PRACTISING CRITICAL LITERACY WORK WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

by

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An integrative approach
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Abstract

Existing mainstream ESL pedagogy tends to be functionalist and assimilationist, ignoring the complex sociopolitical dimensions of language learning (Pennycook, 2001). In addition, critical inquiry is often deemed too difficult for English language learners (ELLs), hence seldom introduced in ESL classrooms. However, academic proficiency, deep understanding and critical literacy (CL) are needed for school success and world citizenship. This doctoral thesis describes a year-long participatory action research with a class of new immigrant ELLs (aged 12-14) in a city in Ontario, Canada. Informed by CL and critical pedagogy, the research aimed to find out how CL education played out in a beginning ESL classroom—the instructional choices made, negotiation of teacher and student identities, processes and challenges involved, and the extent to which students’ critical/literacy development was facilitated. Based on Cummins’ Academic Expertise Framework (2001), the sociocultural theory of learning (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1987) and Guthrie’s (1996, 2004) conception of literacy engagement, an integrative instructional approach was adopted for the design and implementation of the CL program. The program addressed ELLs’ academic language needs while affirming their cultural identities and developing their critical ability in dealing with struggles amidst their acculturation process. Following the principles of critical action research, this study was done through cycles of reflection, action and evaluation with different sets of qualitative data which were coded and analysed based on phenomenological research methods.
The results showed a significant improvement in students’ level of self-confidence and critical/literacy development while the ESL teacher changed from being sceptical of doing CL work with beginning ELLs to fully embracing it and seeing herself as an advocate for ELLs. This research showed that with careful scaffolding and guided practice of functional, cultural and CL skills grounded in a collaborative learning community that set high expectations on students’ critical and creative abilities, students achieved substantial critical/literacy engagement and development. The question educators should ask is not “At which grade or language level can students be introduced to CL?”, but rather “Are we providing support and scaffolds to students’ learning that are geared towards helping them to gradually become critical language users?”
Acknowledgements

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for all the blessings He has given me, especially for surrounding me with these loving people who have inspired me in so many different ways.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to …

*Fil Walker*, my love;

*Janan Chan*, my son;

*So Kuen Fong*, my mother;

the rest of my family;

and all teachers/educators of English language learners.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

My interest in critical literacy (CL hereafter) work with English language learners (ELLs hereafter) stemmed from my English language experience both as a learner and as an educator. Raised in colonial Hong Kong, I learned since I was small that English language held such a prestigious status that no one could afford not to try to master it. As I went through primary school education, my parents and teachers would place great emphasis on English learning. The teachers in the Christian elementary school that I went to were progressive enough to try something new at that time, introducing fun activities like solo verse speaking, storytelling and drama to stimulate our interest in the language. Apart from that, all English lessons were form-focused, with mechanical drills and practice, and rote memory of vocabulary and sentence patterns. Language learning was never meant to relate to our life. We knew from the beginning that it had such high stakes; it determined one’s life chances whether one had the opportunity for higher education or well paid jobs. Parents would do anything to help their children to get into an English medium school believing that the more English exposure that their children had, the better their mastery of the English, and hence better life chances.

I was privileged to get admitted later into a Catholic English-medium secondary school (Grade 7-13) where I had the opportunity to study English literature (strictly British literature at that time, to be correct). Not everyone had the privilege to do that; only those prestigious schools with best student intake in terms of English language performance would offer an English literature course. It is basically a symbol of prestige and success for the schools as well. As a person who loves language and literature, I remembered how I tried so hard to do well in the two subjects. In Grade 12, we had to study a play by Shakespeare, a novel and some poetry. One of the poets we studied was William Wordsworth. I remembered trying my best to understand and

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1 I used the term English language learners (ELLs) to refer to learners whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used in mainstream classrooms in the North American setting. The term “ELLs” is used to distinguish the learners themselves from the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs that support their language learning needs (Ministry of Education, 2005). More importantly, I followed La Celle-Peterson and Rivera’s (1994) use of the term “ELLs” to underline the fact that these students are mastering another language in addition to meeting the academic challenges their English-speaking peers face. The term also focuses on “what students are accomplishing, rather than on any temporary ‘limitation’ they face prior to having done so, just as we refer to advanced teacher candidates as ‘student teachers’ rather than ‘limited teaching proficient individuals’, and to college students who concentrate their studies in physics as ‘physics majors’ rather than as ‘students with limited physics proficiency’” (p. 75).
feel the love for nature Wordsworth described in his poems. As a dutiful student, I would try as much as I could to imagine how it would feel to sit “within an undergrove/Of tallest hollies, tall and green;A fairer bower was never seen” (Wordsworth, 'A Whirl-blast from behind the hill' in Sharrock, 1958, p. 66-67). What is an “undergrove”? What are “hollies”? What does it look like when “withered leaves” cover the “spacious floor” below “leafless oaks towered high above”? I would check the dictionary dutifully, but that was as good as I could get. What would it feel like being immersed in that natural environment and the kind of “tranquility” Wordsworth kept describing in his poems? I would just have to imagine myself. It was only when I moved to Canada and had the opportunity to walk in the woods and mountains that I realized how much I had missed when reading those poems back in high school. I would have appreciated the poem much better had I had the prior experience of living close to nature or that the teacher had showed me ways to better connect with it. Frequently, English or English literature lessons were turned into deciphering of the language. The so-called “literary appreciation” that we learned did not really help us develop ways to appreciate literary works independently, but rather it just helped us to find the answers that teachers had in mind.

In a colonial setting, language is often the tool through which a hierarchical structure of power is enacted and perpetrated (Fanon, 1952/1967). Curricular material based on the colonial culture enjoyed supreme importance, but is often alienating to local students. I am, nonetheless, grateful that I was introduced to English literature. The exposure gave me more rigorous English language training, and more importantly, opened the doors for me to pursue studies in modern literature and comparative literature which bear a critical orientation towards language, literature, culture and social issues. I fully understand the dilemma and contradictions in which colonial subjects are caught: desiring strongly to master the language of dominance but at the same time harbouring the grudge in having to learn something so removed from them. Therefore, when I became an English and English Literature teacher myself in Hong Kong, I was always trying to find ways to make English learning more meaningful to students. This was often not easy, especially when English is practically absent from the day-to-day life world of an ordinary lower class family, i.e., their access to the cultural resources of the dominant language is limited. I often saw students (and often their parents too) feeling defeated and shameful because of low English proficiency despite their many other talents and abilities. On the other hand, I also had students who did superbly well in English especially those who had the family’s cultural and
financial support for summer trips overseas, or extra English tuition and reading material. The second high school in which I taught was a well-established and prestigious school located in a well-off neighbourhood. I remember once the school’s English debating team lost in a competition. As the coach, I debriefed with the students afterwards. Students brought up the importance of more English practice at school, to which I agreed since undeniably one of the best ways for good second language acquisition is practice. However, when we came to discussing whether a school should adopt English or Chinese as the medium of instruction (EMI or CMI), I was shocked to find my students’ lack of sympathy for other competent students who could not survive in an EMI school due to their lack of English proficiency. Nor were they particularly critical about the sudden advocacy for mother-tongue teaching (which has naturally turned out to be nothing more than half-hearted) in post-97 Hong Kong. All what they cared for was whether they could master the language in order to have a competitive edge over the others. Sometimes I would ask myself, as an English language teacher, am I just perpetuating the existing elitist hierarchy? In helping my students to gain access to this “superior” language and culture, can I also do something to help them query some widely accepted social assumptions and build up their capacity to see through loopholes in the dominant ideologies?

As Rockhill and Tomic (1995) pointed out, English as a second language (hereafter ESL), whether in a colonial setting or in the context of immigration, embodies an inherent paradox. Given the superior status of English, it is “empowering” for students to master the language. Yet English education is simultaneously a colonization process whereby those who cannot speak the language or who do not fit in the discursive structure will at once be invalidated and subjugated. As Fanon (1952/1967) pointed out, “to speak means to assume a culture” (p. 17). Being an immigrant parent in Canada, I witnessed firsthand what my son went through when we first came here: the shame, self-doubt and denial of his native culture and roots. This explains my fervent interest and commitment in bringing a more critical approach to ESL teaching and learning. Luke (1997) stated,

Critical approaches are characterized by a commitment to reshape literacy education in the interest of marginalized groups of learners, who on the basis of gender, cultural and socioeconomic background have been excluded from access to the discourses and texts of dominant economics and cultures. (p.143)

This dissertation describes a year-long research study that I did with a Grade 7/8 ESL classroom using an integrative approach which strove to strike a balance between helping
students to build up the necessary linguistic and cultural resources and, at the same time, cultivating in them a critical orientation towards language learning. I will first give a brief description of what CL is and then move on to the rationale behind introducing CL education to ESL classroom. I will also explain the aims and research questions that guided this study. I will end this chapter by briefly laying out the structure of this thesis.

1.1. What is Critical Literacy?

The traditional, psycholinguist view of literacy is that language learning is an autonomous, universalist cognitive process (Pennycook, 2001). Literacy is seen as a set of isolated skills like reading and writing, decoding and encoding. In the case of second language learning, literacy tends to be viewed as solely to do with “psycholinguistic processes, schema theory, or first language transfer” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 76). It was only in recent years that we witnessed a “social turn” (Block, 2003, p. 1) in the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition, with increasing research dealing with a more socially sensitive view of language. Areas like class, gender, race and their complex intersections with issues of language and power are explored (e.g., Frye, 1999; Ibrahim, 1999; Lin, 1999; Peirce, 1995; Rivera, 1999). All these works are telling language educators to take into account the cultural, economic, social and political domains where language learning takes place.

CL originates from the critical pedagogy traditions, with which Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and Ira Shor are strongly associated (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Proponents of critical pedagogy see society as fundamentally divided by relations of unequal power and are concerned with how cultural institutions perpetuate or legitimate an unjust status quo. Critical theorists are calling for an effort to work within the educational institutions to foster a critical capacity in students, not just in thought but also in action, so that they can resist such inequalities of power.

CL as part and parcel of critical pedagogy reckons that literacy, though has much to do with psychological or developmental phenomenon, is always a social and cultural practice. Gee (1996) argued that we are all “socialized” into reading “texts of certain types in certain ways or to certain levels” (p. 41) and literacy practices are always interwoven with values and beliefs. Any cultural texts, be it a book, a film, television, radio, music, etc., are not neutral or value-free. There are texts that fit more easily with the experiences of particular groups of people and their
world views, while others’ experiences are marginalized and silenced. Just take a moment to think how school-based literacy is learned. Through the routine of teacher initiation-student response-teacher feedback cycles, students gradually come to know what answers are considered correct, what values are more privileged, whose points of view are preferred. Luke and Freebody (1997) argued that literacy development also has to do with one’s access to social, community and cultural resources, as well as discourses and texts in one’s everyday life. The reading of the Qur'an, for example, is basically exclusive to men and there is little “lay” debate on the meaning of the text (1997). We do not need to look to another culture to find that literacy practices and access to texts are tied to relations of power, gender, and religion. In 2007, a local Catholic school board received a formal request from parents to remove Philip Pullman’s Golden Compass (1995). After having it reviewed, the board decided to ban not just the book, but also the remaining two of his Dark Materials Trilogy--The Subtle Knife (1997) and The Amber Spyglass (2000)--for their atheist stances. Teachers were also instructed not to distribute book club flyers that had the book available for purchase.

Power and ideologies are conveyed and reproduced through language use. Therefore Gee (1996) argued strongly against Ong’s (1982) traditional functionalist view of literacy as simply the ability to read and write as it “cloaks literacy’s connections to power, to social identity, and to ideologies often in the service of privileging certain types of literacies and certain people” (p. 46).

One main tenets of CL is to help students gain the necessary skills to analyze and critically dissect all the forms of culture with which they interact so that they can gain an understanding of how these cultural forms construct their knowledge of the world and the different social, economic and political positions that they occupy within it. The ultimate aim is to empower individuals to become active readers and writers of cultural texts and create their own meanings to shape and transform their social conditions (Shor, 1992). CL provides students with a language of critique that allows them to have critical understanding of social representations and to come to believe that social changes are both possible and desirable. Hence, CL does not just aim at equipping students with a “language of critique” that allows them to have critical understanding of social representations, but also a “language of possibility” through which social transformation may be possible:
Among other things, critical literacy makes possible a more adequate and accurate ‘reading’ of the world, on the basis of which, as Freire and others put it, people can enter into ‘rewriting’ the world into a formation in which their interests, identities and legitimate aspirations are more fully present and are present more equally. (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. xviii)

Despite the common commitment for social change, CL education does not stand for a unitary approach. There are a number of different orientations in doing CL, the differences of which are generated by the various theories that inform them (Knobel, 1998). I am going to discuss the three major approaches in detail in the Literature Review section of this dissertation (Chapter 2 section 2.1). I will then evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and formulate a more self-reflexive integrative approach to CL education that guided my research project.

1.2. Why Critical Literacy with ELLs?

Why bother about CL education? Here are some of the main reasons behind the urge to adopt a CL approach to ESL education in the multicultural Canadian context.

1.2.1. Inadequacies of the Functionalist Approach to ESL Teaching and Learning

ESL learning and teaching have been largely influenced by research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and in the past two decades what predominates in SLA is the Input-Interaction-Output model (IIO) (cf. Gass, 1997). Language acquisition is basically seen as an autonomous, asocial and decontextualized cognitive process. Comprehended language input is processed and the input apperceived, depending on the combined influence of one’s affect, prior knowledge, attention and the frequency of exposure, etc. The output stage is when the learner produces the acquired language aspect as a kind of test run that, in turn, feeds back into the intake stage. Even though IIO researchers have taken an interest in the sociolinguistics’ tenet on language use in communicative contexts, according to Block (2003), it is often done in a limited fashion. The so-called “social” does not go beyond interactional conversation and information exchange. To Block, a “socially constituted linguistics” as proposed by Hymes (1974), should also be concerned with “interactional and interpersonal communication at the service of the social construction of self-identity, group membership, solidarity, support, trust and so on” (Block, 2003, p. 64).
This thesis does not in any way contend the importance of the technical aspects of language learning. What is deemed inadequate about the functionalist approach to SLA is that it tends to view classrooms as a “closed box” (Pennycook, 2000, p. 89). It often fails to take into consideration the complex interplay of the sociopolitical relations between language classrooms and the outside world, and its impact on language learning itself. One common practice found in ESL classrooms in Canada is to see minority students in a kind of social and cultural vacuum where their indigenous cultural and linguistic identity has to be shed at the classroom door (e.g., Bernhard, Freire, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2001; Bernhard, Freire, Torres, & Nirdosh, 1998). This is also often done out of the best intention of ESL teachers to help students to quickly master the language of power—English—whose linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1982/1991) is seen as the most valued asset for social assimilation and upward mobility. Hence, even though government curricular documents (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2007) recognize the place of one’s first language (L1) in an ESL classroom, the reality is that it is often devalued at school and dismissed as useless or even intervening for learning English (Bernhard, Freire, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2001).

An example is an ESL lesson I (as a university teacher education program assistant) observed in an inner-city racially diverse high school in Toronto in spring 2005. It was a Grade 9 ESL class of which most students were at Level 3 and some at Level 4 ESL competency\(^2\). The lesson was on essay writing with a special emphasis on paragraph organization. One of the ways to open a paragraph, as suggested by the teacher, was to include quotes from famous people. She added that only those sayings from famous Canadian people should be used because sayings from students’ home countries, no matter how famous they were, were irrelevant in the Canadian context. Later in the lesson, she was preparing students for a writing topic on how to apply for a driving license. Again, she reiterated that the writing task was about application procedures in Canada, not in any other countries such as the Philippines, eyeing the two Filipino students sitting at the back of the classroom. Both of these students were slouching in their chairs, looking uninterested in whatsoever the teacher was saying. In my informal conversation with the ESL teacher before class, she shared with me that she was an immigrant from Eastern Europe some 17 years ago and understood how important that it was for immigrant children to quickly master the English language for academic success. Another teacher education program assistant and I

\(^2\) See (Ministry of Education, 2007) for details on the 5-level high school ESL curriculum.
were arranged to observe this ESL teacher’s classroom for her “exemplary” practice. Her lesson shockingly turned out to be “exemplary” in terms of how students’ linguistic and cultural identity and resources were being considered as irrelevant, unnecessary and interfering in a second language classroom. She might be one among the many ESL teachers who are unaware that these seemingly well-intentioned practices and procedures catered to meeting assimilative pressures have often led to poor outcomes in terms of students’ impaired self image and impaired educational achievement (see Bernhard, Freire, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2001).

The asocial functionalist approach to English language education reflects a belief in meritocratic principles and a cultural assimilationist posture (Anderson & Irvine, 1993). This approach ignores the social context and its embedded powered relations, hence forming the major barrier in making second language (L2) education academically and cognitively engaging to learners. Full language development has to embrace both linguistic and cognitive developments (Cummins, 2001). The optimal learning environment is when students’ prior knowledge is activated for learning the new. However, the asocial and decontextualized L2 learning approach often has ELLs’ first language, culture and experience ignored, excluded and dismissed as irrelevant to English learning. When identity investment is not encouraged, students will not be engaged academically and cognitively.

1.2.2. The Lack of Collaborative Inquiry for Deep Understanding

Effective learning also requires active learning with deep rather than superficial understanding. Research regarding ELLs shows that it generally takes them about three to five years to develop oral proficiency and four to seven years to develop academic English proficiency (Cummins, 1981; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Academic language proficiency, as Cummins (2000) argued, does not refer to “any absolute notion of expertise in using language, but rather to “the degree to which an individual access to and expertise in understanding and using the specific kind of language that is employed in educational contexts and is required to complete academic tasks” (p. 66). Academic tasks in higher grades often require higher levels of cognitive involvement and are often minimally supported by contextual or interpersonal cues:

The academic tasks they are required to complete and the linguistic contexts in which they must function become more complex with respect to the registers employed in these contexts. Not only is there an ever-increasing vocabulary and concept load involving words that are rarely encountered in every day out-of-school contexts but syntactic features... and discourse conventions ... also become
increasingly distant from conversational uses of language in non-academic contexts. (Cummins, 2000, p. 67)

On top of that, ELLs have to catch up with a moving target as set by their native English-speaking peers. Therefore, Cummins suggested that optimal instruction for ELLs that engages their full linguistic, cognitive and academic growth will involve a progression from tasks that are context-embedded and cognitively undemanding to more cognitively demanding tasks that are context-reduced. Task-reduction for second language learners only deprives ELLs from having the opportunity to develop the necessary academic language skill for academic success (Mackay, 1992).

Most ESL programs in Canada are, however, found to be lacking in a focus on deep understanding; rather, they just focus on surface conversational fluency and discrete language skills (Cummins, 2001). Take writing as an example, instruction is often focused on the mechanics of writing, spelling, and grammatical accuracy rather than on development of ideas through collaborative inquiry. While students may show an understanding or a fair mastery of some formal linguistic features, there is an appalling lack of ideas in their oral presentations or writing. As Valdés (2004) pointed out, students must be encouraged to see themselves as having something meaningful to say and take part in a dialogue with other people and writers who have written about issues that intrigue and concern them. Both Collier (1995) and Cummins (2000) recommend cognitively demanding tasks for ELLs with adequate linguistic support and scaffolds, engaging them in collaborative interaction among peers and with teacher for co-constructing deeper understandings of the subject matter. Many teachers worry that ELLs are incapable of higher-order language activities in English and so they just cast these off the agenda. Second language research, however, has proven that engaging ELLs in critical dialogue with English texts improves both their critical skills and language ability (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; M. C. Lau, 2003; Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000). Of course, collaborative enquiry of this kind would only be effective in an environment where teacher-student interaction encourages identity investment as mentioned earlier. The role of L1 is of great importance here. Students, especially those less fluent in English, should be allowed to use L1 in carrying out collaborative problem-solving tasks but required to report in English (see Reyes, 1992). In this way, English limitations would not restrict more advanced cognitive processes.
1.2.3. Critical Literacy Much Needed for Social Transformation in Postmodern Age

The twenty-first century is marked by what sociologists called the birth of disorganized capitalism (Lash & Urry, 1987) or the new capitalism (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996). In order to stay globally competitive, there must be constant changes with the help of sophisticated technologies to keep innovating products and services dovetailed to the lifestyles and customized for the needs of each customer. What is needed then is not disciplinary experts (Gee et al.), but rather individuals with high reflective intelligence who can continually reinvest mental resources to address problems at higher levels. Workers are to be knowledge workers and cross-trained team players who can solve problems creatively and collaboratively (Gebhard, 2004). The new mandate for schools is hence to have them turned into thinking and knowledge building organizations or learning communities (Gee et al.). Learning should then be more of project-based collaborative teamwork and teachers are no longer transmitters of knowledge but critical co-constructors of knowledge. Students likewise should not be passive receptacles of information but as critical problem solvers (Gebhard).

This new progressivism (Ball, 1990) as found in recent world education reforms, including Canada’s, is still very much dictated by a kind of economic rationality (Bromley, 1998) where teaching and learning are “aimed at serving the utilitarian needs of a corporate and globalized market place (Corson, 2002, p. 1). According to Cummins (2004), this Knowledge Society Rhetoric opens up a unique opportunity for educators to explore pedagogies that potentially can exert a transformative impact on students and society. Until recently, teaching for deep and critical understanding has seldom been an aspiration, especially with the masses (as opposed to the elites. Educators are for the first time urged to apprentice all students to “the cause of deep understanding” and CL is seen as “an important and acceptable educational goal” (p. 69).

Wallace (2002), while acknowledging the more practical need for language teachers to prepare students for the unpredictable futures of fast capitalism, argued that they should also offer students “tools to resist, not English itself but meanings which are frequently conveyed through English, often via powerful genres such as news and advertising” (p. 107). The postmodern world is a world dominated by the media where even news broadcasts are subject to the ratings game and “the truth is defined as that which sells” (McLaren & Hammer, 1996, p. 90). In the West where Eurocentrism is prevailing, shots and images are tacitly arranged and
narrative employed so that the message will go together with the narratives about it. Racist and sexist values are still rampant. In addition, popular media are all celebrating a lifestyle of hedonism and instant gratification where private satisfactions come before active citizenship, consumption before moral responsibilities (Bauman, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1998). Urban teenagers, with declining anchorage to stable employment, communities or institutions, are often found to be navigating through what Bean and Moni called “non-places” (2003, p. 641) like malls, internet, airports, and train stations. Their forms of identity construction include “cults of performance manifested in consumption of goods that form or alter identity (e.g., cars, clothes, CDs, cell phones), gang affiliations, graffiti writing, eating disorders, ethnic and cultural affiliation, sports, and street life” (p. 642). Given the worrying postmodern cultural developments, the goal of language teaching is not just to equip students with a language for content learning, but also a metalanguage (Wallace, 2002) to critically examine how texts, both print and multi-modal, are produced and received in different cultural contexts and how meanings are constructed, distorted, hidden or conveyed to favour or disparage certain social groups. It is imperative to raise both teachers and students’ consciousness about wider social and ideological issues of language and power (e.g., the myth of Standard English, the gatekeeping functions of ESL, and how language is used to (re)produce gender and racial stereotypes, and postmodern consumerism in pop culture, etc.).

The urgent need to teach deep understanding and CL, as Cummins (2004) argued, is not just to meet the demands of the new economy, but also for the very survival of democratic institutions (2004). With students being bombarded with information on a day-to-day basis, special attention should be given to cultivating their critical ability in reading print texts as well as the multimodal media texts so that they can see through loopholes or social assumptions that bear injustice or stereotyping values.

1.2.4. More Research Needed on Critical Literacy Education with ELLs

As mentioned earlier, the “social turn” in research in applied linguistics (Block, 2003) has led to a growth in research in critical approaches towards SLE. There are two major focuses of these critical researches. The first one is on the critical evaluation of contexts in which English is being taught. This kind of critical research devotes its attention to the inequitable contexts in which language education takes place, in terms of both social or structural inequity
(e.g., access to jobs and education), and cultural or ideological frameworks that supports it (e.g., discrimination, or beliefs about what is normal or right) (Pennycook, 1999). Their critical work attempts to connect the micro-relations of ESL classrooms, teaching approaches and interactions with broader social and political relations as well as critique the power relations and issues of inequity to which these social formations are linked. One example can be drawn from Lin’s (1999) study on four reading classrooms from different socioeconomic backgrounds in Hong Kong. Using Bourdieu’s concept of *habit, cultural capital* (1982/1991) and *symbolic violence* (1979/1984), she critically examined how reading lessons were conducted in these four classrooms and showed how teachers’ discourse practices and their interaction with students play a significant role in reproducing or transforming class-based inequity. On a more macro level, we have research that examines the global power of English and how the English linguistic imperialism has led to the exclusion of other languages (Pennycook, 1995, 1998; Phillipson, 1992).

If the first group of research focuses on the critical examination of unequal power relations inherent in English language education, the second one is on *critical ways of teaching English*—pedagogies that can change those inequitable conditions (rather than just critiquing those conditions) (Pennycook, 1999). This constitutes the large body of CL work which embraces a notion of social transformation. For example, the notion of *critical language awareness* (CLA) was developed by Fairclough (1992) and his colleagues as the classroom application of *critical discourse analysis* (1995). Built on the systemic linguistic theory of Halliday (1994), CLA focuses on helping students to trace lexical and grammatical operations to “ideological representations (field), social relations (tenor), and textual formations (mode)” (Luke, 2000, p. 453). This approach to CL is widely embraced in Australia and has been quickly adopted as classroom practice since the early 1990s. What followed was a growing body of literature of classroom methods and materials geared towards critical analysis of different cultural texts (Comber, 2001a, 2001b; Gilbert, 2001; Kemp, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 1997; C. Luke, 1997). One major challenge that CL education encountered in the Australian context concerned classroom imperatives for basic reading instruction to cater to the needs of ELLs. In the past decade we saw more research work on CL work with ELLs (Alford, 2001; Eastman, 1998; Perkins, 1998; Wallace, 2002, 2003), the emphasis of which was often on building ELLs’ critical language awareness as they mastered their English communicative competence.
As a result of the influence of critical pedagogy (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Giroux, 1988b; McLaren, Hammer, Sholle, & Reilly, 1995; Shor, 1992; Wink, 1997), when CL was taken up in the North American setting, most CL work adopt the Freirean notion of conscientização (conscientization) (Freire, 1998) in raising minority social groups’ awareness of the oppression to which they are subject while helping them master this language of dominance. There is a wealth of research on CL work on adult as well as college-level ESL education (e.g., Benesch, 1993, 2001; Gallo, 2002; Lesley, 1997, 2001; Smoke, 1998). While in the K-12 setting, research is comparatively fewer but we see the same Freirean approach to CL education. For example, Fain’s (2008) research engaged Grade 1 and 2 racially diverse students in reading multicultural texts that deal with language and cultural diversity and the theme of oppression. There is also research that look into ways to empower minority students through building up their academic language and CL skills (e.g., Nussbaum, 2002; Orellana, 1994, April; Wilson, 2007). There are those that build on students’ home and community resources to engage their learning of more complex and CL skills (e.g., Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Haneda, 2006; Sokolower, 2006).

Comparatively, in the Canadian context, there is much less research on CL work with ELLs. As far as SLE is concerned, most CL research was done with adult ELLs. One example is B. Morgan’s (1997, 1998) community-based programs for his Chinese adult ELLs that helped address issues that concerned them as immigrants while they were mastering the basic English language functions. Gaber-Kartz (1996) adopted a similar community-based approach in engaging her adult ELL students in reading life stories of marginalized people. They eventually wrote their own autobiographical accounts expressing their own voice on social issues like poverty and racism. Research on CL with school-aged ELLs in Canada is even more minimal. Influential research by Chow and Cummins (2003) explored the importance of capitalizing on minority students’ family and community linguistic and cultural resources through writing dual-language books. More recent research was done by Cooper and White (2006, 2008). Their collaborative action research was with two Grade 3 teachers in developing their CL practices in their own classrooms.

Perhaps the most vigorous CL research that has been done with young multicultural children in the Canadian setting was the research carried out by Vasquez (2000, 2001, 2003, 2004). Her research involved K-Grade 2 students from a middle-class community in suburban Toronto, which dispelled the general belief that CL is not appropriate or is too difficult for young
learners. In her research, Vasquez demonstrated that, through tapping into students’ interests and concerns for everyday life issues and mobilising their knowledge and resources, students were capable of participating in critical dialogue related to social issues like gender and racial equality as well as social actions that helped to make changes to their immediate environment. For example, her kindergarten students noticed that the officers shown in a poster of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were all male (2003). She used this opportunity to create a critical curriculum with them, exploring together the gender assumptions behind the poster design. One of girls even wrote a letter to the RCMP expressing her concern about the gender bias. Another example was when her students were upset that there was no food prepared for vegetarians at a school barbecue, Vasquez (2004) engaged them in CL practices like critically examining the announcement flyer for the barbecue and writing a letter to the chair of the school barbecue committee to express their concern. Vasquez’s research, though not specifically carried out with ELLs, showed that it is possible, not to mention politically and educationally significant, to practice CL work with learners whose literacy skills are still emerging.

The limited CL research in the Canadian school system warrants more study on the topic. On top of this, the recent poststructural and feminist influence on CL education also calls for a different approach; one with a greater degree of self-reflexivity about its emancipatory claims (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Buckingham, 1993, 2004; Hagood, 2002; C. Luke, 1997; Rogers, 2002) and the need to incorporate the different orientations (Janks, 2000). Coupled with this is the New Literacy Studies (Knobel, 1999; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1995) that have increasingly emphasized and demonstrated the situatedness of literacy practices. As Vasquez (2004) argued, a CL curriculum has to be “lived”, arising from the social and political conditions within the community we live in. All these have pointed to the need to have more research that exercises greater self-reflexivity in examining the context-bound complexities in the implementation of CL work in order to enrich our understanding of the processes and effectiveness of CLs in different contexts (I will further elaborate on this in my literature review in Chapter 2). Comber (2001c) called for a “new” research agenda for CL practices3, by which she reckoned the need to bring the “local nature” of

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3 Comber (2001c) actually used the term “critical literacies”, the plural form, to foreground the negotiation of CL practices in a range of specific social contexts. However, like Wallace (2001), I prefer to use the term CL as a mass noun. On the one hand, as Wallace pointed out, using Auerbach’s (1992) argument, that the term CLs in its plurality might trivialise the concept giving rise to a list of literacies, just as we have lists of competencies, which are in many
literacy practices to the foreground. There needs to be more detailed practitioners’ accounts that document and analyse how community, school or classroom negotiate innovative CL practices amidst their particular material and cultural locations and circumstances. Such accounts will help CL “to remain dynamic and responsive to our changing lifeworlds and institutions (2001c, p. 279) and can become an inspiration to other educators to take action. Comber suggested that the best way is to have more collaborative research between teachers and university researchers where both are involved in “genuinely reciprocal inquiry and learning relationships” (2001c, p. 279). This doctoral research is in part a response to this call for the “new” research agenda for CL practice.

1.3. Aims of the Study and Research Questions

This research aimed to examine the feasibility of and the processes involved in the implementation of CL with beginning ELLs in an Ontario middle school (Grade 7/8). After surveying existing literature on CL and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, I designed a CL program based on an integrative approach characterized by a greater degree of self-reflexivity, embodied engagement and participatory social action. I will explain the integrative instructional model in detail in the next chapter. The aim of the research, apart from exploring the implementation processes of such an integrative CL curriculum, is also to investigate the extent to which students’ critical/literacy development\(^4\) was enhanced. The guiding questions for the research were:

1. **What are the processes involved in implementing an integrative approach to CL with regard to the instructional choices the researcher/teacher makes, and the negotiation of teacher and student identities?**
2. **What are the possible dilemmas, challenges, constraints, and limitations both the researcher/teacher and students face in the process?**
3. **And to what extent does the project facilitate students’ critical/literacy development?**

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\(^4\) The term “critical/literacy development” refers to both CL development as well as literacy development. The use of the slash is to help foreground the fact that both developments are mutually dependent. This is to dispel the common belief that students should acquire a certain level of literacy skills first before they can practice CL. Both CL practices and the learning of literacy skills should go hand in hand. This also ties in with the integrative approach that I adopted for this CL research project.
The uniqueness of this research lies in its response to the poststructural and feminist call for more self-reflectiveness in CL work as well as a balance between rational ideological critique and passionate engagement, between action and reflection, and practice and theory. To ensure a greater degree of self-reflexivity, a qualitative critical action research methodology was adopted to allow ongoing reflection and evaluation. I will further describe this in Chapter 4. With the cyclical process of reflect-evaluate-act and the participatory collaboration among the researcher, the teacher and the students, we examined altogether how CL practices played out in the classroom and how CL theory evolved.

The research will throw light on the existing literature on CL education regarding what instructional and curriculum choices teachers and/or students (co-)create, what kind of relationships are negotiated in school and with their communities, and what conditions constitute the effectiveness of a CL approach. The research inquiry will also help locate and identify the context-bound complexities in the implementation of CL education in ESL classrooms, as an ultimate response to the needs in the field (Comber, 2001c). This will ultimately shed light on ESL pedagogical approaches that are more congenial to literacy engagement and cultivation of CL in ELLs, as well as on ESL teacher preparation and professional development.

1.4. **Overview of Thesis**

In Chapter 2, I review past literature on CL education and discuss the three major CL orientations using the framework offered by Lankshear’s (1997) *three takes on CL*. I will also evaluate their strengths and limitations, followed by my proposal of an integrative instructional framework characterized by a poststructural inclination for greater self-reflexivity, embodied engagement and participatory social action.

In Chapter 3, I put forward the three main theoretical perspectives that have informed this research: (a) sociocultural theory of learning--community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and identity investment (Norton Peirce, 1995), (b) literacy engagement (Guthrie, 1996, 2004), and (c) the Academic Expertise Framework (Cummins, 2001).

In Chapter 4, I present my research questions, and describe the research methodology--critical action research methodology--and explain its rationale. I also describe the context of the study including the school, the teacher and student participants, and data collection and analysis procedures.
Chapter 5 is a description of the integrative CL curriculum that I designed for this research and I also briefly describe the kind of collaboration that I had with the ESL teacher participant in the study, in terms of our co-ordination and collaboration of work throughout the year-long research. From Chapter 6 to Chapter 10, I present the findings in each unit/module of the CL program in a descriptive manner. Each chapter is followed by my reflections together with student and/or teacher participants’ reaction towards that unit/module.

Chapter 11 is a summary and discussion of the findings following the guiding theoretical concepts for this research. Chapter 12 presents the implications of this study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

CL education is often taken up differently in different contexts because of the different theoretical orientations which underlie the specific approach adopted (Knobel, 1998). In this chapter, I am going to discuss the three major orientations of CL work using the framework offered by Lankshear’s (1997) three takes on CL, followed by an evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses. I will then proceed to survey some more recent CL research that bears a more self-reflexive approach that is informed by poststructuralist and feminist beliefs. What I propose at the end is an integrative model that guided my research study, both in my design and implementation of the CL program that encompassed the poststructural inclination for greater self-reflexivity, embodied engagement and participatory social action.

2.1. Different Orientations of Critical Literacy

Lankshear’s (1997) three takes on CL provides a useful framework in examining different CL work’s emphasis by identifying each orientation’s object(s) of critique:

- having a critical perspective on literacy or literacies per se, where literacy itself is the object of critique;

- having a critical perspective on particular texts, where the critique of texts and their world views is the object;

- having a critical perspective on—i.e., being able to analyze and critique—wider social practices... etc. which are mediated by, made possible, and partially sustained through reading, writing, viewing, transmitting, etc. texts. Here, social practices, their histories, their normative work, and their associated literacy practices and artefacts, etc. are the target of analysis and critique. (p. 44)

According to Lankshear, orientations to CL may include one or any of the objects of critique shown above. I am going to explain each one in greater detail here:

2.1.1. A Critical Perspective on Literacy or Literacies

CL work that falls under this category has its focus on what literacy is. Proponents of this CL orientation distinguish themselves from the functionalists who tend to view language learning as simply an autonomous, universal cognitive process. Literacy is often seen as merely a set of isolated skills like reading and writing, decoding and encoding. In the case of second
language learning, literacy tends to be viewed as solely to do with “psycholinguistic processes, schema theory, or first language transfer” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 76). A critical view of literacy, on the other hand, argued that language learning has to be understood within a wider context of social and cultural relations. Literacy should not be seen as “a monolithic entity” but rather as “a set of contextualised social practices (p. 77). One example is Gee’s (2000) New Literacies Studies (NLS) which sees literacy as “social languages”—“specific forms of English fit to and for specific activities (or practices) and connected to specifically socially situated identities (connected, in turn, to distinctive sorts of motivations, goals, and purposes)” (p. 123). Informed by Heath’s ethnographic study (1983) which showed how lower-class minority social groups’ literacy practices are at odds with the mainstream school-based literacy, Gee argued that literacy should not be just confined to school-based practices but should also include socio-culturally diverse and community-based literacy practices.

Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) is another example of such an approach of CL. As a response to the rapid changes in communicating technologies in postmodern global world order, multimodal ways of communication are available. The New London Group (NLG), of which Gee is also a member, formulates a pedagogy of literacy which goes beyond language learning to include a multiple modes of meaning-making: written-linguistic modes, visual and audio modes, and spatial patterns (p. 5). This is also to address the realities of increasing local diversity and global connectedness. Globalisation of communications (through TV, Internet, mobile phones, etc.) and labour markets have made language diversity a more critical local issue. Multiliteracies embrace a more open-ended and flexible conception of functional grammar (the NLG uses the metaphor of Design to replace the traditional concept of grammar) accommodating language differences, be it cultural, subcultural, regional/national, technical, context-specific, etc. Students are immersed in a community of learners engaged in authentic literacy practices (situated practice) and are provided with an overt instruction of the metalanguage to describe

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5 Although the Multiliteracies Framework is a new approach to literacy pedagogy, multi-modal ways of meaning making have existed and been practiced by people for a long time. López-Gopar (2007) made a strong case for indigenous people in Mexico as great “authors of multimodal texts” and active designers of meaning. He showed this by using the example of códices, one of the indigenous writing systems consisting of colourful pictorial representations accompanied by phonetic expressions and logorams, etc., as well as that of huipil—a traditional Triqui garment as multiple representational and communication modes. The autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1995) defines literacy as reading and writing of printed words in texts, and in the context of Mexico, texts in alphabetic components. The traditional multimodal ways of representations and communications have been dismissed as illiteracy. However, it is with the development of technology that our notion of texts has been expanded to include visual, aural, musical, oral, spatial modes.
how meaning is made through available designs. Theoretical analysis of how a design fits in with local meanings and more global meanings (critical framing) is also carried out so that students can eventually transfer and apply design to a different context (transformed practice) where their voices and expressions can be validated.

One example of this kind of CL project is Knobel’s ethnographic study (1999) on a student named Nicholas who is computer-savvy but passive and easily distractible as a student. The study is about how he received assistance from home in using word-processing software to organise and develop his writing, and eventually became more successful with school work.

2.1.2. A Critical Perspective on Texts and Ideologies

CL with this orientation concentrates on developing a meta-level understanding of ways in which language is used for communication and for understanding of our world. The focus is on knowing how language functions as a convention or rule-governed system of communication (discourses), and as social practices (Discourses) (Gee, 1996). One example of this orientation is the functional grammar approach. This approach is based on Halliday’s (1994) systematic functional linguistics which holds the belief that the lexical and grammatical operations of texts can be systematically traced to ideological representations (field), social relations (tenor), and textual formations (mode). The classroom focus is to get students to examine the technical characteristics--lexicon, sentence-level grammar, and text genres--so that students will attain an understanding of “a metalanguage that ties language to function, text to context, theme to ideology, and discourse to society and cultures” (Luke, 2000, p. 453). One example can be drawn from Luke’s (2000) using of the Four Resources Model in analyzing a high school geography textbook. Through analyzing the tricky use of lexical choices

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6 Four Resources Model:

1. Coding practices: Developing resources as a code breaker---e.g., How do I crack this text? What are its patterns and conventions? How do the sounds and the marks relate, singly and in combinations?
2. Text-meaning practices: Developing resources as a text participant---e.g., How do the ideas represented in the text string together? What cultural resources can be brought to bear on the text? What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from the text?
3. Pragmatic practices: Developing resources a text user---How do the users of this text shape its composition? What do I do with this text here and now? What are my options and alternatives?
4. Critical practices: Developing resources as text analyst and critic--- What kind of person, with what interests and values, could both write and read this naively and unproblematically? What is this text trying to do to me? In whose interests? Which positions, voices, and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent? (Luke, 2000, p. 454)
and grammatical devices (e.g., the use of we, the passive and lots of nominalizations, etc.), what appears to be an anti-development, pro-ecology position of the text is shown to be infused with a pro-development ideology. Another example is Williams’ (2001) textual analysis of popular music texts over the past forty years with her Grade 9 students in South Australia to see how the construction of gender roles has changed over the years.

This CL approach is highly associated with critical discourse analysis (CDA), of which Fairclough’s work (1995) is exemplary. Proponents of CDA and the functional grammatical approach to CL assume a one-to-one relationship between discursive formations and ideological formations. By analyzing the structure of a text or conversation (e.g., Who gets to speak? About what? For how long?) and the content (i.e., ways in which ideologies are (re)produced through discourses), critical discourse analysts believe that concealed ideological positions of particular social groups can then be uncovered and hence denaturalized. Critical Language Awareness (CLA)\(^7\) originated in Lancaster is often considered to be the classroom pedagogical tool of CDA (Janks, 2000). Both share the same mission in deconstructing the ideological nature of any texts\(^8\).

**2.1.3. A Critical Perspective on Wider Social Practices**

This line of CL development followed Paulo Freire who saw literacy education as a form of conscientização (conscientization) (Freire, 1998). Through reading the world and the word, people would come to see their situation of oppression and then take social action against it. According to Pennycook (2001), this approach which is very much based on critical pedagogy is widely taken up in the North American context. The key concern is how the ideas, cultures, languages and voices of students from the minority ethnic and lower-class backgrounds are marginalized by the dominant mainstream curricula and teaching practices. CL pedagogy is hence built on the notion of voice: “... the opening up of a space for the marginalized to speak,

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\(^7\) *Language awareness* (LA) originated with Hawkins’ work (1984) was first introduced into the British literacy education in the early 1980s with an aim to promote students’ awareness of the role language plays in every usage like in the classroom, home, workplace and different social contexts. Proponents of CLA made a deliberate attempt to move beyond LA’s existing conceptions which have been viewed as “insufficiently ‘critical’” (Labercane, 1997, p. 3). CLA calls for a more attention to the examination of the relationships between language and power.

\(^8\) CLA was later adopted by the critical genre studies mostly taken up in Australia as a response to the widespread whole language approach in the 70s and 80s which was deemed to rely too much on an idealistic and romantic view of students’ individual development, neglecting the institutional barriers some students experience in their access to the skills needed to succeed. The genre approach to CL argues that by overt instruction of the conventions of dominant discourse and mainstream academic discourse, students will be able to critically examine those conventions and empowerment can be achieved as students develop alternatives of their own.
write, or read... so that the voicing of their lives may transform both their lives and the social system that excludes them.” (p. 101).

Developments of the Freirean approach can be seen in the work of Auerbach (1995) who placed an emphasis on student participation in deciding the adult ESL content. To her, curriculum should be emergent (p.16), starting with the learners’ real concerns followed by a critical process of exploration through which language work can be contextualized as students address those issues. With this approach,

The classroom becomes a context in which students analyze their reality for the purpose of participating in its transformation. They address social problems by sharing and comparing experiences, and analyzing root causes, and exploring strategies for change. Knowledge, rather than being transmitted from teacher to student, is collaboratively constructed, involving the transformation of traditional teacher-student roles. (Auerbach, 1995, p. 12)

Another example can be taken from what Elsasser and Irvine (1985) did with their Creole speaking students in the University of the Virgin Islands. Following the Freirean thematic research, the teachers and students co-investigated a problem common to all students and in this case, it is the students’ indignation about being placed in a non-credit remedial English class mostly because they did not speak Standard English. They started by first investigating the reasons behind people’s negative attitude towards their Creole language and documenting their negative experiences in their language use. They then went on to publish a letter in a local newspaper releasing their survey results and giving out suggestions for curricular changes.

2.2. Evaluating the Different Orientations to Critical Literacy

The above classification is by no means exhaustive, nor is it meant to be a rigid categorization. It just shows some main ways of how CL is understood and practiced. The list is meant, however, for my personal reflection on what could be the most ‘appropriate’ or ‘viable’ direction CL could take in a postmodern multicultural Canadian context, bearing in mind Pennycook’s (1998) cautionary words that in examining any language policies, we need to understand “both their location historically and their location contextually” (p.126) before making any judgment.

As mentioned earlier, mainstream ESL education in Canada still follows the functionalist approach and the assimilationist mentality of most teachers and parents is making students’ identity investment and cognitive engagement all the more difficult. Unless English language
education provides a means for critical understanding of one’s own history and culture and his/her connection to current social structure, students’ interest and engagement in the subject would only be confined to its utilitarian value. The question which then follows is, “What kind of CL education is viable in a second language classroom? What does it look like in practice and how do we ensure these CL practices promote transformative effects?

Following on Buckingham’s (2003) insight on critical media education, I believe that a dynamic and sophisticated CL practice should involve a constant shift between different forms of learning: “between action and reflection, between practice and theory and between passionate engagement and distanced analysis” (p. 154). To me, any personal growth necessarily involves changes on these three levels: cognition, emotion and behaviour, which means the nature of change should include aspects in knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, understanding, self-awareness and practices. Hence, CL, in my opinion, should include the following three aspects: (a) an interrogation of personal emotional investments for embodied engagement, (b) a more self-reflexive poststructuralist critical analysis, and (c) a curriculum built on participatory social research.

2.2.1. An Interrogation of Personal Emotional Investments through Embodied Engagement

CL practices that rely solely on critical textual analysis, ideological critique or genre studies may have the danger of confining curriculum purely to “objective” ideology analysis which may rarely relate to students’ own emotional experiences and identity investment. This kind of ideological critique can be easily reduced to a purely academic exercise and may not factor into real transformative effects. Misson (1996) and Rizvi (1993) argued, with respect to homophobia and racism respectively, that to develop anti-homophobic or anti-racist education requires much more than simply some rational examination of what is wrong with racism and homophobia. Misson (1996) pointed out that “our subscription to certain beliefs is not just a rational or a socially-determined thing, but we invest in them because they conform to the shape of our desires” (p. 121). What he argued is that critical education needs to engage people not just on the intellectual plane, but also engage them with their emotional investments and desires. Misson and Morgan (2006) took issue with a lot of CL work, especially with ideological critique, because it is basically a “rationalist practice”. However, our engagement with aesthetic texts is often both “affective and intellectual” (pp. 218-219). The term “aesthetic texts”, as Misson and
Morgan (2006) used it, has a broad definition which is not limited to classic artistic texts like Shakespeare’s sonnets or plays, but rather any kind of texts, fictional or non-fictional, print or multimodal. Hence popular media texts like songs, newspaper articles or advertisements are included. To them a text is “aesthetic” when we have affective engagement with it, i.e., when it allows us to generate “exciting and pleasurable thoughts and feelings” (p.75). Our rational self may tell us that the ideology behind a romantic comedy is totally against our feminist principles, but we can still be caught up with the tensions developed in the romantic relationships among the characters. We know that, as Misson and Morgan argued, a spray of Chanel No. 5 will not make us any more attractive, but the image as shown on the TV commercial is working “aesthetically” on us, drawing on our desire for this particular fantasy. Other feminist scholars like Kincheloe and Steinberg (1993) also drew our attention to the inseparability of rationality and emotion.

What they argued is that not all our mental operations are available to us for analysis and not all of them are logical. What they critiqued is the very ideal of the rational person and the autonomous sovereign subject whereby truth and meaning can be fully accessible. W. Morgan (1997) illustrated this point by quoting Shor’s (1980) research with a group of students at City University of New York whom he engaged in a rational deconstruction of the hamburger. Morgan wondered, after their investigation, if there were no students who still harboured a desire for the food and the fast-food lifestyle, and desired pleasure from it in other social contexts. She argued that “[t]he inchoate and contradictory workings of our unconscious, our emotions, our desires, must be factored into any accounts of human thoughts and actions and any pedagogy” (p. 12).

Poststructural feminists hence called for the dismantling of the Cartesian mind-body dualism and pointed out that real critical ability is not just limited to formal rationality, but also the ability to draw connection between social realities and personal desires, beliefs and values. Misson and Morgan (2006) called for the “reconfiguration” of CL so that it can take account of the aesthetic dimension. They suggested that one way of designing a critical education classroom is not to jump right into a simplistic and inflexible critique of identity construction (for example, Donne’s poem has to be about gender and power relations). Instead, we should allow ourselves as well as our students to explore the emotional experiences that a text generates in us:
The [emotional] experience cannot simply be objectified intellectually and thus defused, but there needs to be an understanding of the kind of desire involving us with the emotion, the subject position being created through it, and why we experience that position as so attractive, before we can begin to weigh up what its advantages and dangers are…. The objectifying, distancing moves may be necessary, but if that is all there is to critical literacy, and there is not a corresponding emotional understanding of why it matters if black people are depicted as overgrown children or women as passive, then it becomes a set of meaningless exercises. (Misson & Morgan, 2006, p. 224)

The reconfigured CL work should allow one to make connections to one’s own personal experiences and emotional investments. It is only through this can one come to a critical reflection of one’s tacit beliefs and assumptions, and a better self-awareness and critical understanding of social realities, which are much needed for any social changes (Silvers, 2001). This is what I call embodied engagement⁹, signifying that not only is the head involved for rational ideological critique, but also both the heart and the hands are engaged for critical personal interrogation and for creating constructive ways of addressing the issues. Without embodied engagement, ideological critique based on textual analysis would only be reduced to analyzing other people’s problems.

This personal/emotional aspect is found lacking not just in the critical discourse analysis approach, or genre studies, but also in the New Literacies (Gee, 1996, 2000) and Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) practices. Although the latter two validate students’ diverse cultural literacy resources, the emphasis is still more on access (i.e., access to the modes of discourses that are increasingly important in the fast-capitalist global society) rather than on critique or personal reflection of deeply held cultural beliefs and investments. As Pennycook (2001) argued, these two contextualized social literacy practices, though important in opening up new dimensions ignored by traditional autonomous cognitive approach to literacy, lack an overt critique of power and a vision of change. A lot of multiliteracies practices, although they allow learners to understand the design behind different texts and then to engage in their redesign, do not give adequate attention to the examination of the constructed nature of these designs and how these textual productions position us ideologically. Not to mention, there is little space for personal interrogation of values in these literacy practices. An example can be seen in Chandler-

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⁹ The term is to acknowledge the fact that emotions are powerfully bound up with the “body”, as Misson and Morgan (2006) argued. The body is the site of emotions, not genetically but socially, for example class and sexuality are inscribed on the body—the way we dress, walk, talk, etc.
Olcott and Mahar’s (2003) study on the teenage girl Rhiannon’s anime-focused webpage construction. Following the Multiliteracies framework, Rhiannon was enabled to produce texts like love poems and fanficitons through the use of multimodal computer skills and the immersion into an online animation fan community for sharing ideas and solving problems. Undoubtedly, her tech-savviness and computer-based literacies, which are often dismissed as irrelevant to mainstream school-based learning, were validated and recognized as useful tools for literacy learning. However, critical framing in this case was no more than the critique of the technical use of audio, visual and spatial skills\textsuperscript{10}. Transformed practice was nothing more than a hybrid of different popular cultural forms. The girl’s assumptions of traditional notions of heterosexual romance were left unexamined. Hence, there is the need for space where students (as well as teachers) are invited to explore their own emotional investments and come to a better understanding how textual productions structure their beliefs and values.

2.2.2. A More Self-Reflexive Poststructuralist Critical Analysis

Another major shortcoming of the CL taken up by proponents of CDA, CLA and genre studies is its lack of self-reflectiveness in its claim to be emancipatory (Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1992; Lather, 1992). What it is blind to is its unreflexive modernist and positivist claims to truth. Critical textual analysis and ideological critique are premised on an assumption of a “normal, ordered, nonperverted discourse” (Pennycook, 2001, p.86) and by revealing power and ideology that deformed it, we can return to a transparent and ordered discourse again. This resonates with Habermas’ urge for the possibility of emancipatory through “communicative rationality” whereby understanding among people can be reached through ideal speech situations when participating speakers all strive for rational consensus and assume equal dialogue roles (p. 87). This Habermasian form of critical theory, though providing a useful tool to critique ideology, is blind to its idealist emancipatory claim. As Patterson (1997) argued, “if the positivist claim to grasping truth is to be discredited, it seems odd that as a critical analyst I should feel free to assume the truth about ideological operations is within my reach” (p. 426). If all truth is

\textsuperscript{10} The New London Group attempted later to reconceptualise and re-label the critical framing as ‘analyzing’ (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008), with an emphasis on two distinct types of analyzing: (a) analyzing functionally—processes of reasoning, drawing inferential and deductive conclusions, establishing functional relations like cause and effects, etc. (b) analyzing critically—evaluation of one’s own and others’ views, interests and motives (p. 29). There is still, however, “a failure to foreground the influence of power relations” in their conceptualisation of critical framing (J, Cummins, personal communication. September 28, 2009).
constructed and reality is mediated, then the truth the critical analyst is championing is but one discourse among many. The weakness of the ideological critique approach stems from its failure to understand, first of all, how power works; and secondly, the whole idea of identity and agency.

2.2.2.1. Foucauldian notion of power.

Foucault informed us that power is “circulating”, “exercised” and existing “only in action” (Gore, 1992, pp. 58-59) and that there is no place outside power, outside discourse, outside ideology, nor is there a position from which one can arrive at the “truth” outside the relations of power. Power is knowledge and knowledge is power. There is no unmediated access to the “real” and the “real” is always already produced by social and cultural organization. The critical analysis approach, however, often positions teachers as an “objective knower and interpreter” (C. Luke, 1997, p. 41) who can empower the “passive and naive students” to see through the ideological nature of difficult cultural texts. The reality is that apart from their many personal limitations, they are often constrained by historical and social locations and power relations. With the inherent embedded power relations within the classroom, students tend to position themselves as intelligent and rational consumer of cultural texts since this would give them a more socially powerful and prestigious position in the eyes of the teacher and classmates (Buckingham, 2003). Without relating to students’ affective and emotional reflection, critical textual analysis can easily be reduced to a “form of language games” (p.111), where students are just guessing what is in the teacher’s head and competing for the politically correct answers to establish positions of “good students”. It may represent a new form of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1982/1991) for middle class students--a form of social distinction--as they are found to be more adept than working class students at reproducing critical readings (Buckingham, 2003). The transformative potential of such literacy education is thus not as great as it claims.

2.2.2.2. Poststructuralist notion of identity and agency.

Another weakness found in textual ideological critique is its failure to see how contradictions, contingencies, tensions, and internal resistances will inevitably be involved in this whole “objective” analysis project. The whole idea of how the text is taken up, understood or resisted is absent from such a practice. What poststructuralist analysis has informed us about identity is that it is far from unitary, fixed or universal (Barker, 1999) and thus reception of the
text is never homogeneous. Each reader comes to a text with very different histories of engagement with that particular cultural form. They read through and against a social history of encounters with other texts at other times (Buckingham, 1993). Reading is also a socially situated and context specific activity. Construction of meaning of a text is always dependent on the knowledge of a particular group at a particular time and about that particular text (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Students’ interaction with texts is never static but always changing depending on the particular participants that they are with and the social setting. Gee (2001) argued that we all have “multiple identities” which are connected not to our “internal states” but to our social performances. “The ‘kind of person’ one is recognized as ‘being’, at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable” (p. 99). What’s more, he pointed out that identity is very much a discursive practice and has to do with one’s own narrativization of oneself as well as how people talk about you, and how much you resist or inhabit what they say about you. Hence, identity is constantly created and recreated in our interaction with people and it is very much shaped by collective discourses around us (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Gee (2001) put it this way:

Each person has had a unique trajectory through “Discourse space”. That is, he or she has, through time, in certain order, had specific experiences within specific Discourses (i.e., been recognized, at a time and place, one way and not another), some recurring and others not. This trajectory and the person’s own narrativization (Mishler, 2000) of it are what constitute his or her (never fully formed or always potentially changing) “core identity”. The Discourses are social and historical, but the person’s trajectory and narrativization are individual (though an individuality that is fully socially formed and informed). (p. 111)

Approaches like CDA, CLA and genre studies fall into the trap of “structure over agency” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 93). Its predominant focus on production rather than reception fails to see what has been read into a text by particular reading practices other than some pre-given textual or ideological reality.

Therefore, ideological critique should adopt a more self-reflexive poststructuralist approach and the effort, as Patterson (1997) pointed out, should be on locating the intertextual and situated meanings. Besides, multiple interpretations from students of different social backgrounds and history of literacy practices should be encouraged. Bearing in mind that there is no unmediated access to truth, different individual responses should only be the “starting point”
(Buckingham, 2003, p. 120) and used positively as a resource for further analysis and debate to explore the “social basis of people’s tastes and media practices” (p. 121).

2.2.3. Curriculum Built on Participatory Social Research

The move away from structural determinism toward a poststructuralist approach to CL will mean a changed conception of teachers as the sole holder of truth. What this implies is that instead of an “all-knowing” critical pedagogue, what we need is a self-reflective practitioner-researcher who learns as s/he teaches. The greater degree of humility and reflexivity (Gore, 1992) that a teacher practices, the greater the chances that there is a safer space for students to have a more genuine reflection on their own investments and desires, a necessary step toward embodied engagement mentioned earlier.

The teacher as a practitioner-researcher will also imply that students’ participation in setting the curriculum should also be maximized. Teachers should not be the only experts who can determine for learners what is important for them to learn (Auerbach, 1995). This is still predominant in approaches centered on critical textual analysis and ideological critique. The Freirean perspective which emphasizes the centrality of learners and their communities, and the integration of research and pedagogy that starts with learners’ concerns is needed. Norton Pierce (1995) argued strongly for classroom based social research to “engage the social identities of students in ways that will improve their language learning outside the classroom and help them to claim the right to speak” (p. 26). Involving students in a dialogic process of exploration and action on social realities that relate to their interest, desires and lives will foster both cognitive and academic engagement as well as transformative effects.

2.3. Toward a Synthesis for Critical Literacy Education

What I have discussed so far is how the “critical” in CL should look like, with help from poststructuralist and feminist reflections on power, ideological critique, and the notion of identity and agency. Janks (2000, 2010) and Delpit (1995), however, reminded us that critique of and access to the language of power should by no means be made exclusive to each other especially with racial and social minority students to whom English provides a valuable means for academic and social success. To resort to any simplistic “either/or” solutions just neglects the complexities of the whole issue. As Delpit (1995) argued, it is extremely important that Black
and other minority children are taught explicitly the languages of power because “[i]f you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier” (p. 25). Janks (2010), speaking from the post-apartheid African context where English still enjoys the supreme status, echoed Rockhill and Tomic’s argument (1995) about the inherent paradox of English education. While she recognised that the continual instrumental need for the language will inevitably perpetuate South African students’ marginalization, denying their access to this language of distinction will restrict their life chances:

The access paradox recognises that domination without access excludes students from the language or the language variety that would afford them the most linguistic capital, thereby limiting their life chances. It restricts students to the communities in which their marginalised languages are spoken. As the establishment of ghettos based on language and ethnicity was one of the main aims of the apartheid state, English in South Africa came to be seen as a way out of the ghetto. (Janks, 2010, p. 140)

Access, to Janks, is not just about getting access to the powerful forms of language, but it is also about “access to audiences, to platforms, to modes of distribution such as publication, to influential networks” (Janks, 2010, p. 133). Therefore, how literacy is taught will have a strong impact on how the linguistic and cultural capital associated with dominant languages and elite literacies is to be distributed.

Apart from drawing our attention to the importance between a balance of access and critique in CL education, Janks (2000) also strongly called for an integration of different CL realizations which are derived from different conceptualizations of language and power relations. To her, these CL realizations should not be seen as separate enterprises but rather as crucially interdependent. Existing CL work tends to just focus on one of four directions: (a) domination, by which she means ideological critique which challenges the relations of domination, i.e., deconstruction; (b) access (to the language of power); (c) diversity (i.e., inclusion of students’ diverse languages and literacies); and (d) design (to harness the different semiotic systems to change and challenge the existing Discourses, i.e., reconstruction). Janks pointed out that the four elements are equally important and should not be seen as separate enterprises, but rather interconnected and interdependent. They should be woven together so as to balance and inform each other. What she is arguing is that we have to adopt a more dynamic view of CL education
so that it does not necessarily have to take just one form. Interdependence of the different CL realizations is essential because, as she argued,

Genre theory without creativity runs the risk of reifying existing genres; deconstruction without reconstruction or design reduces human agency; diversity without access ghettoizes students. Domination without difference and diversity loses the ruptures that produce contestation and change. Reconstruction needs deconstruction in order to understand ‘the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 94) (Janks, 2000, p. 179)

I agree, in general, with Janks’ (2000) call for a more integrative approach, especially in the multicultural context of postmodern Canada. Both the critique of and access to the language of power have to go together because without access, disadvantaged children will be further marginalized. Theoretical study cannot be dissected from creative action so that through engagement with literacy practices we can come to a better understanding of their mediated nature, and open up a space for challenge, resistance and change. Janks might not have foregrounded the considerations that I put forward in the previous section on the need to adopt a more self-reflexive stance on ideological critique that would also allow personal reflection on emotional investments in different literacy practices. However, basically I agree with the need to treat these CL practices as interdependent and to introduce them as interconnected elements as much as possible, though the emphasis of each element can vary at different times according to the particular needs of the students’ social contexts.

I propose a pedagogical model that attempts to balance of Janks’ (2000, 2010) synthesis of CL education with the poststructural feminist considerations for embodied engagement and self-reflexivity. The model is inspired by Ada and Campoy’s creative reading approach (Ada, 1991; Ada & Campoy, 2004) and is shown in Figure 2.1:
Figure 2.1: The integrative model that guided this research study

Ada and Campoy’s (2004) original model is a reading process which is built on a four-phase interactive dialogue between teachers and students, namely (a) Descriptive Phase, (b) Personal Interpretive Phase, (c) Critical/Multicultural/Anti-bias Phase, and (d) Creative/Transformative Phase. The use of the word “phase” in the original model was replaced by the word “dimension” as the former may suggest a discrete linear structure whereas the latter would give a sense of a more dynamic and fluid relationship among the four aspects. The model can be used for reading any text, be it print or non-print. The original Descriptive Phase, which is meant to focus on developing “an understanding of the content of the book” (2004, p. 82), was replaced by the Textual Dimension which highlights a more overt focus on the grammatical structures, linguistic choices or multimodal designs of the text that help to present and construct certain messages or characterization. This is especially important for language learners when they are still mastering the basic forms and structures of the language and how these formal features help convey certain meanings. This is in response to the need for the balance between access and critique (Janks, 2000, 2010). The Personal Dimension is to encourage students and teachers to weigh the text against their experiences, feelings and emotions for critical reflection which will facilitate self-awareness and, in turn, generate greater potential for change and social engagement. It is also to allow students’ unique voices to be heard, given the fact that there can be plural, even contradictory readings with the same textual structure and content. This links us
back to the *Textual Dimension* and how textual *production* can intersect in multifarious ways with textual *reception* (the overlapping circles in the diagram suggests their interrelatedness). Allowing a space where all these different readings and personal emotional investments are openly discussed will help both teachers and students to come to a better understanding of the constructed nature of any discursive or multimodal texts (Buckingham, 2003; Misson & Morgan, 2006). The *Critical Dimension*, like that proposed by Ada and Campoy (2004), is to encourage reflections on issues related to gender, class, race, ethnicity, etc. that are generated from reading the text. Again, the “critical” here is to intersect with the “personal” to show the interrelatedness of the two dimensions. Ideological critique that fails to take into account the personal affective investments in textual receptions will run the risk of asking students to analyse other people’s problems, without helping them to relate personally to the issue or have a better understanding of how textual productions structure our likes and dislikes (Buckingham, 2003; Misson, 1996; Misson & Morgan, 2006). The last dimension *Creative/Transformative Dimension* is to encourage creative, constructive action that addresses those social realities discussed through a variety of transformed literacy practices like those suggested by the Multiliteracies framework. For example, it can be a poem or a letter or even a short video addressing the issues of discrimination or poverty which can then be sent to a local newspaper or published on the web. Students might also set up a blog to invite further discussion of these issues in cyberspace or they might re-enact a scene from a story or play, or even an imaginary scene, to explore what a character’s thoughts and feelings are, or could be. The idea is to allow students to experience the production of texts. This will not only heighten their awareness of textual constructedness and how it positions us, but the textual production will also “allow them to come to terms with their experience and give their perception on things by shaping it aesthetically” (Misson & Morgan, 2006, p. 224).

This integrative instructional model is not meant to be a fixed one-size-fits-all model or some kind of placebo that could fix any literacy problem.

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11 Nor is this integrative model meant to be a superior model to, for example, Luke and Freebody’s Four Resource Model (1997) or the Multiliteracies Framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). There are in fact quite a few common characteristics that are shared among the three. For example, there is a distinct focus on mastering the structural features of literacy/language and the understanding of cultural and social meanings different texts conveys. There is also the focus on using texts functionally and through critical analysis re-designing the texts for transformation. The three models also emphasise the importance of dynamic and fluid flow among the four aspects or dimensions and not treating them as stages to be achieved one after another. However, the Four Resource
research was to collaboratively explore how CL education plays out in the context-bound classroom. This will be explained further in Chapter 4 on research questions.

Model and the Multiliteracies Framework do not foreground the importance of personal emotional investments and how critical analysis should involve both the affective and rationalist aspects.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

I survey three bodies of literature to assemble key frameworks and concepts for my pursuit of inquiry related to CL education in a junior high school ESL classroom. The first body of literature is related to the sociocultural theory of learning, with a special focus on the concept of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2005) and identity investment (Peirce, 1995). The second body of literature has to do with literacy development and engagement (Guthrie, 1996) and the last one is Cummins’ (2001) Academic Expertise Framework.

3.1. Sociocultural Theory of Learning: Community of Practice

There are many different learning theories, for example, Bandura’s social learning theory, or Piaget’s constructivist learning theory, each of which places its emphasis on certain aspects of learning. Their particular emphasis reflects some fundamental differences in their conception of knowledge, learners and learning itself and deals with a certain facet of the multidimensional nature of learning. It is for the purpose of this research in CL that a sociocultural theory of learning that bears a more critical perspective is employed. This provides a coherent conceptual framework for the transformative concern of CL work.

The Vygotskian sociocultural theory of learning postulates that cognitive activities are mental activities external to the learner but in which s/he participates through mediation (e.g., the use of language). Language mediates the process whereby external activities are transformed into mental ones through internalization (Swain, 2000; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). Premised on the view that learning is the process of internalizing knowledge through interaction with others, the Vygotskian concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1978) becomes a familiar heuristic for setting up learning conditions. The concept of ZPD has received very different interpretations over the years and it can be roughly classified into three main categories. It is first of all generally understood as the distance between a learner’s problem-solving abilities working on his or her own and that when assisted by or collaborating with more knowledgeable others like adults or peers. This “scaffolding” interpretation of ZPD has inspired assessment methods that measure not just the level of actual development but also that of potential development (Wertsch, 1985), which has then been developed into a more systematic form of dynamic assessment (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). It has
also inspired the pedagogical approach of *scaffolding* (Donato, 1994) which aims to help learners to gradually and eventually be able to perform tasks without assistance.

Another category is the so-called “cultural” interpretation which refers ZPD as the distance between an individual’s everyday knowledge and cultural knowledge which is made accessible through instruction. This is also what Hedegaard (1988, p. 144) called the distance between *active knowledge*, as own by the individual, and *understood knowledge*, as provided by instruction. This interpretation is based on Vygotsky’s distinction between scientific and everyday concepts. One’s knowledge is considered to be mature when everyday concepts merge with the scientific ones.

Despite the explicit social concern of these two interpretations of the sociocultural learning theory, Lave and Wenger (2005) contended that the social character of learning is still confined to “a small ‘aura’ of socialness that provides input for the process of internalization viewed as individualistic acquisition of the cultural given” (p. 150). There is no account taken of the broader context of the social structure where learning takes place.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice, which points to the situatedness of any forms of learning where emphasis is on comprehensive understanding that involves the whole person rather than just about “receiving” a body of factual knowledge about the world. Learning is about activity in and with the world, and how the agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. This concept of the relational interdependency of the agent and world, activity, learning, knowing is very similar to Giddens’ (1979) “structuration theory” that meaning is basically socially negotiated and that learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially constituted; objective forms and systems of activity, on the one hand, and agents’ subjective and intersubjective understandings of them, on the other, mutually constituted both the world and its experienced forms. (Lave & Wenger, 2005, p. 151)

Learning is therefore situated in the historical development of on-going activity, where its actors, the relations among them, its environment, are produced and reproduced, and change in the course of activity. The historicizing view of learning process implies that learning is no longer just about a universal process of transmission and assimilation, but rather about ongoing situated negotiations and renegotiations of meaning. Here negotiation of meaning is not referring to the narrow sense of transmission of information, but as learning involves the whole person, it
is also about the negotiation of one’s relation to the social community, a negotiation of one’s position and hence identity:

Activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation; they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning. These systems of relations arise out of and are reproduced and developed within social communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons. The person is defined by as well as defines these relations. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities. (Lave & Wenger, 2005, p. 152)

This relational conception of learning is significant because the social structure of the learning community or what they called the “community of practice”, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy (of proceeding from a new timer occupying a peripheral position to an old-timer gaining full membership) define possibilities for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Whether one can attain full membership depends on (a) whether s/he can have broad access to different parts of the activity, and can then gradually proceed to full participation in core tasks; (b) whether there is abundant horizontal interaction between participants, sharing their stories of problematic situations and their solutions; and (c) whether the technologies and structures of the community of practice are transparent so that they make sense of what they learn and why they have to learn it (1991).

Lave and Wenger’s (1991, 2005) social theory of learning has extended the study of learning beyond the context of classroom instructional setting to include the structure of social world in analysis and has taken into account of the confliction and relational nature of social practice. Norton Peirce’s (1995) research on immigrant working women further extended Lave and Wenger’s legitimate peripheral participation to include a more overt political agenda by drawing on Bourdieu’s (1982/1991) concept of legitimacy and authority. The process of language learning is seen as inseparable from ELLs’ negotiation of their social identities within the community of practice that is structured by discursive power relations. One’s communicative competence will hence necessarily involve one’s access to “the right to speech” and “the power to impose reception” (Norton, 2000, p. 8), which ultimately determines whether one can gain full membership within the community. A learner has a complex social history and multiple desires. When s/he speaks or refuses to speak, it should not be understood as simply information exchange or its refusal, but rather as their constant negotiation of their identities across time and space. Norton uses the term “investment” (p. 10) (as opposed to the traditional notion of
“motivation”) to describe such a relationship with the target language. Her research on language investment foregrounds the role of language as “constitutive of “and “constituted by” the language learner’s identity which agrees with Heller’s (1987) work that demonstrates that “it is through language that a person gains access to--or is denied access to--powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak” (Norton, 2000, p. 10).

3.2. Literacy Engagement

Another main body of learning theory linking directly to second language learning is Guthrie’s literacy engagement.

Guthrie’s (1996, 2004) conception of literacy engagement throws light on the essential elements for sustaining literacy development and the instructional practices that help students to be permanently engaged as readers. An engaged reader, first of all, is characterized by having the intrinsic motivations (e.g., curiosity or involvement) for pursuit of conceptual understanding of the natural world or the fictional world. To put it simply, they are energized and active in reading for knowledge. It is also characterized by a disposition to think deeply and an employment of cognitive strategies, like problem finding, searching for information, applying prior knowledge to texts, inferencing and comprehending multiple genres for learning from texts. The last characteristic is that engaged readers will participate in the social networks of classroom and community. They will interact with partners, team members and the teacher as an avenue for understanding and delight.

Guthrie’s (2004) research on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1998 indicates that there is a higher correlation between the indicators of engaged reading and reading comprehension achievement than any other demographic factors such as gender, income or ethnicity. It is found that even though the nine-year-old research participants might come from a low-income or low-education family, if they were highly engaged readers, their reading achievement substantially outscored those who came from higher income, higher education families but were less engaged readers.

Similar findings appeared in another study, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Kirsch et al., 2002) done with the 15-year-olds in 32 countries. Again, the PISA study showed that highly engaged readers from lower socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated excellence in reading that less engaged readers from more middle class
background. This pattern is observed repeatedly both within and across nations (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007).

The strong correlation between literacy engagement and sustained long-term literacy development points to the fact that we need to turn our students into engaged readers. The question then is what classroom contexts foster literacy engagement? Guthrie proposed seven dimensions for such a context (1996). Firstly, it is observational by which he meant that literacy activities are fused with real-world experiences. Students’ observation of the natural environments—like trees or grass—and social environments—like friends, politicians or the homeless—that illicit their fascination and interest for further understanding, forms the point of departure for extended literacy. The second is the conceptual dimension. The classroom contexts conducive to literacy engagement are those that support for deep understanding, which in turn enable learners to explain phenomena and reorganize their knowledge for application in new situations. The third dimension is self-directed learning, that is students are given the options for the what, how and who of learning activities. When students have the freedom to choose their topics, tasks, assessment criteria or groupings, they are personalizing literacy by tailoring it to their needs and interests. The fourth dimension is concerning the explicit support for strategy learning. Engaged reading can be enhanced by strategy development through peer modelling, teacher scaffolding, guided practice or group discussions. Another dimension is collaboration. Students should feel that they belong to the classroom community and that they are valued and cared for by the teacher. This will help the social construction of ideas and strategies, and peer-led discussions tend to enhance self-monitoring and interpretive capability. The next dimension is self-expression which refers to the extent to which students are encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge or imagination in ways they choose. The classroom is characterized by multiple opportunities for students to create artefacts that are tailored to their interest. Artefacts can range from verbal expressions (like debates, presentations or essays) to physical models or art work. Again, this personalization of knowledge demonstration contributes to long-term motivations for literacy. The last but not least is coherence whereby learning experiences are connected to each other. It can be done through thematic organization as it permits depth of learning which generates extended knowledge of topics and genres.
Guthrie’s concept of literacy engagement explains clearly why the asocial and decontextualized L2 teaching approach often fails to foster learners’ cognitive and affective engagement in literacy development and why CL may facilitate better literacy development.

### 3.3. Cummins’ Academic Expertise Framework

Cummins’ Academic Expertise Framework (2001) espouses a very comprehensive pedagogical model that has a distinctive transformative orientation in second language teaching. Drawing on the consensus among cognitive psychologists on the optimal conditions for learning, Cummins emphasized the importance in activating students’ prior knowledge in learning the new. For minority students, this is often more difficult than thought since their diverse backgrounds are often seen with negativity and irrelevant in classroom settings. Learning with deep rather than superficial understanding is another condition since learning is never simply about memorizing, but rather about transfer of knowledge from one context to another. Lastly, active learning of which students feel ownership and in which they have identity investment should be promoted. Only when students feel that they take control of their own learning would there be any effective learning.

As for academic development, according to Cummins (2001) the major challenge for ELLs is academic language proficiency, one of the three aspects of language proficiency (the other two being conversational fluency and discrete language skills). This is often neglected in an ESL program with emphasis often wrongly placed on surface conversational skills. Development of academic language proficiency often depends on students’ access to academic language by means of extensive reading and opportunities where they can harvest the language that they encounter in reading.

Based on the important conditions for optimal learning and the urgency for academic language development, Cummins (2001) outlined what he called the Academic Expertise Framework which is built on collaborative rather than coercive relations of power between the teacher and students. This kind of collaborative teacher-student interactions does not just maximize students’ cognitive engagement but also their identity investment. The two elements are in a reciprocal relationship: the more valued and respected that student’s experiences and talents are, the more they are likely to engage cognitively. The more cognitive engagement that they have, the more affirmed that they are of their cognitive self and hence even more
cognitively and academically engaged. Here Cummins attempted to go beyond the sociolinguists’ view on the importance of affect in learning to that of power relationships. He highlighted the crucial importance of identity affirmation in a multicultural learning environment since teacher-student interactions are never neutral and often reflect the unequal power relations on the macro societal level.

The framework proposes that instruction should focus on meaning, language and use. The first component, focus on meaning, argues that construct of comprehensible input should go beyond just literal comprehension. What is intrinsic in the notion of comprehensible input is the depth of understanding of concepts and vocabulary as well as CL. Hence, teachers have to facilitate students to relate what is taught to their prior knowledge and experiences, critically analyze the information and use the results for their discussions and analyses in some concrete activity or project like a video presentation, writing an essay, etc.

The second focus is on language, which proposes that a focus on formal features of the target language should be integrated with critical inquiry into issues of language and power. Students in learning the language structures are also encouraged to develop their critical language awareness like the status of different genres, or varieties of language, or themes which are often related to issues of power. An example is asking students to analyze letters to the editor on controversial issues such as immigration and examine how the language used in these letters positions and potentially stereotypes minority group learners.

The last component, focus on use, is based on the notion that language acquisition will only be actualized when ELLs are given plenty of opportunities to express their identities and intelligence through language. Again, Cummins tied in the concept of identity investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) here and accentuated the role of identity texts (Cummins, 2004) in developing students’ academic expertise. Identity texts refer to texts, written, spoken, visual, musical, or combinations in multimodal form, that reflect their identities in a positive light.

The Academic Expertise Framework also calls for an integrative pedagogical orientation:
Figure 3.1: Cummins’ (2004) nested model of transmission, social-constructivist and transformative pedagogy

Figure 3.1 shows a nested model of transmission, social constructivist, and transformative orientations to pedagogy. Cummins (2004) argued that second language education should include the mastery of formal features which can be done through a transmission pedagogical orientation which is represented in the inner circle with the narrowest focus. The second aspect is students’ experiential learning of the target language which is done through a social constructivist pedagogical orientation. It broadens the transmission of curriculum materials to include the development of students’ higher-order thinking abilities through teachers and students’ co-constructing of knowledge and understanding. The third element is the depth of critical understanding through a transformative pedagogical orientation. The emphasis is not just on transmitting the curriculum and constructing knowledge but also on enabling students to gain insight into how knowledge intersects with power. The goal is to promote CL among students. My instructional framework for the integrative CL program echoes the principles and theoretical concepts offered by Cummins’ pedagogical orientations.

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Chapter 4: Methodology

The aim of the research was to see how an integrative model of CL work played out in a class of Grade 7/8 beginning ELLs in a multicultural middle school in the north-east end of Toronto. The guiding questions for the research were:

1. What are the processes involved in implementing an integrative approach of CL with regard to the instructional choices the teacher and/or researcher make, and the negotiation of teacher and student identities?
2. What are the possible dilemmas, challenges, constraints, and limitations the teacher and/or researcher, and students face in the process?
3. And to what extent does the project facilitate students’ critical/literacy development?

In answering the above research questions, I outlined the following main inquiries regarding the teacher and/or researcher; and the student participants:

**Teacher and/or researcher:**

1. How does the teacher define herself as an ESL teacher? How does her professional identity intersect with CL education? Does it change as the research is carried out? If yes, how does it evolve?
2. With what kinds of pedagogical orientations are the teacher and/or researcher aligned? With regard to the following aspects of curriculum and instruction\(^\text{13}\), what choices does the teacher and/or researcher make?
   i) **tools:** What tools are used to carry out a variety of tasks, for example, pencil, projector, videos, tapes or computer? In what ways are these tools used predominantly for transmission purposes or are expanded for more social constructivist or transformative purposes?
   ii) **content:** What curricular texts are chosen? Do they promote or inhibit critical inquiry?

\(^{13}\) Cummins, Brown, & Sayers (2007) proposed a range of instructional options that can be identified in any school situation, which are tools, content, cognition, assessment, language/culture, and parental involvement. The teachers’ choices concerning these curricular and instructional aspects will “reflect their identities and role definitions as well as the underlying pedagogical orientations that drive their instruction” (2007, p. 233). The point on parental involvement was omitted in this study, as it might not play a very obvious role at this grade level.
iii) *cognition*: What kind of cognitive engagement is encouraged by the teacher and/or researcher’s form of instruction, ranging from low-order thinking and mechanical language practice and drills to higher-order critical inquiry?

iv) *assessment*: What assessment methods are used to measure learning outcomes? Are alternative methods such as portfolio or performance assessment employed to assess the full range of literacy outcomes?

v) *language and culture*: Are students’ first language linguistic and cultural resources acknowledged and capitalized on for learning English? What kind of interaction does the teacher and/or researcher orchestrate in the classroom? What kind of power relations (coercive versus collaborative) is enabled in the classroom? Does it encourage open and equal dialogue for student empowerment?

3. Do these choices change in the research process as the CL project is implemented and in what way? How does the integrative approach to CL evolve and how does it look it?

4. What, if any, are the dilemmas, contradictions, limitations, constraints and complexities the teacher and/or researcher encounter as they negotiate and juggle with these instructional choices in the process?

**Students:**

The following aspects were explored:

1. How do the students perceive English language learning (as a more functionalist cognitive process or a sociocultural practice that necessarily involves issues of power and values)? What are the investments (Norton, 2000) they have for the target language? Does their perception change in the process as the CL project is implemented?

2. How do they perceive themselves as ELLs? What subject positions and identities does the CL project constitute for them, if there is any? What challenges, dilemmas, conflicts, and contradictions, if any, do they encounter in the process?

3. Do they experience positive affect and identity investment in the ESL classroom? Do they feel their voices being respected and their sociocultural identities and resources being valued? Are there changes regarding this aspect in the process?
4. What kind of literacy and cognitive engagement are they engaged in (both in-class discussion and homework assignment)—mechanical low-order thinking language activities or higher-order critical inquiry? Are there any changes throughout the process? If yes, what are they and how do they feel about them?

5. Do they perceive any progress in their critical/literacy development? If yes, what are they? If no, why?

To answer these questions, I adopted critical action research methods for my study, which allowed greater reflexivity and challenged the epistemological distinction between research and practice as well as research and praxis. In this chapter, I would first of all expound a little bit on what a critical action research is and the rationale in adopting it before moving on to describe the research setting, research participants, and the data collection and analysis processes.

**4.1. Critical Action Research**

Action research, as it was first introduced by Lewin in post-war America (Hendricks, 2006) has a fundamental interest in emancipation and empowerment. Enquiry, he argued, should be situated within participants’ own practical environment and all members in the community should be involved in developing action and theory in tandem in order that the community can be democratized. However, the more recent action research tends to operate from an ahistorical, apolitical value system (Lather, 1986). Some just focus on gaining a practical understanding of the environment while others merely have a technical interest in finding ways to better control the environment without the conscious effort to democratize the inquiry process, therefore leaving the unequal power relations unchallenged (Grundy, 1987). Action research theorists who are interested in emancipation came up with labels such as participatory action research (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), participatory research (Park, 2001), critical action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996), or emancipatory action research (Grundy, 1987; Kemmis, 2001) to highlight their overt political interest and to differentiate themselves from those who do not. They basically share the same interest and belief in social transformation through a democratic inquiry process. The following outlines in detail the rationale in the choice of a critical action research methodology for the present study.
4.1.1. Rationale for Using Critical Action Research Methodology

Critical action research (CAR) bears an epistemological belief in social transformation. Within this paradigm, research goes beyond the technical interest (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) in mere explanation of social phenomenon and the practical interest in subjective understanding or interpretations of certain social phenomenon to uncovering its systematic social, cultural or political distortions thereby changing them. CAR is hence not research “on or about education”, but rather research “in and for education” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 156). Instead of seeking to test out theoretical ideas at a distance and to validate them independently, CAR is driven by practical actions within the immediate environment, from which educational theories can be drawn (Burns, 1999). This means CAR is contextualized and localized, and it is through investigating the immediate practices of individual classrooms, unexamined assumptions of the educational practices and systems are critically analyzed. Therefore, unlike other research paradigms, CAR espouses a holistic conception of theory and practice that “what is thought, what is represented, what is acted upon, are all intertwined aspects of lived experience and, as such, cannot be discussed or interpreted separately” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xvii). The main reason for adopting this research inquiry model for the present research was to help locate and identify the context-bound complexities in the implementation of CL education in the ESL classroom.

This grounding of research in practice and practice in research is done through a cyclical process which involves (a) strategic planning to deal with the problem as identified in the immediate educational context, (b) action, i.e., implementing the plan, (c) observation and evaluation, and (d) critical and self-critical reflection on the results of the first three stages and making decisions for the next reflect-act-evaluate cycle (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). What happened in my research was that the processes were not as neat as this spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting suggests. Those stages tended to overlap and were more fluid, open and responsive, substantiating what Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) anticipated of any CAR.

Each set of data that I collected (which will be discussed in detail in the next section)--no matter whether they were from my ongoing discussions with the teacher, interactions with students or their work specimen--all fed into each other so that continual reflection and development of the program could be made possible. Rearick and Feldman (1999) described
three types of reflection. The first one is *autobiographical reflection* which has its focus on how the researcher’s own values, beliefs and background affect the actions s/he takes. This is similar to what Winter called *reflexive critique* (1996)—a process of becoming aware of one’s own perceptual biases. The second type is *collaborative reflection* which involves researchers or practitioners’ analyzing and interpreting each other’s ideas and perspectives for problem-solving. What we need in this process is *risking disturbance* (1996), i.e., the willingness to submit one’s taken-for-granted beliefs to critique. The third type is *communal reflection* which allows researchers or practitioners to go beyond collaborative reflection to focus on issues of justice and democracy, to reflect if their actions promote or obstruct the transformative ideals. In the Data Collection section, I will explain in greater detail how I strove to maintain these three types of reflection.

In addition, as CAR is based on an agenda for social transformation, the process of inquiry itself should be democratized. Participating researchers (whether school-based or university-based) and practitioners assume a more equal relationship where both contribute their expertise to the inquiry on a collaborative basis. The “insider” (teacher) offers assistance to the “outsider” (researcher) as a *critical informant* in the field while the “outsider” is considered to be a *critical friend* who helps the “insider” to become more critical for educational change and eventually become a self-critical researcher into his/her practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The similar kind of equality is also promoted in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. For instance, participants like students, parents, or staff, as Cole and Knowles (2000) argued, can be involved as research collaborators in a number of ways. Their opinions can be sought in identifying problems in the educational practice in their localized context. They can also help evaluate the effectiveness of any intervention that will then feed back into the spiral cycle of reflection and implementation for further improvement. This subject-to-subject collaborative relationship among the researchers, practitioners and participants is empowering as it gives all actors in the research a *voice* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Heron (1981) argued that research participants, “as autonomous beings, have a moral right to participate in decisions that claim to generate knowledge about them” (p. 165). This kind of “reciprocity” (Lather, 1986, p. 263) will ensure that theory-building is really grounded and dialectical in nature where all parties are encouraged to undertake continual self-reflection as they bring in different perspectives into the study.
I am well aware of the fact that the emancipatory claims of CAR might sometimes be over optimistic. For instance, Gore (1995) questioned the equitable and democratic nature of the participatory inquiry as the hierarchical relationships still exist in the partnerships where expertise is viewed as belonging to the university-based researchers. According to Grundy (1998), genuine collaboration and equal involvement in planning for action may not be easily achievable in reality. Teachers may not have the time to engage in the planning and writing of research proposals, so this has implications for whose questions and interests that the research is really addressing. This actually was one of the challenges that I encountered at the initial stage of our collaboration, which I will cover in the next chapter. As McTaggart (1996) pointed out, however, there is too much baggage added to the notion of “emancipation”. Sometimes people dismiss CAR because they think it has contributed little to improving the justice and rationality of educational work and has not always been successful as an “emancipatory” project. McTaggart contended that the question that we should ask is “Are things better than they were?” rather than “Are we emancipated yet?” (p. 245). What should also be asked is, “Whether things are little more rational..., coherent, just, humane and satisfying for participants and others than they were” (1996). If yes, the aim is already achieved. What is needed perhaps is not just sustained effort, but also tolerance of slow progress and setbacks.

What I like about CAR is that the subject-object relationship between the researcher and the research, and the dualism of research and activism are deliberately challenged, even though not so successful at times. The highly self-critical and reflexive nature of CAR and its spiral mode of implementation, observation and evaluation, together with the critical thick descriptions was useful in exploring the complexities, contingencies and contradictions involved in the process of CL education which is the major enquiry guiding this research.

4.2. Context of Study

4.2.1. The School

David Allen Public School (pseudonym), the school where I conducted my research, was located in a moderate-sized community in the northeast of Toronto. Immigrants made up two-
thirds of the total population in the neighbourhood and recent immigrants\textsuperscript{14} made up around 15\% (Statistics Canada, 2006). They were mostly from Eastern, Southern, and Southeast Asia. The biggest ethnic group in the community was Chinese, which made up almost half of the visible minority population, followed by South Asian and Black (2006). The top home language in the household of the district was Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese and other regional dialects)\textsuperscript{15}.

This profile was adequately reflected in the school’s student population. According to the school profile (TDSB, 2008), almost 80\% of them have a primary language other than English. Although the school did not have a breakdown of students’ ethnic backgrounds, from my observation and what the ESL teacher (Ms. Li, pseudonym) told me, the majority of the students were of Chinese descent (almost three-quarters) followed by South Asians. There are some Black students and Caucasian students of various cultural backgrounds. I remembered what struck me when I first entered the school was that apart from Ms. Li, I could hardly see teachers of other ethnic groups. Ms. Li later told me that over three quarters of the staff were Caucasian. Ms. Li was one of the only two teachers who were of Chinese descent (the other one was actually Eurasian) in the school. None of the teachers on staff spoke Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese); 90\% of them were English native speakers and the remaining 10\% spoke a European language like French or Russian.

David Allen Public School was an intermediate school which had only two grade levels: Grade 7 and Grade 8. In Grade 7, there were five regular classes (English-speaking) and four French extended/immersion classes. In Grade 8, there were six regular classes (English speaking) and three French extended/immersion classes. These were the core classes where most of the core teachers would deliver English, History, Geography and Math. All other subjects like Arts, Drama, Music, Science, Physical Education, etc. were on a rotary system, i.e., students going to different specialist teachers for those lessons. There were altogether around 500 students. Hence, the school community is comparatively small and close-knit. Through Dr. Gagné, one of my thesis committee members, I was introduced to Ms. Li who was also Dr. Gagné’s M.A. student.

\textsuperscript{14} Recent immigrants refer to landed immigrants who came to Canada up to five years prior to a given census year. For the 2006 Census, recent immigrants are landed immigrants who arrived in Canada between January 1, 2001 and Census Day, May 16, 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006)

\textsuperscript{15} The demographical information is obtained through the City of Toronto’s ward profile: http://app.toronto.ca/wards/jsp/wards.jsp
at OISE. I volunteered at the school, working as a teaching assistant/consultant to the ESL teacher for a whole year before I started my research in the 2007-2008 school year.

The principal, one of the few visible minorities in the school, was very supportive of the ESL program. When I consulted with her about my research project, she was very excited about it and even wrote a personal email to the school board’s External Research Committee to support my research project. She also introduced me to the parents and the whole staff team during the Curriculum Night at the beginning of the school year. According to Ms. Li, the principal had been supportive of her work in terms of allocating funding for teaching resources and library books as well as arranging for a supply teacher in case she held field trips for ELLs. The school administration had also been trying to promote a greater level of collegiality and a professional learning community by setting up curriculum teams for each level with regular team meetings discussing issues around curriculum planning and design, teaching ideas and student learning issues. This collaborative professional culture, according to Ms. Li, was still at its initial stage, and she found collegial collaboration and sharing still lacking. Therefore, even though I felt very welcome in the school for this research project, not many teachers, not even the curriculum team leader or the English Department head, seemed to be interested in what we were doing in the ESL classroom.

4.2.2. The ESL Classroom

The school adopted an open withdrawal model for its ESL class, which meant that it accepted any new ELLs throughout the year. Students were withdrawn for one to two ESL periods per day, each period lasting for about 50 minutes. As a result of funding and staff allocation, Ms. Li’s work allocation to ESL was reduced from 0.5 in 2006-07 to 0.4 in 2007-08, which meant there were only 11 ESL periods in a 5-day cycle allocated to her that year. All ESL periods were in the afternoon. At other times of the day, the ELLs would be integrated with their core classes for other subjects like Math, Science, French, etc. The ELL participants for this research were from one Grade 7 and two Grade 8 classes. Due to differences in the core classes’ timetables, these ELLs came for their ESL lessons during different periods. Table 4.1 shows the ESL class timetable:
Table 4.1: Timetable of the ESL Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 6</td>
<td>8B</td>
<td>8B</td>
<td>7A/8A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The challenge for both Ms. Li and I as a researcher was that since these students came at different times, we had to keep track of what we had taught to which group of students and to make sure that we were not repeating or skipping any of the lessons. As the research started, I tried to get into the school on the two days when I could meet the most ELLs; for example, Days 1, 2 or 5. On these days, there were at least one period where all ELLs were there in the class. As the research progressed, there might be days when I could not get into the school for different reasons. Sometimes the ESL class was also cancelled because of some special school activities like the Asian Heritage Week or special assemblies. I kept close contact with Ms. Li to ensure that there would not be too many disruptions.

Again, because of funding, the 11 ESL periods were just for the Stage 1 and Stage 2 learners (details see next section on participants). The ESL classroom was outside of the school building in a portable next to the football field. Due to the distance from the main school building, and the fact that the room was not equipped with computer or internet access, as all other classrooms in the main building were, both Ms. Li and I felt that the ESL classroom was physically marginalised.

4.2.3. The Participants

4.2.3.1. The students.

When the 2007-08 school year started, Ms. Li administered the ERGO assessment\textsuperscript{16} tests to potential ELLs (new immigrant students or new students with elementary school reports’ recommendation for such a service), and there were altogether 12 students who were admitted to the program, with seven from Grade 8 and five from Grade 7 (see Table 4.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>(gender F= female, M= male)</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Length of stay in Canada by the time of interview (October 18, 2007)</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>Mother Tongue</th>
<th>English level: Stage _____</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baoh</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>1 year 7 months</td>
<td>Fujian, China</td>
<td>Fujianese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Xinhui, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2, (listening/speaking Stage 3) (exited the ESL class after 1st term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkie</td>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>8B</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri</td>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>8B</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2 (listening/speaking Stage 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Fujian, China</td>
<td>Fujianese, Mandarin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnamese, Cantonese (little)</td>
<td>Low Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakura</td>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>Less than 2 months</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>7C</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2 (listening/speaking Stage 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>7C</td>
<td>Less than 2 months</td>
<td>Hong Kong, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>7C</td>
<td>Less than 2 months</td>
<td>Shanghai, China</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>7C</td>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>7C</td>
<td>Less than 4 months</td>
<td>Hangzhou, China</td>
<td>Mandarin, Hangzhou dialect, Mandarin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the students used a pseudonym, either of their choice or were given one when they did not indicate one themselves. All of them, seven boys and five girls altogether, were of Chinese descent, with most of them coming from southern China. The two students, Chicken and Al, who experienced multiple transitions were also originally from Southern China, Hong Kong.
and Guangzhou respectively, and spent most of their years in China before returning. The only student who was not from China was Jerry. He was from Vietnam, but he was also of Chinese descent and could speak some Cantonese. The rest of them all spoke Mandarin as well as a Chinese regional dialect, either Cantonese, Fujianese, or the Hangzhou dialect. All of them were recent immigrants, with over half of them staying in Canada for less than a year, and 30% less than two years. Seven of them were assessed as Stage 2 learners (with some having stage 3 listening and speaking proficiency) and the rest were of Stage 1 proficiency level when we first started the program in September 2007.

After obtaining the approval from the principal (see Appendix A for consent form) and the district school board, consent forms for students’ participating in the research were sent out to their parents in mid-September in 2007, both in English and Chinese. I explained to the students in class the nature and purpose of the project, my role as a teacher/researcher, and their part in it. The explanation was done in Cantonese and partly in Mandarin. When Mandarin speaking students failed to understand my accented Mandarin, other students would jump in to translate for them. They then took it home and explained to parents using the Chinese consent forms. All of them returned the forms and agreed to participate in the project. Most of the students and their parents were excited about the research. In early September, the school held a Curriculum Night and the parents of four ELL participants came to the school and I had the chance to talk to them about this research. All of them were enthusiastic about the research, not so much because they were particularly supportive of CL education, but rather because of the belief that any program of an academic nature would be beneficial to their children, especially when it was about English language education. None of the parents that I met that night asked me detailed questions about the research program. They just asked mostly about the curriculum in general. Most of them showed complete trust in the ESL teacher and me (whom they saw more of a teacher or teaching assistant rather than a researcher), pleading for our extra help in improving their children’s English as this was an area in which they found themselves most helpless.

As the class was an open program, the class took in four new students who came in at different times after the New Year (see Table 4.3) and their parents’ consent was sought in early April 2008. Again, all of them agreed to participate in the program. They shared similar characteristics with the students who were in the program since the beginning of the school year-
all were from southern China, speaking Mandarin and one other regional dialect, mostly at Stage 2, and had been in Canada mostly less than a year. One student from the first group, James, was assessed before Christmas and exited the ESL program as he was found to be ready to re-join the core class, both in terms of language skills and self-confidence level. Therefore, from early April till the end of the school year, the total number of participants who stayed in the program was 15--ten boys and five girls.

Table 4.3: Profile of Student Participants (who joined in the latter half of the program)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Length of stay in Canada by the time of interview on (May 15, 2008)</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>Mother Tongue</th>
<th>English Level: Stage _____</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Mike (M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Fujian, China</td>
<td>Fujianese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Google (M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>Less than 5 months</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Peter (M)</td>
<td>8B</td>
<td>Less than 3 months</td>
<td>Kaiping, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Edison (M)</td>
<td>8A</td>
<td>Less than 5 months</td>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
<td>2 (listening/speaking Stage 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the research started, it became clear that it was unwieldy to include all 12 participants for any in-depth study. I decided to focus on four student participants: Terri, Baoh, Chicken and Melody. The choice was based on the balance in gender (two girls and two boys), grade levels, as well as years in school. Both Terri and Baoh were from Grade 8 and were already in the ESL class the year before the research started. Melody and Chicken were in Grade 7 and new to the school. I also considered the geographical locations where they were from. Chicken came from Hong Kong having experienced a somewhat different English education than the rest of the three who were from different cities in China. Two of them spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin, and the other two spoke only Mandarin.

I knew both Terri and Baoh the year before the research when I started volunteering in Ms. Li’s class. They were both in Grade 7 at that time and new to the school. Terri was a very conscientious learner and would have her homework done and everything well prepared for every class. I remembered when I first met her, she did not speak much in class and even though she might have got the correct answers (which I could see from her worksheets). Unlike some of her more outspoken Grade 8 ELLs, she would not raise her hand and volunteer to answer. Even
when she was called upon by Ms. Li, it would take a while before she would gather up her
courage to answer the question. However, if you talked to her in Cantonese, she could be very
articulate about her feelings. She said she was afraid to make mistakes and always thought that
other people in the class were better than her. Despite her lack of confidence, she was always
very pleasant and kept a smile on her face. She treated her ELL peers with great care and
consideration. Whenever there were new students in the class, she would take it upon herself as a
“big sister” to offer them help, either translating some English vocabulary in class, or reminding
them of the homework that needed to be done. I could see that she took her big sister’s role even
more seriously when she moved up to Grade 8, i.e., the year we started our research. Even
though she remained quiet most of the time in class, she was actively listening and thinking
deeply. She was highly reflective and often gave you very thoughtful responses.

Terri told me that it was her mother’s decision to immigrate to Canada, hoping that she
would get a better education. She was left with no choice but to move with the family. She had a
hard time studying Canadian history, which she could not relate to in the least. Even though Terri
had English education since Grade 3 back in Guangzhou, what she learned was some tenses and
vocabulary. Even for vocabulary, she found that she had to re-learn a lot of words here in Canada
because most vocabulary and expressions that she learned in China were either out-of-date or not
commonly used here. There was instruction on phonetic symbols, but no focus on conversations
and there was basically no opportunity in class to practice speaking English. English classes
were very much form-focused in a teacher-centred classroom setting. Both her parents were
fluent in English and she felt the pressure to achieve better English proficiency faster. She would
sometimes tell Ms. Li and me how disappointed her mother was with her slow progress in
English and would push her to study harder, which she was already doing.

Baoh had been in Canada for more than a year and a half when we started the research.
Again, like Terri, he was in Grade 7 when I volunteered at the school. He did not speak much in
class. No matter what you asked him, he would only give you a one- or two-word answer, even
in Mandarin. I remember him coming into the ESL class in Grade 7 always with a blank face, as
if he was at a loss. He would forget to bring something, either his worksheet, book or homework.
His progress in English proficiency was very slow that year and he did not show much interest in
learning the language. I remember by the end of that school year, he could not write even an
English sentence properly. After the summer break, however, he seemed to be a changed person.
He would smile to me and greeted me when I saw him in the corridor. I also observed that he was always playing some ball games with other ELL boys in the playground during lunch break. They seemed to have lot of fun together. In class, he would still be very quiet, but he would always have his homework and books ready. He would even raise his hand to answer questions, even though with the same one-or two-word answers. I had the chance to talk with his mother on the Curriculum Night in early September that year. His mother told me that Baoh used to be a top student at school in Fijian, China and perhaps because of this and together with the culture shock, he was not himself the year before. Ms. Li and I felt so happy to see him opening up gradually, beginning to enjoy the classes and putting in his best efforts. He told me that he was confident that he would improve his English proficiency; the key to which was to do whatever the teacher asked him. He showed complete trust in Ms. Li and me, which was amazing considering how miserable and frustrated he seemed in the past year. Regarding prior English education, he only had a vague memory even though in Fijian he had English lessons from Grade 1 to Grade 6. Again, from what he described to me, English lessons were very much form-focused with teaching of decontextualized vocabulary here and there, which he did not enjoy at all. On top of that, the school focus was really on Math and Science. He did not really pay much attention in the English class.

**Chicken** was the only student who came from Hong Kong and had relatively more English education. He was born in the States and immigrated to Canada when he was one. He stayed here until four when he went back to Hong Kong with his family. He started learning English since kindergarten, so his exposure to the language was comparatively greater than his peers. He also seemed to be more confident in terms of speaking up in the ESL class, though not in his core class. He might not have the vocabulary or the correct grammar structure, but he would always try and express his opinions by pulling words together, despite inchoately sometimes. He was outgoing and sociable and had quite a few friends from the beginning who were not from the ESL class, which was quite unusual compared to other ELLs. The primary school he went to in Hong Kong was an English-medium school: English was taught from Grade 1 to Grade 3 in English and starting from Grade 4 all subjects (except Chinese language) were taught in English. Despite the English-only policy, teachers would resort to the use of Cantonese when they found that students did not understand them. According to him, English lessons focused a lot on grammar, especially the use of tenses. Students were encouraged to read.
independently one to two books every term. English lessons were based on a text-book with different comprehension passages. Students learned to answer comprehension questions and learned the vocabulary in each passage. There were regular dictations or spelling tests. Assessment was mainly based on examinations where their comprehension skills, grammar knowledge and spelling were tested. They were taught very simple English conversations but most lessons were delivered with teacher-centred instruction. Chicken did not enjoy his English lessons in Hong Kong because of the frequent spelling tests at which he said he was poor. Like Baoh in his first year, Chicken seemed to be quite displaced. Despite his active participation in class, he would always forget his homework or books, or forget to study his quizzes, or sometimes would hand in his assignment half done. This was not just with ESL; teachers from other subjects also complained about this. Some teachers, as I was told by Ms. Li, thought that his parents were too protective of him and just let him have his way. I was not sure about this and since his parents did not show up in the Curriculum Night, I did not have the chance to talk to them. English was not the subject that he worried most about, but rather History. For English, he was not afraid to talk and try using new words. He said one strategy he used was to keep repeating a phrase or practise using certain expressions while walking to school every day. In that way, he would become comfortable using the expressions or words. History, on the other hand, posed the greatest challenge for him. He mentioned that History was not studied until Grade 7 in Hong Kong, and hence he was not familiar with the subject and how to approach it, not to mention studying Canadian history (in English) to which he had no prior exposure.

The last but not least student was Melody. The first impression that I had of Melody was that she was very miserable and definitely unhappy most of the time. As I later found out, she experienced bullying right from the beginning of the term (about which I will talk more in the following chapters). Hence, she was upset and out-of-place in most of the ESL classes at the beginning. Even though she was paying attention, she did not respond to any of Ms. Li’s or my questions. Ms. Li set up a class blog (the details of which will be given in next chapter) and asked students to post their works online and give feedback to each other. Melody usually had minimal participation or was the last one to post her comments. For the initial assessment, Ms. Li encouraged students to write in their first language and she showed Melody’s to me since she did not know Chinese. She would like to have an idea of Melody’s first language proficiency level. It was quite an extended piece of creative writing (one full single-lined page with words packed
together in a small font). I forget what it was about now, but I was very impressed at that time to see how literary and creative her use of Chinese was. As for English, she could not write even a simple proper sentence. I found out later that she did not like English at all when she was in Hangzhou, China. Like Terri, she started having English lessons since Grade 3. Teachers would teach English in their Hangzhou dialect. Again, English was taught as a subject with form-focused teacher-centred instruction. Since English was not such an important subject at school, she never paid attention in class. The teachers would do their teaching at the front while she would either doze off or do other things at the back of the class. School was easy to her and she always came top of the class. She used to be very popular among her peers but now in Canada she had become a bullying target. We spent much time helping her and other ELLs to deal with bullying, which will be described in later chapters. Like some of her peers, she experienced several family separations before moving to Canada. I will talk more about this in Chapter 7 section 2 which describes the assignment “A Photo Story of My Family”.

4.2.3.2. The teacher.

Ms. Li, the ESL teacher in the school, graduated from a local university’s education program about five years ago and started teaching two Grade 7 core courses. It was only the year before the research began that she started taking up the ESL class when the former ESL teacher retired. Before that, she earned an Additional Qualification (AQ) for ESL teaching (Part 1) from the same university which is the basic requirement for being an ESL teacher in Ontario classrooms. She started her Masters of Arts in Education three years ago.

Having spent some time in Ireland after university as an expatriate, she showed great sympathy for students who underwent social and cultural dislocation and was very empathetic towards the language and cultural barriers new immigrant ELLs had to face:

**Excerpt 4.1: Interview Recording with Ms. Li on October 1, 2007**

Ms. Li: I think the odds are insurmountable against these kids, so when we see one who is really successful, you can appreciate the resilience, their motivation, their ability to cope because there are so many difficulties, like the emotional aspect, the cultural aspect, and there is obviously the language barrier as well, so ummh.., you know, it’s so difficult, like somebody can be saying something to them and they don’t understand, then they would think is that person laughing at me, oh that person is talking about me?..... I think I might be more sensitive, as I said, I went to Ireland, that’s the same language, like we knew English, but there were times when I felt lonely, I had no friends, or there were times when I was sitting on a Saturday night by myself, like no TV, no nothing, just sitting there.
Being an ESL teacher was very a rewarding job to her especially when she saw students improving both in terms of cultural adjustment and language proficiency. Being raised by Chinese parents who spent most of their life outside of China, Ms. Li does not speak Chinese, but she saw herself sharing most of the cultural values and beliefs that her Chinese ELLs held. She even planned to start learning Mandarin once she finished her Master’s program.

Despite her enthusiasm in being an ESL teacher, she found that some of her colleagues were inclined to question her professional ability although only three to four of the staff members had attained the same AQ level. She found herself often faced with the question of why particular students were not in the ESL class. She wondered if the staff was aware that her 0.4 allocation would only allow her to accommodate Stage 1 and 2 learners, so even if there were Stage 3 and 4 students who might need support, they would be reintegrated into their core classes and would not be pulled out for ESL support. She would express frustration time and again that she only had a 0.4 ESL allocation, while in another school just across the street, which had a bigger ELL population, the school could afford to have 1.5 ESL teaching allocation. She would express from time to time how she wished to have a full teaching allocation for ESL. With that, she would be able to stream students into two different levels. She would be able to do some more challenging work, like novel studies, with the middle-stage students. With her current 0.4 teaching allocation for ESL, she felt very constrained in terms of her curriculum design. She found it hard to do anything challenging with these students with mixed abilities within one class.

Ms. Li kept the maximum number of ELLs in her class to not more than 12, which was recommended by her instructional leader in the school board. However, more often than not, she was not able to keep to that size since it was an open program. She found that one of the reasons her colleagues did not show much appreciation to her job was because they thought ESL teaching was an easier job, especially with the class size often just hovering around 10-15. As she gathered from conversations with her colleagues, some of her colleagues thought that ELLs were a burden in their own class and that Ms. Li should just take over these students totally. She found her colleagues had little idea of how to accommodate ELLs’ learning needs and of what stage they were at. Some of them were reluctant to make accommodations for ELLs for fear that it would slow down other students’ progress. Other teachers thought that eventually ELLs would be able to catch up, although slowly, as they moved along, hence there was no need for specific
accommodations. When Ms. Li first took over the ESL class a year ago, she offered to teach also History and Geography in her ESL class because many core teachers reflected that they did not know how to accommodate ELLs’ needs within the core class. Another reason was that in the school ELLs were deemed to have too big a language gap to benefit from the mainstream History or Geography curricula. Yet after teaching one year of this combined English-History-Geography program, not to mention the dual levels’ (both Grades 7 and 8) very different contents, she found that with her current 0.4 allocation, it was practically impossible to tackle students’ basic language skills as well as their subject learning in History and Geography. On top of that, the principal actually advised her not to take on the two subjects because if she did so, the core teachers would have a further reason to believe that these ELLs were just the ESL teacher’s responsibilities. Therefore, the year when we started the research, we just focused on English language education. Ms. Li did offer to other core teachers her Geography and History binders of teaching material for ELLs, yet no teacher approached her, except for one who, however, never used it in his class according to the ELL participants.

Another common problem that most teachers in the school had with ELLs was that they found it hard in grading these students, especially in report card writing. They were reluctant to give them a good mark since it might give people the impression that their course was too easy. To address this issue, the school came up with a policy where the ESL teacher would have to issue an ESL tracking sheet for every ELL to go with their report card. Parents or students would then have an idea that certain students’ marks in core subjects like History or Science were actually reflecting an adaptation in their Stage 1 or 2 level.

Ms. Li was very excited about the research mainly because she thought she could learn something from me as an experienced ESL teacher and teacher educator. She mentioned that the AQ Part 1 course that she took just touched on how teachers across the curriculum made adaptations in their subject design and instruction so as to accommodate ELLs’ needs. Things like how to set up an ESL classroom or design an ESL program with a specific orientation to suit particular students’ needs were found to be lacking. The only source of advice that she could seek was the school board’s ESL instructional leaders but they did not meet often. She was therefore thrilled to have me on board working with her. The year before the research took place, when I was volunteering in the school, was actually her first year taking up an ESL class. The way that she designed the curriculum plan was very much done “by the book”, just to make sure
that she met all the school requirements and those stated in the curriculum guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2006). In order to ensure that her students were exposed to different text types and literacy skills, her curriculum design was genre-based. So the class went from poetry, to short stories and then to advertisements (media literacy). There was no inclusion of a particular theme or subject matter she would like to address with students. Thus, there was little coherence among different units and there was also no attempt to have a more systematic organization of the skills students were learning, what to learn first, what had to be revisited before more complex skills were introduced, etc. The curriculum planning was also very much dictated by the requirements set up by the school. For example, for the report card, she needed to have a mark for students’ comprehension skills and another for media literacy. She would teach comprehension skills discretely often out of context and then students were asked to work on comprehension passages taken from exercise books on their own. Usually the exercises were marked, handed back to students without being taken up again in class. By the end of that year, I recommended her a theme-based curriculum where topics of interests to students could be used while we could still ensure that all the requirements from both the provincial curriculum and the school would be met. I also discussed with her an integrative model of CL where language learning would be incorporated and introduced in a very systematic fashion. She welcomed the idea.

Regarding CL, Ms. Li had this definition:

**EXCERPT 4.2: INTERVIEW RECORDING WITH MS. LI ON OCTOBER 1, 2007**

Ms. Li: Critical literacy is looking at texts with a critical lens, like moving beyond the basic message. So for instance if you are looking at a text, you are looking at whose voice is present and whose voice is absent and why, and opening up those kinds of discussions, and also just getting students to think critically, like not just be passive consumers of knowledge and information but to think about why something is the way it is.

She agreed that CL had a place in ESL classroom and pointed out that “it is just a question of how to implement it.” However, when it came to Stage 1 students, those who were brand new beginners, she expressed reservation whether beginning language learners would benefit much from it since it was deemed too challenging for most of them:

**EXCERPT 4.3: INTERVIEW RECORDING WITH MS. LI ON OCTOBER 1, 2007**

Ms. Li: ...... Like we are looking critically at the advertisement or media type website, I am sure once they have more language, they can express like why one advertisement is better than the other, that kind of stuff and the images, but with the more beginner ones, I am not sure, they don’t have the language. Should we focus on that piece or should we try to give them the
language to reach the level when they can express themselves critically? So that is the dilemma.

Ms. Li experienced a dilemma when it came to the introduction of CL to ELLs. Even though she found that it was worthwhile to do CL work, she had doubt if beginning students had the language ability to handle it. As I mentioned earlier, she did try to incorporate media literacy the year before we started the research and had tried to examine advertisements with students in a critical way. She found that some Grade 7 beginning students were not able to get it. She wondered if they understood it at all or that they did understand but did not have the language to express it. From this experience, she found that what stage 1 students needed most was learning basic vocabulary:

**EXCERPT 4.4: INTERVIEW RECORDING WITH MS. LI ON OCTOBER 1, 2007**

Ms. Li: Even someone like Sam, I wonder if time should be spent on drilling him… Not drilling him necessarily, but like for instance we are doing classroom language activity, he should be going around the classroom labelling things, or like Baoh or Jerry, they can be doing the TPR thing, the Total Physical Response, I wonder if that is more beneficial to them helping to remember the vocabulary, than like having them trying to communicate something which is beyond them, which is before their level, before they are ready.

Here Ms. Li used Sam, Baoh and Jerry as examples to illustrate her point. Sam was a Stage 1 Grade 8 student who just came to Canada four months ago, while both Baoh and Jerry were all at Stage 2 but progressed very slowly last year in the ESL classroom. She thought that instead of doing CL with these “weaker” students, she could be just working with them on improving their vocabulary using different methods like the Total Physical Response approach (TPR)\(^\text{17}\).

Ms. Li’s opinion regarding language learning reflected that she still viewed it as isolated discrete skills which could be learned out of context, and that CL and language learning were incompatible with each other—that is, there was no way CL could promote English language learning, or at least basic English skills.

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\(^{17}\) TPR is a “meaning-based, whole-to-part-approach to language instruction. It relies on physical cues and actions to teach new vocabulary and grammar structures”(Coelho, 2003, p. 285).
4.3. Data Collection

The data collection process lasted for the entire school year from mid-September 2007 to the end of school year in 2008. The original plan was to have the research end in March 2008 but by February, both Ms. Li and I found that the students were progressing and responding very well to the program. Thus, we decided that it would be better to carry on the research until the end of the school year. Further rationale for this decision was that the pace of the program was much slower than we had originally thought, especially at the beginning stage. We did not cover as many topics as we had planned. Therefore, Ms. Li and I both found that it would be of students’ best interest to go on with the program, especially when the two of us had already developed a good way of collaborating and students were very used to me working with them. I applied for the continuation of the research project and permission was granted by both the university and the school board to have it carried out till the end of the school year.

The research started after all consent forms were received from teacher and student participants. In order to triangulate data sources for validity, different sets of qualitative data were collected.

One major set of data was the research journal that I kept that documented detailed field notes on all my interactions with Ms. Li and the student participants. The journal entries started when I was preparing for the CL program during 2007 summer. Ms. Li and I communicated through email and phone conversations exchanging views on student needs, curriculum requirements, and program design. I then met with her once to finalize the details. Some time before September 2007, we already had a preliminary draft of the program, but we waited until we knew exactly how many students and what their proficiency levels were before we fine tuned the details and the model we were to go about the program.

All journal entries included summaries of what had been discussed in those meetings, email or phone conversations, as well as analytic memos, questions, musings and speculations about the data being collected. This also applied to the big pool of data I collected as an active full participant in the classroom working with the teacher and students to implement the instruction. Depending on the day of the 5-day week cycle, I worked in the classroom for one to three 50- minute long lessons roughly two afternoons a week. After each session, descriptive field notes were written up to document the nature of the classroom interactions related to literacy, together with analytic memos of speculations, questions and reflections that would help
guide the research and that were of interest to the objectives of the project. The lessons were also audio-taped roughly twice a month to get a sampling of the actual discourse of student-researcher/teacher interaction.

Another set of data was the interviews with both the teacher and student participants which were all audio-taped. For the teacher, the initial in-depth interview was conducted in early October 2007, and was basically exploratory in nature. This was to find out the teacher’s general attitude toward ESL teaching, her self-perception as an ESL teacher and the instructional choices (cf. Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007) that she perceived to have. Her attitude, understanding and expectations towards CL education were also explored (see Appendix B for interview protocol). Throughout the research, there were also regular formal conversational interviews with the teacher, usually after a class either in person or through email communication, both on substantive and logistic matters. These interviews or better peer debriefings were meant to facilitate collaborative reflection and communal reflection (cf. Rearick & Feldman, 1999). Collaborative reflection which took the form of peer debriefing was to check biases or absence in field notes on the part of the researcher, and for both the researcher and the teacher to discuss and interpret each other’s observations and perspectives concerning the in-class student-teacher/researcher interactions and the perceived student progress in critical/literacy development. Communal reflection was to allow both researcher and teacher to reflect if their actions promoted or obstructed the transformative ideals, and to reflect on the challenges, dilemma or difficulties encountered in the process. Both the teacher and researcher then discussed and explored ways to alter, if needed, instructional practices and ways of support to enhance students’ critical/literacy engagement and development.

There were two more in-depth semi-structured interviews: one mid-way through the program and the other in March (see Appendices C and D for interview protocols) when I thought we would end the research at the end of the month. In these two interviews, I gathered the teacher’s opinions on the CL program and her perceptions on students’ development in critical/literacy, issues on identity of being an ESL teacher, etc. In that interview in March, together with the informal conversations before then, it became clear to both of us that it would be a better idea to continue the research until the end of school year. I planned to interview Ms. Li one more time when the program finished in June, but because of the hectic schedule she had at the end of the school year, we did not have the time to get together to have a formal interview.
However, we had been communicating with each other during that whole period either face-to-face or via email or phone. As I invited Ms. Li to co-present with me on our research project in a few conferences in the following year, I had the opportunity to carry out a follow-up interview with her in February 2009. The purpose of the follow-up interview was to gather her thoughts and feelings about the research project. I basically asked her the same questions as I did in our end-of-program interview. The assumption was that now that a year had passed, she might gain some perspectives and insight on the CL program.

As for the students, an open-ended focus group interview was conducted in mid-October 2007 as we just started the program, which was again exploratory in nature (see Appendix E for interview protocol). Another one was conducted in April 2008 after the class admitted four more ELLs from January to March. The focus group interview was to build up students’ profile, find out their general attitude towards and investments in ESL learning, and their self-perception as ELLs. After the initial interview, I focused on four student participants--Terri, Baoh, Chicken and Melody--for in-depth case study, gathering their opinions and perceptions on the CL program after each module we did. There were altogether four semi-structured individual and/or focus group interviews after the initial interview. Apart from prompting questions identified from emerging themes that were noted from field observations, those interviews were mainly for data triangulation and dialogical data collection to ensure that students’ voice was included. They were also intended to find out their ongoing reactions and perception of their ESL classes as the program moved along, especially the kind of literacy and cognitive engagement they had and their feelings towards it. As all interviews took place during lunch time, depending on the day, one or two students might not be able to come for the focus group as their teacher might want them to rehearse a drama performance or work on a quiz. I would then have to interview that particular student(s) individually at another time. Since Terri and Chicken spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin, so even at times when my accented Mandarin could not get across to Baoh and Melody who were non-Cantonese speaking, they could translate for me. I also sent out an email to these four students around the same time that I had the follow-up interview with Ms. Li. Similarly, the idea was to seek their opinions and feelings on the program after a lapse of a year’s time when presumably they had might have gain some perspective of their experience in the program, especially as two of them had then moved on to high school. Unfortunately, I only got one reply from Melody.
To sum up, the interview data fed back into other sets of data for gradual co-development of the CL program, with the teacher playing the role of a critical informant in the field working alongside with the critical researcher. This kind of dialogical data collection or “reciprocity” (Lather, 1986) was to ensure that theory-building was grounded and participatory.

Another set of data was students’ work specimens which included their writing assignments, journals, presentations, or electronic work specimen (e.g., blog postings). They were collected as archives for analysis of the type of literacy engagement they had and to document any progress in critical/literacy development.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a cyclical rather than a fixed linear approach. At the initial stage, I depended more on my field notes which I organised immediately after the lessons that I taught. I wrote in the margin memos of my reflections (Huberman & Miles, 1994), questions, and actions that had to be taken. For the purpose of an action research, this ongoing process of analysis was needed in order to feed back to the continual reflect-act-evaluate cycle (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). As I had collected more interview data from both students and Ms. Li, I did the same thing—started transcribing, writing memos on the transcript, and writing descriptive summary of the participants’ experience. I would discuss my initial observation analysis with Ms. Li in the numerous informal conversational interviews throughout the research process. This formed a kind of peer debriefing as well as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for the study. From time to time, I would email Ms. Li or talk to her in person seeking her clarification on some factual information or her views on the way that I analysed certain events. I also had two in-depth debriefing sessions with Dr. Maria José Botelho, one of my thesis committee members, discussing some of my observations and analysis of the research. With the ongoing feedback from Ms. Li and Dr. Botelho as well as the student participants, I made ongoing revisions to my CL curriculum to meet students’ needs.

After the field work, I read the whole database in its entirety several times in order to “immerse myself in the details” (Aga, 1980, p 103) and try to get a sense of it as a whole before breaking it into parts. I then moved to the spiral of the describing, classifying, and interpreting loop. I started developing codes and categories, beginning with a short list or what Creswell
called the “lean coding” (2007, p. 152), and then expanded the categories as I continued to review and re-review my database. Some overarching themes began to emerge.

Following the broad strokes of phenomenological research in collecting data from people who were involved in the experience, I decided to develop a composite description of the essence of the experience, which involved “what” as well as “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2007) in a chronological manner. The description of “how” the experience happened is a “structural description” of the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. The “what” was the “textural description” of the participants’ experience including verbatim examples. As I started the writing process, I listened once again to those segments of the recorded interviews or lessons that contained significant statements by participants that reflected the major themes identified. This was to ensure greater accuracy. With both the textural and structural descriptions, I tried to capture the essence of the culminating experience of the participants involved in this integrative CL project.

4.5. Data Transcription

The process of transcribing was continuous and ongoing throughout all phases of data collection and after the completion of field work. I transcribed all recorded interviews and lessons. I carried out member-checks with the ESL teacher concerning the interviews that I had had with her. In order to verify accuracy, whenever I had doubts in her responses, I would clarify with her either face to face or via email. When transcribing the student interview in Mandarin, I checked with a Mandarin speaking colleague to ensure correct understanding.

I used “T” to represent “Teacher” (i.e., Ms. Li) and “R” to represent the researcher (i.e., me). Most of the time I could identify students’ voice and their pseudonyms would be used. When I could not identify who was talking or because they were talking all at the same time, “S” and “Ss” would be used to refer to student(s). Words and sentences in italics are those that were spoken in Cantonese or Mandarin during student interviews or lessons. Words that are underlined indicate special emphasis was given to them by the speaker. Two dots (..) indicate a short pause while three dots (...) indicate a longer pause between utterances. Double hyphen (--) is to indicate an incomplete word or an abrupt break in an utterance or that the utterance is interrupted. Explanatory notes, comments or significant contextual information is given in brackets, e.g., (a student is screaming) or (Ms. Li is writing on the board). A cross inside square
brackets [x] refers to an incomprehensible word, while two [xx] and three crosses [xxx] refer to incomprehensible item of phrase length and beyond phrase length respectively. Question marks (?) were used with interrogative intonation, and exclamation marks (!) were used for exclamatory intonation. Students occasionally used phrases and local idiomatic expressions during interviews, which had no compatible translation in English, were marked with pinyin--Mandarin phonetics--and Chinese characters with the meaning in English given in brackets afterwards. The point at which another utterance intersects an ongoing one is indicated by an insertion of two slashes in the ongoing turn. The second speaker and her/his utterance(s) are placed below the ongoing turn and are preceded by two slashes, for example,

R: Do you understand// what it means?
S: //I know. I know.

If the first ongoing turn is long, the second utterance is placed under the ongoing turn at the point of intersection indicated by two slashes (//), and an equal sign (=) is used to indicate the latched utterance, for example,

R: We are going to read a //story=
S: //what story?
R: =called the Name Jar.
Chapter 5: An Integrative Critical Literacy Curriculum

5.1. The Program Design

Ms. Li and I started discussing informally the design of the CL curriculum by the end of the school year before the research began. The actual planning took place during the summer when we corresponded with each other through phone and email.

For the program design of the integrative CL curriculum, I followed closely the instructional framework that I adapted from Ada and Campoy’s creative reading approach (Ada, 1991; Ada & Campoy, 2004). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the original four-phase model of reading process was turned into a more dynamic and fluid model with four interconnected and overlapping dimensions: textual, personal, critical, and creative and transformative. The interconnectedness and overlapping of the four dimensions pointed to the fact that each dimension is necessary but not sufficient for reading in contemporary culture. In addition, it is not a linear sequence. Those four dimensions were not construed as stages where lessons were moved from textual to personal to critical to transformative. Rather in each module, we included all four dimensions as we engaged students in interactive dialogue on our reading texts. Depending on students’ needs, responses, interests and background knowledge of the subject matter or language structures to be learned, we might start with the personal dimension, then go to the textual dimension to highlight a grammatical point or certain vocabulary for better understanding, before returning to the personal dimension where students were invited to reflect and share their opinions on the subject. This might spark some discussion on the assumptions that people held on a certain issue (critical dimension) and we might invite students to come up with some suggestions to deal with the problem that they brought up in the discussion. In general, we could be crisscrossing the four dimensions at any stage in the program. Generally we did spend more time on the textual dimension at the beginning, especially the first month of bridging period to help build up students’ basic conversational and daily English in order that they could function in a school setting. We then spent proportionally more time on the textual and personal dimension and gradually incorporated more of the critical as well as the creative and transformative dimensions as we moved along.

One important feature of the program was that it strictly adhered to the Ontario curriculum guidelines for ESL (Ministry of Education, 2006). There was constant
communication between Ms. Li and me to make sure that the CL curriculum met the expectations outlined in the government document and in addition to the specific student evaluation and assessment requirements of the school. Oftentimes it involved negotiation and renegotiation of a space for CL work especially at the beginning when Ms. Li still had reservations about the relevancy of CL with beginning ELLs. I will further elaborate on this in the Teacher-Researcher Collaboration section where I will talk more about our collaboration.

There were altogether four modules (see Table 5.1) with a bridging component to start off the program. We tried to have topics that addressed immigrant students’ lived experience.

**Table 5.1: Modules of the Integrative CL Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Language Focus</th>
<th>Critical/Literacy Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bridging Program</td>
<td>• Classroom English &amp; basic daily conversations</td>
<td>• Basic comprehension skills: prediction, guessing meaning from context, summarizing information, making connections, responding and sharing opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary</strong> on classroom objects, directions/locations &amp; time, seasons, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Me and My Family</td>
<td>• Pronouns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit 1: The Story of My Name</td>
<td>• Present tense and present continuous tense</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I’m + adjectives// I have + noun// I love/hate + ~ing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary</strong> from <em>The Name Jar</em> (Choi, 2003)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and researcher’s “Story of My Name”: on family members, adjectives on describing appearance and personality</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Bullying</td>
<td>• Simple past tense</td>
<td>• Basic comprehension skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Re-visit present and present continuous tenses</td>
<td>• Make inference and connections using bookmarking techniques and concepts of text-to-self, text-to-text-, and text-to-world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary</strong> from <em>Marianthe’s Story</em> (Brandenberg, 1998), a two-part picture story: 1. <em>Painted Words</em> 2. <em>Spoken Memories</em></td>
<td>• Formulate arguments &amp; support with reasons</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Challenge texts by posing questions like “Whose point of view/ voice is missing?” and learn to view things from different perspectives</td>
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</table>
| 4. O Canada | • Countable & uncountable nouns  
• Quantifiers  
• Revisit different tenses  
• Making simple instructions with imperatives  
• **Vocabulary**: provinces, territories, capital cities, Canadian symbols, food items, etc.; and vocabulary from “Don’t Trust Your Parents” (Yee, 2006)  
• Learn basic literary elements and concepts, e.g., setting, illustrations, narration, plot, characters, themes, etc. | • Basic comprehension skills  
• Make inference and connections using bookmarking techniques  
• Develop research skills and learn to extract and synthesize information  
• Formulate arguments and support with reasons  
• Challenge texts by posing questions to find out what values are preferred  
• Examine how different literary elements structure readers’ understanding of the text |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1: Interesting Facts about Canada</td>
<td>Unit 2: The Greatest Canadians</td>
<td>Unit 3: “Don’t Trust Your Parents”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5. Critical Reading Strategies | • Revisit different tenses  
• **Vocabulary**: from *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), and *The Korean Cinderella* (Climo, 1993)  
• Revisit basic literary elements and concepts, e.g., setting, illustrations, narration, plot, characters, themes, etc. | • Basic comprehension skills  
• Make inference  
• Formulate arguments and support with reasons  
• Examine how different literary elements structure our understanding of the text  
• Challenge texts by posing questions on personal, textual and critical dimensions to help understand the message, make connections with texts and have personal reflections on the values and assumptions embedded in texts. Critique texts by writing alternative texts. |

Let me give a brief snapshot of what the modules/units were. The Bridging Program lasted for a month with an aim to build up students’ basic conversational skills and classroom English so that they could function properly in a school environment. During that time, Ms. Li and I also set up a class library and classroom routines to encourage reading and other good learning habits. We then moved on to the first module--“Me and My Family”--with a purpose to help students to affirm their linguistic and cultural identity. Through reading the story, *The Name*
Jar (Choi, 2003), we explored together the cultural practice and meaning behind our names and how students might deal with the differences of their names in a new culture. We also shared our family life back in our hometown. The idea of sharing our immigrant experience was to challenge the dominant discourse that second language learners’ home language and cultural experiences have nothing to do with the second language classroom and to open up a space for them to talk about their life experiences as they grappled with the upheavals in the acculturation period.

It was in our discussion of their names and new lives in Canada that we found out quite a number of them, especially girls, were bullied by their schoolmates. I discussed this with Ms. Li and decided to insert a unit on bullying. This was to help students examine the issue of bullying by exploring why people bully, who the bullies are, and what we can do about it. This was to empower them in dealing with bullies at school and also to critically examine issues on cultural differences and stereotypes and reflect on one’s assumptions on race and culture. The third module was “O Canada” which was designed to equip students with the necessary cultural literacy as they integrated themselves into the host culture. Students were introduced to some basic fun facts about Canada, like its symbols, food culture, geography, etc. We also examined the criteria for the greatest Canadian, based on the result of the country-wide poll on The Greatest Canadians held by the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) in 2004. We examined who were present and absent from the list and hence what values were reflected through the inclusion and exclusion. Through examining and reflecting on what values students treasured, we invited them to decide for themselves who the Greatest Canadian should be. We also studied a short story, “Don’t Trust Your Parents” (Yee, 2006), about an immigrant teenager and examined the challenges and implications of immigration on their own life. By the time we finished this module, both Ms. Li and I found that students were ready for more challenging literacy work. Not only had they got used to the open discussion in class, they also expressed the desire to learn more vocabulary and language skills. We therefore decided to have one whole module devoted to critical reading strategies. One major focus in this module was to help them pose questions that aid their understanding of texts, personal connections and most of all, personal reflection on the social assumptions embedded in texts. We also engaged them in writing alternative texts to challenge and critique those ideological values.
Apart from sticking closely to curriculum expectations, each unit/module also had one or two distinct language focus that tied in with the activities that we did in the unit/module. The grammatical structures and vocabulary were introduced in a gradual and spiral manner to ensure that students could master the vocabulary and language form before moving onto the next. This is the same with the introduction of reading skills and CL practices. We started off with some basic comprehension strategies, like prediction, summarizing, guessing meaning from context, and gradually moving to formulating one’s opinions with reasons. We kept revisiting all these basic skills so that they became more fluent with them and became more comfortable engaging in more complex CL practices.

In the chapters following, I am going to present what we did in each module/unit. Each chapter began with the module/unit design stating the aims and purposes for that module/unit, the texts we used, the class activities in which the students were engaged, the specific language focuses and critical/literacy practices that were tied in with the units. Then I will move on to describe some interesting and critical incidents or conversations we had in class or outside class during that period of time. This is to answer the research questions regarding the processes involved in doing CL work and students’ progress in critical/literacy development. Samples of students’ works will also be examined to see the exemplifications of those emergent literacy skills. After each module/unit, I carried out a student interview asking for their opinions on that particular module/unit. This helped me to understand students’ progress, what was effective and what was not, and more importantly allowed me to have a better idea of student needs and evaluate the program to make necessary adjustments as we moved forward. I also asked some general questions concerning ESL learning and students’ perception of themselves as ELLs to document any changes, if any. I included the opinions they shared in interviews, together with Ms. Li’s comments, observations or communications with me that were related to the analysis of the relevance and usefulness of the module/unit in students’ critical/literacy development. Each chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings that I had for that module. This discussion also includes my collaboration with the ESL teacher, and our evolving views on CL work. Before turning to the details of each module/unit, I would like to give a better picture of the nature of my collaboration with Ms. Li. The purpose is not merely to highlight the kind of practical difficulties involved in our collaboration as we juggled with a peculiar timetable.
arrangement. It is also to provide a background for our understanding of the ESL teacher’s and my evolving perception of what CL work was.

5.2. Teacher-Researcher Collaboration

The reason for choosing critical action research methods for this project was not just to ground research into practice but also to democratise the whole research process so that the teacher and researcher would be enabled to collaborate on a more egalitarian basis. The ideal kind of collaboration is when the teacher plays the role of a critical informant in the field while the researcher takes up the role of a critical friend providing expertise and knowledge in helping the teacher to introduce transformative changes to educational practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In my research, the teacher-researcher collaboration took quite an interesting form. My original intention was to have the teacher totally on board, planning the curriculum together while sharing our views on CL and exchanging ideas on how it could best be introduced into the classroom to meet students’ needs. It soon became clear to me that Ms. Li was far too busy to work on the curriculum plan, not to mention reading literature on CL and having follow-up discussions. As supportive as she was, I found that she did not feel that she had enough understanding of CL to give any suggestions to the program, nor did she feel comfortable to teach the part of a lesson that to her involved CL, especially on those days that I came into the school. She worried that she might have a different take on certain issues and could not deliver what I intended in the program. Although I reassured her that I would be open to any opinions or discussion how we might approach the topics, she preferred that I did the teaching while I was in the school and she would take up where I left off. I think she was not familiar with CL and wanted me to show her how it could be done in the ESL classroom. What’s more, she was still dubious about whether beginning students could deal with CL or whether they could benefit from it at all. Therefore, at the beginning, our collaboration was not participatory to the degree that I intended it to be.

What we ended up doing was that I came up with a draft of the curriculum plan and through email or phone communication. She provided feedback on the design especially on its compliance to the curriculum expectations, school requirements and students’ needs. As I only came into the school two days a week, we tried our best to negotiate the schedule so that whenever I came in, I took up the teaching and class discussions with students. After each class,
we reflected on the progress and decided what aspects the teacher could take up while I would be away. Most of the time, the teacher just took up the language focus of the unit and waited for me to come the next time to continue with whatever discussion we had left off. While we tried our best to maintain a continuous flow of the lessons, it was inevitable that lessons became somewhat disjointed because of the limited times I came into the class and the division of work we had. Depending on the week, there could be a lapse of a few days before we could take up a discussion we started earlier in the week. The problem was worsened by the fact that students had their ESL periods at different times (see Table 4.1) according to their 5-day cycle. Even though I tried to come in on a day when I could see most of the students, there were still days when I missed some of them. There were also days when I started the discussion of a story with a group of students, and then the next period another group of students came in and I had to start all over again. Most of the time, I found myself conducting class discussions on the same topic for a few times as different groups of students came and went.

Ms. Li and I tried to overcome these challenges by having ongoing reflection and evaluation. We made continuous adjustment in our collaboration to ensure that the program could be delivered smoothly without too much disruption.
Chapter 6: Bridging Program

As most of the research participants were at the beginning stage of English language learning, both Ms. Li and I thought that it was necessary to help these beginning learners to acquire the necessary literacy skills so that they could function well in the new school environment. We therefore dedicated the first month of the school year to a bridging program.

6.1 Aims and Objectives

One of the goals that we wanted to achieve in the bridging program was to help students ease into a new learning culture. This was done through learning basic classroom English like how to raise questions in class, ask for permission or clarification, etc., and some daily English conversation. Through role play and dialogue in a communicative setting, they mastered the basic structures in forming questions, making requests, and responding to questions. Students were also introduced to vocabulary on classroom objects, subject names, and how to tell time, months, seasons, and some important holidays. Table 6.1 shows the main activities students were involved in and the grammar focus that went with it. It also shows what they achieved by the end of the unit:
### Table 6.1: Unit Plan for the Bridging Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language &amp; Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Sample dialogues of daily conversations & classroom English | • role play: greeting people, & introducing oneself  
• basic classroom English & instructions  
• vocabulary on classroom objects & rooms  
• directions & locations of objects or classrooms  
• telling time, days of the week, months, school holidays & seasons  
• class contract: rules using “We must/should/ can…”  
• set up a class library, and class blog  
• book talk and learn to write journal, reading log, etc. | • classroom objects & This is../That is../What is this/that?  
• asking for permission—Can I../May I../?  
• Yes/No & Wh-questions  
• Phrases of place & time  
• should, have to, must | • greet people & engage in common daily English conversation  
• ask questions in English in class & know the English names for classroom objects  
• tell time and read the calendar  
• complete a diamante poem on seasons  
• set up a classroom contract: know their roles & responsibilities as an ELL, e.g., handing in homework on time, participating in class discussions, etc.  
• start writing journal & reading log **Vocabulary** on classroom objects, directions/locations & time, seasons, etc. |
| 2. Diamante poems |  |  | **Ss are expected to …** |

Apart from the basic language skills, another focus was on basic school-based literacy skills. All the research participants came from learning environments very different from those in Ontario. Often, students’ success at school has a lot to do with the prior literacy skills that they bring with them into the new school; the greater the resemblance between the skills learned previously and the skills to be learned, the easier the transition would be, hence the greater chances for success (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). It would be logical to assume that by Grade 7 or 8, students should have known simple things like making good use of the school agenda to keep track of homework assignments and tests, or using a binder to systematically organize notes and handouts. However, these literacy practices are highly cultural and with these beginning immigrant ELLs, these skills had to be taught explicitly before they knew how to navigate themselves through the new learning environment.
Another objective of the bridging program was to set up a safe and inclusive environment where students felt secure to take risks. We did this by making a class contract together which set up some roles and expectations for learners. Again all activities were tied in with a clear language focus. For this activity, it was the use of modal verbs, where students set up rules or standards upon which they agreed, e.g., “We should ask questions when we don’t understand”, “We will respect each other’s opinions”, “We must hand in our homework on time,” “We will try our best to participate in class discussion”, etc. Ms. Li also set up a class blog as a first step to set up a collaborative learning community while tapping into their computer literacy skills. Most of the students were from a highly competitive, exam-oriented education system and collaborative inquiry was never a common practice (Y. Qian, personal communication, February 06, 2008). School-based literacy skills--like sharing opinions in a class discussion, or giving feedback to each other’s work, which are so valued in the Canadian school setting--were not nurtured in a predominately teacher-centred learning environment where these students came from. The class blog did not just aim to foster a sense of safe learning community but was also intended to give them an opportunity to gradually master those highly valued school-based literacy skills necessary for collaborative inquiry which would form the basis for CL learning.

The bridging period also allowed us to set up class routines and encourage some good learning practices. We set up a class library. I brought in a variety of used children’s books. We had student representatives run the library themselves. We also taught them how to write a reading journal and encouraged them to read on a regular basis. There were other expectations, like having a weekly quiz on whatever they learnt that week. We built this kind of formative assessment into the program because of our perception that students could benefit from this structure for monitoring their own progress. Apart from this purpose, the weekly quizzes were also used as one of the tools for course evaluation so that Ms. Li and I could adjust the pace and organization of lessons that addressed students’ needs.

All in all, the design was in line with the purposes of the integrative approach to CL. While critique is the ultimate goal for any CL program, access to the language of power that facilitates academic and social success should not be made exclusive (Delpit, 1988). The groundwork done in the bridging program--basic English skills for carrying conversations and class discussion, and setting up a environment for collaborative inquiry--was to pave the way for students to be gradually introduced to CL. The basic set-up of the ESL classroom was no
different from any student-centred language classroom. This is to dispel the myth that basic language learning and critical work are inherently incompatible, i.e., if we are doing CL work with students, we will have to forgo students’ basic language learning opportunities. The two can actually be married in an organic way. In the next section, I am going to describe one of the activities that we did with students, which demonstrates the integration of the different literacy skills they learned and the nurturing of an environment which fostered collaborative inquiry, an element indispensable for CL education.

6.2. Diamantes on Seasons

In order to help students to remember new words more easily, we decided to construct some meaningful activities around them. One example was the diamante poems which we did with them. Diamantes are 7-lined poems in the shape of a diamond. They follow a very structured pattern (see Figure 6.1), hence it is easy for beginners to follow and be able to create one of their own.

**Figure 6.1: A sample and template of a diamante**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winter</th>
<th>= 1 noun (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snowy, chilly</td>
<td>= 2 adjectives (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sledding, ice-skating, mountain skiing</td>
<td>= 3 gerunds (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas, snowman, beaches, ocean</td>
<td>= 2 nouns (A) + 2 nouns (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunbathing, swimming, surfing, surfing,</td>
<td>= 3 gerunds (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny, bright</td>
<td>= 2 adjectives (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>= 1 noun (B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All students needed to do was to think of two seasons on which they would like to write, and following the structure, think up two adjectives to describe each season, then two gerunds to describe the activities that we usually do during that time of the year, and lastly two nouns regarding things or objects we tend to associate with them.

After some explanation on the different word forms and the structure of the poem, we brainstormed for ideas related to the four seasons. Students then each worked on their own poem. In order to enhance the motivation and tap into all the multimodal literacy skills that they brought with them, we decided that students were to publish their work on the class blog that Ms. Li set up for them. Through the publication, we hoped that students could attain a sense of achievement and, at the same time, learn from each other. In order to foster a collaborative learning community, we added an element onto the task: After uploading their work on the blog,
they also needed to comment on each others’ work. The aim was to move them gradually away from the competitive exam-orientated and self-focused learning style to one that is more based on co-operative learning and sharing of opinions.

Figures 6.2- 6.5 show the works of the four student participants on whom I did the case study. The assignment turned out to be very motivating to most students, even to the new students with little English. Most of the students made an effort to find pictures from the web to illustrate and beautify their poems.

**Figure 6.2: Terri’s diamante on seasons**

Terri spent quite some time looking for the right picture that fit what she was describing about summer. She even went to the extent of having different colours for different lines and words.

**Figure 6.3: Baoh’s diamante on seasons**

Baoh, like Terri, managed to find pictures that best represented his descriptions of the two seasons that he chose. He even attempted to create a special visual effect by being very creative with the use of colours and font sizes – from big to small, then small to big.

Baoh also mentioned some cultural specific activities that Chinese people do in autumn, i.e., kite-flying and eating moon-cake. One of the festivals that we went through with students was the Mid-Autumn Festival, which they just celebrated in September. It was great to see that Baoh applied what he learned in this poem.
Baoh, whose slow progress in English proficiency in the previous year worried Ms. Li, was the first one who posted his work on the blog. The interest and effort he showed in this piece of work and its excellence was a real surprise to both Ms. Li and me.

**Figure 6.4: Chicken’s diamante on seasons**

Chicken also included two very beautiful pictures to help illustrate his poems. Although he might not follow the structure of the poem very strictly, he was able to think of some interesting ideas related to the seasons. Like Baoh, he also included activities related to the Chinese Moon Festival (or Mid-Autumn Festival).

**Figure 6.5: Melody’s diamante on seasons**

Melody was the only one here who did not include any pictures in her poem, but was great in terms of accuracy and ideas. She posted her poem a bit late and hence did not get much feedback from her peers.

As mentioned earlier, one of the goals in setting up the class blog was to foster a collaborative learning environment where students learned to share knowledge and opinions together. To this end, they had to comment on each other’s work. Ms. Li and I also participated in the class blog not only to give feedback on their work but also to model to students how they could comment on each other’s work. The excerpts below were taken directly from the class blog with only the change in the use of pseudonyms; hence, they contained grammatical mistakes that the students made:

**Excerpt 6.1: Comments on Baoh’s poem in class blog**

Ms. Li: Great work, Baoh! I like the words you chose to talk about the seasons. (October 4, 2007 11:16 AM)
Ms. Li: Wow Baoh! Great job adding the pictures. I like how you added pictures for autumn and spring. I also like how you changed all the colours. You're very good with computers! Well done! (October 4, 2007 2:39 PM)

Chicken: very nice Baoh (October 9, 2007 7:04 PM)

Yorkie: nice!!, very colorful, your's is better than my -_-|| (October 11, 2007 11:02 AM)

R: I love your work the best--- the careful choice of colours and font size of words! The pictures just go so well with the poem. Amazing! (October 16, 2007 1:30 PM)

James: Good! keep on go in! (October 17, 2007 11:36 AM)

Even though Ms. Li’s and my comments on Baoh’s work focused on a variety of aspects--choice of words, use of pictures, colours, etc.--students’ comments tended to just focus on the visual aspects of the poem. They were able to give each other simple comments even though they still made grammatical mistakes like the use of capitalization and punctuation. However, what was encouraging was that they were very supportive of each other and made good use of emoticons, an internet language, to further express themselves. For example, Yorkie uses “-_-” to indicate she was sighing since she found Baoh’s work much better than hers. Let’s look at the comments on Terri’s poem:

**Excerpt 6.2: Comments on Terri’s Poem in Class Blog**

Ms. Li: Nice work Terri. I like how you used many different colours. It makes your poem more eye catching. (October 4, 2007 2:44 PM)

Baoh: nice work Terri. (October 10, 2007 10:56 AM)

Terri: Nice.= = (October 11, 2007 11:07 AM)

Terri: Thank..everybody~~ (October 11, 2007 11:11 AM)

James: nice when I like at it, it makes my feel so relax. And stop using one word comment(feedback)!!!!!!!!!! (October 13, 2007 6:56 PM)

R: Very good! Good choice of pictures and colours for your words. You must have put in great effort! Way to go!!! (October 16, 2007 1:28 PM)

Terri: Thanks~~ (October 17, 2007 11:12 AM)

Baoh: Great work Terri, your picture is beautiful, I like it and keep on go in. (October 17, 2007 11:56 AM)

Terri was very responsive to the comments that she received and there was a lot of interaction going on thanking her classmates for their encouraging remarks. What is so interesting here is that James, noting the need to provide more elaborate comments, made an emphatic remark--“stop using one word comment (feedback) !!!!!!!!!!”--to remind his fellow classmates to give more detailed feedback. This seemed to have an effect on Baoh who, though having posted a comment earlier (“Nice work Terri”), re-posted a longer comment at a later time (“Great work Terri, your picture is beautiful, I like it and keep on go in”). He did the same thing with Chicken’s work; he went back and posted a more elaborate comment:
Excerpt 6.3: Comments on Chicken’s Poem in Class Blog

Ms. Li: I see that you’ve added some pictures. Very nice! Please check your poem again. (October 11, 2007 4:41 PM)

James: good, the picture is very clear and beautiful! (October 13, 2007 6:50 PM)

Baoh: wow good job (October 13, 2007 7:39 PM)

R: Chicken, this is really a great job! I love the pictures. They show how beautiful spring and autumn can be. But don’t forget the structure of diamantes. Some words should stay together on the same line. Check again if you can. (October 16, 2007 1:22 PM)

James: I like the picture, it really shows how beautiful spring and autumn can be! (October 17, 2007 11:24 AM)

Baoh: Good Chicken. This is very nice work! I liked your picture and way to go (October 17, 2007 11:29 AM)

Melody: ^-^ (October 17, 2007 1:06 PM)

Terri: The pictures very nice! (October 17, 2007 1:12 PM)

Baoh posted a short comment for Chicken on October 13--“wow good job”, and then he re-posted a longer comment, in full sentence four days later--“Good Chicken. This is very nice work! I liked your picture and way to go”. Not everyone was as active as Baoh and James in this assignment. Baoh’s participation and eagerness to write in a more extended way surprised both Ms. Li and me since he had always been quiet in class and would only give you a one-word or two-word answer when summoned. As mentioned earlier, his slow progress last year had worried Ms. Li.

In Excerpts 6.1- 6.3, we see that only four to five students were actively involved in posting comments. In fact, it was these same students who posted comments on other students’ works; the rest of the class were not as active. Ms. Li was quite frustrated at the beginning since she thought that students would be thrilled to engage in an activity in the cyber setting where they could use their other literacy skills. I explained to her in one of our email communications (personal communication, October 14, 2007) that students’ reluctance to provide feedback on each other’s work in the online community could be due to a number of different reasons. Some of them still thought that all they needed to do was to post their own poems. It was hard for them to grasp the idea that this kind of exchange among themselves could also be considered a form of learning. Making contribution in class discussion and commenting on each others’ opinions are valued school-based literacy skills, but ones which were not practiced nor encouraged in the highly teacher-centred learning environments (Y. Qian, personal communication, February 06, 2008) where these students came from. Being brought up in a teacher-fronted learning environment, they would need some time before they recognised the importance and usefulness
in making class contributions in a collaborative manner. This is also an indispensable skill if students are to engage in CL work. Oftentimes, it is not that students do not have things to share but rather that they haven’t acquired the skills for doing it yet. This skill to conduct collaborative inquiry became an important skill that students were to pick up gradually as we proceeded and got more involved in CL work. Also, for some who did not contribute much in the class blog, even though they might be tech-savvy enough and have a lot of blogging experience in their own language, they were still not familiar with the English web setting and hence found it intimidating to write in English. There were others who complained that Internet connection at home was not stable since they were just renting a room in a house or an apartment. With a comprehensive assignment like this which involved quite a few stages (working on their own poem, designing and illustrating, then publishing it, and commenting on others’ work), students--especially those who were rarely exposed to such literacy practices--needed exceptionally clear guidelines and scaffolding. Despite everything, this assignment helped to kick start a collaborative learning community and create a platform where they could publish their own work despite their limited English skills.

6.2.1 Commentary

Both Ms. Li and I found that with the class routines and expectations all set up, and the integration of clear language focuses in all class activities, students were most of the time engaged and showed great interest in learning. Ms. Li especially like the thematic approach and how activities incorporated a lot of literacy skills while capitalizing on students’ prior computer skills:

**EXCERPT 6.4: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON OCTOBER 1, 2007**

Ms. Li: I think like being more ummh.. I think organising things thematically is better than last year how I tried to organise things by kind of genre. So I think the thematics is a lot better, like exposing them to different forms of writing like the song, or short story, or newspaper article.. I think that’s more effective than just doing a newspaper unit, or something along those lines, so... that’s something I’m a lot happier with this year. And also like, just in terms of like making assignments, ummh..more..maybe more meaningful, like for instance, the poem, I was really happy with the poem because it integrates a lot more skills, like the computer skills, oral presentation, the writing and the grammar aspect for sure, so I think I’m a lot happier, with those assignments as well and also like hopefully the integration of the class blog as well. So there are some improvements that are being made, which hopefully would benefit the ELLs.
Despite her satisfaction with the bridging program, Ms. Li still found herself being challenged by some of her colleagues about the success of the program. She told me that one teacher came to her and asked if she had taught Sam to say “Hello” yet and wondered why he was not talking in English yet. Sam just came to Canada four months ago. This teacher’s question reflected the common belief that language learning is very much a psycholinguistic practice—once learners are taught a certain language structure, through adequate practice or exposure, they will be able to master it (cf. Gass’ input-interaction-output model, 1997). What the teacher had neglected is the sociocultural aspects of language learning, not to mention individual differences. Sam happened to be a very shy student. He talked little even in Mandarin. In my interaction with him, I found that he often evaded eye contact and paused indefinitely after I asked him a question. Most of the time, I found that he could understand my question, but he would pause to search for an answer or to figure out how to put the English words together. This silence was often interpreted as the student not understanding the interlocutor’s question or just being impolite in not replying. In my discussion with Ms. Li about Sam, I reminded her about the elements that make up communicative competence (Coelho, 2003; Hymes, 1974). No doubt, these beginning ELLs still had a lot to catch up in terms of structural competence (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation). But what’s more was their lack of sociolinguistic competence—the cultural norms governing communication. An example is eye contact. While it is widely considered as polite to look at people in the eye when talking to them in the North American setting, it is however considered impolite in some Asian communities, especially when you are talking to your seniors or superiors. Sam was not the only student who tended to avoid eye contact with teachers when being talked to. While it could be personal characteristic, or the lack of sociocultural competence, it could also be the fact that these new immigrant students were still going through an enormous emotional upheaval dealing with the cultural and linguistic disorientation. Part of the CL program was to help them address the emotional and identity crisis that they faced as they struggled with the acculturation process. This could not be just done through teaching them some technical aspects of language learning.

Ms. Li showed great understanding of the complexities of the issues faced with ELLs in their learning of the new language, but with the colleagues’ challenge of her teaching (see section 4.2.3.2), she felt the pressure to help her students to demonstrate some visible language gains, like conversational skills. Another source of pressure she experienced was the
requirements set by the school in giving regular assessment for these students. As much as she liked the integrative theme-based approach, she felt the pressure to give students some comprehension exercises so that she could hand in a mark for that as the report card would be due by early November. Even though we were teaching comprehension skills bit by bit as we proceeded, she felt the need to comply with the school request. What she did was to give students some comprehension passages and asked them to complete them on their own just for the marks. Even though she tried to find some passages that were related to the subject matter that we were doing in class, there was no follow-up discussion on the passages. The pressure to show visible improvement in students’ language skills and comply with the school assessment system formed a major resistance to our CL program and there was ongoing negotiation between the two of us to accommodate different needs.

6.3 Conclusion

As Luke and Freebody (1997) postulated in their four-tiered model, helping learners to become code breakers--being able to master the representational codes--is always a necessary element in CL work. Yet often, basic English language skills and CL work are seen as mutually exclusive in a classroom. The general assumption is that if we are teaching CL, students must have already attained a high level of proficiency and the job of the language teachers will then be merely to hone students’ higher order language and thinking skills. Another assumption is that CL does not have a place in a beginners’ class since what they need is basic language skills. CL is a “luxury”, the “icing on the cake” that beginning students cannot afford to have or are simply unachievable for them. What they have missed is that CL and English language learning do not have to be incompatible, and actually CL facilities language learning especially academic language skills. With careful scaffolding, students could be introduced to critical inquiry while building up their language proficiency. I also discovered another very important element in doing CL work as I moved along in the research. Many teachers, Ms. Li included, would think that beginning students do not have the language to carry out any critical inquiry. However, critical inquiry required more than just English language skills. We need to have an environment where collaborative inquiry is a common practice in the classroom and students must be exposed to the experience of sharing opinions, formulating and supporting their ideas. These school-based literacy skills are cultural and often not experienced by minority students who come from an
exam- and teacher-oriented school environment. The idea of having a bridging program in the CL program was to ensure students’ basic language needs were catered for, and that an inclusive and safe learning environment was built up as they proceeded to learn together as a community. These two continued to be the goals throughout all the modules/units. In the following chapters, I am going to show how we negotiated a space for CL work while trying our best to meet the curriculum requirements and engaging students in language learning.
Chapter 7: Me and My Family

Research has informed us that immigrant students typically go through many upheavals. Epstein and Kheimets (2000) argued that immigrant teenagers have to cope with three traumas simultaneously—“the crisis of adolescence, the culture shock and the problem of identity and status” (p. 196). We often forget that apart from the pressure of adapting to the unfamiliar school culture, language barrier, and oftentimes racism, immigrant teenagers also have to deal with all the psychological and physical changes as they enter adolescence. This adds to the great turmoil that they are already facing during the acculturation period. Whether the transition process is smooth depends on a range of factors. For example, involuntary immigration, as opposed to voluntary immigration (Ogbu, 1992) could make a great difference in immigrants’ attitude towards cultural and language difference. What immigrants went through prior their landing in the host country also affects the smooth transition to the new culture. In addition to war or other natural disasters, a lot of immigrants experienced family separation and shifting between homes before finally getting reunited in the receiving country. This exerts a lot of pressure and stress on all family members, especially with the changes in living environment, financial situation, and employment status that ensue after they finally get settled in the host country.

As I was drafting the CL curriculum, my initial understanding of the ELLs gathered from Ms. Li was that half of the class experienced multiple transitions and splitting of families before their final settling in Canada. For example, Yolanda came to live with her sister and brother-in-law to find better education opportunities, leaving her parents back in China. Melody’s father, as mentioned in Chapter 4 (section 4.2.3.1), left the family five years ago to find work in Canada. Her mother was a surgeon and needed to work in hospital so she was left with her grandparents most of the time. Four other students were just living with one parent at the time when we were doing the research. Their parents were either divorced or got divorced during the process of immigration, or stayed in the place of origin for work. Disman (1981) argued that the trauma that the immigrant experience entails is no less than that of bereavement.

As a result of these reasons, one indispensable element of the program design is to help these students to feel confident and supported in their learning. English language learning should be an additive experience rather than a subtractive one (cf. Lambert's subtractive bilingualism, 1987). What we did was to empower these immigrant students, giving them a “voice” where they could talk, write, or read about their experiences and the struggles that they were going through.
in the acculturation process. Through engaging them in different literacy practices, they came to a better understanding of their own situations, learning how to deal with the lived realities in a transformative way as they negotiated their new cultural and linguistic identities.

The module “Me and My Family” was aimed at addressing the identity crisis that these immigrant students faced as they started to learn a new language and negotiate their cultural identities. The goal was to help affirm their cultural self and, at the same time, express their individuality through creativity. This process generates a counter-discourse against the assimilationist social discourse that immigrants’ cultural and linguistic heritage has nothing to do with the dominant culture and English language learning. The module consisted of three units, each dealing with a particular aspect of the self.

7.1 Unit 1: The Story of My Name

To help students to affirm their cultural identity, we thought there was no better place to start than one’s name. The aim was to explore the cultural values attached to students’ names. Through reading and writing about stories of our own names, students were invited to re-visit the cultural values attached to their name and to feel proud of who they were. Another text that we worked on was a picture book, *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2003), which was about a Korean girl who immigrates to the United States. As she is starting school, she feels awkward about her name as she finds it so different from the American names of her peers. The story is about how she eventually accepts her name and also her cultural identity as she comes to know more about the rich cultural meaning behind her name. Through the story, we also hoped that students would be given an opportunity to relate the story to themselves and discuss problems concerning names they might be facing as new immigrants.

Personal pronouns and the use of adjectives were the main language focuses for this unit. Again, we tried to tie in language learning with the activities we carried out.
Table 7.1: Unit Plan for The Story of My Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. “Story of My Name” (a short essay by the research) | • share name origins & meanings  
• relate story to self and discuss problems concerning names encountered by the story characters and students themselves as immigrants | **Grammar**: subject, object & possessive pronouns  
**adjectives** | 1. write a “story of my name” (blogged) |
| 2. The Name Jar (a picture book by Yangsook Choi) | • interview someone from a different cultural background on their name origin and problems they faced regarding names | **Vocabulary**: from *The Name Jar*, and “Story of My Name” | 2. write an acrostic poem on one’s name and illustrate it on a poster |
| 3. Samples of acrostic poems on names | | **Critical/Literacy**: basic comprehension skills, e.g., prediction, guessing meaning from context, summarizing information, making connections, etc. | 3. retell the story “The Name Jar” |
| | | • responding and sharing opinions | 4. complete a brief written report on the interview with an immigrant relative/friend |

For each text students read, we identified certain common words or expressions and added them to students’ must-know vocabulary list. This applied to all the modules/units that we did later on. In addition, we also tried to infuse different reading skills bit by bit. We made sure that these skills were introduced in a progressive and spiral manner so that they would be revisited, strengthened and built on each other as we moved along. For this unit, we concentrated on some important reading strategies such as making predictions, guessing meaning from context, summarizing the story and most important of all, helping students to make connections. As mentioned earlier, these students coming from a teacher-centred school system were seldom asked what they thought or felt about the story or the message of the text (student interview, October 18, 2007). A lot of times, what they did was to just decode the text in order to get the right answers in a comprehension exercise. Without making the effort to connect with the text, students would find it hard to take any meaning out of it. They were just reading other people’s story, not knowing what it would mean to them. Ms. Li and I found that we spent a lot of time at the beginning of the term helping students to get used to this kind of literacy practice which
involved making personal connections, and providing them with the space to voice and formulate their opinions and feelings on issues touched upon in the texts.

Here are some of the highlights of the activities we did with the students.

7.1.1 Story of My Name

I wrote a story of my name, which was intended as a model for students to write their own version. I also used this text to introduce students to some common adjectives in describing people. The words underlined as shown in Figure 7.1 were the vocabulary which we focused on for this unit.

**Figure 7.1: Researcher’s “Story of My Name”**

*The Story of My Name: Sunny Man Chu Lau 劉敏珠*

My name is Man Chu Lau. Chinese people usually have 3 characters for their name, the first being the family name or last name (姓) (Lau 劉) and the second and third being the first names. The practice is a little bit different from Canada where the family name is always put at the back. When I came to Canada, I had to put my family name to the last.

For some families, like mine, they like to have their kids having the same middle character (字), so in my family for instance, we have Man Ling (敏鈴) my eldest sister) or Man Yee (敏兒 my brother). And "Man" (敏) in Chinese means quick, as in nimble (敏捷的), or quick-witted (機智的). "Chu" (珠) means "pearl" in Chinese, and there is an idiom (成語) which says you treasure (珍愛的) something so much as if you were treasuring a "pearl" (如珠如寶). This is what my mom wanted to say about me when she chose the name for me. So in a way I always feel a bit special (特別的) among all the 4 sisters.

When I was small, my parents used to call me “Lui Lui” (女女) which means “girl, girl”. It is quite an affectionate (親切的) term. Or sometimes they will call me “Chu Lui” (珠女). When I was small, I was timid (膽小的). This nickname does suggest that. I’m the second last in my family, and my youngest sister is quite bossy (跋扈的). Though she is one year younger than me, she is taller, bigger and has a stronger personality (個性強硬) than I do.

In HK, almost everyone at school has an English name. When I moved up to grade 7, the teacher wanted us to get an English name. I had no idea of what to choose. My sister suggested I take the name "Sunny". I liked the name a lot because it means full of sunshine (陽光), hope (盼望), and cheerfulness (快活). And I definitely would love to have all these qualities.
Students responded with much enthusiasm and interest as we started to read the story of my name. This was a topic to which they could easily relate and they also enjoyed the opportunity to learn a bit more about me, whom they treated very much as a teacher. As we went through the story, I invited students to share from time to time the meaning of their names. To help them to write their own version, I gave them an instruction sheet clearly laying out what to include in each paragraph and what they could write about concerning their name: What is your name in Chinese? How many characters are there? What do they mean? Who chose this name for you? Was it named after someone? Does it have some special meaning? Students wrote paragraphs on their names and had them posted on their class blog. For the sake of confidentiality, all students’ Romanised Chinese names are replaced with two or three English letters depending on how many characters there are in their name. Some of them included the names in Chinese characters in brackets as they explained the meaning. I replaced those Chinese characters with the “#” symbol. Their work is shown as they appeared on the class blog without any corrections, so grammatical and punctuation mistakes remain as they were written. Students also had their paragraphs written in different colours. In order to ensure that they are readable, I had the original colours darkened. For some reason, Melody did not post her work online and I only had the posting of the other three:

**Figure 7.2: Baoh’s “Story of My Name”**

*The story of my name: XY(# #)*.

My Chinese name is XY. My English name is Baoh. Chinese people usually have two characters for their name, the first being the family name or last name and second and third being the first names. My name of X(Chinese character) it has the same sound as the word (# #). In ancient China, the emperors called themselves "朕" instead of "me". I’m the youngest in my family and so I’m like a little "King", my grandfather chose this name for me.

*I don’t have any nickname. I like my name, because my grandfather chose this name for me, it’s cool!

Again, Baoh was among the first who posted their stories on the blog. He talked about how his name in Chinese stood for the word “emperor” in Chinese as his family was so proud of him, and he found his name “cool”.
**Figure 7.3: Terri’s “Story of My Name”**

**Meaning of my name**

My name is AB. I have 2 characters in my name. B is my last name. A is my First name in Chinese. “A” means child. It is my dad help me chose. Why my dad Chose this name for me? Because he wants to tell people that “AB” is in our family. And he hopes I am help every day, so he chose this name for me.

I have a nickname is: “EFG” which means a little kid. They say that I’m a “little kid” forever in their hearts. So I get this nickname. I like my Chinese name, because it has some special meaning for me.

Like Baoh, Terri also paid much attention to the use of colour to make her piece appealing. She talked about how her father chose the name for her which showed how proud he was to announce that Terri was born to the family. Terri also mentioned that she liked her name as it had some special meaning for her.

**Figure 7.4: Chicken’s “Story of My Name”**

My name is IJK. I have 3 characters in my name. The first character in my name is my family name second or third is first names

For my family name is same. And I (# ) means health , K (#) means outstanding (#) and my mam call me KK it is quite an affectionate term.

I have nicknames. My friend call my Chicken. I quite like my nickname because it is short and easy to write it. I like my name to because my name is my mam and dad to it give me

Chicken’s explained the two characters in his first name meant health and outstanding qualities. To him it was a very “affectionate” term, and just because the name was given to him by his parents.

I found students’ stories of their names very touching, especially when I got to read how proud they were of their name and the special meaning it had to them and their family.

As for the comments they wrote for each other, again the remarks were mostly supportive: “Nice name. Good job”; “You have a nice name”; or “Your Chinese name is cool”. Students tended to just give feedback to one another once. The communication pattern was often uni-directional--students seldom responded to other’s feedback or had more divergent conversations among themselves. We did have one exception here with Sam’s story:

**Figure 7.5: Sam’s “Story of My Name”**

My name is LM . My character is more gentle, my name mean glitter filled with sunshine. my parents chose the name for me. I have no sister.

I have not any nickname I like my name, because my name is very beautiful like the meteor
EXCERPT 7.1: COMMENTS FOR SAM’S “STORY OF MY NAME” IN CLASS BLOG
Ms. Li: I like the meaning of your name. It is very interesting! (October 28, 2007 7:31 PM)
James: It is nice. But don't you think is too short? (October 30, 2007 7:18 PM)
Terri: don't worride, i know is hard to write more. but next time you can ask people to help you.^.^ (October 31, 2007 9:43 PM)
Ms. Li: Yes, remember we all have different levels of English. Some are newer at learning this language than others. We have to give everyone a chance to develop. Remember, it takes lots of time! (November 1, 2007 3:38 PM)

Here James commented that Sam’s writing was way too short for the assignment, but Terri jumped in and showed understanding that it could be very challenging for a new student to write longer at the beginning stage. She encouraged him to ask for help in case he needed the next time. As mentioned in Chapter 4 (section 4.2.3.1.), Terri was very helpful to new students and even though she was always quiet in class, she could be very vocal in the class blog and stepped up to encourage Sam here. Ms. Li then responded with an aim to encourage the whole group that they should also show more support for each other knowing that everyone learns at a different pace. James’ comment, though it might seem a bit discouraging to Sam, was feedback that focused on the actual writing itself. He was calling for more elaboration and further development. This kind of feedback was rare among students. As students got more familiar with this kind of learning community, we began to see students giving feedback that moved away from just focusing on the use of graphics or colours, to more on the writing itself--the content, the development of ideas and arguments. There was also more genuine feedback for each other and more interaction among themselves, which will be shown in later assignments and class presentations.

7.1.2. The Name Jar

Before we started the lessons on The Name Jar, Ms. Li emailed me expressing concerns over the difficulty level of the picture book and she worried that some Grade 7 students would not be able to understand the text: “I was looking at the story that you were going to read to the kids. It looks a little difficult for Sakura, Sam and Yolanda” (personal communication, October 12, 2007). I agreed that even though the book is intended for children aged 4 to 8 years old, beginning second language learners would still find a lot of vocabulary inaccessible to them.

Look at this paragraph from the book: “Again she took out the red pouch to look at the wooden block with her name carved in it. As she ran her fingers along the grooves and ridges of the
Korean characters, she pictured her grandmother’s smile” (unpaginated). Just in this paragraph, there are many new words that no beginning ELLs would be able to decipher. The usual reaction for teachers is to replace it with something simpler. However, my hunch was that this story—with its theme so relevant to students—should not pose too much problem in terms of comprehension. Besides, the barrier new vocabulary posed could easily be solved by different strategies. What I did was that I designed a summary worksheet to help them get the main ideas of the story (see Figure 7.6; for the full worksheet see Appendix F). I re-wrote the story in simple sentences leaving blanks in between. The idea was to get students to find words from the story to complete the part of the story that I covered in the lesson to ensure that they could all follow. This would help me make immediate adjustment in terms of pacing and the use of instructional strategies if students had difficulty in filling in the worksheet. For some blanks, in order to make sure that they could find the right word from the book, I gave them the letter head to start with:

Figure 7.6: Excerpt of worksheet on vocabulary

1. Unhei felt n_________________ and e_________________ on the way to her new school.
2. She had a block of w____________ inside her pocket, which was a s___________ with her name on it.
3. The stamp was given to her by her __________________ at the _________________ in K___________.
   Her name was carved in K__________ characters.
4. When she touched it, she remembered her grandmother’s _________________.

To ensure comprehension, I also had a picture walk with students first before we did the actual reading. What happened was that students were able to make predictions and guess quite correctly what is happening in the story just from the pictures. What’s more, I also brought in real objects to help their understanding. For example, I brought a name stamp, an ink pad and a pouch to class and showed students what they were as I read the story aloud. I also stopped from time to time to expand or explain ideas or to give further examples to illustrate. I also made constant reference to their own experience in this new school, like what teachers they had, or how they felt when they first arrived. The read-aloud went very slowly but what happened was by the end of the second lesson on the story book, almost all the students had already finished the summary worksheet. This was when we still had not finished reading the story together in class. Even Sam got all the answers correct, which surprised Ms. Li as she was concerned about his ability to follow the story.
7.1.2.1. Class discussion.

As I just worked with the class two days a week, I tried to cover the class discussion on *The Name Jar* as much as I could within the two days I went in. As mentioned before, since students from different classes came in at different times, I always had to make a mental note of what had been covered with which group of students, and as a result of this, I always started the lesson by recapitulating what had gone through. We did a lot of re-telling of the story (or part of the story) together every time we started the lesson. This was to train them to summarize ideas; to use words that they learned to make sentences which could clearly describe what the story was about.

Apart from summarizing skills, another major focus for this story was to help them to make connections with the story. The idea was not just to facilitate their comprehension, but also to provide them with the platform to talk about their own experience, especially the difficulties that they faced as they went through the upheavals of cross-cultural adjustment. My hope was that together we could explore ways to deal with them.

As we started to read the story, I invited the students to share with the class if they had similar experiences to those that Unhei did in the story—feeling nervous and anxious about the new school and new schoolmates—or whether they felt embarrassed about their ethnic name like Unhei. I soon found out that they did not have so many problems with their names since the majority of the student population at the school was Chinese and most students still used their Chinese names. What bothered them, however, was that they experienced a strong sense of inferiority because they did not speak English. They had a lot of experiences and ideas to share regarding that. The following excerpts were taken from the second time when we discussed the story:

**Excerpt 7.2: Lesson Recording on October 25, 2007**

R: Remember the first day or the first few days you came here, when you first came to this school, that there were situations that you felt very embarrassed about, either it is about your name--

Chicken: No.
James: Language problem.
R: Could you explain.. say a little bit more, James?
James: I just sat in class, I don’t know any English.
Chicken: You have English now.
R: Wait (to Chicken). So James., you felt--
James: A loser
R: So you felt like you were a loser because you could not express yourself in English?
James: I cannot say any English sentence when I come.. when I came here.
James had been in Canada for two years and he now felt very comfortable speaking up in the ESL classroom. Actually, in most of the early class discussions, James was always the most responsive one. Here James admitted that that he felt like “a loser” when he first came to the school since he was unable to express himself even in an English sentence. Soon Chicken and Al joined in the conversation. They also recalled experiencing a similar kind of anxiety when they first came:

**EXCEP**\texttt{7.3: LESSON RECORDING ON OCTOBER 25, 2007}\texttt{E}

Chicken: When I first come to school, I feel little bit nervous. One month ago, I’m always talking to classmate.

Al: So you are not nervous anymore?

Chicken: I’m not nervous anymore.

Al: I came to school at Grade 5, right? I so nervous, right? I don’t know what to do, I biting bit my hand, and I’m so worried.

R: You’re so nervous that you’re biting your fingers.

Al: No, I’m biting my hand, like this (biting his hand).

….

Al: I don’t know. Very few days, I can talk now.

Chicken: I can talk now, just a month.

Al: Not one month, just a few weeks.

Chicken expressed that he was quite nervous at the beginning, but after a month, he was already talking with his classmates, which meant he was not feeling that lonely and nervous anymore. In the initial student interview that I had with him, he had expressed frustration that teachers or classmates tended to think that he knew no English when in fact, he could understand quite a lot. Chicken, having had his elementary education in Hong Kong with English as the medium of instruction, had comparatively more exposure to English than most of his peers in the ESL classroom. He found that, in terms of the languages spoken in the community and the school, his experience here was not so different from that in Hong Kong. He still found many people speaking Chinese around him, and of course English, too. The only difference was, he said, “\textit{Some English words are harder. I can understand mostly what they said, but they would think that I know no English}” (original speech in Cantonese) (interview recording, October 24, 2007). Often, he would resist the label of ELL and would assert himself by showing to others his English ability. Like in Excerpt 7.3, he pointed out that though he was nervous at the beginning, he was already talking with his classmates in English after a month’s time. He and Al were the other two students (apart from James) who tended to dominate class discussions in the beginning.
months when we started the research. In Excerpt 7.3, we found Al joining in and sharing his own nervousness when he first arrived, explaining that he would displace his anxiety through biting his hand. He soon added that it only took him a few days (later he changed to a few weeks) before he could talk in English. Chicken and Al then got themselves into a kind of competition--while Chicken reiterated that he took only a month to overcome that anxiety, Al said he took only a few weeks.

Up until then, the girls had been very quiet and did not join in our discussion. I knew from our interview the day before that they experienced many difficulties as they first entered the school. I wondered if the conversation had been dominated by these three boys and as a result the girls did not have a chance to speak up or if they were still struggling with their emotions and hence found it hard to express such painful experience in a different language. In the interview, for example, Yolanda and Terri both mentioned being bullied and feeling very much alienated (italics show original speech in Cantonese):

**Excerpt 7.4: Interview recording on October 24, 2007**

Terri: *When I first came, I would love to exit the program as fast as I could...because people would look at me as if I were a monster*

Yolanda: *They bully us.*

Yolanda also shared that her classmates would never want to work with ELLs when it came to group work and hence she was often left alone to work with other ELLs. This to her was very saddened:

**Excerpt 7.5: Interview recording on October 24, 2007**

Yolanda: 心哭皮不哭 (xīn kū pí bù kū/ Inside, my heart cries, but my skin would not show it.)

Despite my effort to keep encouraging the girls to speak up, they remained somewhat quiet until we came to the discussion on the question of *difference*. In the story, Unhei reveals to her mother that she would like to have her own American name because she does not want to be different from her American peers:

... “I would like my own American name,” She said quickly. Her mother looked at her with surprise. “Why Unhei is a beautiful name. Your grandma and I went to a name master for it.”

“But it’s so hard to pronounce”, Unhei complained. “I don’t want to be different from all the American kids.” “You are different, Unhei”, her mother said. “That’s a good thing!”

Unhei just wrinkled her nose. (unpaginated)
One of my intentions was to help students to examine what *difference* is: From whom and what we are different? Who sets the standard/norm? Is difference necessarily bad? It was my goal to make them aware how arbitrary most norms are and oftentimes the norm reflects a power relation. Norms are often set to favour the dominant group at the expense of the minority who are seen to “deviate” from the norm. For instance, in an English-speaking environment, ELLs are often defined by their lack of the English language skills instead of by their ability to learn a different language on top of their other language skills.

I started the discussion by asking them if they were like Unhei who did not want to be different. Most of them expressed that they did not want to be different. But Al had a different answer:

**EXCERPT 7.6: LESSON RECORDING ON OCTOBER 25, 2007**

Al: Sometimes different is good, sometimes different is bad--
R: So can you tell us in what situations being different is good, and in what other situations being different is bad?
Chicken: In the class difference is not good.
R: Why?
Chicken: because all people looking at you and it is so--
R: embarrassing? (I then explained the meaning in Chinese to them)
...
Melody: I’m ESL, too many people laugh at me.

Chicken responded that being different in a classroom was bad and Melody agreed with what he said because to her being an ELL in her class she found herself being laughed at all the time. Melody then went on and shared in Mandarin what happened before lunch break. She said she was chatting with Yolanda, another ELL in the class, while changing after their gym class. Then suddenly one of her Black classmates came up to her and slapped her on the face and accused her of saying the “n” word. Neither Melody nor Yolanda understood what the “n” word stood for and Melody was so upset that her classmate could be so mad with her as to hit her like this. She just cried and cried. Later Yolanda reported this to their core teacher, and the principal. They were still investigating the case. The principal asked them to find witnesses. Melody only had Yolanda who saw what happened and they were worried that their English was not good enough to explain the incident clearly.

I was quite shocked by Melody’s sharing for a moment. I was not sure what I should do next. My intention of reading the story *The Name Jar* was to allow students a space where they
could talk about and understand their own adjustment problems, thereby finding ways to deal with them collaboratively. Now that Melody was sharing a real issue at hand, I became uncertain if I should deal with it or more exactly, how I should deal with it. Part of my concern was that Melody and Yolanda were still very emotional about the incident. I was not sure if we could talk about it in a rational manner. I also worried if I would be able to engage the rest of the class in exploring further what was happening there; I feared some of them might lose interest, especially those who mentioned before that they did not experience being bullied at all at school. Looking back, indeed I could have grasped this teachable moment and turned it into a meaningful discussion on difference and discrimination. We might not be able to find out if this Black student was just bullying Melody (because of her being an ELL) or that Melody did say something offensive of which she was not aware. I could have at least brought their attention to the social and political implications of the “n” word and why it could arouse so much social anger. This could lead us back to the whole discussion on difference and power relations. Instead of picking up Melody’s sharing, I just went back to Al’s point that being different was not necessarily bad all the time. Students came up with some counter examples where being different was good and the lesson was over. I did not even have the time to bring them back to the whole idea of the arbitrariness of norms.

7.1.2.2. Commentary.

What I learned from this lesson was that I really had to be very spontaneous and responsive to students’ needs especially when the goal was to encourage them to bring their lived experience to the classroom. I might come to the class with a plan of my own and I might also structure the lesson so that ideas could be introduced step by step. However, in responding to the story, students could bring up a problem they experienced that sparked off discussions that might go in different directions. As a teacher, I had to be very clear of the goals that I wanted to achieve. Was it about just helping students to understand the story? Or was it to help them to see what the story meant to their real life, i.e., what they can take out from it that helps them better understand or face their lived experiences?

Besides, Melody’s story, though I did not deal with it immediately, kept me thinking what Ms. Li and I could do to help these ELLs in adjusting to the new school environment. Other female students also expressed in the interview how miserable they were in their own core class where they felt alienated and discriminated against. Even though the male students seemed to
have fewer problems, Ms. Li and I suspected that they just tended to deny it or downplay the impact on them. We did hear from other students and teachers over casual conversations that male ELLs were similarly laughed at or called names. I suggested to Ms. Li that we should take some critical action and in the end, I decided to make changes to the original curriculum plan and inserted a unit on bullying to help students deal with those issues, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

On the whole, even though our discussion on The Name Jar did not turn out as I planned, I found that students enjoyed reading the story and learning the vocabulary. For example, Baoh in the interview said that he loved the idea of learning more vocabulary so that he could understand the text he was reading (interview recording, October 24, 2007). They also loved the story since it resonated with the experiences they had or were going through.

**7.2. Unit 2: My Family**

This unit was a continuation of the theme on cultural identity. Ms. Li and I wanted to send students the message that we were interested in their roots, heritage and family and that they were much valued in an ESL classroom. I wrote a photo story about my family and used that as the main text for this unit to teach grammar items, like present continuous tense to describe objects in photos, and vocabulary related to family, like “cousins” or “nephews”. We also continued to work on the use of adjectives in describing appearance and personality, which we started in the previous unit on the Story of My Name (see Table 7.2 for the unit plan).

### Table 7.2: Unit Plan of My Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. “My Family” (a photo story by Man Chu Lau) | • students and teacher share information about family members, and life in home countries, etc. | **Grammar:**  
• Present continuous tense to indicate ongoing actions & describe objects in photos  
• Adverbs of place: in the middle, on the right, behind, in front of, etc.  
• Adjectives | **Ss are expected to…**  
1. complete a family tree and a brief description of family members  
2. write a short paragraph describing a friend’s family member (blogged)  
3. write a photo story of one’s family |
| **Vocabulary:**  
• on family members |


Figure 7.7 shows part of the photo story (see Appendix G for the full photo story) which provided a model for students to emulate theirs. I underlined the vocabulary on family members, and since our grammar focus for this unit was present continuous tense and adverbs of location, all verbs and adverbs of places were italicized to facilitate their learning. Apart from the grammar and vocabulary, I also modeled how one could start describing a photo like “In this photo…” or “We took this photo in…”, etc. The sentence and grammar structure together with the description for each photo provided them with a framework so that they could easily write their own family photo story.
I have a big family. There are nine of us altogether—my parents, my 4 elder sisters, 1 elder brother and 1 younger sister.

This picture shows my elder brother and sisters and me outside a park in Hong Kong when I was very small. Do you know which one is me? Yes, I am the one who is crying. I want my brother to give me a candy.

We took this photo in our old home in Hong Kong in a Chinese New Year celebration. My father and mother are sitting in the middle. I’m the one with my hand over my mom’s shoulder.

I moved to Canada with my son when he was six years old. His name is Janan. We are in our old apartment and are having a birthday party for him. He is unwrapping his birthday presents in this picture. Does the dog look real to you?

A number of mini tasks were designed around this story to gradually build up students’ grammar and vocabulary necessarily for writing their own family photo story in the end. One of the mini tasks was to describe their family members using adjectives. To encourage student interaction and collaborative learning, Ms. Li suggested that students should pair up and interview each other about their family members and write up the paragraph. They then posted their paragraphs on the class blog and gave feedback on each other’s work. We continued to promote a collaborative learning attitude and practice what students learned by sharing with and learning from each other—a culture different from what these students were brought up with. This task was in preparation for their next task—writing their family photo story. With careful
scaffolding, we hoped that students could accomplish the task step by step. Figure 7.8 shows their paragraphs as they were posted on the class blog.

**Figure 7.8: Students’ postings on family members**

**Yolanda’s family** (posted by Terri)

**Appearance:**
Yolanda’s mother is average height. She has short hair and she is good looking.
Yolanda’s father is average height. He has black hair.
Yolanda’s sister has long hair and red hair. She is pretty and she is in her twenties.

**Personality:**
Yolanda’s sister is mean, smart, friendly and bossy.
Yolanda’s mother is funny, evil and nice.
Yolanda’s father is nice, friendly and bossy.

**Terri’s mother** (posted by Baoh)
Terri’s mother is tall. She has black hair. She is pretty. She is slender. She is good-looking. She is slim. She is cute and beautiful. Terri’s mother is intelligent and smart. She is funny and friendly. She is nice !!!!

**Sakura’s father** (posted by Melody)
Sakura’s father is strong, fat, average height, cute and average old.
Sakura’s father is friendly, cool, nice and crazy

**Frank’s father (posted by Chicken)**
Frank’s dad is handsome, tall and middle aged. His hair is short.
And he is very funny, and nice

Again, students loved to express their creativity through the use of colours. The sentences might appear much patterned but they showed good use of adjectives. There was also gradual improvement in their comments for each other.

**EXCEPT 7.7: COMMENTS ON CHICKEN’S POSTING**

Baoh: WOW, Franks has nice dad! (November 20, 2007 10:31 AM)
James: Nice! But is too short need to be longer! (November 20, 2007 10:32 AM)
Sam: You write funny wrong but i like your what you wrote about your father and your paragraph is too short (November 20, 2007 2:32 PM)
Ms. Li: Nice comment Sam. (November 20, 2007 3:16 PM)
In Excerpt 7.7, Sam, who was one of the new students Ms. Li worried most about, wrote a relatively long comment. He commented on the length of the paragraph and also a spelling mistake Chicken made. Sam opined that the paragraph was too short and that the word “funny” was wrongly spelt with only one ‘n’. At the same time, however, he also expressed his appreciation of the way Chicken wrote about Frank’s father. While most of the students’ comments were still very formulaic, Sam’s concrete feedback showed much care and thought, and improvement on his part.

EXCEPT 7.8: COMMENTS ON YOLANDA’S POSTING
James: Nice! But there should only be one paragraph. (November 20, 2007 10:30 AM)
Ms. Li: Good work. But please check again for mistakes. (November 20, 2007 3:14 PM)
Terri: Fat is not a good word. you can say: over weight or chubby. (November 20, 2007 3:53 PM)
Terri: Haha” (November 20, 2007 6:52 PM)

In Excerpt 7.8, we see a similar improvement in Terri’s comment. She pointed out to Yolanda that the use of the word “fat” might not carry a positive sense and gave alternative suggestions like “overweight” and “chubby”. Perhaps she worried that this forthright comment might sound rude or arrogant, so she posted another comment--“Haha”--shortly afterwards to indicate amity and friendliness.

As mentioned earlier, not all students were active on the class blog. Some just posted their work or just gave feedback to one or two students’ work. Some even did not post any comments. The students who were active from the beginning were James, Terri and Baoh, and now Sam was getting more vocal. Their comments were getting less formulaic but more detailed and genuine. Setting up this online learning community and maintaining it was not an easy job. The greatest difficulty lay in the fact that there was no Internet access and computer in Ms. Li’s portable which was placed outside the main school building. It was often a hassle to make sure the computer lab was booked well in advance, and then to take students back and forth between the lab and the classroom often took up so much time. We then had to rely on students to do the work at home. Some students did complain to us that their internet connection at home was not stable depending on what kind of access was offered by their landlord. Ms. Li and I both wanted that the class blog could continue so that students could learn from each other and cultivate a collaborative learning environment. However, because of the hassles, we began to use the blog less and less, especially when students began to get more used to discussions and cooperative
work in class. In retrospect, the class blog was definitely a good experience for them to be gradually introduced to a collaborative learning environment.

The next assignment was the family photo story. In the photo story that I gave students, I shared with them openly my family situation specifically that I was an immigrant like them and came to Canada as a single parent, missing all the relatives back home. I hoped by being open to my students, I could carve out a space where they would feel safe to talk about their family and their immigration experience.

Students showed great interest in my story, partly because they never had teachers who would be so open about their personal life, and partly they were just curious to know more about me as a teacher to them. They learned a lot of vocabulary and grammar from the story. But when it came to the writing of their own family photo story, they were very reluctant to do so. They resisted not so much the idea of writing a story about their family as the idea of having to show others their family photos. Some of them expressed that the family did not take their photos with them when they moved to Canada while some said their photos were still packed away with other belongings. Though most of them had no problem showing Ms. Li and I their family photo story, they were reluctant to present it in class or show it to their classmates. Later as I related this incident to one of my thesis committee members, Maria José Botelho (personal communication, November 17, 2007), she pointed out that family photos could be a delicate issue especially with immigrant families. While some might not have the practice of taking family photos, some might have the family training not to disclose any family information to others because of different social or political reasons. What I also neglected was that some students were also embarrassed about showing pictures of themselves in their younger age. It could be the adolescent feeling of insecurity of their appearance.

Despite all of these potential concerns, students returned their assignments with a few of them opting to draw pictures of their family members instead of including family photos. To respect confidentiality, we did not ask them to do a class presentation. Ms. Li and I just read them ourselves. Most of them did a great job using the language and grammar structure that we provided them. Some of them wrote quite of lot about their family life and also their family members. Here is Baoh’s photo story before editing (all names are pseudonyms and the family pictures are removed for confidentiality):
Figure 7.9: Baoh’s family photo story

**Photo 1:** On Christmas Eve, December 23rd, my family and I went downtown. We were at Nathan Phillips Square. I took this picture of my two cousins, Dale and Paula. In the picture, Dale was pinching Catty’s cheeks. It was really funny and we all laughed.

**Photo 2:** On December 9th, my family and I went to Niagra Falls. My aunt took this picture of my cousin and me. Dale and I are smiling in the picture. We had a lot of fun at Niagra Falls that day.

Even though Baoh just used 2 photos for his story, I was very happy with the accuracy with which he wrote, especially with his use of personal pronouns. I had been pointing out to him a few times that for formal writing we should use “My mom and I” rather than the colloquial form of “me and my mom”, which he kept using in his journal. He also showed a good grasp of the use of the progressive form to describe the action shown in pictures. Even though he still showed confusion over the use of past form versus the present form, he showed great understanding of purpose for this type of narrative.

Figure 7.10: Terri’s family photo story

**Photo 1:** This picture in the middle that was me. The lady wear in white that was my mom, and the other person is my dad. We took this picture at our house.

**Photo 2:** I took this picture with my grandparents. The girl wear in read that was me. The man told me when i was 2 years old, they were brought to my grandparent’s house to visit them. So they took this picture to me and my grandparents.

**Photo 3:** In this picture the lady sat beside my mom is my aunt. She also very nice. When dinner time she always put some food in my bowl.

**Photo 4:** This little girl is me! I was sat in front of the piano. That time i was 9 years old.

**Photo 5:** She is my grandma. That is her house, did you see some red pouch on the tree? When new year, they will put the pouch of money on the tree. My uncle told my grandma to sat beside tree and touch the lower, then took the picture, does it look so nice?

Like all her assignments, Terri put in great effort in doing this one. Apart from the pictures, she also drew some illustrations beside each caption. She still had problems with her use of punctuation, capital letters and tenses, but her ideas were rich and fluent. This was actually the first time since the beginning of the term that students were asked to write such an extended piece of work and she did a great job.

In terms of fluency of ideas and creativity, Melody did the most wonderful job for this task. She wrote the longest photo essay which Ms. Li and I did not expect. When she handed in
her work, she put all her photos in a plastic pocket folder instead of sticking them onto the paper next to her writing. She said those pictures were too precious to leave a mark on. Here is her story:

**Figure 7.11: Melody’s family photo story**

I have a big family: my parents, my grandparents, my two uncles, two aunts, my two younger sisters, one baby brother and me. But today, I just show some of them—my parents, my grandparents and myself.

**Photo 1:** This photo shows my grandma and I standing on our old building’s living room. My grandma looked so young, and I looked so happy. Look, my grandma has many teeth, but where is my teeth? At that time, I was just 3 months old, so I didn’t have teeth yet. But I could smile, I could give photographer a beautiful pose!

**Photo 2:** When I was 4 months old, my parents took me to a playground and took photos for me. Yes, that baby is me! I had a little baby fat, and look so cute, don’t I? I’m in yellow, and my mom put a red white hat on my head to hide my spiky hair. When I looked at this photo, I have a question. Where is my eyebrow?

**Photo 3:** This photo was taken on May 3, 1996. Guess, does that day have some special meaning? Yes, that day was my first birthday. Do you know? At that time, my mom was so fat, but now, she is much thinner than me. There was a big birthday cake. I want to eat it when I write this essay. Look, there was one candle on the cake. As I said, I was 1 year old then. But I can’t find my eyebrow.

**Photo 4:** This photo was taken on July 20, 1996. That day was my mom’s birthday. She was 27 years old, and she was so young. But this photo doesn’t show her, because she took it. My grandma looked older than now! At that time she looked very old, but now she looked very young and kind. My grandpa is standing on the right. Hey! Look here! My dear grandpa! The baby in the middle is me. I as over 1 year old then! But I was still a baby. I’m a VIP—Very Important Princess! So my grandparents held me in the middle. They held me, and I held a frog doll. When I was born, I loved frogs; I still love frogs now.

**Photo 5:** Haw-Haw, guess, who is this girl? IT’s me used my grandpa’s shades to make myself a “blind person”. Wow, so cool, I like this very much!

**Photo 6:** This is the first photo I took on April 9, 2000. My parents are standing near the West Lake, one of the most beautiful lakes in China.

**Photo 7:** I like this photo. It shows my dad and me. My dad put me on his leg and held me in his arms. Look, at that time, I had so many teeth. They are so shiny! But I still can’t find my eyebrow.

**Photo 8:** This photo was taken in Montreal, when I first came to Canada, and traveled to Montreal. At that time, I was so small, young and short. I’m taller than my mom now. I can’t find anything to introduce there, but I can find my eyebrow! I’m so happy because I found it!
I especially like the personal and casual tone Melody used for this photo story--it was almost like she was sitting next to you sharing her family stories. It creates a very inviting appeal to the audience/readers. Apart from occasional spelling mistakes or wrong choice of words, the essay was perfect regarding the richness of ideas, the variety of sentence styles, etc. Ms. Li and I were very surprised at her rapid progress. It was later when I returned the assignment to students, Melody came to me and told me in tears that among all the assignments in this module, she liked this one the most (personal communication, December 10, 2007). In her essay (photo 8), she mentioned visiting Canada for the first time. Actually, she came here to visit her father after he moved to Canada on his own first to look for a job and get settled down. In the past five years, her family members were all living apart, with her father working in Canada, mother busily involved with work at hospital, and her living with her grandparents while her mother visited her occasionally. She shared that the assignment allowed her to sit down with her parents together for the first time in so many years, going through their family photo albums and sharing interesting past stories. The assignment hence meant so much to her.

7.3. Unit 3: Who Am I?

“Who Am I?” is the last unit in the “Me and My Family” module, which focused on who the students are--their likes and dislikes, the different roles they played, their personality and different strengths. Again, the goal was to help boost their self-esteem as they weathered the acculturation process when oftentimes they became doubtful of their unique qualities and talents as they were compared against the mainstream culture.
Table 7.3: Unit Plan of Who Am I?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Loves and Hates (a poem) | • share what one likes and dislikes, one’s abilities, hobbies, possessions, etc. | **Grammar**  
  - Simple present tense to indicate habits, personal preferences, etc.  
  - Adverbs of frequency: always, never, etc.  
  - Can to indicate ability → I can + verb infinitive  
  • I’m... (adj)  
  • I’m a/an...  
  • I’ve a/an...(object)  
  • I love/ like/ dislike + ~ing  
  • *Simile & metaphor: I’m like a... | Ss are expected to…  
  1. write and illustrate a poem on Loves and Hates (blogged)/ oral presentation  
  2. complete an “I am...” or an “I can …” poem through process writing & oral presentation |
| 2. Samples of “I Am”/ “I Can” poems (taken from Ada & Campoy 2004) | • express who they are, what roles and abilities they have | **critical/literacy**  
  • elaboration |

Table 7.3 shows the unit plan and again we integrated clear language focuses based on the texts we used. This time we read two kinds of poems with them. One was the “Loves and Hates” poems. This was an activity that I had tried out with my own students in Hong Kong and they all loved it. What I did was to show them samples of “Loves and Hates” poems (Lau, 1997), with some written by my past students (see Figure 7.1) to encourage these ELLs to emulate their own.

**Figure 7.12: A sample “Loves and Hates” poem**

**Loves and Hates**

I love the initials of my name;  
some interesting things about the games;  
stars shining in the night,  
and birds singing in the light;  
Joking with my best friends sometimes,  
and beautiful things in my eyes.  
I hate my little fingers on both sides;  
mosquitoes coming out all the times;  
friends going away saying “good bye”;  
the people always telling lies,  
and the difficult, bad things of my life.  

*Catherine Cheng, Grade 7*
Before writing, we brainstormed with each other what our likes and dislikes were. In order to write an interesting poem, they should try to think divergently, including as many different aspects as possible, such as food, hobbies, people, movies, songs, or activities, instead of just dwelling on one aspect of their life. Also, I encouraged them to make good use of the adjectives they learned in the previous unit to describe the items they talked about, for example, instead of just saying “I like apples”, they could say “I like sweet apples” or “I like big sweet juicy apples”. The idea was to give as much descriptive information as possible with a short phrase. Another way to elaborate and give more concrete description was to use ~ing clauses to further qualify the item mentioned, for example, “I hate friends going away saying goodbye” or “I like birds singing in the tree”. As students were getting more used to working on extended writing, we started doing process writing with them, encouraging them to write with drafts, then edit and revise their writing. This actually took quite a while and considerable explanation before they understood the purpose of process writing. Most of the participants were just used to their assignments being assessed for grading purposes. Everything was about whether you got the right answer or not rather than working together to perfect it. Not long after I started the research, I soon found that it was hard for these students to work together and refine a piece of work before handing it in and to view the process as more important, if not the same, as the result. I had to keep explaining to them the purpose behind process writing and encouraged them not to treat their poem as just another piece of work to be graded, but rather as an opportunity to learn the different steps involved in a good piece of writing.

Ms. Li was very supportive of my idea and we worked with students individually after they got their first draft ready. We discussed with them individually what words they could use, which phrases needed more elaboration, what other aspects they could include and so forth. After all the drafts and editing, they posted their work on their class blog. Figure 7.13 shows the four main participants’ poems. They all did a great job. Apart from the use of wonderful colours, Baoh and Terri’s poems were full of interesting and unique ideas. For example, Terri said she did not like “fighting and name calling”, while Baoh said he hated “countries at war and people fighting” and “violence”.
Figure 7.13: Students’ “Loves and Hates” poems

Terri’s Loves and Hates

- Loves and hates
  - I love riding bicycle, colours and fishing, hiking far in the woods.
  - I love playing badminton, swimming in summer.
  - I love talking and running, babies and girls.
  - I love blues and purple, sleeping.
  - I love drawing, going to the beach.

- I hate walking, swearing and winter,
  - I hate playing soccer, fighting and name calling.
  - I hate people telling lies, singing.
  - I hate smoking, boys, shopping, films.

Baoh’s Loves and Hates

- Loves and hates
  - I love rain, countries at war and people fighting,
  - I love cold winters and hot summers.
  - I love accidents and diseases,
  - I like fog and snow.
  - I love sadness and pain,
  - I love rowdy people,
  - I love swindling,
  - I love violence,
  - I like smoking.

- I hate playing and sleeping,
  - I hate fun and joking.
  - I hate singing, being happy, laughing,
  - I hate eating steak and skateboarding.
  - I hate friends and guys.
  - I hate black and white.

Melody’s Loves and Hates

- I love going to school, because
  - I love in the school, I can see my friends.
  - I love shopping with my mother, because
  - She will buy many beautiful clothes for me.
  - I love caring for my friends, because
  - I love them.

- I love sharing cakes with my sister, because she likes cake.

- I hate going to hospital, because
  - I hate being scared!
  - I hate running in rainy, because
  - I hate falling down on earth!
  - I hate eating with my uncle, because
  - He can eat too much!
  - I hate shopping with my friends, because they will use my money!

Chicken’s Loves and Hates

- Loves and hates
  - I hate doing homework.
  - I hate all day long.
  - I hate eating seafood.
  - I hate going to the library.
  - I hate reading English book.

- Love
  - I like playing in the snow,
  - I like playing violin.
  - I like playing computer games,
  - I like swimming in the pool.
  - I like eating chocolate ice cream.
  - I like watching movies in the cinema.
  - I like playing soccer and basket ball with my friend.
  - I like comic Naruto One piece.
Chicken even downloaded pictures, especially those of his favourite comic book characters, to illustrate his poems. Melody did not do much with her poem but hers turned out to be very unique since she used a lot of repetition which created a very structured pattern.

Another group of poems we read in class were the “I Am” and “I Can” poems from Ada and Campoy’s book (2004, pp. 62-3). I took Ada and Campoy’s idea of encouraging immigrant students to write about themselves to affirm their unique cultural identities. Often we define ourselves by telling people what roles we play, what we have, what activities in which we engage, etc. By helping them to look at themselves from the wealth of experience, strengths, roles and interests that they had, our aim was to help them to speak back to the prevalent discourse they heard at school or in society that they were stupid or useless just because they could not speak English well.

I started the work on this assignment by sharing with students one incident that I had with my son. Like other immigrant children, he experienced great levels of anxiety when he first entered an English-speaking school. One day he came home and showed me a poem Just Me that his teacher had been reading with his class. It is about some animals talking about themselves, each wanting to be someone else, but in the end, they realise that they are just making a mess by not being themselves. The poem ends with a note saying that it is good to be just being oneself. I then asked my son if he, like those animals in the poem, would like to be someone else too. He thought for a while and he said he would like to be “an American”. What he meant was that he would like to be an English speaker. At that time, all he knew from watching movies in Hong Kong was that the Americans were English speakers. He found that he was so different from others that he could not speak English; hence, he felt very miserable. I immediately encouraged him and made him see that actually he had an advantage over most people. Now that he was learning English as a second language, together with Chinese, he would be able to speak to more than half of the people in the world. I tried to make him see that he should not be feeling ashamed of himself because English was not his mother tongue, and let it discount his other good talents and abilities.

All the students were very attentive and motivated while listening to my story. We then started to read the “I Am” and “I Can” poems and at the same time, I introduced the different grammar structures that might be needed in writing such poems. For example,

- I am (an adjective), e.g., “I am funny.”, or “I am excellent at painting”
I am a/an (role), e.g., “I am a ballerina.”, or “I am a soccer player.”

I also taught them the use of figures of speech and relative clauses to help their description of themselves:

- Simile, e.g., “I am strong like an eagle.”
- Metaphor, e.g., “I am a race car”, or “I am the nightlight by your bed.”
- Relative clause, e.g., “I am an artist that likes to draw.”

The use of figures of speech did not turn out to be as difficult for students as Ms. Li and I had thought. Students were quite familiar with figurative speech in Chinese, and there was not much difference in its structure in English from that in Chinese, therefore students could grasp the idea very quickly. Again, we encouraged them to experiment with their creativity and come up with interesting ideas about themselves. Table 7.1 shows our Baoh, Terri and Melody’s work. Chicken forgot to hand in his work.

**Figure 7.14: Students’ “I Am” poems**

**Baoh:**
- I am a Chinese that can speak Mandarin very well.
- I am a basketball fan that can shoot a basket very nicely.
- I am a student that loves to learn.
- I am a gymnast that loves to get strong.
- I am a boy that can get any girl friends I like.

**Terri:**
- I am a musician that can play many instruments
- I am a granddaughter that always makes my grandparents smile.
- I am a caring friend that helps other classmates
- I am a strong girl who knows how to protect herself.
- I am a good child that helps my mom clean the house.

**Melody:**
- I am a computer games player that plays well.
- I am a book reader that reads a lot
- I am a piano player that plays good music
- I am a princess that boss my family around

We did not ask students to post this poem online. Instead we spent time working on process writing with them, encouraging them to expand their ideas and focus on the accuracy. Even though the poems might be very short, we put in great effort in helping them to elaborate
their ideas, always pushing them to give some more concrete details. Their “I Am” poems were well done, and so were the “I Can” ones since both poems were structured and patterned. Baoh’s “I Am” poem (see Figure 7.14) was very interesting as he managed to talk about different aspects of himself and was also able to give specific details to substantiate his claims about himself. I was happy to find that he was proud of being a Mandarin speaker, too. Terri had no problem coming up with ideas about herself and she did give a very accurate portrayal of herself too—a very strong, caring and respectful girl. On the other hand, Melody’s description of herself might seem not as rich but no less interesting.

The “I Can” poems are comparatively simpler since students only need to think of what they were able to do. I reviewed with them the use of the modal verb “can” and how it is used with an infinitive verb. Students experienced a great sense of accomplishment in writing this poem since it was highly patterned, hence very easy to master, and at the same time, it was self-reassuring. Here are three of our participants’ works:

**Figure 7.15: Students’ “I Can” poems**

**Baoh:**
- I can do push-ups 40 times per minute.
- I can play the race car games very fast.
- I can read the book really loud.
- I can use some words to make sentences.
- I can speak Mandarin very well.
- I can walk to school every day.
- I can sing for a long time.

**Terri:**
- I can do my text very well when is open-book test.
- I can make the house very clean.
- I can finish my homework fast.
- I can play a lot of instruments.
- I can hand in my homework on time.
- I can decorate my house very beautifully.
- I can sing songs very loudly.

**Melody:**
- I can learn more English. When my English is good, I can learn History and Geography at home. When my history and Geography is good, I can learn more piano. When everything is good, I’ll be a special person.

Baoh in his “I Can” poem mentioned a few things of which both Ms. Li and I were very proud. Again, he talked about him being able to speak Mandarin, but what’s more, he mentioned he could read loudly and he could write sentences in English. I remembered throughout last year,
he did not speak much in class and he could barely write a sentence. His progress this year had been phenomenal. When Terri started to work on this poem, she looked miserable and had a hard time coming up with ideas. When asked, she said she thought that she was a very stupid student and she did not have anything good to write about herself. I then started asking her questions about what she did outside school. She soon came up with a lot of ideas. Melody again tried something different. She departed from the template I set for them, but it was after all an interesting piece showing how she longed to do well in her studies.

7.4. Conclusion and Reflections on the Implementation of the Initial Units

The goals of this module were to help affirm ELLs’ cultural and linguistic identity and the wealth of experiences and talents they brought with them. The general social discourse both inside and outside school defined them by their lack of English proficiency, but what we did through the array of activities was to speak against such a discourse. We once again put these students back on the centre stage and reassured them that their rich cultural and linguistic experiences were valuable and important for who they were and for what they were learning too. As I was teaching this module and as I heard more and more stories from students about how they were laughed at in their core class or bullied in the cafeteria, I began to see how significant and meaningful it was to the students that they had the ESL classroom as their safe haven where they were still seen as who they were and where their cultural and linguistic identities and resources were recognised and appreciated. Though the activities and assignments that we did were not, on the surface, especially sophisticated, the message was powerful. Of course, I also began to see that the positive recognition of ELLs should not stay within the ESL classroom. This message had to be got across to other teachers and students. Everyone has to feel that they belong, or to use Norton’s words, that they are a legitimate member (1995) of the community before they can be fully engaged in their learning. I started talking with Ms. Li what we could do to get other teachers’ attention about what these ELLs were going through. I also began to think of what we could work further on in order to help students to cope with the issue of bullying at school. These will be further discussed in the next chapter.

What was achieved so far in the Bridging Program and in this module “Me and My Family” was to gradually build up a learning community where students learned how to work collaboratively. We started off by asking them to post their work on an online community and
give feedback to each other to improve their work. Though not every student turned out to be equally active in the class blog, they all learned to give supportive feedback to each other. At first, most feedback tended to be on graphics or the use of colour or pictures, but as we progressed, we began to see more feedback that focused on the use of language—the choice of words, the richness of content, etc. This initial virtual collaborative community was to pave the ground work for students to participate fully in class discussion where they needed to respect and respond to each other’s opinions, negotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge. The progress was slow but we could see that students were getting more used to a learning community where they needed to take an active role to think, to formulate and to share their ideas together. In the later units/modules, students were asked more and more to formulate, explain, elaborate and substantiate their opinions. They were also encouraged to challenge each other’s opinions so that they understood the importance of thinking things through and looking at things from different perspectives, and negotiate meaning together as a community.

All the students in this class somehow came with a teacher-fronted school background where they were not encouraged to have their individual opinions or to share and challenge each other’s ideas. Therefore, one of the main focuses in this “Me and My Family” module was to help them make connections with what we were reading. By using texts that reflect their immigrant experience, we invited students to relate what they read to their present lived realities and reflect on how they might address issues they faced. In this way, we helped them to turn other people’s stories into their own stories. Through the range of activities described above, and especially through the writing of their own identity texts (Cummins, 2004) as shown in the family photo stories and the different poems about themselves, we attempted to address the identity crisis they were facing as new immigrants. From Ms. Li’s and my observation and students’ response in class and their written work, we found that they responded very well to the program so far and they were also making great progress in their language skills. Ms. Li was very happy especially with the way the program was set up with the language focus well integrated with the different topics:

EXCERPT 7.9: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON DECEMBER 03, 2007
Ms. Li: Oh, it’s been a good learning experience as well. For me, I think this year is a lot better than last year. It is good to see how you would set things up and drawing in the language focus and that kind of stuff too.
For me, on the other hand, the work we did on affirming students’ cultural and linguistic identities forced me to think once again about the nature of CL.

7.4.1. My Reflection on Critical Literacy

As mentioned earlier, as students revealed more and more to me how they felt and what they experienced amidst their acculturation process, either through class discussion or interview, I came to see how immensely second language learning was interwoven with power and cultural identity. Kramsch’s (1998) dynamic view of language and culture informs us that language does not just express culture, but it also embodies and symbolizes culture. The language learning process is therefore a process of acquiring a new culture, and hence a new cultural identity, which is especially true for immigrants. In acquiring the new language and culture, they are actually grappling with a lot of related issues like those of power, self-esteem, self-worth, cultural heritage, cultural identity, etc. The students in my research, as eager as they were to learn this new language, had to grapple with the dominant discourse that depicts them as incapable, strange, stupid or worthless. It is imperative that a second language program address students’ social and affective needs in their acquisition of the new language and culture so that their language learning becomes an additive rather than a subtractive experience rendering them in self-doubt and shame about their heritage language and culture. The range of activities we initiated in this module was to affirm students’ identity. Cummins (2001) described the relationship between identity investment and cognitive development as a reciprocal one—the more positive students feel about their linguistic, cultural and personal identities, the more investment they will have in their learning, and hence more cognitive engagement, which in turn further increases identity investment.

This made me re-think what was “critical” with CL work in a beginning ESL classroom. I started out with a goal in mind hoping the CL program would help empower students in building up their academic language skills and in becoming critical users of the language. What I had been doing so far was to gradually build up in students some common school-based literacy strategies indispensable for collaborative inquiry--making connections, formulating and sharing ideas, giving comments and learning from each other. This of course was to enable students to have the literacy skills to eventually engage in more critical discussions and examinations of different social texts. But so far, I had not engaged them in any kind of critical reading as in
textual ideological critique yet. Sometimes, Ms. Li would question me if this was what CL was all about, since she was mostly expecting me to do textual critique with students. This made me re-think what CL was.

I went back to literature to clarify my understanding of CL. Lankshear’s three takes on CL (1997) and Pennycook’s (2001) detailed account of different “critical” language education work reminded me once again the different orientations to CL and its highly contextualised nature. Ideological critique is but just one approach to CL even though it tends to be more typically considered as CL. Cummins (2001) held a broader “umbrella” definition of CL. His Academic Expertise Framework reminded me once again that power relations exist in any teacher-student interactions. In contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity, because of social inequality, teacher-student interactions are never neutral: “They either challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society or they reinforce these power relations” (p. 125). CL then is the teaching of literacy in ways that challenge coercive relations of power. The identity-affirming literacy practices that we did in these initial units were speaking against the dominant discourse that students’ first language and identity have nothing to do with second language learning, and challenging the negative definition of ELLs as having a deficiency that must be remediated by the school. The critical element then lay not so much in textual ideological critique as in our effort to empower students to wrestle with their identity crisis as they were grappling with the new language and culture. Speaking of students’ sense of identity, I am not unaware of the contentious debate brought forth by poststructural feminists (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992; Kamler, 2001; Weedon, 1987) that the discourse of empowerment and liberation runs the danger of essentialising students’ identity. The notion of voice could be treated as if it was unitary and universal, which tends to eradicate differences. I understand that in going through the acculturation process, each of my student participants dealt with it in a different way. Some students like Melody, Yolanda and Terri, for example, might suffer a greater sense of self-doubt because of the unfriendly treatment they had from their peers. Others like Chicken or Al, on the other hand, might have more confidence in themselves believing that things would get better as soon as they got accustomed to the environment and the use of the language. It could also be that these two boys did experience bullying, but felt it would be too humiliating to admit it in front of the class. Or they decided that they just would not let it affect them. Some of them were relatively quiet in class discussions and because I did not have the
chance to interview all of them, I was not able to get a better idea of what they thought. No matter what, I took Kamler’s (2001) idea of situated voice or better the “storied self”. She preferred to use the metaphor of story instead of voice because

Stories do not tell single truths, but rather represent a truth, a perspective, a particular way of seeing experience and naming it. Stories are partial, they are located rather than universal, they are a representation of experience rather than the same thing as experience itself (‘not authentic’). (Kamler, 2001, pp.45-46)

The “transformational” power of engaging these students in writing their personal experience and/or their identity texts (like the “Loves and Hates poems, “I Am/I Can” poems or the “Photo Story of My Family”, etc.), though not in some grand scale social transformation, lay in a more localised and personal way that they experienced through the possibility of re-writing and re-imagining themselves. It allowed them to see themselves from a different perspective, a perspective that resisted the deficit discourse of ELLs that they dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

I always knew that it was significant to recognise and capitalise on students’ cultural and linguistic resources, but I only came to realise how powerful and “critical” the impact of these identity-affirming activities was on students when I did this research. I saw for myself how these students suffered from the discriminating discourse that their bilingualism was a problem, and how imperative it was for teachers to take deliberate action to challenge the unequal power relations in their teaching.

7.4.2. Collaboration with Ms. Li

I had the second in-depth interview Ms. Li at the end of this module. It was supposed to be a mid-point interview but was more like a debriefing session where we evaluated the program so far, reflecting on different aspects of the curriculum and the approach, and how best students’ needs were addressed. All the comments also fed into the cycle of reflection and action and helped us to decide our next steps.

As mentioned earlier, Ms. Li had a very positive response to the program on the basis of students’ interest in the lessons and gradual improvement in language. Ms. Li, however, did have some concerns over our collaboration. I only came to the school twice a week, always on the days where there were the most ESL periods. As a result of this, there could be some activities that I just started but would have to pick up again the next time I came in. There could be a lapse of two or three days in-between. Ms. Li worried that this kind of disjointed schedule would make
it difficult for the students to follow closely what we were working on with them. My original plan was to have her take a similarly active and equal role to me, and that we would plan and discuss everything together and negotiate a plan that worked for both of us. However, as it evolved, she was too busy to do the planning, and most of all, she also expressed reservations about doing the teaching especially the main activities:

**EXCERPT 7.10: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON DECEMBER 03, 2007**

Ms. Li: I’m saying, like you may have your critical literacy spin on it, or something you want to pull at, like some kind of a message that you would like to draw out, .. So I don’t want to do the main activity and not pull that piece out. Do you understand what I mean?

Ms. Li worried that I might have some specific take on my teaching and that she would not be able to draw out the CL piece that I intended so much so that she was reluctant to take up the main activity when I was away. She felt comfortable just doing the grammar or vocabulary piece with students. She thought that after all, it was “my research”, so she would not like to ruin it. I explained to her once again that my intention was to collaborate with her. Even though I might start out with a certain take on CL, it was my hope that through the process of collaboration with a field expert like her, we both could learn more about CL and get a better idea of what it was like in a real classroom context. I looked forward to discussing the curriculum with her in greater depth so that we both could challenge each other’s positions if needed and share some kind of understanding before we set out to teach. In this way, she would be able to take up where I left off on those days that I was not in. What I really wanted was to have a more dialogic collaboration with her rather than just a division of labour. Ms. Li, however, still had reservations in taking up the main activities though she agreed to discuss with me more about the future units before we actually delivered them. Her reservation perhaps also reflected her uncertainty about what CL was and whether it worked with ELLs. She therefore decided to take a back-seat role to observe rather than taking an active part in teaching it.

Another of her concerns was that there was not enough focus on comprehension strategies and oral fluency. Even though she found the focus on helping students affirm their identities valuable, she worried that students were not doing enough work on comprehension and oral skills. She was especially worried for those new students in Grade 8 that they were still unable to read properly and carry out an extended conversation in English. For the latter, I agreed since some of them did need basic phonics training. I then volunteered to have a lunch time
phonics class with the students on those days that I got into the school for my research. I also suggested we could have a stronger focus on oral skills from then on, especially in pronunciation, oral presentation skills, the projection of voice and the attention to intonation, and have them integrated into our curriculum.

As for her worries about the lack of work on comprehension skills, I found it quite surprising since I did include these skills in this module. For example, when we were reading *The Name Jar* or the poems on “Loves and Hates”, or “I Am” poems, we were working with students on prediction, guessing meaning from context, making connections, etc. I would agree that those skills were embedded in the units and introduced in a gradual manner, and not necessarily assessed in isolation. I knew from the previous year when I volunteered in Ms. Li’s class that she tended to hand out individual comprehension passages to students on a regular basis and had them finish the questions on their own. In this way, she could obtain a separate mark for comprehension skills for students’ report card which was required of her by the school policy. Ms. Li had expressed to me that the first term report card was coming up and there was the need for her to assess students’ comprehension skills and give them a grade. I could totally understand the pressure that she had from the school policy. Actually, half way through this module, she emailed me about her decision to set apart every Friday to have students work on their reading response or journal and comprehension exercises. I liked the idea of setting up a routine where students would have a regular time in class to do their reading response or journal. What I opposed was giving out comprehension passages (that might not have anything to do with the topic we were working on) to students to work on their own without any follow up work. Comprehension skills were still seen as some isolated skills that could be learned out of context. The focus of those exercises was shifted away from meaning construction back to testing and grading of students’ language ability.

Another instance was when we were working on the “Loves and Hates” poems, Ms. Li suggested building a media aspect into the assignment. She was eager to introduce the media literacy aspect partly because it was required of in the curriculum, partly also because she needed to also submit a media literacy mark for all ELLs. I totally agreed that students need to learn how to target their writing or presentation to the right audience and display a sense of purpose in their work. However, these skills have to be taught and embedded in meaningful activities where students see the importance of targeting their communication at the different needs of the
audience. For the “Loves and Hates” poems, Ms. Li suggested students write two versions of the poem--one for a Grade 7 audience and one for a Grade 4 audience, or one for a Grade 7 male audience and one for a Grade 7 female audience. I explained to her that this might not be very meaningful for students. First of all, they were not really presenting to those audiences, which made the task more remote to them. Second, the purposes of the two versions of poems might not be distinct enough for students to see what changes they could make to the poems. No matter whether it was for a male or a female reader, students were still writing about themselves. They might not change much of the facts about themselves to suit the audiences in this context. They might need to write in simpler wordings if they were writing for a Grade 4 audience as opposed to a Grade 7 one, but since they were only capable of writing something not too complex at this stage, the need to differentiate the level of difficulty would be unrealistic for them.

From these two instances, I could feel how pressured that Ms. Li felt about the need to fulfil the report card requirements so much so that her teaching was dictated by the assessment standards set out by the school. Also, her view on language learning was quite compartmentalised. As we progressed though, I began to see a change in her views on both issues, to which I will come back later.
Chapter 8: Bullying

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in my interview with students and our discussion on *The Name Jar*, we found that quite a number of ELLs were bullied by their schoolmates. Here are some of the instances of bullying they shared with me. Speech in italics was spoken in Cantonese or Mandarin and translated into English:

**Excerpt 8.1: Interview Recording on October 24, 2007**

Yolanda: *Those western people, those Black people are.*

Terri: *They would come and bully us. They would come to our seats and ask us to leave.*

Terri: *When I first came, I would love to exit the program as fast as I could because people would look at me like some kind of an alien since I didn’t speak English.*

Yuan: *They bullied us; they would order us around like saying, “Hey, you, you sit here, and you sit there.”*

R: *And you couldn’t talk back to them in English?*

Ss: *No.*

Yolanda: *Melody and I sit together in core class. One student threw a paper ball at us. Maybe he thought we were ELLs.*

When I asked how they dealt with these bullying and all the pressure they went through, they gave me these replies:

**Excerpt 8.2: Interview Recording on October 24, 2007**

Chicken: *Now I use my computer more. I talked to my old classmates in Hong Kong more online.*

Melody: *I will tell my mom.*

R: *Does she console you?*

Melody: *Yes.*

R: *Does it help?*

Melody: *No, it’s no use.*

Terri: *I would go home and cry my eyes out…. I am still in touch with my old friends in China, but I would not share with them how miserable I am here. We talked on ICQ, just chatting.*

R: *You don’t want to share your unhappiness with your friends in China?*

Terri: *No, when they asked how my life was in Canada, I would say “It’s okay.”*

Terri: *I felt that I was a very poor student…. but I would tell myself that since I am now in a different country, I need to learn in a new way, and to start from the beginning again. This makes me feel more comfortable.*

Baoh: *Sometimes I will do push-ups to make myself feel comfortable, to relieve the pressure.*
From what they shared with me, I found that they felt helpless regarding the bullies they encountered. They did not have the language to negotiate with their peers and felt powerless to do anything to change the situation. The most worrying thing was that they felt so ashamed of themselves that they were reluctant to seek help from others. They thought it was their problem that their English was poor and all they could think of doing was to put their mind on their studies hoping that one day they could master the language and all these problems would be resolved. Both Ms. Li and I thought that we should do something to help them deal with the bullies at school. I suggested changing our original plan and inserting a unit on bullying before the Christmas break. We hoped that we could provide some timely support for them so that they would know more what bullying is: what forms it takes, why people bully, what roles people play in a bullying incident, and what people’s motivations and feelings are behind the bullying. The aim was also to help them explore alternative ways in dealing with bullies. Apart from empowering the students in dealing with the difficulties, we also hoped this would allow them the opportunity to critically examine issues on cultural differences and stereotypes and reflect on their own assumptions.

8.1. Marianthe’s Story--Understanding What Bullying Is

The text we based our discussion on was Marianthe’s Story (Brandenberg, 1998) which is formed by two combined stories, Painted Words and Spoken Memories. Painted Words is about Marianthe who is a new arrival to America and how she struggles with English and bullying at school. Though Marianthe does not speak English, she is fond of painting. Her class teacher, Mr. Petrie, knowing that there is more than one way to communicate, encourages her to express herself through painting. Marianthe then draws pictures to illustrate her family history. Eventually Marianthe’s English is getting better and she is able to use words to tell her background. The second installment of the book, Spoken Memories, is Marianthe’s first person narration sharing her memories of her homeland--how the community pulled together to grow food and to weather tragedies like war and famine--and the events that brought her family to the new country.
Table 8.1: Unit Plan of Bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Marianthe’s Story (a two-part picture story by Aliki Brandenberg)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ss are expected to…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Painted Words</td>
<td>• reflect on issues raised in story: a. examine cultural differences and how they affect cross-cultural communication; b. explore issues around bullying: -What, Who, Why &amp; What we can do about it?</td>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>1. design an anti-bullying poster, with an intended audience, e.g., the bullies, the bystanders, or the targets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Spoken Memories</td>
<td>• identify from what angle a story is written and whose voice is missing</td>
<td><strong>Vocabulary:</strong> from Painted Words &amp; Spoken Memories</td>
<td>2. write and role play an incident of bullying and how it could be dealt with in alternative ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• role play an incident of bullying and come up with alternative ways to deal with the situation</td>
<td><strong>Critical/Literacy:</strong></td>
<td>3. create a photo essay/picture book on their own Spoken Memories through process writing and present it orally to class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1 shows the plan for this unit. Apart from the grammar focus (the use of past tense), I tried to infuse more reading skills in the lessons. We had been working on making connections with texts. To continue to encourage student engagement with the text, I introduced the bookmark technique which I adapted from McLaughlin and Allen (2002). I asked students to use the following symbols to mark the part of the text which they found interesting, confusing or that they could connect with personally or that it reminded them of some other texts they came across:
After doing the picture walk together, I asked them to read the story silently, book marking the story using the symbols I introduced them to ensure active interaction with the story and monitor their own comprehension. We then started our discussion based on the bookmarks they had on the text. I found that oftentimes students had to be taught explicitly how to read: what they understand or do not understand, what messages they get from the text, and how they respond to them, etc. This is especially true with these ELLs who did not have access to such literacy skills training in their previous education.

Another literacy practice we focused on was to begin to read critically to find out which character’s voice is missing and to view a situation from different characters’ point of view. *Painted Words* is written in third person narration. Some characters, like Patrick the bully in the story and her other classmates, are not given a voice. In order to help students to understand why people bully and what they do and what we can do about it, I invited students to look from different characters’ perspective to try to understand what they are thinking and feeling, what problems or difficulties they encounter, and what role they play in the whole story. It is essential that students have the language to talk about the social processes and name the strategies they can use against bullying (M. J. Botelho, personal communication, November 30, 2007). Following Christensen’s (2001) *Acting for Justice* work with her students, I borrowed the categories used by the British Columbia Teachers Federation Program Against Racism (McKenna, 1999)—(a) *target*, (b) *bystander*, (c) *intervener*, and (d) *perpetrator*—to help students understand what is happening and what roles that they are playing in a bullying incident. As we were reading the story, I introduced the four categories to them and then examined together what roles
different characters are playing in the incident, and tried to guess the motivation behind their action when their voice is missing in the story.

It was hard to make them understand the concept of voice (as in narration) at the beginning. They were unaware of how a story is written, especially the position from which it is written. But after some explanation, they were able to get it. We did not go further to analyse how the text is positioning us as readers through the control over whose voice is present or absent. This was something we further worked on in our later modules. For the time being, I just wanted students to understand that people could have different perspectives in viewing the same incident and how they might also have different motives and feelings behind their views or actions. I invited students to put themselves into the situation and make conjecture as to what the characters, especially those who are silent, were thinking and feeling.

**Excerpt 8.3: Lesson Recording on December 5, 2007**

R: Yes, he is the guy who does the action, but do we know why he did it? Do we know why he teases Mari? … Does the story tell us?.. Does the author tell us why he laughs at Mari?

Ss: No.

R: No, so we have to guess.

James: Low self esteem.

R: Low self esteem (writing the phrase on the board). Do you know that word self esteem? Self esteem means you think highly of yourself, you think you are good. When somebody has low self esteem, you think lowly of yourself; you think you are bad, you are not good. We have to guess why this boy teases Mari. The story does not tell us, so we have to guess. James said because he has low self esteem. And Baoh, what did you say?

Baoh: She doesn’t speak English.

R: Maybe he thinks that Mari doesn’t speak English (writing the point on the board). So Baoh, why do you think that when Mari doesn’t speak English, Patrick teases her? Why?

Jerry: Because he don’t like people don’t speak English.

R: Because he doesn’t like people who don’t speak English. But why? Why doesn’t he like someone who can’t speak English?

James: Because he think they are dumb?

R: Because he may think that they are dumb. Okay (writing on the board). What else?

Jerry: Different place.

R: Different place. What do you mean by different place?

Jerry: [xxx]

R: Oh, because they are of different races. They came from different places. Why when they think they are of different races, then they don’t like each other?

James: Because people like different stuff?

R: Oh, okay. Maybe I like this, but you don’t like it. Maybe we do different things, we are different and we don’t like each other.
Here students came up with three different reasons why Patrick bullies Mari in the story. It could be because he had self-esteem issue, or he thinks Mari is a dumb girl since she does not speak his language, or it could be that he thinks Mari is different from him culturally and ethnically. We then went on to discuss what other characters are also silent in the story. Many of Marie’s classmates are witnesses to her being bullied but they do not do anything to stop Patrick. They are actually bystanders or even perpetrators in some cases. We also discussed then what these people could have done in order to stop the bully.

I noticed that more girls in this class reported being bullied than boys. Even though I heard from other female students and teachers that there were ESL boys who were bullied, not many of them talked about it in our discussions nor did they appear too upset about it. Marianthe’s story was actually a springboard for discussion of students’ own experiences, helping to see for themselves what role they were playing in the bullying process and what actions they could take in order to stop it. After studying the story, I asked them to write individually a bullying incident they encountered or witnessed. They then formed themselves into three groups and shared their own stories with their group members. Together they were to choose one story to work on, using the categories of target, bystander, perpetrator, and intervener, and to explore what alternative actions different roles could take, for instance, speaking back, reporting, ignoring, intervening, etc. They then together rewrote the story showing a different approach to the incident. Here is one example (shown as originally written by students but with pseudonyms used):
**Figure 8.1: Group A--A bullying incident**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original version</th>
<th>Revised version (C= Chris, B= Baoh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This story is about my cousin Chris bully me, and then my cousin Catty stop Chris bully me.</td>
<td>C: Give me you lego!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day, in the afternoon, I’m 6 years old. In Catty’s house, we’re playing “Lego”.</td>
<td>B: Why should I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But the lego is not much and then, Chris spent the lego, then he said “Give them to me!” I said: “No! I need them!” “But I want them” he said. “No” I said very loud. Chris said: “Give it to me or I’ll hurt you!” Then he is angry.</td>
<td>C: I’ll hit you or else!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And then, he using his hand hurting me. Now I am crying, but my other cousin “Catty” is coming and she said: “STOP! Leave him alone!” and she hitting his head and said: “say sorry.” Chris is very scare, then he said sorry to me. I stop crying.</td>
<td>B: You want to trade?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: What can you use to trade?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: I will give you my favourite action figure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: Too bad! I just want you lego. Now give it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(C took the lego away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: Give back my lego! Please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: Why should I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: Because I asked for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: No!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: No yeah!? I am going to tell on you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: Oh yeah?! Go ahead!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Reporting...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C’s mom: What’s wrong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: Chris took away my lego!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C’s mom: Chris, is that true?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C’s mom: Now give the lego back to Baoh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: Fine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: Thank you, Aunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C’s mom: You’re welcome.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group A decided to choose Baoh’s story to work on (see the original version in Figure 8.1). Baoh talked about an incident that he encountered when he was small back in China. His cousin bullied him and forced him to hand over his Lego blocks to him. All he did was to cry until his aunt came along and stopped his cousin from hurting him. In the revised version, Baoh, the target, is no longer a passive but rather assertive and reasonable person. For example when Chris threatens to hurt him if he is not giving up his Lego blocks, he is not to be intimidated. Instead, he comes up with a reasonable suggestion that is to trade his Lego blocks with Chris’ action figure. When Chris does not accept his proposal and just snatches the Legos away, he tries to beseech him with much politeness and urgency (“Give back my lego! Please.”). When all the begging falls on deaf ears, Baoh decides that he has to report this bad behaviour to the adults. The way her aunt stops the bullying, unlike the original version, does not involve any physical violence. There is no hitting back. She just gives out the request firmly. The exchange
ends with Baoh thanking his aunt for helping him, which shows he is well aware of socially acceptable behaviour and that he would show respect to others while not tolerating disrespectful behaviour from other people as well.

Group B chose Terri’s story for their assignment (see Figure 8.2). Terri talked about an incident that happened to her last year in a French class. One of her classmates, who often jeered at ELLs, borrows a pencil from her during French class, but does not return it after class. When she asks her friend to help her get it back from him, he returns it but is broken into half.

**Figure 8.2: Group B--A bullying incident**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original version</th>
<th>Revised version (X= the bully, T=Terri)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Last year when I was grade 7. In my class had a black people. He always bullied at the ELLs. He always talk to his friend “ESL are stupid, why we have so many ESL in our class!!!” His friend never said anything but he never stop him also. I remember one time in French class he wanted to borrow my pencil, I let him borrow it. But after the French class, I told my friend to ask him to give back the pencil. He break my pencil, give back to me and just go away. | X: Yo! Give me your pencil!!! I don’t have pencil for the french test.  
T: (T scare by X and uncomfortable, give the pencil to X... X not said anything, just go back to her seat.  
After the French class, T try to ask X to give back the pencil.  
T: Can.. can.. can you give me back my pencil?  
(X give the pencil to T but the pencil is brock.  
T: excuse me, you broke my pencil!!!  
X: So?  
T: I will tell the teacher.  
X: Fine. Sorry (said very uncomfortable) |

In the revised version, Terri is no longer as frightened as she was at the beginning. She decides that she is not going to tolerate the abuse from her irresponsible classmate. She asserts herself by confronting the bully and threatening to report the incident to the teacher, which makes the bully apologise for his behaviour.

In both stories, the targets do not take a passive stance, letting the bullies do whatever they like, but rather stand up for themselves and seek help from adults. After the writing, we also discussed other strategies in dealing with bullies. Apart from reporting to teachers or adults, they could choose to ignore them, or to ask them to stop. We practised different phrases they could say to the bullies like “Cut it out!” , “Grow up!” , “That’s not cool.” , “Stay away from me!” or “Leave me alone.” Of course, the tone
and voice they used was also very important. I asked them to practise saying those phrases in a firm but calm voice so that they would not sound whiny or overly angry.

There was actually a third group but they did not do the writing. Melody wrote about an incident that she shared with the class before when we were reading *The Name Jar*. It was about how she got slapped in the changing room by her classmate who thought she and Yolanda used the “n” word and said something bad about her (see Chapter 7 section 7.1.2.1). Melody was still very emotional and upset about the whole event. She found it so painful that she could not read it out in the group, so I offered to read it for her (see Figure 8.3). It was a really touching story, and she was in tears while I read it to her group members.

**Figure 8.3: Melody’s story on a bullying incident**

*When I came to Canada at third time, I will go to school. My mom told me, don’t worry anything in the school, any people will be friendly to you. I trust her, but when I to be a student in ABC school, I found my mom was wrong. All she said are wrong, almost nobody want to be my friends, even nobody want to talk to me and not friendly at all! They always didn’t smile to me, didn’t say hi to me, because they think I am a unnecessary person. Somebody like to called me idiot, stupid……. They think that is cool, is funny! They have powers! They can bully me! They can control my feel! But they never think if we switch, I tease them like they teased me, how can they feel? Will they be happy?! Or excited?!*

*And then, they found I'm scared about they ridicule me, they want to change their ways to bully me. They knew, I can’t tell teacher, because teacher can’t understand me, teacher will not trust me, and I’m afraid they to retaliate me. So they think they can fight me…… Sometimes they would tease me, abuse me, fight me to use their hands, kick me to use their feet. And one day, someone heard I talk to Yolanda to used Chinese, maybe she thought Yolanda and I talking something bad about her, so she feel angry. She walked to me and gave me two slaps. I didn’t know how should I do, if Yolanda didn’t tell teacher, maybe she will slap me again, again and again. I just cried, and Yolanda said don’t be sad, but I couldn’t help it.*

*But now, I will be not sad for their to tease me. Although their say: “Hey! Imbecile! Go home!” to me.*

*“It’s okay!” Sometimes, Angel said.*

*“Don’t feel sad! Anything will be good.” Sometimes, Wendy said.*

*“Don’t care about the other people said, this will be my habit.*

The story was about how disappointed she felt when she found that unlike what her mother told her, her schoolmates were not at all friendly. Her mother told her she would be alright going to this new school but she soon found out that her mother was
wrong. There was actually no one who would like to talk with her, and people around her just thought that she was dispensable and an idiot. Some students teased and bullied her and when they found out that she was unable to report to teachers in English, some even started to hit her. Then she talked about the run-in she had with her Black classmate who thought she used the “n” word against her and slapped Melody on the face. Melody was not sure what actually happened and had no idea what the “n” word meant. She was so upset and just cried.

In her story, she kept saying that she did not know what to do and thought there was nothing she could do about it. I assured her we could do something together. Instead of writing the story, I asked the group to role play the scene again and brainstormed together what Melody could say to the girl in response. The boys in the group had quite a lot of suggestions of what she could say. I reminded them that they had to be firm and calm when telling the bully what they did not like about the behaviour. We also suggested what she could do afterwards, like enlisting help from other classmates, or to write down the details if she found herself too nervous speaking to teachers right away.

I also invited other students in the group to think what they could do when they saw fellow students being bullied. Even though the boys would say that they were willing to help, as we talked further, they did bring up the worry of turning themselves into another target for the bullies too if they stood up for the victim. They mentioned they would carefully consider the situation. If the bully was bigger and stronger than they were, they might not intervene, and would simply report to the teachers.

Having heard students’ different stories and in particular Melody’s, Ms. Li and I thought that we must take some immediate critical action so that their core teachers and the school would know what ELLs were going through and necessary steps would be taken to stop the bullies. Ms. Li and I toyed with a few ideas, including delivering some kind of professional development for the staff members to help them understand what these new immigrant students were going through, what they were learning in the ESL classroom and what teachers could do to support these students in other subject areas in their core classes. However, it was turned down by the principal even though she was

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18 I later found out from my Canadian friend who worked in China before that the Black student could have mistaken the Chinese phrase “那个” (Mandarin pronunciation- nèi gè), which is often used as a filler in conversation, as the n-word.
very sympathetic about what the students were facing. She pointed out that the staff meeting was already long with many urgent school matters to be discussed, and was worried that making the professional development compulsory might turn the staff away. Ms. Li and I then looked at other possibilities and a month later, Ms. Li came up with the idea of a Lunch and Learn session where staff members were free to attend. The principal was happy with the idea and we scheduled the session in February, two months after we did the bullying unit, so that students would have time to write about and practice their own stories to present to their teachers. This will be described in detail in the epilogue of this chapter.

8.2. Anti-Bullying Campaign

Another major activity we did was to get students to design posters for an anti-bullying campaign. This was partly in response to Ms. Li’s request to have a media literacy mark, but more importantly, to allow students to have the opportunity to make an appeal to the others to confront bullying together.

The task for students was to design a poster targeting a particular audience to whom they would like to appeal. The audience could be the bullies, or the bystanders, or the victims. Since the audiences this time were more distinct, it was easier for students to make the appeal. In order to help students to understand the basic media literacy skills in terms of the use of color, text, design to appeal to different audiences, I studied with them some advertisements before they designed their own posters. I showed them a flyer from a major drug store. Since it was near Christmas, the advertisement shows a woman in red on a red motorcycle. Staked on the front of the motorbike were red boxes of presents with different name tags on like “baby”, “mom”, “sweetie” and “teacher”. On the side of the flyer, we find the words: “Gifts made easy for the holiday rush!” I asked students to describe what they saw on the advertisement. When I asked to what audience they thought the advertisement was appealing, they gave answers like “people” or “humans”. They were not aware of the differentiated market yet. Then I invited them to guess why a middle aged woman was shown in the picture, instead of a man or a woman from another age group. It is an accepted fact that women (usually mothers or wives) do most of the Christmas shopping. The middle-aged woman in the advertisement is meant to appeal to
the major market that does Christmas shopping. Students began to understand that there was always an intended message behind the choice of the model, a wording, or graphics. As we continued with the discussion, students were able to draw out more details; for example, Yorkie found that the use of red color was to match with the reds we always find in Christmas. Al found that the use of the motorbike was to suggest speed. This helped to show that shopping at that store is fast and convenient, which resonates with the text which says that shopping in the store was made so much easier even for last minute holiday shopping: “Gifts made easier for the holiday rush”. We then went on to discuss some other advertisements with special attention on how the text, color, design, photos or pictures and space are used to convey messages for the intended audience. Students found it very interesting and they could also grasp the ideas quickly.

Before students started their poster design, I reminded them to think carefully what message they would like to get across to their target audience. They also had to decide how to put the message across, in terms of the words they use, the design, the color, etc. Figure 8.4 shows Baoh and Terri’s posters:
In terms of design, both Baoh and Terri did a great job. Their careful use of the text like the single word “STOP” as the title, or the slogan “Don’t be afraid. There is always help!” works well in putting across the message clearly. The use of space with the slogan placed strategically on the top of the poster is also very effective. Baoh was not good at drawing but he downloaded a picture from the web that suits the purpose of the poster very well. Terri’s drawing was excellent in that it shows how the school authority will not tolerate any form of bullying and that there is always a passage open for students to enlist help. Her intended audience was the bully victims. She also included most of the possible actions we came up with in class discussions for a bully victim. The suggestions all started with “You can…” which suggests a positive hope and the repetition suits the purpose of a poster.
Like Baoh, Melody’s poster was targeted at the bullies. They both tried to appeal to the bullies by inviting them to think how the victims feel and what they could actually gain out of bullying. They might feel happy or excited for a while, but it is not a cool act and they will lose friends, and will just be sad and mad. Though Melody’s design was less attractive than Baoh and Terri’s in terms of layout and the use of graphics, the sense of purpose and audience was the same clear. Chicken, on the other hand, did not show a clear sense of purpose. He tried to appeal to both the bully and the bystander. He was using an authority figure (George Bush) to show how seriously the matter is and that both the bully and the bystander should be held responsible for their action or lack of action. The choice of the picture might not be an appropriate one here. Of course, students still needed to work on their grammatical accuracy, but basically, they understood the requirements for a poster and had grasped the very well the sense of audience.

Ms. Li and I intended to do something about those posters, like have them posted around the school, but since we were still trying to arrange some kind of professional development for the staff, we did not pursue this idea further.
8.3. Class Discussion--Critical/Literacy Practices

In this unit, apart from helping students to understand what bullying is, what roles people play and what creative actions they could take to fight against it, I also intended to continue to improve students’ literacy development like making connections, and formulating and supporting arguments. Another major area that I worked on with them in this unit was to reflect together on some of our assumptions regarding racial differences.

8.3.1. Making Personal Connections

In this unit, we continued to work on making personal connections as they read. As I mentioned earlier, I introduced an additional strategy--bookmark technique--they could use to help make personal connections. Through using the bookmarks, they were made conscious of the need to interact with the text, whether they found it resonate with their experience, reminded them of some other text, or was beyond their understanding. Students made great improvement in relating the story to themselves in this unit and more students joined in the class discussions and there were a lot more interactions among themselves. It could be because the topic addressed was an urgent concern for them at that time; hence, there was no lack of things to share. It could also be that they had got used to the format of our lessons where they were always encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas. Both the girls and the boys were sharing more of their bullying stories, especially when we were examining the different roles people play in a bullying incident.

I came to see even more clearly that I should not assume it a natural skill for students to be able to make personal connection with what they read. Like any other literacy skills, interacting with and reflecting on a reading text is a social practice (Luke & Freebody, 1997). These new immigrant students’ prior learning experience was one that did not encourage their sharing of feelings and thoughts. Definitely, it did not mean that they had no feelings or ideas about things. I remembered that before we started this unit, Ms. Li found that students did not know how to write reader responses in their independent reading journal. She taught them the phrases that they could use for their reading response, like “I found the story interesting because….” or “I like the main character best because….”. Those phrases were useful in giving them a tool to start the
writing. However, what’s more important is to elicit students’ genuine feelings and thoughts about the story. In our class discussions, I found that my own sharing provided a good model for them to follow. It did not just show students the way to approach it, but also encouraged them to open up themselves to share their doubts, feelings, and thoughts about the message. A text will forever be a text out there and will have no impact on oneself unless one interacts with it, speaks back to it, appropriates it and makes it your own. I hoped that by encouraging them to make connections, they would begin to see their own stories in the texts they read, instead of just reading other people’s stories.

8.3.2. Elaborating and Supporting Opinions

In order that students could share their ideas, they had to learn to formulate them and be able to support them through good reasoning. While the attention of this unit was to help students to address the bullying issue, another major goal was to gradually build up their ability to support their claims by adequate reasons.

As we started to read *Painted Words* (Brandenberg, 1998), one of our discussion focuses fell on a statement Mari’s mother made in encouraging her to be proud of being who she is even though she might look different from other schoolmates: “People may look different on the outside, but we are the same inside” (unpaginated). I assumed that students generally agreed with the statement especially if they were against discrimination. The belief that we are all basically the same, despite different skin colors, religions, sex, or political orientations, is an important premise on which we build our anti-discrimination argument. As we started our discussion, I soon found out that they were not sure what “outside” and “inside” referred to even though they knew what the two words meant. They were unable to give concrete examples to define and describe the two words. Without that understanding, it was hard for them to decide whether they agreed or disagreed with Mama’s statement. When I was planning for my lesson, I assumed that students would have no problem in expanding the statement, but they actually needed some step-by-step guidance before they could articulate what the concept was about. What I did was to stand next to a male student sitting in front of the class, and invited students to tell what differences they could find between us. Soon they came up with some differences, like we had different hair style and different height, belonged to
different age groups and gender, etc. Having done the part on the “outside”, I then moved on to what the word “inside” could mean. They actually came up with some interesting ideas:

**Excerpt 8.4: Lesson Recording on December 04, 2007**

R: Nothing is the same inside?
Ss: No, no.
Melody: We hate homework.

... R:... Okay, so there are things that we like. We have our loves and hates, right?
Ss: Yeah.
R: What other things that we share?

... Jerry: We have heart, lung..
R: Okay, we have our organs, we have our lungs, we have our hearts, but still these are the things that we can see. There are some sick people. Their hearts may not be functioning very well, right? But when Mama said, inside we are the same, think what that means.

Melody took the word “inside” to mean individual’s likes and dislikes, and she said students didn’t like homework but teachers did, so we were not the same inside. Another student, Jerry, said “inside” meant the body, like we all have our hearts and lungs, and so forth. As I was reviewing my field notes and recording, again I found that I had a preconceived notion of what “inside” means. To me, what makes us the same inside has to go beyond our individual habits or tastes, or even our biology since we could be very different in that respect too (e.g., male and female biology, people with disabilities, etc.). What makes us “human” is our desire to love and be loved, to be respected, to have happiness, to feel we are valued. Since Melody and Jerry’s answers did not quite match mine, I just brushed them aside. Therefore, when Al finally came up with a closer answer, I was thrilled:

**Excerpt 8.5: Lesson Recording on December 04, 2007**

R: Al, when you said we all have a heart, what do you mean?
Al: We like.. um we can make friends, like that.. yeah.
R: I think you mentioned something very important that we all love to have friends. Even though we are different, we love to have friends. Do you agree? ..Do you agree?.. Do you agree? Yes, or no?
Ss: Yeah.

When I looked back, I could have acknowledged Melody and Jerry’s points about individual likes and dislikes, and biology, and that both were some common ways we define people. We could have also led them to see how the two definitions could
sometimes lead to inclusivity and exclusivity. Oftentimes, people are discriminated against because of what they like or do not like to do or their cultural practices do or do not fit with the mainstream culture. Also, people who suffer from a particular psychological or physical ailment could be marginalized.

I realized, as I reviewed my field notes and recordings, how I rushed through a discussion in order that students could finally get what I wanted them to get, instead of really listening intently to find what they had to offer to enrich the discussion in ways that I had not anticipated. I found that because of time constraints and my preconceived notion of what I intended them to achieve at the end, I often ignored the process itself. Whatever they shared, they disagreed or agreed was actually reflecting their thinking process and their values. As the integral part of CL, I should be addressing any pertinent issues that arose in the process of discussion even though they might not be in the agenda I anticipated at the beginning. The process should be as important, if not more, as what we arrived at in the end. I found that sometimes, my priority was inverted. Instead of focusing on the CL practice in the process, I was too eager to bring out the message that I intended them to learn in the end. What I should have focused on was really the process of open and rational discussion, of reflecting on and admitting one’s possible biases, of accepting people’s different views and being ready to make revisions. As I continued to analyze my recording, I found that sometimes my students were actively thinking but I ignored them when it did not fall into what I planned beforehand:

**Excerpt 8.6: Lesson Recording on December 04, 2007**

R: No matter where you are from, no matter how old you are, no matter what you do, we still have something the same. When Mama said, okay.. Terri, do you understand? When Mama said, yeah, we are so different, but she said it is only on the outside, inside we are the same. Now do you agree?

Al: No.

R: Okay, I want to hear why, because when you say no, you have to support yourself, right? We talked about this today. Okay?

Al: How her mother know inside is the same? Maybe somebody is different inside, maybe somebody is [x] inside, you can’t know.

Ss: Yeah, yeah.

R: You are not sure if everyone thinks the same way. I agree, yes, true, Al, but do we have some desires, something that we want which is the same? Like we want love, we want friends, we want happiness.. Do you all want happiness?

Ss: Yes, Yes.
Now that when I think about it very carefully, Al was right (see Excerpt 8.6). Yes, there is really no way to know what people are thinking inside, and there is always a range of differences among us even when it comes to our basic desires or emotional needs. Al was sharp enough to notice that there were people who didn’t seem to need to have friends, or were less sociable. We all fall on different points on the continuum and depending on whom we are with, where we are, at what point of life we are, how important the relationships is, our emotional need for love can be fluctuating and evolving and never static. We should not be categorizing people as “either/or”. The bottom line was students did not need to agree with what Mama said in order not to discriminate against people who are different from us. We did not even have to agree with Mama’s statement that we are basically the same before we demand respect and equality for each other. We could be different, both inside and outside, but that does not give us the right to pass judgment on people’s differences from us, as simple as that. On the contrary, I found that I just wanted to push students to accept what Mama said in order to establish my anti-discriminatory standpoint. As a CL teacher, I found that I have to constantly reflect on and deconstruct my own beliefs, and always be on the alert to stay open and listen carefully to my students. To be able to really practice what I teach, I need to critically examine myself. I think the more I practice it, the more it will become part of me too.

8.3.3. Reflecting on Personal Social Assumptions

As we started to read Painted Words (Brandenberg, 1998), I invited them to share with the class any similar unpleasant experience Marianthe in the story had when she first came to the new school. The aim was, of course, to build on their prior knowledge, to keep them engaged, and prepared for our later discussion on bullying. Little did I anticipate that two of the students would point an accusing finger at each other saying that they were teased by the other. James said Jerry was spreading a rumour about him dating another girl in the class, while Jerry defended that it was the girl who told him about this and that James was just being racist since he disliked him, a Vietnamese.

**Excerpt 8.7: Lesson Recording on December 05, 2007**

Jerry: He know me Vietnam people, and he don’t like, he don’t like all Vietnam people
James: What [xxx]?
R: Wait, Jerry said because he is Vietnamese, so you don’t like him. Is that true?
James: Because I heard Vietnamese people, they are like .. I don’t know how to say it
R: In Chinese?
James: 無家教 (wú jiā jiào, lacking in family education or upbringing)\(^{19}\)
R: They are not polite?
James: (nodding)
R: So you think Vietnamese people are not polite and so Jerry is not polite?
James: Yes, and it is true!
R: You have a lot of Vietnamese friends?
James: No.
R: You have only one Vietnamese friend..
James: No, but he is the only one I saw is not...
R: Okay, then how can you draw the conclusion that Vietnamese people are all impolite?
Ms. Li: Yeah, he is one person though. He is not all Vietnamese people. I know lots of Vietnamese people who are very polite.
James: Really?

When James brought up his issues with Jerry, I was caught off guard and was unsure of what to do. I was a bit hesitant at the beginning to take it up for an open class discussion. One worry was that if I let it go out of control, the two students might end up hating each other more. On the one hand, I could see that it was a great teaching moment and a good learning opportunity for everyone to address real life issues they had. It was only when they found themselves in the story could they start reflecting on what their stance and beliefs were. Ms. Li and I went on to probe a little bit more on their source of grudge for each other, inviting them to express their points of view so that the other party would have a chance to explain for himself. I definitely could not say that their conflicts were totally resolved at the end of the lesson or that they would become friends one day. However, what I thought significant was that at least we had provided them with a chance to really openly discuss it and be able to see the whole issue from different angles. I felt strongly after that day that a book would still remain a book if students could not connect with it. Real comprehension is when they can relate to what they read. Real comprehension is when they can see themselves in the book, interact with it, speak back to it, appropriate it and make it their own. If not, it is still a text, a text that they “comprehend” but which exerts no effect on them. Looking back, I think I could have pushed them further to think more, since a lot of hate crimes or racial discrimination all

\(^{19}\) Confucianism places a great emphasis on the role of the family in providing guidance and training to ones’ character and moral development. Chinese people tend to view one’s ill-mannered or socially inappropriate behaviour as a failure of the family in providing such crucial education.
start with little things like this: mis-communication, different expectations, etc. Ms. Li was actually happy that we could deal with this in class as she found that some ELLs “were treating Jerry badly or there were a few students that didn't seem to get along and they were not really behaving appropriately. I had wanted to address this for a while, but the timing never seemed right” (Ms. Li, email communication, December 06, 2007).

As we had more class discussions, I found that students’ responses often revealed their beliefs and values, even in matters for which I had not prepared. Here is another instance. In Painted Words, Marianthe’s teacher, Mr. Petri, tries to encourage her by affirming that there are different ways of communicating. When I invited students to give me some examples, Al found it so hard to accept that dance could be a way of communication:

**EXCERPT 8.8: LESSON RECORDING ON DECEMBER 10, 2007**

R: We can communicate through our music, through joy, through dance, right?
Al: No.
R: Right, we can communicate through dance.
Al: It is impossible!

... Frank: (asking Al) Why not? Why?
R: Yeah, ask him why. Explain.
Frank: Why? (asking Al)
R: Because when you say something, you have to explain and support your argument, so you said no, it is impossible to communicate through dance, you communicate, right through dance. Do you agree that we can communicate through dance?
Al: No!
R: Why?
Al: Just can’t!

... Al: Dancing is for girl, boy don’t dance.

Al held very strong views on what the male and female could do or could not do. I suspected that Al was not the only one in the class who held this kind of chauvinistic assumptions on gender difference. However, if we did not provide an environment where students were encouraged to think and share their opinions, all these tacit beliefs would go unchallenged. At least this time, Al had the opportunity to hear what his peers had to say about dancing. Some students challenged his standpoint by drawing his attention to the fact that there was an enormous number of male dancers on TV or in dance troupes. In our routine class discussions, we were also learning together to be responsible for what
we said, be prepared to support our opinions with reasons, and of course to have the humility to reflect and revise our views when they were found to be biased or erroneous.

Another good example was from Terri. I was asking students to share any similar experience they had just like Marianthe’s and Terri started talking about how she was bullied by some Black students. When students were relating to me their bullying stories in the past few months, I noticed that they would use the term “Black people” (黑人, hēirén) or black ghosts (黑鬼 hēguǐ)\(^{20}\) to describe their Black classmates while using some neutral terms like “a classmate” or some students” when they talk about non-Black students. Therefore, when Terri brought that up again, I stopped her and asked her why she and other classmates would highlight the students’ race when they were Black. At the beginning, she just said because those students were Black and so she just described them as Black. She could not explain to me why she would just single out Black students while if it was a non-Black student, she would not mention their race. After some probing, she finally said that it was the Black students who would cause trouble (italics shown original speech in Cantonese):

**EXCERPT 8.9: LESSON RECORDING ON DECEMBER 13, 2007**

**Terri:** Even adults would agree. My mom would say if you have nothing to do with them, they will have nothing to do with you. Others would say, don’t go near them, if you step on their toes, they will beat you up.

**R:** Do you think what they are saying about this people is fair.

**Terri:** (shaking her head)

**R:** Why not?

**Terri:** This is what they tell me. .. I just listen.

**R:** But do you think it is fair? (Terri shakes her head). Why not?

**Terri:** We are discriminating against them...

**R:** Which means?

**Terri:** But they discriminate against us first.

The use of the terms “Black people” or “Black ghosts” seemed innocent, that students were just describing the race. By highlighting the colour for just this particular race and not for the others, they were actually defining their classmates by their racial

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\(^{20}\) The term Gweilo (鬼佬), literally meaning “ghost man”, was a Cantonese slang to describe Europeans who first appeared in China. The term is often translated into English as foreign devil which carries a racially derogatory meaning. It is partly to describe the “strange” looks of Caucasians: their pale skin and green or blue eyes and secondly, their invasion of the mainland and the destruction brought to the country. The word “ghost” (鬼) has since taken on the general meaning of foreigner.
characteristics. It was almost like saying Black students were synonymous with bullies and trouble makers. Through questioning Terri in her choice of words, she was forced to unearth the social prejudice that she had behind the seemingly innocent term. It was not just her prejudice, but was also one that was widely circulated in her community and also in the general public. I reminded Terri that bullies actually took many forms, one of which being name calling, and that if she was against bullying, she should not be doing it on the others too.

Even though she agreed in the end with what I said about her prejudice with Black people, I knew it would take more time and education before these social assumptions could be eradicated. This was, however, definitely a meaningful first step in opening up a space within the classroom to allow students to talk genuinely about their own emotional investment, fear or misgivings about issues relating to race or gender. It was easy for them to know the harm bullying and discrimination could bring when they were the victims. Often they failed to see that they could also be the bullies on other occasions and circumstances. Hopefully with more genuine discussions, we could raise their social sensitivity and reflectiveness.

8.4. Conclusion

Students’ feedback for this unit was very positive. They welcomed the idea that there was a space for them to talk about these issues; otherwise, they would have no one to turn to. Usually because of feelings of shame, they dared not talk about being bullied even with their close friends or family. As Terri said in her interview (Excerpt 8.2), she would not disclose any of her unhappy incidents at school to her old friends in China. This unit was especially useful for Terri and Melody and other female students since they were much troubled by bullies. To Terri, the most useful thing was that it taught her how to respond to the bullies (words in italics show utterance spoken in either Cantonese or Mandarin):

**Excerpt 8.10: Interview recording on December 13, 2007**

Terri: *It helps me to speak back… it is also good that now others know that I can speak.*

Terri felt much empowered now that she knew what words to use to confront the bullies and more importantly, it helped her to negotiate an identity as a conversant and
assertive teenager: “... now others know that I can speak”. Melody, on the other hand, learned some different thing:

**Excerpt 8.11: Interview recording on December 13, 2007**
Melody: Now I am bullied, but back in China, it was always me who bullied others.
Now I finally learned to look at things from other people’s perspective.
R: So now that you are being bullied, you realise how devastated the target could be, and you wouldn’t like to bully anymore.
Melody: No. It’s devastating.

But when I asked her if the unit helped her in dealing with bullies, she was less positive:

**Excerpt 8.12: Interview recording on December 13, 2007**
Melody: I still can’t do much about it since there is still the language barrier.

Melody felt that she still had not the language to help her explain herself adequately to her peers, especially after the “n” word incident where misunderstanding could easily have been solved by better explanation in her peers’ language.

When it came to whether the unit helped them to take on a different role when they witnessed their friends being bullied, Terri wrote this in her journal:

If I could change one thing, I want Mari can speak English. When just came here, some people laugh at me because I don’t know English. I know how Marianthe feel. And when someone talks to me, I don’t understand what he says, I will feel I am different to others. That feeling is not very good. And if I am in Mari’s class, I will help her when Patrick is bullying her. I will tell Patrick “Cut it off, that will make Mari feel bad in a new place!! If you continue to say that bad thing to Mari, I will tell the teacher!!” And I hope I can help other people if they are being bullied.

Terri seemed to hold a very firm view that she would take positive actions to stop the bullies for her friends. But in our interview, Terri and other students gave me some incongruous answers:

**Excerpt 8.13: Interview recording on December 13, 2007**
Melody: If someone beat my friends up, I would beat him or her up for my friends.
R: But you would just continue the bully.
Terri: Then I will just ignore it, like I didn’t see it.
R: It is hard, right?
Terri: I’m scared.

Terri in Excerpt 8.13 admitted that she was after all very scared to confront the bullies. Baoh on the other hand said (see Excerpt 8.14) that he was not afraid of the
bullies and said he would tell them to stop. However, when I pursued this point, he changed his mind a bit:

**Excerpt 8.14: Interview Recording on December 13, 2007**
Baoh: Oh, bullies? No, I’m not afraid.
R: So you will stop them.
Baoh: Maybe
R: Maybe (students laughing). Okay. Then when will you intervene?
Ss: Depends on situation.
R: Depends on situation. Under what circumstances will you do that then?
Terri: If the bully is smaller than me (students laughing).
R: Yes, it also depends on who the person is, right?
Baoh: If there are a lot of them.
R: If there are a lot of them, then you won’t.

Their fear was totally understandable and it is not something we could resolve just by having a few class discussions. Apart from the fear of revenge, they also feared that they did not know the language well enough to report the situation to teachers or principals. They found that their English speaking peers could always talk themselves out of trouble while they would have to struggle for words in order to let people understand what the real situation was. It was disheartening to hear that they felt so helpless and alone in facing this challenge. I encouraged them to at least report bullying to me or Ms. Li since it was only when we were informed could we think of ways to help them. We wanted them to feel that there was solidarity among ELLs and teachers and that they were never alone.

I think the value of this unit lay in the fact that students had the opportunity to talk about the issue: to understand what was happening, to name the problem, to find ways to improve, if not to totally resolve it, to re-imagine themselves as an assertive and strong person, and most of all, to know that they were not alone in the process and that there was always help. What’s more, we had the chance to cross-examine our own biases towards race and sometimes issues that I had not anticipated in this unit, like gender difference.

Ms. Li also had very positive comments on this unit:

**Excerpt 8.15: Interview Recording on March 12, 2008**
Ms. Li: I thought for the content, for sure, I think it gave the ELLs more of a voice, how to handle insults. I think it is a big issue, like the bullying of the ELLs, and for some reason it seemed to be more of an issue this year than last year and knowing that what strategy
they can use, and also when communicating to them how misunderstanding can arise, that kind of stuff, that helped them as well.

I also noticed that during the time when we were working on the bullying unit, Ms. Li became more involved in the lessons and had been very active in thinking up different ways by which we could reach out to other teachers to make them aware of what these ELLs were going through. In the same interview, she divulged to me that her conception of her role as an ESL teacher had changed. She came to see herself more as an advocate for the ELLs. I will go into details in the next section when I describe the Lunch and Learn PD session, and her and other teachers’ response for the whole event.

My own conception of CL also changed. I became more convinced of what I brought up in the conclusion of the previous chapter, that CL should not be just about looking at texts critically, it could also be about helping students to find their “voice”, to provide them with the opportunity to reconstruct and renegotiate an identity that is resistant to the one depicted by the dominant deficit model of bilingualism. I felt it very strongly especially when I saw students presenting their Spoken Memories in front of the teachers and the impact that it had on them. Their stories made the teachers aware of what emotional upheavals these students were facing and re-think what they could do to help accommodate their needs. Again, a detailed account of the Lunch and Learn PD session will be presented in the epilogue of this chapter.

Another aspect I learned about doing CL work was that sometimes as a teacher I focused too much just on the text we were reading. I came into the classroom with the plan to achieve the goals of the lesson through facilitating discussions around the text. Instead, what I found was that students could bring up things that I did not expect. For instance, Al argued that it was impossible for boys to dance, or Jerry accused James of discriminating against him as Vietnamese. All these were issues that I had not expected but were no less critical. As a teacher, I had to really listen very carefully to students’ ideas and opinions and go with the flow, rather than being too constrained by the text we were studying. Students’ dialogues were as important, if not more, as the text we were dealing with. Oftentimes, it was an irresponsible remark or accusation that did the greatest damage. As we had more class discussions, I found that students’ sharing reflected much of their tacit beliefs that needed to be challenged. In the process, I also
grew to be more reflective of what I said in the class. For example, in challenging Terri’s use of the term “black ghosts” (see section 8.3.3), I also became very conscious of how I used the term Gweilo (鬼佬, “ghost man”). Although I never used the term “black ghosts” because of its racist connotations, I was quite easy with the term Gweilo, thinking that it was just an innocent term now after so many years of widespread usage. But again as common as it is, it is still a derogatory term. It reinforced that the lesson for me as a CL teacher is that I have to listen and respond very carefully to what students have to share and help each other to reflect and cross-examine if there are any blind spots or taken-for-granted beliefs. What needs to be critically examined is not just the reading text, but also the talk that circulates in the classroom, including both the students’ and the teacher’s. Everyone in the class, teacher included, should learn to look at things from different perspectives, support arguments with reasons, and have the humility to reflect and revise our views if they are found to be biased.

8.5. Epilogue: Lunch and Learn PD Session

Students’ continued feelings of helplessness led us to decide to move beyond the classroom in addressing the issue. Sociocultural research on second language learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2000) informs us that community building and identity construction affects learners’ investment in the target language. A student will have more investment in a learning community if he or she feels they are recognized as a legitimate member of a community. In order to gain full membership, it is important that students do not just feel that they have the right to speak, but that they also have the right to command reception (Norton, 2000). This meant we needed concerted effort from all teachers and the English speaking peers in helping the ELLs to feel that they were legitimate members of the school community. I remember in one interview that students told me how they felt isolated in their own core class, as if they were just the “garnish” (italics shown speech in Cantonese or Mandarin):

**Excerpt 8.16: Recording from student interview on February 26, 2008**

Melody: We are just sitting on the side, like garnish; they are the core. They are learning, sitting in the classroom; we are just on the side, auditing, not taking the class, not participating.

R: But even if you are just listening, you can still learn something, can’t you?

Melody: It isn’t that meaningful. [xxx]. We just can listen.
Terri: *If there are no friends in class, it is difficult for us to learn.*

After much negotiation with the school, we finally decided on a Lunch and Learn PD session where teachers were free to join. Before the session, as we were wrapping up the bullying unit, I asked students to follow what Marianthe does in the story, to write their own version of *Spoken Memories*. We quickly went over the story together. This time our focus was on their own “identity texts” (Cummins, 2004). I asked students to use the following guidelines and write their version of the story:

1. Describe briefly your home town where you used to live before coming to Canada.
2. When and where were you born? Were you the first/ only child in your family? Did you live with your grandparents?
3. How was life in your family or home town? Were people close to each other in your community? Describe how a usual day was like.
4. Describe one interesting or unforgettable incident in your childhood.
5. Why did your family decide to move to Canada? How did you and your family prepare for it?
6. How did you feel after arriving in Canada and going to a new school? And what about now?

Ms. Li and I did process writing with students and helped them to expand their ideas and write in a more accurate manner. We found that students were still getting used to writing an extended piece like this. The idea of having a draft, editing, and revising was still quite novel to them. We gave them a lot of individual help and guidance in writing and rewriting their drafts.

We started the PD session by having the ELLs present their *Spoken Memories*. We chose Terri, Yolanda, Melody and Baoh to present their stories in the meeting. They treated the event very seriously and practiced and rehearsed with Ms. Li. Below are two students’ life stories in PowerPoint slides that were presented at the session (the rest are shown in Appendix H):
Figure 8.6: Yolanda’s *Spoken Memories*

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

I was born in Chia. There are members in my family. I respect my dad, mom. He was 1.0 and tolerated us. He would let us do whatever we like.

My home was in New China. My family just lived in a small apartment. There was a small room in a house there.

My life in China was happy. Every Chinese New Year, my cousin and I had the money from our parents, so we could go shopping.
When I first came to Canada, I went to a new school called ABC in Scarborough. Everyone teased me. They laughed at me because I did not speak English. One day some girls in my class hit me and my friends with a volleyball. I felt miserable. I regretted coming to Canada.

*Part of the picture and words on the last page of this story were changed so that a pseudonym for the school can be used.*
2. My Home Town

My home town is a beautiful city in China, named Hangzhou. Hangzhou is a famous city in China, because it has beautiful scenery, like the West Lake. Many people love Chinese tea. They must know one of them: Longjing tea. Longjing tea is the best green tea in China, and it's from my home town—Hangzhou.

3. In China

I was born in Hangzhou, on May 3, 1995. I was the only child in my family. I lived with my grandparents, from the day I was born in the past 12 years.

4. My Community

My life in my home town was so-so, nothing too happy, and nothing too special. In my community, people were busy, nobody had free time to talk to the other people, they even didn't know who their neighbors were.

5. My Childhood

When I was in grade 6, a wounded stray cat got in my school. Many people wanted to keep it, but in the end, I got it. When I took it home, my mom insisted that we couldn't keep it. We quarreled for a few days, and in the end they gave up. They didn't want to be angry over a cat.

A month later, my grandma asked my uncle to take away this cat secretly. When I came to know this, it was too late. A few days later, my uncle left a message on my cell phone, that my cat had died.

After this, I would never have a cat again, I figured.

6. Before I Left China

My parents thought if I went to Canada to learn that would make my future better and brighter. So my dad came to Canada first when I was just in grade 2. After 5 years, when I was going onto grade 7, my parents decided to let my mom take me to Canada. We bought almost everything we needed in Canada, and I used a long time to collect all of my memories, like my friends’ photos, my diary, gifts from my friends…

7. In Canada

When I arrived in Canada, I found on everything, almost all English or French (except in China Town). It drove me crazy! And I hated to speak English, but my mom always said: speak English...Speak English...I felt lonely because in summer holiday, I didn't have any friends, nobody talked to me. I was so sad, and wanted to go back to China to see my friends, but I couldn't.

8. When I went in a new school, I was almost in despair, because I couldn't speak English, I couldn't find a friend. Although I found friends, but I couldn't talk to them, I was still lonely.

Now, I can speak English, although not very well, but I can talk to people. They can understand me, I can understand them, too. I found friends, no, it was my friends who found me, when I was bored, and slept on the grass. I have friends now, some of them in ESL class, some of them in other classes. I'm not just one person now, I have them. Someone said.
The four students we chose did a great presentation. The presentation was not just meant for the teachers, but also for the students—to present their own work and have their own stories heard. We told them beforehand the purpose of the session and the importance for ELLs to allow teachers to understand better what they were going through. They were representing their fellow classmates in carrying this mission of “teaching” their teachers. They practiced and rehearsed and Baoh even memorized his own story and could present without reading from cue cards.

After their presentation, the teachers remained to have a discussion on the bullying issue. I also gave a short presentation on research findings on the difficulties immigrant students face in their social and cultural adjustment processes as well as issues around language learning. We then shared ways we could better support these students. There were altogether four teachers who attended the session, but none of them were the core teachers of classes where these ELLs reported being bullied. Ms. Li was quite frustrated by the low attendance of teachers, especially with those core class teachers. Her aim for the PD session was to help these teachers to better understanding ESL issues and hopefully they would strive to set up a more inclusive environment for the ELLs in their own classes. Ms. Li began to see more strongly that there was the need for her to advocate for ELLs at the school level. In a later interview, she expressed that she had changed her view of herself being an ESL teacher:

**EXCERPT 8.17: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 12, 2008**
Ms. Li: I see myself more of an advocate for the ELLs now, that’s why I think I was really very excited about the PD session, to advocate for the ELLs and ESL issues out for the school. I think like sometimes ...because the ELLs are quiet and they don’t really cause, you know, too much trouble, so as long as they are not causing trouble, it is easy for them to get overlooked, so that’s why I like to bring those issues to the staff’s attention that there’s bullying happening. That is what the ELLs are experiencing, and just because they are quiet, it doesn’t mean they are not going through their own trouble.

What Ms. Li had been doing in the past was to put in her best to build up ELLs’ confidence and pride so that they would feel more motivated and comfortable to learn in a new environment. As a further consequence, in these few months she realized that she had to be more active in advocating for her ELLs because they tended to be forgotten by other teachers. ELLs tended to be quiet as neither they nor their parents have the English language skills to make known their difficulties at school. Ms. Li began to see that it was
her role to be their “voice”, to make the administration aware of what these students were going through and then provide necessary help for them. Also, she noticed that in order to get the administration’s attention, she needed to adopt a higher profile for her students. She mentioned to me that the art teacher in her school did extensive work with her students last year, such as exhibitions of their art work, hence getting a big budget for materials, and even getting the school’s permission to attend seminars or to take trips to exhibitions during work time (personal communication, February 11, 2007). In order to raise the profile of ELLs, one thing Ms. Li planned to do was to involve ELLs in the Chinese New Year’s celebration at school so that the students could get more attention at the school level.

Ms. Li also opined that the bullying unit together with the PD session was valuable to students on multiple levels:

EXCERPT 8.18: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 12, 2008
Ms. Li: I think the bullying unit was very good, and also the Spoken Memories one. I think the students were able to get a lot out of it, and then by sharing their stories and their experiences during that PD session, I think it can really help them like start to recognize their strengths, and that they have a lot to contribute.

....
I think in terms of their confidence, yeah, in terms of.. even the Spoken Memories, for the writing-- how they were able to go through the writing process. Also in terms of like you have the difficulty having them presenting and not taking the presentation seriously, you know when they are actually presenting to more authentic audience, that benefited them a lot too.

....
I think it went well for many different reasons, For the students themselves, Li think it is very powerful for them and also from the feedback from the staff members, you know how they mentioned that they don’t know the ELLs much. I think they did have an awareness of the issue, like the staff member, but it’s good to have it brought to their attention again, because sometimes when you are teaching, you are busy, you have other issues to deal with. By having the PD session, it brought the issue to the forefront again. I think again as a result of that PD session, some of the teachers became more conscious of the need to accommodate for ELLs, to talk to them on a regular basis.

Ms. Li expressed that both the unit on bullying and the PD session helped build up students’ confidence in that they become more positive of what they were capable of accomplishing, like writing their own stories and presenting to a real audience. She also thought that it was most powerful when it could help to make teachers aware of ELLs’ needs and what they could do to help. Later Ms. Li forwarded to me an email she got from a colleague who attended the session:
**EXCERPT 8.19: COMMENTS FROM THE SCIENCE TEACHER**

Hi. I thought it was awesome... and sad. It helped me to remember the ELLs...and I've made more of an effort to talk to Yolanda and Melody which is really upsetting... I wish I could do more. It's too bad that Sunny can't present these findings to the whole staff... I think a lot of people (on staff) don't really have a clue what the students are actually going through.. (or they turn a blind eye like some of the students)...

This science teacher made an effort to reach out to the ELLs after listening to their stories. The students actually shared with me later that they were very surprised this and another teacher started talking to them during recess because before it was seldom for teachers to chat with them outside the classroom. Later the science teacher emailed Ms. Li again to tell her what she tried out with the ELLs in her class:

**EXCERPT 8.20: COMMENTS FROM THE SCIENCE TEACHER**

After attending the lunch and learn last week (about ELLs) I decided to take a different approach to ESL and Science... I found some great resources through Tippett for the science unit and created an alternative assignment based on the resources. 7D was given an earthquake project recently that was language-based (although I did give it to the ELLs so that they also had access to what everyone else was working on). It was their choice (the ELLs) if they wanted to do the alternative assignment or work on the earthquake project. I told the class that they'd be working on it in class, during class time, with a partner. Today, Melody and Chicken showed up with the COMPLETED EARTHQUAKE PROJECT.. totally typed and everything answered. I was shocked ... basically over the last couple of days, they had translated everything on the sheet (must have taken forever!) and wrote it out in their own words. I was so proud of them that I showed the rest of 7D and everyone clapped!!! I think it was really important for their class to see that ELLs are capable of doing everything (and in this case --- so much better!) than English-speaking students. If only their class would give them a chance... sigh.

This science teacher changed her usual way of teaching in that she allowed ELLs to have a choice in deciding whether they needed accommodation for their project and allowed them to use their first language to work on it first before they translated it back to English. The students were very surprised about the change, but they were very appreciative of it all and were very excited that they could write the words in their own language as well. It became highly motivating to them and they did their best and handed in work that was judged by the teacher to be even better than their peers’ work. ELLs, like all students, need recognition from teachers that they are as cognitively capable as their English-speaking peers. In this case, according to the teacher, they actually
surpassed their English-speaking peers. Melody later in her journal wrote about this project. Mrs. T was the pseudonym for the science teacher:

**Excerpt 8.21: Melody’s Journal Entry on February 29, 2008**

After this (the science project), I leaned many things from Mrs. T because she gave us this chance to try to do better; I learned many things from earthquake, because I know many words about it, I know how it form… I also learned many things from Chicken he was working very hard (although I was harder than Him!), and I will do it like him for neat project.

I was very glad to see that students felt happier after this even though I would wish more teachers could join us in the PD session.
Chapter 9: Canada and I

The reasons to have a module on Canada were multiple. I remembered one day in early September when I first started the research, one ELL came and asked me what the word “Roots” meant. I told her the meaning and asked her where she saw the word. She told me that she saw it on a T-shirt her classmate wore that day. Of course, “Roots” is the famous Canadian chain store which sells men and women’s trendy wear and leather goods. Some immigrants and immigrant students tend to live in their own close-knit community at the beginning years as they adjust to the host culture. As a consequence, this might lead to a segregated life with little opportunity to keep in touch with the mainstream culture. Without the necessary cultural literacy, immigrant students would find it hard to integrate themselves into the mainstream culture. This would affect not only their social life, but also their pursuit of academic study. Subjects like history, social studies and geography require them to know a lot of social history and facts in addition to their understanding of the country. For most students, history, social studies and geography pose the greatest challenge partly because of the difficult English language used in the texts, but mostly because of the lack of the prior social and cultural knowledge (Short, 2005). Without the necessary background social and historical knowledge, ELLs will encounter immense academic difficulties as there are more and more context-reduced and cognitively demanding learning situations in different subject areas as they move up the grades (Cummins, 2005). Both Ms. Li and I agreed that it was crucial for us to include a topic on Canada as a way of supporting students in learning Canadian history and geography in their core classes.

This module was basically divided into three units. To enhance students’ interest in getting to know Canada, the first unit focused on some interesting facts about Canada, which included Canadian symbols, some geographical facts, and a segment on Canada’s multicultural cuisine. The second unit was on greatest Canadians, which was more challenging to students as it demanded more historical and social knowledge in order to appreciate what contributions these great people made or are making to the country. Again, we tried to have a critical approach to the topic. We based our discussion on the list of greatest Canadians generated by a national poll conducted by the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 2004, and critically examined it to see which social groups
were not represented and what values were cherished as conveyed by the inclusion and exclusion of social groups in the list. We then invited students to choose their own greatest Canadian. The last unit was on immigrants’ experience, discussion of which was based on a short story “Don’t trust your parents” (2006) written by the Chinese Canadian writer Paul Yee.

9.1. Unit 1: Interesting Facts about Multicultural Canada

This first unit was meant to introduce students to Canadian culture and history in an interesting way. Table 9.1 shows the details of the unit plan:

**Table 9.1: Unit Plan of Interesting Facts about Canada**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Crazy about Canada (Bowers, 2006) <em>(children’s book on Canada)</em></td>
<td>• reflect on what they associate Canada with “When I hear of Canada, I think of…” • get to know Canadian coins and do a jigsaw research into some Canadian symbols, e.g., polar bears, maple leaves, loons, moose, etc. • learn the basic geography of Canada—provinces, territories, &amp; capital cities • learn food names &amp; the multicultural Canadian cuisine. Plan a dish, work on the shopping list, and do a mock shopping trip.</td>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong> • countable/uncountable nouns • quantifiers, e.g., a head of lettuce, a bag of sugar, etc. • How much../ How many..? • present continuous tense to indicate planning • revisit past tense • simple instructions for cooking/recipes: use of imperatives, sequence markers</td>
<td><strong>Ss are expected to…</strong> 1. work collaboratively on a collage of pictures that best represents Canada. Report orally to class and provide reasons for their choices. 2. research on Canadian symbols and icons and report orally to other group members 3. written and oral report on a recipe of choice, the shopping list and the mock shopping trip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Informational texts on Canadian geography &amp; history</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong>: provinces, territories, capital cities, Canadian symbols, food items, etc. <strong>Critical/Literacy</strong>: • develop research skills and learn to extract and synthesize information • formulate arguments and support with reasons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We started off with something more interesting and less intimidating to students--Canadian symbols and coins--and then moved to the Canadian geography, learning the names of provinces, territories and capital cities. We planned to work on the languages spoken in Canada, but because of time limits, Ms. Li and I decided to scrap it and do the section on food instead. Again, we integrated some language items in this unit--the use of count and non count nouns, and quantifying phrases, which are needed in describing food and food amount. We also worked on the use of continuous tense to indicate planning. This was to tie in with the shopping trip plan that students were to carry out after researching and deciding on a dish to cook. I am going to describe some highlights of this unit and the language and CL practices in which the students were engaged.

9.1.1. Canada Collage

To start this new module, I thought it would be fun to have students to work on a collage of Canada based on their perceptions of the country. It is natural for immigrants to come with a set of assumptions about the host country. Usually they are often stereotyping images that they have got from the media or those circulated in their community. As we were going to study something about Canadian history and culture, Ms. Li and I thought it would be interesting to let students be aware of their own perceptions of Canada. Their knowledge of Canada could be partial, biased, or saturated with generalizations or stereotyping images. The task we assigned them was to work in groups and create a collage using pictures from magazines, newspapers or flyers that they believed best represented Canada. They were then to write a paragraph to describe their collage, explaining what it represented and why they chose those images to represent Canada.

I brought some newspapers, magazines and store flyers to the class for the collage. Before students broke out to work in groups, I brainstormed with them possible ideas that they might have when they thought of Canada. Some students came up with ideas like snow, cold, fresh air, etc. I found that once a student came up with a certain idea, others tended to just think along the same line. Like in this case, they tended to just think up ideas concerning weather. After pointing this out, I invited them to think of other categories. Slowly some came up with categories like food, language, people, etc.
Thinking in terms of categories will help expand and diversify students’ thinking. Moreover, I did not want their ideas to be dictated by the newspaper or magazine pictures I brought into the class. I hoped that they could first decide what they would like to convey and then make good use of the pictures available to put across their message. Their end task was to write sentences about the pictures: “When we hear the word ‘Canada’, we think of ….. because…..”. Again, the aim of the exercise was to get them to practice formulating opinions and supporting their claims with reasons.

Students were very excited about the activity. Ms. Li and I went to help individual groups to ensure that their ideas were well supported. After they finished their work, we invited each group to present in class and encouraged the rest of the class to ask questions or give comments to their classmates. For example, Melody’s group said when they thought of Canada, they thought of the subway because they could not find it in China. Chicken immediately objected saying that subway was available in China. Melody explained that subway could not be found in some big cities including the one she came from (i.e., Hangzhou, China). I then pointed out to them the importance of refining their argument by giving more specific and relevant detail to strive for precision so that the audience would not misunderstand the message. So in Melody’s case, the group had to rewrite the sentence to reflect the real situation: “When I hear of the word Canada, I think of the subway because there was no subway system in the city where I came from.” The whole process of inviting students to comment on each other’s work was to help them to learn to be responsible for any of their opinions made and to be prepared to explain and support themselves with reasons, and similarly to revise them if the ideas were inaccurate or erroneous. Another similar example was Al’s group’s idea about “pop”. They said when they thought of Canada, they thought of soda. This was heavily objected to by the rest of the class because they thought soda could be found in almost anywhere, so why Canada then? What Al’s group wanted to say was that soft drinks were very popular in Canada and more people were drinking them. Again, this challenge from the class prompted them to revise the sentence so that it could reflect precisely what they would like to convey. Figure 9.1 shows Chicken’s group’s final work:
When we hear the word Canada, we think of big houses because there are a lot of big houses here but not in China. We also think of cars because almost all families have a car to go shopping or buy some thing and we think Canada is a big place. In addition we think of football because we only have this game in North America. We think of hockey because there are a lot of hockey players and it is a famous sport in Canada. We also think of expensive thing in Canada because there thing are more expensive than China’s thing. We think of snow because in our house there are snow in Canada and we can make a snow man or ski on the snow.

After much discussion and revision, Chicken’s group came up with their final version of Canada Collage. The ideas were well presented with clear and logical explanation. However, it did not mean that they were free from ideological assumptions. For example, they mentioned that they thought of cars because almost all families have a car to go shopping. They thought of hockey too because there are many hockey players and it is a famous sport in Canada. First of all, if we think of the double-digit child poverty rate in Ontario (usually with single-parent and/or immigrant families) (Campion-Smith, 2007, November 26), we could easily see through the middle-class point of view that the statement about families owning cars was reflecting. Secondly, of course, not every Canadian plays hockey nor are they fans of the sport. I did not press them to examine critically the ideological assumptions embedded in their statements at that time yet. Since the task was just to get students to become more aware of their perceptions about Canada, I just left them there. For the time being, I just wanted them to get used to formulating opinions on their own and be prepared to explain or revise them with reasons. Also, most of their ideas of Canada were still around weather, food, sports and facilities available here. None of them touched on language, people, politics or other more social issues.

9.1.1.1. Commentary

The task turned out to pose more difficulty to students than I had expected. Even though I invited them to think up their ideas first before going through the pictures, once
they got a hold of the material, they were much distracted. Some groups would allow the pictures available to dictate what they were going to say, instead of manipulating the available material to bring out their ideas. Second, while some groups could come up with interesting ideas and were able to give a clear explanation for the associations they made with the country, some groups had problem in giving a precise or logical explanation for their associations. We spent quite some time formulating ideas and had the statements supported with precise explanation. Despite the challenges, the exercise itself was worthwhile. As M. J. Botelho (personal communication, January 20, 2008) reminded me, students were unfamiliar with these practices and they were socialized and/or invited to participate or not to participate in certain literacy activities. In delivering CL education, one major step is to create for students the experience of engaging in CL work so that they can build up the prior knowledge necessary for further development in CL. All of my research participants were unfamiliar with the practice of formulating and verbalizing their ideas, and supporting them with reasons, at least in English. They would need more practice in such literacy skills so as to build up the experience as well as the skills necessary for CL development.

9.1.2. Canadian symbols

The activity of researching into Canadian symbols was to start preparing students to do independent research, extracting, evaluating and synthesizing information. These skills would be very useful when we were working on the Greatest Canadians unit and in the final module in unearthing the ideological messages in fairy tales.

We decided to ask them to do a jigsaw activity, which was a common instructional strategy in Canada but unfamiliar to my student participants. The purpose of jigsaw is to develop team work and cooperative learning skills while the individual maintains a high level of personal responsibility. We asked students to pair up and form an expert group researching on a symbol of their choice, like the maple leaf, polar bear, loon, moose, or beaver. They would then go back to their home group as an expert and assume the responsibility to teach the rest of the home group members what they had learned from their research. Locally-born students were comparatively more familiar with this activity because of more exposure to such a collaborative learning activity.
They would understand the expectations of them to take up a leader’s role in presenting accurate information from their own research, in answering questions from group members and leading group discussions. Again, for my research participants, prior experience of these literacy skills was absent. They were often unsure what was expected of them in class discussions and tended to take a passive role when it came to presentations and class discussions, especially because of the fear of making mistakes and being laughed at by others. This Canadian symbols jigsaw activity was to provide students with the experience of learning in a collaborative environment and also to build up the literacy skills needed to function in such a learning environment. I found that I needed to guide students step by step not just in how to do the research, but also to present to their group, and conduct discussions like inviting and answering questions, clarifying their opinions, etc. They needed the language to conduct these literacy activities.

Figure 9.2 shows two of the worksheets we had for students\textsuperscript{21} (see Appendix I for the rest of the worksheets):

\textsuperscript{21} The information sheets were designed based on the information available in Bower’s book (2006) \textit{Crazy about Canada!}
Figure 9.2: Information sheets on Canadian symbols

**The Buzz on Beavers**

1. Why do beavers build dams?
   - they build a lodge with ____________________________.
   - the pond acts like _______________ to _____________________
   - the water in the pond freezes/ does not freeze in winter because __________________________.

2. Are beavers ever killed by the trees they fell?
   - beavers log _________________________________ trees a year.
   - how: they stand on their ____________________________.
   - they are hard workers but seem unable to ___________________________
     and sometimes, they ________________________________.

3. Why are beavers’ teeth orange?
   - they are orange because ____________________________.

4. How do beavers breathe underwater?
   - they can hold their breath up to __________________ because they have ____________________________.

5. Why is the beaver a symbol of Canada?
   - because ____________________________
   - in ________________, the beaver became the official emblem.

---

**Plenty about Polar Bears**

1. How can polar bears swim in the cold Arctic water?
   - it is ____________________________.
   - its fur is ____________________________.
   - the hairs are ____________________________.
   - under the fur, there is a ____________________________.
   - it has big paws which act as ____________________________.

2. Do polar bears freeze?
   - their bodies are ____________________________ and adapted to ____________________________.
   - but if they don’t have ____________________________ they may ____________________________.
   - through infrared photographs of a bear, scientists found that they almost had no
     ____________________________.
   - on worst winter days, polar bears ____________________________.

3. Where would I spot a polar bear roaming the streets of town?
   - ____________________________, Manitoba, on the ____________________________.

4. Are our polar bears dying out?
   - there are between __________________ and __________________ polar bears in the world today,
     ____________________________ in Canada.
   - the Artic temperatures are getting ____________________________ and the
     sea ice _____________________________. So if the temperatures keep ____________________________ 
     and polar bears can’t ____________________________, they may not survive.

5. What is the largest polar bear ever found in Canada?
   - the largest polar bear weighed ____________________________.

---

Students showed great interest in researching the symbols and they had no problem locating information and filling in the information sheet. However, when it came to presenting to their home group members, almost all of them were unprepared even though we kept reminding them of their responsibility. Ms. Li and I each sat with one home group and listened to their presentations. What we found was that students were not aware of their role as an expert or “teacher” for the other group members on what they had learned from their independent research. Most of them just laughed or muttered along, or just read directly from their information sheet while covering their face with the paper and did not establish any eye contact. We had to stop them half way through and explained to them their role as an expert. We gave them tips on how they could maintain audience interest by starting the presentation with some lead-in questions to draw attention and how they should use their voice, eye contact, facial expression and gestures to maintain contact with the listeners. The audience, on the other hand, should also listen actively since they had to rely on their group members to provide them with the
information they would need. They should also raise questions to ask for clarification or further explanation. I found that students still found this kind of cooperative learning very novel to them and still needed more practice to get used to the idea of assuming responsibility for their own learning. But both Ms. Li and I found this lesson worthwhile. This explicit teaching on learners’ responsibilities in a collaborative learning community was what they needed.

9.1.2.1. Commentary.

In the interview after this module, students disclosed to me that their experience of doing oral presentations in their own core class was minimal, not to mention taking part in class or group discussions. The reason was that usually when it came to group work, no one would like to be in a group with them. Often ELLs were left to form their own group (italics show speech in Mandarin or Cantonese):

**Excerpt 9.1:** Interview recording on February 26, 2008

Melody: No one is willing to take us on.
R: Did you ever try to get into their groups?
Melody: It is very difficult to communicate, to work together.
R: Why is it difficult? In what way?
Terri: They just think that we ELLs are not good enough, and also because we think differently, so they don’t want to work with us.
R: Do you really think that you think differently from them?
Terri: (nodding)
R: In what way is it different?
Terri: Sometimes we would want to improve English, so we want to work with them. But they would think that we are dragging them down, so they don’t want to work with us in a group.
R: So in the end ELLs are often left working together in a group.
Melody: Almost all the time.

Terri said that even though sometimes she was grouped together with her English-speaking peers, she found that she was not expected to contribute in any meaningful way. Her opinions were not asked for and of course, she was also not assertive enough nor did she have the language to assert herself. When it came to presentation, she was often assigned the least important point to say for fear that she would drag the whole group’s marks down. Both Terri and Melody expressed fear of presenting in front of her English-speaking peers:
EXCERPT 9.2: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON FEBRUARY 26, 2008

Melody: *I hate to speak English*. I hate to speak English. When we speak English, they always laugh at us.

Terri: *If you do not pronounce a word correctly, they would just laugh at you.*

As a consequence of the fear to speak English in front of the whole class, they would wait until they became the last group and usually by then the class would have run out of time. Most teachers also did not want to pressure them into doing a presentation that they did not feel comfortable doing. Often, they could get away without doing class presentations. As a result of these low expectations of ELLs, they gradually learned to just hide behind their more vocal and assertive English-speaking peers, and stay on the periphery.

The purpose of the activity on Canadian symbols was to help students to learn to do independent inquiry and share their learning through presentation and conducting group discussion. I found that the greatest barrier was not students’ limited language proficiency. The greatest difficulty lay in the fact that they did not feel they were treated as legitimate members in their own core class and could not apply and further develop these literacy skills in a meaningful way. I found it difficult for them to break out of their usual passive role to assume the responsibility of being an expert in teaching other group members on what they learned from their own research. Ms. Li and I tried to teach them explicitly the steps and the proper way to carry out a presentation and group discussion and let them experience what it was like to be an active and full participant in a community and what contribution they could make. On the other hand, both Ms. Li and I were also aware of the fact that getting ELLs to be recognized as full participating members needed to go beyond the ESL class to the school level. Melody explained to me she felt like being merely a “garnish” in the class, that she did not feel she was participating or involving in the class in any meaningful way (see Excerpt 8.16). Students need to have an authentic audience who shows genuine interest in what they have to share. Similarly, these ELLs needed to see themselves as legitimate part of the community and be expected to offer meaningful contributions before they felt engaged. This formed part of the reasons why we decided to invite them to take part in the teachers’ Lunch and Learn PD session and share their *Spoken Memories* stories. The details of the session have been described and discussed in the epilogue of Chapter 8. We
saw a great improvement in students’ presentation skills and a big change in their attitude towards their work. They treated the whole presentation with much seriousness and did not only write down their speech, but rehearsed and practiced it. Baoh even memorized the story so that he could focus on the audience and the projection of his voice.

9.1.3. Canadian Geography and Cuisine

Our next segment was on Canadian geography. Apart from the worksheets that I adapted from books on Canadian geography, I also tried to include some interactive online games to help students to remember the names of different provinces, territories and capital cities\(^{22}\). They found the online interactive games fun and very useful.

The unit on Canadian cuisine was another of their favourites. We included the grammar focus on countable and uncountable nouns, quantifying phrases (e.g., a bag of sugar, a head of lettuce, a pound of butter, etc.), and the use of present continuous tense together with the vocabulary on food. With Canada being such a multicultural country, cuisines from all over the world are available. I brainstormed with students the different cuisines available here. At the same time, I used this as a good opportunity to introduce words like Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, or French; and their corresponding country names (i.e., Chinese - China, Thai - Thailand, etc.). I also introduced to students some common Canadian regional dishes like tourtière (Quebec) or clam chowder (New Brunswick). The next thing that I did was to teach students how to read recipes and understand more of this genre of writing. I used the recipe for macaroni and cheese (Figure 9.3) to teach them the recipe-related vocabulary like the names of some common food items, ingredients and of course the measure words and quantifying phrases. The recipe that I chose was on macaroni and cheese, a very common comfort food in North America. I was sure that they must have heard of the dish in some restaurant, from TV commercials, or their English-speaking peers. I used the recipe to teach them the imperative form of cooking related verbs, like “preheat”, “wash”, “stir”, “cut” or “mix”.

\(^{22}\) The games were found on these websites: (a) http://canada.worldweb.com/Maps/CountryMaps-Flash/CanadaMap.html, (b) http://www.pm.gc.ca/grfx/games/flash/capital_scramble_e.html, and (c) http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/Games/GeographyGames/Geospy.
**Figure 9.3: Worksheet on Canadian cuisine**

### B. Recipes and Cooking

Below is a recipe for macaroni and cheese which is a very common dish in North America.

#### Macaroni and Cheese

**Ingredients:**
- 1 package elbow macaroni
- 1 package shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
- 1 container small curd cottage cheese
- 1 container sour cream
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup dry bread crumbs
- 1/4 cup butter, melted

**Steps:**
- **Preheat** oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).
- Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil, add pasta, and cook until done; drain.
- In 9x13 inch baking dish, stir together macaroni, shredded Cheddar cheese, cottage cheese, sour cream, Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. In a small bowl, mix together bread crumbs and melted butter. Sprinkle topping over macaroni mixture.
- Bake 30 to 35 minutes, or until top is golden.

We find in a recipe a lot of cooking related action verbs. Can you find those verbs in the above recipe? Write them down below:

---

**Chocolate Chip Cookies**

Here is a recipe for chocolate chip cookies:

#### Ingredients:
- 1 cup butter (melted) or margarine
- ¾ cup white sugar
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups chocolate chips (semi-sweet)
- 1 cup chopped nuts (optional)
- 1 cup raisins (optional)

**Steps:**
1. **Preheat** oven to 350 degrees F (190 degrees C).
2. In a large bowl, beat together white sugar, brown sugar, vanilla and eggs until light and fluffy.
3. Add flour, baking soda, and salt and beat well until blended.
4. Stir in chocolate chips (and nuts or raisins, if using).
5. Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls about 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until lightly browned.
6. Remove cookies from baking sheet and cool on rack.

**Activity Two:** Work in pairs and find a recipe for a dish from the following categories:

- appetizers
- main dishes
- soups
- desserts

Here are some useful websites:
1. http://allrecipes.com

---

After the initial teaching, Ms. Li and I arranged an afternoon to make chocolate chip cookies with the students in the school’s cookery room. During the lesson, I invited students to give me oral instructions of how to put the ingredients together to make the cookie dough. In doing so, they had the chance again to practise using the language structure and vocabulary learned in class. We had such a great time and when the cookies
were ready, they were so eager to take some of them to their core teachers to show them what they achieved and share the product with them.

The final task of this unit was to have a shopping trip to a nearby supermarket to buy the ingredients that they would need to make a dish of their own choice. They could choose any dish to work on, whether Chinese or Vietnamese, an appetizer or a main dish. The idea was to get them to do some research and then come back to report to the class what they were planning to cook (using present continuous tense). They then had to write out their shopping list as shown in Figure 9.4. If the recipe called for 2 teaspoons of sugar or 2 tablespoons of oil, they would need to buy “a bag of sugar” and “a bottle of cooking oil”. The whole exercise was to get them to recycle the vocabulary and language structure they learned as much as possible. On the day of the shopping trip, they were to go to different aisles of the supermarket and look for the items that they would need to cook the dish of their choice. As we would not be able to actually cook it during class time, they did not actually buy the items, but rather just take note of where and how much they were as shown in Figure 9.4.
Figure 9.4: Worksheet on shopping trip

Shopping List:
What we are going to buy

Report on Shopping Trip:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Aisle</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: __________________________________________

Questions for supermarket staff:
1. Find out if the shop has door mats.
   Question: __________________________________________________________
   If yes: aisle _________________________ price: _________________________

2. Find out if the shop has energy-saving light bulbs.
   Question: __________________________________________________________
   If yes: aisle _________________________ price: _________________________

3. Find out if the shop has organic soy drink.
   If yes: aisle _________________________ price: _________________________

In order that they would have the opportunity to use their English, Ms. Li and I came up with three items that students would need to ask a supermarket staff member in order to locate them (as shown in the second half of the worksheet in Figure 9.4). On the day we had the trip, we also had lunch in the mall. To prepare students to order food on their own, we taught them the specific language required for different fast food stores or restaurants. For example, going into a local famous café or to a pizza chain store requires them to use specific vocabulary to place an order. Phrases like a “double-double”, “a regular coffee” or “a combo” would come in handy.
9.1.3.1. **Commentary.**

Many new immigrant students tend to live in their own community especially in the first few years after immigration (Brown, 2000). Most of my research participants did not have the chance to use English outside of their classroom. Their contact with the mainstream culture was limited since their families mainly visit shops run by Chinese speaking vendors in the neighbourhood and most of them just watched Chinese TV programs. This was made possible with the big Chinese community in the area. With limited contact with the mainstream culture, immigrant students’ cultural literacy was affected which, in turn, impacted their social life as well as their school performance. The unit on food turned out to be very successful. Students felt they had learned a lot especially the vocabulary on food and the language they would need to buy and order food. Terri in her journal mentioned what she learned from the activity:

**Excerpt 9.3: Melody’s Journal Entry**

> I never ask question in English at supermarket, because I’m shy… But at this time, Ms. Li and Ms. Lau said I must try to speak English, like the other people do, so I tried. I tried, I learded, I spoke, I listened.

This is what I got from the activity.

Terri also said in her journal that she learned a lot from this unit: “I learned how to ask people to tell you the things that you looking for, I learned what is ‘aisle’ means, and learned how to order food in restaurant.” Baoh mentioned that he ordered his lunch on his own in a fast food store for the first time in that following weekend, and he was very proud of himself. Other students all expressed that they would like to have more of this kind of field trip where they were allowed some hands-on experience. We found that students needed encouragement, guidance and support from us so that they could gradually venture into the English speaking environment on their own.

The shopping trip took place on the Chinese New Year’s Day and it turned out to be a good choice. Ms. Li had been thinking of raising the profile for ELLs in the school so that more teachers knew what students were going through and what they were capable of doing. She purposely asked to have her ELLs to do the morning announcements giving a short history of the origin of the Chinese New Year and the related customs and practice of the festival. During recess, the ELLs also helped arrange
some games for the whole school. At lunch, when we were getting ready for our shopping trip, students were greeted by their teachers on the hallway wishing them a good trip. For the first time, the ELLs got that kind of wide attention from the school on one day, and hence they were all excited. Ms. Li and I both felt so happy for them. This also reaffirmed Ms. Li’s belief that she needed to keep a high profile for her ELLs so that there would be more support from the staff, and the students themselves would also feel more recognised. She mentioned earlier to me that the new art teacher at school did a lot of work with students the previous year and she thought as a result of that, the art teacher got a big budget this year for materials and was supported by the school to attend PD seminars/trips for exhibition. What Ms. Li learned from all these was that she needed to advocate more actively for her ESL class at the school level so as to get the administration’s attention and support in different forms. This further confirmed her need to push the Lunch and Learn PD session forward, which I already described in Chapter 8.

9.2. Unit 2: The Greatest Canadians

The main aim of this module on Canada was to equip immigrant students with the necessary cultural and historical knowledge of the country to facilitate their learning and their gradual integration into the mainstream culture. I was well aware that learning a new culture and history could sometimes be very alienating to immigrants if we just adopt a transmission and assimilationist approach—throwing students some facts or information of which they had little or no background knowledge and asking them to study and learn by heart. ELLs, however, do need the necessary historical and cultural knowledge in order to succeed at school.

The approach we took for this unit on the greatest Canadians was to invite students to examine what values and ideological positions people expressed in selecting or omitting certain social groups of people as greatest Canadians. Students were then invited to select their own greatest Canadian based on the values and beliefs they thought a country’s hero should exhibit. By engaging students in this kind of ideological critique, we hoped to raise their awareness that not a single text, print or non-print, is value-free, so that when they read, they would beware of the embedded ideological messages and how they positioned them as readers or users of the text. Also by involving them in
deciding for themselves their own national hero, we hoped they would find the learning of the host country’s culture and history less alienating. Table 9.2 shows the details of the unit plan:

**Table 9.2: Unit Plan for The Greatest Canadians**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CBC ‘s The Greatest Canadians documentary series</td>
<td>● get to know Canada’s most famous people</td>
<td>Vocabulary: related to Canadian history and social history</td>
<td>Ss are expected to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● critically examine 2 lists of Canadian famous people and what social groups are not represented and what values the lists reflect.</td>
<td>Critical/Literacy: ● challenge a text (2 lists of most famous Canadian people) by posing questions to see which social groups are missing and what ideological values are reflected.</td>
<td>1. design an advertisement looking for a person who has the qualities to be the Greatest Canadian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A popular website on famous people from Canada</td>
<td>● critically examine what qualities great Canadian people should possess and research, then decide who is the most eligible for that title</td>
<td>● develop research skills and extract relevant information</td>
<td>2. choose the most famous Canadian person and support one’s choice with reasons. Write an essay on the choice (through process writing) and present it orally to class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Job advertisements</td>
<td></td>
<td>● formulate and synthesize arguments well supported with reasons. Refining arguments and expansion of opinions—extension, elaboration &amp; enhancement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We based our discussion on the Canadian Broadcasting Company’s (CBC) documentary series “The Greatest Canadians”. The CBC Television did a public polling on who the greatest Canadian was in 2004. They received over 140,000 Greatest Canadian nominations from all over the country. They then narrowed the nominations to the top 100, and then the top ten in order of votes received (CBC Television, 2004a) as shown below:

1. Tommy Douglas  
2. Terry Fox  
3. Pierre Trudeau  
4. Sir Frederick Banting  
5. David Suzuki  
6. Lester B. Pearson  
7. Don Cherry  
8. Sir John A. Macdonald  
9. Alexander Graham Bell  
10. Wayne Gretzky
Another focus of this unit was to build on the skills students started to learn in this module—formulation and synthesis of arguments ideas; and the expansion, elaboration and enhancement of their opinions.

**9.2.1. Who Is Missing From The List?**

To engage students’ interest and build on their prior knowledge, I started by inviting them to think of the great people in their home countries. They were excited and could easily come up with some good examples. For example, Chicken mentioned Sun Yet San (孫逸仙) who was a Chinese revolutionary at the turn of the century and was considered the Father of Modern China. Melody suggested Lei Feng (雷锋), a young military leader in the early years of communist China who was killed while carrying out a military duty. Other students came up with Tran Hung Dao (a military leader in Vietnam who repelled two major Mongol invasions in 13th century Vietnam), Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) (Communist Party leader in China in the 80-90s, who was responsible for opening up China to the global market), and Mao Tse Dong (毛泽东), the founder of communist China in the 1950s.

I then showed them CBC Television’s list of the top ten greatest Canadians and asked what they noticed. Interestingly, students immediately noticed that there was no female in the list:

**Excerpt 9.4: Class recording on February 12, 2008**

R: When you look at this list, what did you see?
Al: Heroes.
R: When you say heroes, you are correct. Why? Because there is no...
Melody: No woman.
R: No woman. Right! It is very interesting.

I then went on to ask students if they noticed other social groups that were also missing from the list, but they were not able to give me an answer. The lesson I learned from the activity on Canada collage was that students needed modeling especially when it came to critical analysis like this since they did not have any related prior learning experience. What I then did was to go over the ten greatest Canadians one by one and briefly talked about what these people did and what contribution they made in their field.
I then modeled once for them the ways in which I examined the list to see what social
groups were missing:

**Excerpt 9.5: Class Recording on February 12, 2008**

R: Now when you look at the list again, can you tell me what you do not find? So first of all, I
think, oh, okay, how come there is no woman in the list and then what I also see is, how
many politicians are there?..Who are politicians? Okay, Tommy Douglas, Sir John A
Macdonald, Lester Pearson, and Pierre Trudeau. Four out of ten are politicians. That
means almost half, right? And then, we have two hockey players. That’s very interesting
because in a country, to have a sports player being a great hero is quite rare, right?

Ss: Hmm.

R: I mean like in China, I don’t think you will have a sports player… or you will find his story
in the text book. Do you know what I mean?

Chicken: I know, I know.

R: The list will tell you something of what people value, right? What else do we see? How
many scientists?

Ss: Two.

Students now noticed that in the top-ten list, there were people who made major
contribution in the field of science, politics and sports. However, they still were not able
to tell me then what other social groups were missing from the list. What I did next was
to show them the top 100 list in order to see who could not make the cut to the top ten.

Due to the limited cultural knowledge of Canada, my research participants were not able
to recognize even some very famous Canadians. I went over some people like Shania
Twain and Celine Dion and Jim Carrey, thinking that they might be more familiar with
these pop stars from the media. There were names they recognized, like Lucy
Montgomery (author of Anne of Green Gables) and Tim Horton, but they were surprised
to find that Tim Horton was actually a hockey player and not just a coffeehouse chain.

We then did some tallying together and found that there were nine hockey players and
including the two in the top-ten list, there were altogether 11 who made the top 100.

When I asked them to guess how many aboriginals there were in the list, some students
said half, Melody said 75 % and Chicken said 5 %. They were very surprised when we
looked at the list again, we could only find three out of the hundred--one Métis (Louis
Riel) and two native leaders (Tecumseh and Elijah Harper). None of them were among
the top ten. Having gone through the list, they could now tell me what other professionals
were not represented in the top-ten list:

**Excerpt 9.6: Class Recording on February 12, 2008**

R: Now let me ask you the question again…. Just look at the top ten again, can you tell me
who is not included? …First of all, there is no woman.
…
Al: No artist.
R: Yes, very good. No artists.
Ss: No children.
R: No children... it is a very good answer actually. Listen, listen, sometimes when we think of great people, we immediately think children would not contribute [much], but sometimes they do, right? But they will not be recognized. That’s a very good answer. Who else we cannot find?
Ss: No singer// No actor.
R: Yes, no singers, no actors.
Chicken: No doctor.
R: No actors, no singers, simply there is no one from the show business. No natives. Look! (pointing at the board where I wrote the list) Canadians, right?
Chicken: Oh yeah...

Some students pointed out that there was no Chinese in the list. Some Grade 8 students had read *Ghost Train* (Yee, 1996) when I volunteered in their class the previous year. We did talk about the contribution of early immigrant workers who helped in the building of the nation, especially the Canadian Pacific Railway, but their effort was seldom recognized. It was great that they could see the connection here. Another student pointed out that there were no teachers or educators included in the list too. In Chinese culture, Confucius and Lao Tze, both teachers and thinkers, were recognized as the greatest national heroes. Their thoughts were revered as the backbone of Chinese values and beliefs. At once students could see the difference in the values as shown in the different types of people the two countries chose as heroes.

I also showed them another list of famous Canadian people (Garrick’s Palace of Stuff, 2000) to compare and contrast who were included and who were excluded. This list, compared to the CBC Television’s list, was more diverse and it included people from a bigger variety of professions. For example, there were musicians, authors, music groups, designers, or actors apart from politicians or government leaders. From the comparison, students came to understand better that the standards for greatness could vary from country to country or even from one social group to another. The CBC Television’s list, like any other cultural texts, should not be treated as an objective or neutral text. The fact that it was an all-male list with the majority being politicians, followed by scientists and hockey players reflected the kind of values upheld by a particular social group of people that responded to the election. The list was derived from a national poll, which is supposed to be more democratized and representative of public
opinion. Even with that, we could still go on and ask what sectors of the public tuned into
the CBC Television, and make assumptions as to who actually took part in the national
poll. The list of greatest Canadians, though generated by such mass scale polling, was
actually as value-laden as any texts.

9.2.2. My Greatest Canadian

The next activity we had was to ask students to choose their own greatest
Canadian. This of course was to encourage more independent thinking and to make the
learning of Canadian history and culture more relevant to these new Canadians. My plan
was to let students watch the CBC Television series on the Greatest Canadians so that
they have a better understanding first before deciding who to choose. However, due to
limited class time, Ms. Li and I decided that we could only watch four of them at most.
When I finally decided which four to show them, I thought I should explain to students
the reasons behind my choice. As I was teaching them to beware of the values embedded
in any texts, I wanted them to do the same thing to my teaching practice as shown in
what texts I included or excluded in their classroom. My aim was to make my teaching
practice as transparent as possible, explaining to them the purpose behind what I did with
them, so that they would come to a better understanding that there were always preferred
values or agendas behind any pedagogical choices. The ultimate purpose was to raise
their awareness not just of the texts they read, but also all kinds of social practice and
how they shaped their values and beliefs.

The four great Canadian nominees that I decided to study with them were Terry
Fox, David Suzuki, Lester Pearson and Tommy Douglas. Terry Fox was the only
tenager in the top-ten list and being teenagers, students would find it easier to relate to
him and appreciate the great work he did. I also explained to students that I also liked the
fact that Terry Fox was not a politician nor a military leader, but rather a young man with
physical disability. This would make his contribution more unique. The second choice
was David Suzuki, an environmental scientist. The reason I chose him was that he was
the only racial minority in the top-ten list and hopefully my students who shared a similar
background would be able to appreciate his achievement and contribution to the country.
Lester B. Pearson was the third choice. Given students’ limited historical knowledge of
Canada, what Pearson did especially with the Canadian flag would be easier for students to understand. The last one was Tommy Douglas, who was in the end chosen as The GREATEST CANADIAN. He did a lot of social justice work including the introduction of labour laws and universal medical care.

Despite my original intention to cover these four nominees, we ended up only having time enough to watch the first three. We watched the three episodes on these nominees and they all touched on a lot of historical and sociopolitical details which were a bit hard for ELLs to follow. I had to stop from time to time to explain the background information. However, the visuals helped them to grasp the main ideas. To aid their viewing, I adapted the Greatest Canadian Profile sheet from the Resource Guide for Educators provided by the CBC Television (2004b) (see Figure 9.5), so that students could use it to jot down notes on the profile of the nominees and important details of their personal and professional life. They also had to summarize the arguments put forward by the presenters in each episode in supporting these nominees and then think of their own personal views on those arguments and come to decide on their choice.

**Figure 9.5: Worksheet on the greatest Canadian profile**

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**THE GREATEST CANADIAN PROFILE SHEET**

Use this sheet as you view each Greatest Canadian episode and record some interesting facts:

**Greatest Canadian Nominee (候选人):** __________________________

**Supporter (支持者) for this Great Canadian:** __________________________

**Nominee Birth Date:** ____________________ **Birthplace:** ____________________

**Date of Death (if applicable):** ____________________

**Major Field of Activity:** ____________________

**Major Achievements (成就):** ____________________

**Did this Great Canadian face any obstacles (障碍)?** ____________________

**Did s/he overcome them? If yes, how?** ____________________

**What are some important details of his/her personal life? (i.e., education, employment, travel, family, children)**

**What are some of the supporter’s arguments in support of this Great Canadian?**

**What are your views?** ____________________
The purpose of viewing the episodes was to help students get a general idea of what these great people accomplished. Students still had to do independent research on them before they decided for themselves which one they would choose as the Greatest Canadian. I suggested to them some websites where they could look for further information on these nominees and guidelines in writing up their paper.

At the same time, I also got students to start thinking what qualities they were looking for in the greatest Canadian. Again I adapted the CBC’s Resource Guide (2004b) to help students to do this task (see Figure 9.6). They were to make up a job advertisement for this post of the Greatest Canadian and outline all the qualities that might be needed for this “job”:

**Figure 9.6: Worksheet on job advertisement for the greatest Canadian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time to Think</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before choosing the greatest Canadian(s), we have to pause and think what “greatness” means. Can a great Canadian be measured by the same standards as a great Chinese or Vietnamese? How do you define greatness? Do you consider one’s ability, character, achievement, etc?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Think about the qualities that might be needed for this “job” and write a HELP WANTED ad that would be suitable.

**HELP WANTED**

**Greatest Canadian!!!**

*Description of Job Title:*

*Qualifications Needed:*

*Personal Qualities and Attributes:*

*Rewards/ Remunerations:*

Heartfelt thanks and respects of a grateful nation!
In order to help them complete this task, I showed them some job advertisements to see how companies outline their job descriptions and the qualifications and personal qualities for potential candidates. Afterwards, we briefly went through the top ten nominees one by one to see what work they had accomplished, what qualifications they had, and what personal qualities and abilities they had demonstrated. This was to pave the way for students to decide on what qualities they thought were the most important for the Greatest Canadian title. They needed the vocabulary and phrases to describe the candidates’ qualities and contribution.

9.2.2.1. Class discussion.

Making Connections: In our class discussion on the good qualities of these great Canadians, I found that I always had to help students to relate the issues to their prior knowledge and constantly compare and contrast great people from their birth countries: Do any of these great Canadians remind you of someone in your own country? What would a great contribution be like in their homeland, say in the area of social welfare or education? What kinds of obstacles did they face and how does it compare to the great Canadians we study here? Students with limited mainstream cultural and historical background needed to have their background knowledge activated in order to understand and appreciate better the Canadian history and culture. For example, when we were going over Tommy Douglas, a prominent Canadian politician who introduced free universal health care to Canada, I invited students to share their home countries’ medical and welfare policies. In this way, they could better appreciate what historical and social significance of the change in the welfare policy Tommy Douglas introduced to Canada. Also, when we studied Terry Fox, it was easy for students to think that the work that he accomplished seemed less significant compared to other prominent politicians who brought about revolutionary changes to the government policies. What I tried to do was to remind them that Terry Fox was actually a teenager like all of them when he was first diagnosed with cancer. As an ordinary teenager, he displayed great courage and self-sacrifice as he ran a self-initiated marathon across the country to raise people’s awareness and financial support for other cancer patients. I encouraged students to think what they would do if they were in Terry Fox’s shoes:
**EXCERPT 9.7: CLASS RECORDING ON FEBRUARY 25, 2008**

R: Yeah, but did cancer stop him? Did cancer stop him from doing anything? Did cancer stop him... Imagine if you had cancer, would you be like him running around, or you’d say, okay this is the end of my world already... you just stay home, you just want people to take care of you, right?

Ss: (nodding and chuckling)

Baoh: Maybe.

R: Right? Maybe. (laughing) I think... I think what people really like him is this “selfless” (writing on the board) attitude (explaining the word in Cantonese and Mandarin), that he didn’t concern about himself. Remember.. you watched the video, right? Remember this scene when people were interviewing him and he was crying? He was crying, not because of himself. He was crying for another small child. Remember? The child had the same problem like him. Remember that scene?

Ss: Hmm.

Besides helping them to connect themselves to Terry Fox’s story, I also opened up myself as a teacher and confessed to them my own vulnerabilities. Even as an adult, I might not have that courage to step up and fight for a cause like what Terry did when I was still wrestling with my own ailment:

**EXCERPT 9.8: CLASS RECORDING ON FEBRUARY 25, 2008**

R: So this selfless attitude, and not being afraid of pain... can you do that? I think I really can’t myself. Having just one leg, and then running for that long, it needs a lot of ..What does it need?

Jerry: Power.

R: It needs a lot of power, and the power is not from the body. I think it’s the power here (pointing at my head), right? Will power. Do you know will power? (Writing on board, and then explaining its meaning in Cantonese and Mandarin). It needs a lot of will power. What else does it need?

Jerry: The heart


Baoh: Hope.

R: Yeah?

B: Hope.

R: Hope. Very good! A lot of cancer patients, they don’t have any hope anymore. Very good! Because they believe in change, right? When you’ve lost hope, you just think okay I might as well just hide myself in my room and don’t do anything. But he hadn’t lost hope, because he thought, even though I did a thing so small like this, I could still make a change, so that’s hope. Very good!

I relinquished my teacher authority by admitting to students my own limitations. For example, in this case, I really would not have Terry Fox’s courage to appeal for public support for cancer patients, let alone running the marathon when I only had one
good leg left. By demonstrating my self-awareness, I helped to raise my students’ awareness of what it took for Terry Fox to accomplish the task he set for himself. Students came up with excellent answers about Terry’s good qualities like will power, love, hope and bravery later which are not shown in the recording transcript outlined above (Excerpt 9.8). Despite the short answers, students displayed serious thinking. I kept inviting them to connect themselves with what they read and watched so that they could fully appreciate the meaning behind the Terry Fox run:

**EXCERPT 9.9: CLASS RECORDING ON FEBRUARY 25, 2008**

R: Oh yeah, people awarded that for him. But I think he himself had this quality that he’s strong, he’s brave, he had a heart for people, he had strong will power, and he had hope. Okay? I’m asking you this because you have to think and try to connect this to yourself. Would you be able to do that as a teenager? Sam, tomorrow, if you found out that you had cancer (all laughing), what would you do? Do you understand what I’m saying? So it takes a lot for a teenager to be able to do something like what he did. You know, every year, we have this Terry Fox run, right, in Canada. Do you know that? … Did you join the Terry Fox Run this year? Do you have this at school?

Ss: Yeah.

R: So I hope next year, this would mean something different to you.

**Striving for precision:** Another skill that I wanted students to continue to hone was precision in their arguments. They would come up with an idea, usually very vague and we would then discuss around it and try to re-phrase it as precisely as we could in order to convey what they actually intended to convey. What I did here was to guide students to come up with a list of possible job descriptions, personal qualifications and attributes and each had to be precise and concise enough so that people would understand their ideas. I did not ask them to show whether they agree or disagree with each other’s points yet. We just wanted to focus on the precision of the wordings first. For example, Terri suggested that the greatest Canadian should “save people”. I went on to ask her what she meant by to save people: What kind of people she had in mind, and how to save them. She explained she was actually thinking of sick people. Therefore, I pointed out to her that she should then refine her answer and make sure that the qualifications required match with the job description. She should be looking for someone who had good medical knowledge or had major scientific contribution to the field of medicine, or someone who worked in the government and implemented changes to the medical system to provide better and more comprehensive medical care. The discussion was to help increase students’ language awareness so that they knew when a change in the wordings
would affect what they were implying. A phrase like “to save sick people” versus “to save poor people” could entail very different sets of skills or qualifications. They should learn to strive for precision in expression of ideas. Another example:

**Excerpt 9.10: Class recording on February 26, 2008**

R: Okay, war, okay when you say “fight for the war”, what kind of war are you talking about?
Jerry: Fight for country.
R: Okay, what you said is one must fight for the country. Is that right?
Ss: Yeah.
R: Again you are saying, fight for the country against ..?
Al: Enemy.
R: Yeah. Very good! That’s what you mean. Is that right? Look, are you with me? This is very important because when you think of the wordings, sometimes if you don’t write clearly enough, you miss the point. So what you are actually saying is that, the job title is “Must fight for the country against enemies”, i.e., if there are enemies, then you have to fight, then this is a great person. Okay? We can disagree later, but let’s come up with the list first.

Here Al came up with the point “must fight for the war” which itself was not clear, so I went on and asked what war he had in mind. Another student clarified for him and what actually he wanted to say was that a country should “fight for the country” and Al finally decided that what he wanted to say was “Must fight for country against the enemies.” We did not invite students give their opinions on these job descriptions yet. I just wanted students to come up with a list first before we examined it together.

As the list started to build up, we began to see that some students’ ideas contradicted others. We then moved on to work closely on those points and debated to see which of those we preferred. For example, Melody later suggested that a great Canadian should stop wars, which obviously contradicted what Al suggested earlier that a great leader should fight for the country against enemies. So I put the two points together and invited them to debate to see which one they would pick or to decide if we needed to merge or modify the statements so that they could best represent what students were thinking:

**Excerpt 9.11: Class recording on February 26, 2008**

R: Who support this? (pointing at “Must fight for country against enemies”) Who support this? (pointing at “Must stop wars”). What about you, Sam? .. It may not be an easy answer because... what if someone attacked Canada? What do you do?
Al: //Attack//
Melody: //Stop the war.
Chicken: //I'd love to protect the country.
R: See, what Chicken is saying has changed the meaning already. “Protect”, and he doesn’t use the word “fight”. “To protect” is different from “to fight”. “Protect” means only
when, only when someone attacks you, then you protect yourself. You do not go out and fight people, because I don’t like him, so start fighting…
Ss: (laughing)

Again, what I was doing here was to draw their attention to their choice of words, to refine the words they used so that they could adequately convey what they wanted to express. To fight for the country against enemies could mean you went to great lengths to eliminate your enemies who might be invading your country but alternatively, it could also justify an attack against people who just have different beliefs or values from yours. However, if one changed the word to “protect”, it would suggest that one would only resort to war or violence to stop the violation only based on reasons to protect the safety of the country. Of course, even with that, it was still arguable--one could still stretch the meaning of “protect” to justify some aggressive actions in the name of protecting the country. For example, in some highly authoritarian governments, there might be a constitution which legally lays out the rights of its people but often, the terms are up to the interpretation of the authority to decide whether one has breached the law. Again, this was the first step for these students to be aware of the fact that the choice of words can have different connotations and implications, hence suggesting different values and beliefs.

9.2.2.2. Students’ works.

Both Ms. Li and I found that students did a great job in their job advertisements. Most of the answers that they put into the worksheet were points we discussed in class, but occasionally they would also add in their own points. Figure 9.7 shows Melody and Terri’s advertisements. They are shown as they were handed in with mistakes shown as they were:
The students were provided with the template. They were to fill in the details for the three sections: job title, qualifications and personal qualities. The section on rewards/remunerations was given to them since I did not expect students to come up with something on their own. Most of the students just kept this section as it was, but Terri added her own ideas (see Figure 9.7). She suggested that the rewards for the Greatest Canadian would be respect and love from us, that people would write a book about this great person and would be given the title of the “Greatest Canadian”, and that s/he would have the control over the country. She really gave a lot of thought to this assignment. Apart from the points that the class came up with, she added quite a lot of her own. She also took my advice to make them as concrete and precise as she could. She also demonstrated great understanding in what each section was asking for. For example, in the job title section, she wrote that the Greatest Canadian must use power to change the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Melody’s advertisement</th>
<th>Terri’s advertisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HELP WANTED</strong></td>
<td><strong>HELP WANTED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greatest Canadian!!</strong></td>
<td><strong>Greatest Canadian!!</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Job Title:**
- Stop the wars.
- Must donate money to help needy people
- Must protect nature.

**Terri’s advertisement**
- Must use power to make changes in policy to help the needy.
- Must help maintaining peace.
- Must help people to realise their dreams.
- Must fight for justice.
- Must protect others.

**Qualifications Needed:**
- Good leadership skills.
- Persevering.
- Good knowledge of economy.

**Personal Qualities and Attributes:**
- Never give up.
- Love the country and the people in the country.
- Selfless, not selfish.

**Rewards/ Remunerations:**
Heartfelt thanks and respects of a grateful nation!

**Rewards/ Remunerations:**
- The respect and love from us.
- Write a book all about you and name “Greatest Canadian”.
- Control the hole country.
policy in order to help the needy. She also put in the qualification section that s/he must have the wisdom to know what the best policy was for the country, and that the candidate should also listen to other peoples’ advice. The points corresponded well to each other.

Melody was very active in class discussion and she seemed to have come out of her shell (after the issue of bullying was resolved earlier) and was contributing a lot in class. The points on “persevering”, “good knowledge of economy” and “love the country and the people in the country” were all her own points that she brought up in class. Let’s look at Baoh and Chicken’s advertisements (see Figure 9.8):

**Figure 9.8: Baoh and Chicken’s job advertisements for the Greatest Canadian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baoh’s advertisement</th>
<th>Chicken’s advertisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HELP WANTED</td>
<td>HELP WANTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest Canadian!!!</td>
<td>Greatest Canadian!!!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Job Title:**
- Must helped other people.
- Must donated money to people.
- Must run the country

**Qualifications Needed:**
- Must have a strong body.
- Must have good willpower.
- Must have sports skills.

**Personal Qualities and Attributes:**
- Must be selfless to the poor people.
- Must be kind.
- Must be brave.
- Must not be selfish.
- Must never give up.
- Must be smart.

**Rewards/ Remunerations:**
Heartfelt thanks and respects of a grateful nation!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baoh’s advertisement</th>
<th>Chicken’s advertisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HELP WANTED</td>
<td>HELP WANTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest Canadian!!!</td>
<td>Greatest Canadian!!!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Job Title:**
- Must donate money to help people.
- Must keep the promises.
- Stop the wars.

**Qualifications Needed:**
- Good leadership skills.
- Good will power.
- Good scientific knowledge.

**Personal Qualities and Attributes:**
- Won never give up.
- Loves for nature.

**Rewards/ Remunerations:**
Heartfelt thanks and respects of a grateful nation!

Comparatively, the two boys’ ideas were not as rich as Terri’s and Melody’s, and also not very coherent. However, both had good contribution in the class discussion, and the ideas were also relevant and interesting. Baoh was very good with personal qualities
and he suggested ideas like being brave, kind, and selfless; Chicken, on the other hand, thought leadership skills and scientific knowledge were more important for the candidate.

After finalizing the qualities they were looking for in the greatest Canadian candidates, students were to decide whom they thought would suit the title. Among the three candidates we studied, surprisingly all students chose Terry Fox as the Greatest Canadian. We asked them to write a short essay on their choice—briefly introduce the person, summarize some of his major achievements and obstacles and how they were overcome and lastly, outline their reasons for choosing the person. Students did a good job in compiling and summarizing the information they had from the videos we watched and the websites we suggested for them to do further reading. This was the first extended piece of expository writing students were asked to write. Both Ms. Li and I found that with clear scaffolding and guidance, students were able to build up step-by-step the skills and substantive information needed for this task. Here are the samples from the four participants:

**Figure 9.9: Terri’s Greatest Canadian**

Terri’s essay showed great organisation skills. She was able to present her argument in a logical and coherent way. She was also able to elaborate on what Terry Fox did and support her arguments with adequate information from her research. I liked especially the way she ended her essay with her own opinions on Terry Fox’s courage.
Baoh, like Terri, did a great job in terms of organisation. There was good elaboration of ideas with specific developed details. Baoh argued that what he liked about Terry was his strong will power and his bravery and selfless spirit.

Melody delivered the best work among the four. Apart from excellent organisation, her writing showed great improved accuracy. She supported her arguments with relevant details and I like especially her strong ending when she asserted that the hero that Canada needed was someone like Terry Fox who would not easily give up but persevere for a good cause.
Figure 9.12: Chicken’s Greatest Canadian

In my opinion, Terry Fox should be the greatest Canadian because his great contribution in cancer research.

Terry Fox was born in Vancouver, Canada. He was the third child in the family. He was born on January 28, 1958, in Vancouver, British Columbia. He was born with his brother Fred and his younger brother Peter, and his sister Judith. He was the third child in the family. He liked swimming, soccer and music when he was 18.

He ran 5,378 kilometers through Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. He raised $21.17 million for cancer research. He was 18 years old when he got cancer and lost his leg. So he just used one leg to run the marathon.

I support him because he had run 5,378 kilometers for the greatest Canadian. He raised $21.17 million for cancer research. He was 18 years old when he got cancer and lost his leg. So he just used one leg to run the marathon.

9.2.3. Conclusion

9.2.3.1. Ms. Li and students’ comments.

I collected both Ms. Li and students’ opinions on this module. For the student interview, I had to conduct it over three lunch periods because some students needed to have drama practice and some came in late and had to re-schedule for a follow-up interview. Ms. Li had very high opinions of this module:

EXCERPT 9.12: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 12, 2008

Ms. Li: I think they are getting a lot out of all the lessons, pretty much, so, you know, I don’t think there have been any units which have been like dull or dry for them, so I think they are getting a lot out of all of them. So I think for them personally, I think some of them may appreciate, maybe, the vocabulary aspect more, but I think all the lessons have been good. In terms of, like, we are doing the food unit, they got the cooking demonstration. That’s really good for them.

Baoh also had very positive opinions about the two units on interesting facts about Canada and the Greatest Canadians. Baoh had great trust in Ms. Li and me and...
expressed that he believed everything we taught would help him to improve his language skills. Apart from learning a lot of vocabulary and grammar, he also thought that he learned a lot from the life experiences of the great Canadians (italics show speech in Mandarin):

**Excerpt 9.13: Interview recording on March 04, 2008**

Baoh: Oh, I learned will power and ..um.. brave.. qualities
R: You mean you learn the qualities of people. *You can speak in Mandarin, you think you’ve learn ...?*
Baoh: A lot of vocabulary and their stories.
R: *What did you learn from people’s life stories?*
Baoh: Terry Fox.
R: *What did you learn from people’s life stories?*
Baoh: I learned what they did.
R: *Did you learn like, oh I know now how important is perseverance.*
Baoh: Yes, that is right. *And one’s sacrifice to the country.*
R: Sacrifice.. okay.

Chicken had a similar positive experience. When I asked what his opinions were on the units on Canada, he said it was “awesome” as he learned a lot about Canada, and that it was by far the most interesting module to him. Compared to the unit on bullying, he found the work on Canada more useful and relevant to him since he had not been bullied. When I asked students about our work on thinking skills and CL practices, they had differing opinions:

**Excerpt 9.14: Interview recording on March 04, 2008**

Chicken: It can help me to learn to explain things.
Melody: Difficult.

Chicken explained that in Hong Kong, his teachers would just ask him to remember and spell the words that they learned, and to read, but seldom asked students to think critically. He said he liked what we did especially when he was asked to think. Melody, on the other hand, expressed that what we did was quite difficult for her. She explained in Mandarin (italics show original speech in Mandarin or Cantonese):

**Excerpt 9.15: Interview recording on March 04, 2008**

Melody: *Most people are not interested in that.*
Terri: *But this is something we all need to learn.*
R: Terri thinks this is something we all need to learn.
Terri: *Since we are living in this country, we need to learn the culture here. Even though I may not like to learn it, but it is necessary for me to learn.*
R: *You think this is the Canadian culture that teachers require you to think. Are you saying that if you live in China, then you don’t need to think?*
Terri: *I’ll learn according to the way things are taught and learned in the country.*
Terri interrupted Melody in pointing out that CL was an important school culture and practice here and that even thought she might not like it, she would still try her best to learn it. When I asked if she thought CL would still be important for her if she studied in China, she said she would just follow whatever was taught and however it was taught in that country. Terri basically adopted a very pragmatic view on CL. The value of CL lay in its promise for success at school rather than its liberatory claim of independent thinking and personal empowerment.

Chicken also saw the practical value of learning CL. He mentioned that most of his elder brother’s homework required him to give reasons to support arguments and he found that what we learned in the ESL class would help him as he moved up the grades. In a follow-up interview later in the week, I asked if the skills (such as formulating arguments and supporting opinions, or reflecting on the values embedded in historical facts, etc.) that he learned in the ESL class could be applied in his learning of other subjects. He said yes, particularly in science:

**EXCERPT 9.16: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 07, 2008**

Chicken: *In science class, we do experiments. There are questions asking us to explain the process and how the results come about.*

He also mentioned that all Grade 7 students, except ELLs, were taking part in an annual public speaking competition at school. They took turns to make a speech on a given subject. The rest of the class was to listen and raise questions. He said even though the teacher did not pick him to ask questions, he did think of questions to ask while listening to his peers’ speeches. He said this was what he learned from the ESL class— to keep thinking. When I asked him if he would also use the critical thinking skills in history lesson, he said most questions were still around the facts like how many people fought in the war, how many people died, what treaties the countries signed, etc. He was seldom asked for his opinions or views on historical events or to analyse them.

He pointed out that it was his first time learning history in the Greatest Canadian unit. He found that having learned the stories of these great people, it would help his social life since he now would have conversation topics with friends at school (italics show original speech in Cantonese):

**EXCERPT 9.17: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 04, 2008**

Chicken: *And when we notice things, and we can easy talk to people.*
R: Right. This is another advantage, so in the class, if they start talking about Terry Fox, then you have something to say.
Chicken: And when we are nothing to talking with people, you can talking about this.

Melody, on the other hand, found the unit difficult as shown in the interview transcript earlier. Melody admitted that she did not like to study Canadian history and the fact that there were many names of people that she had not heard of made it hard for her to understand. Also, she thought she had nothing to do with whatever these great people did. She found especially the part on David Suzuki boring, but the reason for which really surprised me (italics show original speech in Mandarin):

**EXCERPT 9.18: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON FEBRUARY 26, 2008**
Melody: ..because he is Japanese.
R: Why is that? You don’t like Japanese?
Melody: I hate.
...
Melody: Japan attacked the US and then China.

Later Melody revised her comments a bit, and said:

Melody: *I don’t really hate this person, but he is doing a lot of environmental protection work. I don’t care what contribution he had to the environment. Why do I have to learn about what he did to the environment?*
...
Melody: The most … umm, the best one is Terry Fox because he is not too like some boring government or scientist, he is just an …
R: Ordinary kid.
Melody: Yeah.

Melody found it hard to relate to and appreciate the contribution David Suzuki made to Canada. In part it was due to the fact that he was Japanese and she still held a grudge on what Japan had done to China in the Sino-Japanese war. Second, she had no idea how environmental protection was relevant or important to her life. The only person that she found interesting was Terry Fox because she could relate to him; both were ordinary teenagers and not politicians or scientists and she could understand better of what he overcame.

When I related this to Ms. Li, she was surprised with that reaction Melody had. She said it was actually “valuable for them to view” the videos since

**EXCERPT 9.19: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 12, 2008**
Ms. Li: … it is an opportunity for them to view videos critically, or even in terms of just for their own listening skills as well, I think maybe what happened is for some of them cannot follow the videos as well, so they lost the interest.
Melody’s dissatisfaction with the unit could be, as Ms. Li pointed out, due to her lack of the background knowledge of Canadian social and political history, which posed difficulties for her. On top of that, there was still resistance from her when it came to the study on Canada. She kept saying that she could not understand what she had to do with the contribution these people had in Canada. She said later she should be studying Chinese history instead because she was Chinese. She did not feel that she was a Canadian yet and hence did not feel the need or interest to study it. Her comments on David Suzuki revealed that she had a very strong sense of her national and ethnic identity. Her response surprised both Ms. Li and me since we deliberately included David Suzuki in our viewing list as he was the only ethnic minority in the top-ten list. We thought that what he did as a visible minority about anti-racism and environmental protection would be much appreciated by our immigrant students. Melody did not see herself as Canadian, nor did she ally herself with David Suzuki as an Asian Canadian. It could also be that she did not see the immediate significance of environmental protection to her daily life. As a result of these reasons, she might find it hard to relate to any of the work done by Suzuki. Despite this, Melody did say that she enjoyed the work done on Canadian symbols or the part on food. She liked especially the collaborative research work she had with her classmates.

9.2.3.2. My reflection on critical literacy.

The idea of introducing this topic on Canada derived from two major concerns--access and critique. To have access to the language of power and its culture is empowering to most immigrant students since it is valuable on multiple fronts: academic study, as well as social and cultural integration. For example, students are required to study Canadian history and geography in middle and high school. What Ms. Li and I did was to help them get to know better this host country, while at the same time inviting them to examine the perspectives and the values behind those so-called social or historical facts. Instead of shoving them the details of great historical figures and asking them to study and memorize them, as most mainstream history lessons would do, we encouraged them to question those facts and come to understand the particular social values they reflected. Also, knowing that the study of Canadian history or geography could be alienating to immigrant children, we tried as much as we could to help them
make connections with their prior experience in their own country, for example, relating the lesson to the national heroes that they had back home and what their contributions were, etc.

Despite our efforts, students like Melody still reacted with strong resistance. This made me re-think the appropriateness of teaching immigrant students mainstream culture and history. I think the question is not whether we should or should not teach them local culture and history, but rather how and when. I still believe that it is essential for ELLs to have access to the dominant language and culture for empowerment and success at school. To deprive them of this opportunity would make their life at school, both academic and social, even harder. What I—as a teacher–have to do is to find better ways to teach the subject matter so that students would not feel alienated.

One thing I could have done to avoid overwhelming students was to allow them to work on any one of their choices right from the beginning. In this way, they only need to deal with the one that they choose to work on. Melody’s suggestion of teaching Chinese history was also an interesting suggestion. I could also invite students to study the heroes in their home countries using the same critical method. In this way, I could cover other aspects of Canadian culture which may not require too much of the local social, political and historical knowledge just yet.

Due to the strong emotional investments in Melody’s ethnic and national identity, it made it harder for her to appreciate the CL skills they were learning behind the activities on greatest Canadians. Baoh, Terri and Chicken, on the other hand, appreciated the practical value of CL skills more and they saw how these skills would help them in other subject areas, especially as they advanced through the grades. They did not yet see the socially empowering or liberating impact of CL practices.

I found that students could easily appreciate the usefulness of structural language skills like grammar and vocabulary in comparison to CL skills. For one thing, improved grammar and vocabulary readily helped them in their day-to-day functioning inside and outside school. Their perspective when it came to CL development was more limited; they tended to just see its practical value, i.e., improved academic literacy, rather than its socially empowering value. This view of English language learning was still very new and abstract to them. It took time to gradually build up their CL, and it would be harder
to see the improvement over a short period of time. What I did up to this point was to show them the embeddedness of ideological value even in the most seemingly objective social text (i.e., the top-ten list of greatest Canadians). Through the different activities and discussions, students’ language awareness was also raised. They understood that the choice of words could entail different connotations. What’s more, they also learned to take responsibility for their opinions—have them supported and explained with reasons, and be prepared to subject them to the interrogation of the learning community. The students did, in fact, show steady improvement in these areas as shown in their class discussions and different works produced in these two units.

Ms. Li suggested that we could make it clearer for students what kind of learning in which they were engaged to help them to see the benefit of CL:

**EXCERPT 9.20: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON MARCH 12, 2008**

Ms. Li: Or even like at the start of every lesson, if you mention what benefit they would gain out of it, what kind of learning, and how it would help them in high school, it would probably help them... I think most of them are interested in going to university, so if they recognize like why something is important.

To Ms. Li, explaining to students what kind of learning was involved and why they were learning it was useful to help students understand why CL was important to them. We had been trying to change students’ attitude towards homework and project work. To them, the idea of homework for grading purpose was so ingrained that they failed to see it as a process where they could practice and perfect their knowledge and skills learned. They would treat quizzes or tests seriously but not homework which they thought would not be graded. At the beginning of the term, they just took homework as something to get over and done with and not to learn. The idea of process writing, for example, was so hard for them to grasp. Ms. Li and I kept explaining to them the value of homework. Importantly, Ms. Li told me that students were taking this message to heart and she heard them mentioning a few times to each other reminding themselves how they should treat their homework. This made me understand that that it was really significant to make the objectives clearer at the start of the lesson and to make sure that students understood what they were learning and for what purpose. This meta-cognition would encourage them to take ownership of their own learning.
9.3. Unit 3: “Don’t Trust Your Parents”

The main aims of this unit were to help students to explore the cultural conflicts and uprooting experiences immigrant families might face and to explore different ways of dealing with those challenges. The major text that we used was Yee’s short story “Don’t Trust Your Parents” taken from the book What Happened This Summer (2006). The story centers around a Chinese teenager named Da-ren who immigrated to Canada with his parents and how he struggles to meet their expectations and wrestles with his own life—the pressure from study and love life. Da-ren’s medical doctor father, under the persuasion of Da-ren’s mother, applied for an exchange program in Canada and later applied for immigration together with the rest of the family. While his father finally lands on a nursing job, Da-ren’s mother—because of the overwhelming language and cultural challenges—decides to leave the family and goes back to China. The story starts with Da-ren’s mother coming back to Canada and offering to take Da-ren back to their homeland. Da-ren has expressed similar problem in adjusting to the culture before, especially in catching up with the great English language demands as he is preparing for his TOEFL exam for university entrance. Da-ren should be happy about the news, but instead it becomes a moment when he has to rethink all over again what kind of life and where he wants to live. In the end, however, even though Da-ren chooses to return with his mother to China, it is his mother who backs out at the last minute, believing that it is best for Da-ren’s education and future opportunities to stay.

The story is told by Da-ren in first-person narration, not in a chronological order, but interspersed with flashbacks crisscrossing between the remote past, the more recent past, and the present. Nodelman (1996) advocates that we should read against the texts so that we would not be persuaded unconsciously into accepting “its description of reality as the only true one” (p. 121). With the limited first-person perspective, and the chronologically fragmented narration, readers/students have to be wary of the limitation of the single perspective offered and they have to put together all the pieces, weighing them against each other in order to gain a fuller picture of the situation. Often, we find Da-ren being very judgmental of his parents’ choice and tending to gloss over his vulnerable feelings. One of the focuses in this unit was to make students become aware of how the use of different narrations positions us as readers—what it intends us to get or
not to get (see Table 9.3). To achieve this aim, I introduced to them some basic literary concepts like illustrations, setting, narration, theme, etc. as the first steps to appreciate a literary work. Students also needed to exercise inferencing skills so as to unearth information or evidence that is glossed over by the narrator in order to fill in any gaps in the narration. The limitation of the first person narration also means that readers have to try to infer what other characters in the story would say or think were they given a voice. This will help students to begin to see things from different perspectives and the complexities of any social situations. These were the main CL practices on which we focused in this unit.

The idea of reading Yee’ story was also to provide immigrant students with an opportunity to examine some of the challenges that they were facing, especially the difficulties of straddling between two different cultures—home culture versus host cultures, family expectations versus their own wishes. By making connections with the story and relating it to their lived realities, I hoped to get them to explore some real social issues that immigrant families have to face, like cultural and intergenerational conflicts, and higher education and career prospects. To achieve these goals, apart from ongoing class discussions, one major task students had to do was a character study and interview after we studied the story. I also asked students to interview family and friends about the satisfaction and challenges that they had as immigrants especially with regards to job opportunities. Then I tried to bring their attention to the society level and engaged them in discussion on what the government could do to help immigrants. The final assignment was to design a poster to be sent to a regional member of parliament to seek government support on this issue.

As for grammar and vocabulary, we followed the same procedure that we did in all the previous modules, integrating them into all our tasks. For example, when we came to character study, we revisited some commonly used adjectives to describe characters.
### Table 9.3: Unit Plan of “Don't Trust Your Parents”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main Activities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Language and Skills Focus</strong></th>
<th><strong>Learning Outcomes/Products</strong></th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reading (text types)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grammar:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ss are expected to...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. “Don’t Trust Your Parents” (a short story by Paul Yee)</td>
<td>- author study</td>
<td>1. give an oral report on author study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- character study—explore the issues through different points of view</td>
<td>2. role play a character interview—the ‘Hot Seat’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- introduce some basic literary terms and concepts and explore how illustrations and different narrations structure our understanding of texts</td>
<td>3. give an oral report on a mini survey on immigrants’ employment in Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- discuss &amp; examine problems faced by the immigrant family in the story and make connections to self</td>
<td>4. design a poster on challenges immigrants face and what the government can do to help</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- explore ways to deal with these challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Newspaper articles (adapted) on immigrants’ study and employment issues</td>
<td><strong>Vocabulary:</strong> from “Don’t Trust Your Parents”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Critical/Literacy:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- get to know some basic literary concept e.g., author, narration, illustrations, setting, plot, themes, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- learn how illustrations and different narrations (first person vs. third person) structure our understanding &amp; position us as readers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- comprehension skills: inferencing, making connections, predications, locating information, etc.</td>
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As far as my research participants were concerned, since the beginning of the new term in January 2008, there were new students, all male, who joined the ESL class at different time in the two months following (see Table 4.3 in Chapter 4). By the time we did this unit, there were altogether four new Stage 1 and/or Stage 2 students, with the length of stay in Canada ranging from less than three months to two years. With the old students getting more used to class discussion and the arrival of these new students who all happened to be very lively and energetic, class discussions became even more vigorous and rich.

#### 9.3.1. “Don’t Trust Your Parents”: Some Literary Concepts

I started this unit by introducing to students the different literary elements--the author, illustrations, setting, characters, plot and theme--to help guide their study of the
story. Most of the students had heard Paul Yee since we studied his picture story *The Ghost Train* (1996) together at end of the previous school year and most students should have also attended his talk in the first term arranged by the school librarian on his new book. However, since it was a talk targeted at the whole school with no special accommodation for ELLs, most of them did not understand it. The first thing that I asked them to do was to do some online research about the author to get to know his background—his works, and some of the major themes and messages that he had in his books. This helped to give them a context of what we were going to read.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main focuses was to help students to be aware of how literary choices like the use of illustrations and narration structure our understanding of the text, which in turn would help understand more about the author’s intent and the production economy as a whole. As Nodelman (1993) pointed out, no matter whether we are conscious of it or not, “illustrations always convey information, not just about what things look like, but how we should understand and what we should feel about the things depicted” (p. 6). McKenzie (2003) argued that with the growing dominance of images, we should unpack not just the “artistic composition” of the image, but also “the power relations and meanings of pictures and their reverberations in the text” (p. 202). He pointed out that visual literacy is now becoming as urgent as verbal literacy or mathematical literacy in children’s education (p. 202). Therefore, in reading the story, I examined with students both the use of visual and textual narrative and how they convey message(s) intended by the author and/or the publisher.

**The use of illustrations** I started reading the story by asking students what they could see from the book cover (Figure 9.13). After some elicitation and facilitation, students were able to tell me that it shows an Asian teenager dressed in some trendy westernised outfit standing on a balcony of an apartment unit against a background showing rows of high-rise condominiums closely knitted together.
I then modelled for students how I used all the gathered information, together with the book title on the cover, to formulate my prediction of what this story was going to be about, i.e., things happened to some Asian teenager in a city in one summer. To help students further understand the intended messages this illustration conveys, I invited them to substitute the urban residential background to a rural farmland where what they could see was just trees but no houses, or to imagine the Asian teenager to be shown in all hockey wear, or that he was standing next to an older Asian woman. They were able to tell me that with the changes in the objects to be put in the picture and how they were put, the intended message was changed too. For example, if the boy was shown in a hockey outfit, immediately we associated this character with hockey, and hence the story could be about his getting to love the sport in this summer. Or if he was shown with an old Asian woman, we might assume that she was his mother and that the story focus could then be the boy’s relationship with his mother or family.

The experience that I had from the previous units was that students needed to have more practice when it came to CL before they could better master it and have it applied in their own reading. Ms. Li had previously suggested that I could try to single out one CL reading strategy at a time and teach it with a simpler story so that the students could master the strategy first before applying it back to the text we were reading. I found that the suggestion made sense. It was like teaching any language structures; students need to know the form and meaning, but at the same time, they should also know how to use it in context, i.e., knowing what communicative functions it serves. In order to make sure students master certain language forms, they need to have a balance between language drills (to get the form and meaning right) and authentic practice (to get the use/function correct). I thought the same principle could apply to the teaching and learning of CL. Therefore, I decided to put aside Yee’s short story for a while and zeroed

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in on critically analysing the use of illustrations and how they structure readers’
understanding of the text. I chose two versions of the story book *Because of Winn-Dixie*
to show how illustrations can manipulate the way we understand the story. The original
story, written by DiCamillo (2000), was about a 10-year-old girl named Opal who lives a
lonesome life after her mother abandons the family. Opal’s father becomes a very
distressed man and turns to his work for escape. Opal later befriends a stray dog whom
she names Winn-Dixie, and because of the dog, she befriends the somewhat unusual
residents of her new hometown and begins to find her place in the world and let go of
some of the sadness left by her mother’s abandonment. The book was later adapted into a
popular movie in 2005. Of course, the movie also churned out many movie tie-ins such
as DVDs, children’s picture books, and other items like the one I included for students’
analysis—a movie scrapbook with a simplified version of the story narrated from the
point of view of the dog, Winn-Dixie, and still photos taken from different scenes in the
movie. I placed the two covers side by side and students could see immediately the
difference in the intended tone and message of the two books.

**Excerpt 9.21: Class recording on March 18, 2008**

R: Why? Why this [the scrap book] seems to be much, much happier?
Chicken: This picture book just not like this book—all in black.
R: Say something more. Because.. elaborate.
Melody: It’s for kids.
R: It’s for kids, and ...
Melody: Nothing (laughing).
R: C’mon. You know it. Why it is for kids and so it must be happy?
Melody: Because kids don’t like sad things.
R: Because kids don’t like sad stories.

Chicken and Melody were able to tell the difference in the tone between the short
story and the scrapbook by the difference in the colors and brightness in the two book
covers. Melody was also able to come to see the different purposes of the two books as
they appeal to very different audiences. We then went on to discuss other elements that
they noticed which helped to bring out the difference in the moods. For example, the
scrapbook gives a close-up of the smiling cute dog while the original story shows a long
shot of the neighbourhood showing the girl-dog pair (and their shadows) against a quiet
and lonesome background. The contrast helped students to see the gloomier atmosphere
conveyed in the original story as opposed to the more uplifting mood we sensed in the
movie-based scrapbook, especially with the little picture on the side showing the girl-dog pair playing some kind of a game or on an adventure.

Another set of texts we worked on was the picture book *Red Riding Hood*—one is written and illustrated by James Marshall (1987) and the other by Shogo Hirata (1992). Again, it was very easy for students to see the difference when we juxtaposed the two together. They noticed that the Red Riding Hood illustrated by Marshall seemed to be happier than the one by Hirata, especially with her happy face and with animals jumping around her and her trying to touch or talk to them. They were also able to tell me the use of colours that made such a difference:

**Excerpt 9.22: Class recording on March 18, 2008**

R: … What else can you see? Tell me, c’mon.
Mike: The background.
R: The background. Yes?
Mike: The background. This one is --
Chicken: --is colourful.
R: The background is colourful. There is sunshine, like it is in the morning. Here it’s dark, right? What else can you see? Very good! Very good!
Chicken: And this one, the girl is [xxx].
R: …is what?
Chicken: Never mind.
Mike: In a dark forest.
R: In a dark forest. It is in a dark forest. Can we see the wolf?
Ss: No.
R: But we see the wolf here. It should be very dangerous, but do we have that feeling?
Ss: No.
R: No, right.
Mike: Because of the darkness you may think the trouble is going to happen.
R: Oh very good. Because of the darkness. Okay, you think maybe something bad is going to happen. But not in this one, even though we can see the wolf. Even the wolf, does it look really, really horrible?
Ss: No.

By breaking down the different elements that make up the picture, students began to see how messages are constructed by the author, illustrator, and/or publisher to ensure the reader take or does not take certain messages. For example, when we examined the book cover of Pocahontas, what students noticed immediately was a pair of lovers. When I came to ask why they had the impression that they were lovers, they had answers like this:

**Excerpt 9.23: Class recording on March 18, 2008**

S: [They] look at each other (students laughing)
R: Listen. All of you listen. You can’t just say because I can see [that in] the picture…Even though there is a man and a woman there, it doesn’t necessarily mean they are lovers.

Chicken: Hand in hand.
R: Now you are answering my question. Because even if you can see a man and a woman, it doesn’t mean they are lovers…and now you said, “Because they are holding hands”.
Okay. What else?
Chicken: Very happy.

What students realized here was that even the gesture or posture characters had were sending certain message to the readers. Here Pocahontas and John Smith’s eye contact and their holding of hands conveyed to us that they could be involved in a romantic relationship. I also drew their attention to the animals as shown in the book cover. Students noticed that the animals such as the raccoon and the bird seemed to be very happy:

**EXCEPRT 9.24: CLASS RECORDING ON MARCH 18, 2008**

Chicken: Even the animal world thinks they are..
R: They are happy for them, right?
Chicken: Yeah.
R: And what else can you see?...Why is he giving her the hand?
Jerry: He helping her to get down the boat.
R: Yes, he is helping her to step down the boat. This is a very common image. When you see a couple, … like the man is always.. helping the woman, right? It is a very common image. Do you realize that? I mean you’d be surprised to find a picture with a woman helping a man.
Chicken: So that image is good. If some book cover is woman helping a man, not people buy it.

The happy and life-filled atmosphere, especially with the presence of the joyful animals is conveying a sense of harmony and love that surrounds the couple, hence giving us the image of a loving couple. When I drew their attention to how John Smith, the male in the picture, helped Pocahontas get off the boat, students were able to get the message of how common this image of man helping woman is. Chicken (see Excerpt 9.24) was able to relate it immediately to the production economy that if it showed an unconventional image of a woman helping a man, then there might not be many people buying the book, even though it could be a good image itself.

Like all class discussions, our discussions on the use of illustrations were repeated a couple of times since students came to the ESL class at different times, sometimes with the same group, and sometimes not. With another group, we had time enough to go
deeper to see not just the gender relationship, but also touch upon the racial power relationship. When I asked them if they could imagine having a story with an aboriginal woman helping a white man, Terri’s response was, “Maybe that it is a joke” (lesson recording on March 18, 2008). Ironically, Pocahontas is actually about this legendary native woman who bravely stopped her people from killing John Smith, the colonist, by throwing herself across his body. She did this for the ultimate desire for peace. However, what was highlighted in the book cover is the gentlemanly and dignified behaviour of John Smith and the romance around the pair rather than the brave and self-sacrificing love for peace that was central in the legend of Pocahontas. This illustrates very well what McKenzie (2003) argued about ideological nature of illustrations:

…obviously the publisher, illustrator, and sometimes the author determine the images that define the genre of the text for the reader. For every picture included, a range of choices is omitted, much like our choice of words in theories of language. The cover and the frontispiece are representational, tools to engage our attention and draw us into the book, and so become crucial in how we envision the story without having read it. (p. 203)

**First person narration** I found that students had greater difficulty in understanding how first person narration—as opposed to third person narration—can change the point of view that is made available to readers and in turn positions them differently. This was definitely new to the students especially when they had never been asked to question the authority of any text, not to mention school texts. First of all, I made sure that they understood the difference between the author and the narrator, since the narrator can assume different identities or beliefs from those of the author. To illustrate this concept, again I used other texts with which they were more familiar, texts like Spiderman and Harry Potter, so that they could focus directly on the concept without having to struggle with understanding the story in the first place.

After some discussion, students were able to tell me what first and third person narrations were. Despite that, I still found that students had a difficult time in understanding how our views could be skewed by different narrators. It was only after reading the whole story, and then talking about its ending and their perception of Da-ren’s mother that they realized that Da-ren’s depiction of his mother was partial. I could
see their improvement in understanding of perspectives when we did the final project on a character interview. I will come back to this later.

9.3.2. “Don’t Trust Your Parents”: Discussion on the Story

As we were working on the literary concepts like illustrations and narration, we were also spending time reading the story bit by bit. The focus was to help them form a general picture of what the story was about before we delved deeper into the themes. It was their first time reading a short story. The pace was slow at the beginning, but once they understood the background of the story, they were able to relate the story to their own life experience. I also found that students were more at ease in speaking up, telling the whole class what they felt and thought of the characters and the story. Class discussion became easier and smoother. We revisited the bookmarking techniques we started using when we were doing the bullying unit and I asked students to bookmark the story as we read along.

Make connections They showed great improvement in making connections. For example, Mike told the class that he could relate to the passage where Da-ren talked about his nostalgia for his hometown:

I knew all Cui Jian’s music:
Goin’ back to that fine old place
Find the old road and go for a race.
I want to go back home. Those songs are my life, homework has no melody, no backbeat, no energy and, worst of all, no end. (Yee, 2006, p. 53)

Mike shared that like Da-ren, he missed his homeland very much because it was his birthplace, and more importantly all his extended family were still there. I was very interested in the point Da-ren makes about homework in the passage above. He seemed to be saying homework here had no end. This really surprised me since everybody knew the Chinese education system was way more exam-orientated than that in Canada. I went on to ask how Mike thought about that point:

EXCERPT 9.25: CLASS RECORDING ON MARCH 27, 2008
R: You don’t have homework there?
...
Ss: A lot of homework.
R: Yeah, a lot of homework. Then why you think “homework has no end”?
Mike: In China, I’m not.... I’m same as everybody.
R: Okay. Everybody is the same, but here, why it is not the same?
Mike: Have white people ...
R: Here you feel what?
Mike: Left out.

Here Mike was able to finally narrow down the reason why he shared Da-ren’s desire of “goin’ back to that fine old place”. He felt “left out” as a visible minority. To him, it was the white people who lived on the centre of the Canadian society while he was left on the periphery. In order to help students to make connections not just to themselves but also to texts, I used Mike’s sharing to model for them how it could be done:

**EXCERPT 9.26: CLASS RECORDING ON MARCH 27, 2008**

R: You feel left out. That’s very good. Mike. What you said reminds me of p. 59, bottom of the page. Mike, that’s very good. Da-ren said he always dreams of China:

“I’ve dream about it so many times that I feel I’m already there. I’ve spent hours imagining Nanjing Road at nighttime. It’s a million times busier than Yonge Street. Crowds pushed in from all directions; neon signs form a flashing canopy overhead, couples walk hand in hand; and security officers hassle the peasant vendors...I hear Pu-tong-hua. I hear Shanghai dialect. Shall I go to Kentucky Fried Chicken or Gou Bu li for fast food tonight: I’m invisible... Everyone is Chinese, like me. I don't feel out of place.”.

This is very important-- “I’m invisible, everyone in China is the same, I don’t feel out of place...” So what Mike said just now reminds me of this paragraph. Why he wants to go back to China? Because “I am invisible”. Do you understand the word “invisible”?

Mike: Yeah, you can’t see me.
R: You can’t see me, which means what?
Mike: Everybody is same.
R: Yes, exactly. When everybody is the same, you feel like you are in the group
...You feel comfortable there when you are invisible, but here you are visible.
...

I found that making text-to-text connections was more challenging to students than making text-to-self connections. Again, this was a new skill to them and it needed to be revisited and practiced further. I also found there were more instances where students would respond to each other’s ideas rather than just responding to mine. Here is an example where students got into a heated debate about a comment Da-ren makes about the challenges that he will have if he stays in Canada: “They think big opportunities await them here. But as soon as an employer hears their fractured, accented English,
they’ll be dismissed like yesterday’s fish” (Yee, 2006, p. 68). I asked if students agreed with Da-ren’s opinions about slim job opportunities available for immigrants:

**Excerpt 9.27: Class Recording on March 25, 2008**

R: Okay, I’m asking all of you think if you agree with what he is saying here.
Melody: Yes.
R: Do you agree? Yes, Chicken?
Chicken: Yes, but he can still find some nice jobs. I agree that you want to find a nice job, you try and try.
R: Okay, good. Melody, you said you disagree?
Melody: For example, find a good job... it is hard to find a good job, for example.
R: What about the others? I want all of you to think… if immigrants here don’t have good English, would their future be like what he says here--people will just dismiss you like yesterday’s fish?
Chicken: Yeah, but if you can speak English, then it is good.
R: Does anyone support Chicken? You support him? He said, no, we can still find jobs here; the future is not that sad.
Al: We can still find jobs here.
R: So you agree with Chicken?
Al: Yeah, I agree.
Melody: We can find jobs here, but we can’t find good jobs.
R: Okay, so Melody said, yeah, maybe we can find jobs, but those jobs are not good. What about the others?
Yolanda: I’m agree.
R: You agree with whom? Agree with Chicken?
Yolanda: I agree with Chicken.
Melody: But if you find a labour.. labour job, why not stay in home.
R: If we find a job as good, why don’t we stay in China, and find a better job. That’s what Melody is saying.. Yes, Frank? Do you want to say something?
Chicken: We can learn another language better. If you are in China, then you can teach people English, and if someone...
R: But you are saying you are going back to China?
Chicken: If you stay here, and learn English, your English is good, better than China.
Chinese, right...
Melody: No! No! Some students in university
Frank: //some of the Chinese students’ English is better there.
R: Is there anyone who would support Chicken?
Ss: No.
Chicken: I give up.
R: No, you’ve done a very good job. You are helping us to think, cos it is always good to have two sides of the coin, different opinions, and then people will start thinking.

Chicken was trying to show the brighter side of the picture that if one speaks English, there were always nice jobs available in Canada. Melody disagreed, arguing that immigrants might be able to find a job, but often it was a hard labour job. In addition, even if we could find a good job here, why not stay in China where they could always find a better job. Chicken continued to argue that staying here, immigrants could also
learn an additional language and the language skills would help them find a teaching job if they decide to go back to China later. Again, this point was contested by Melody and Frank who pointed out that some university students in China had better English language skills than immigrant children here.

I was really happy with the enthusiastic participation of students in this class discussion. Their language was not mistake-free but they were eager to express their ideas and ready to provide an explanation when challenged. This conversation also led us to talk about in greater detail the issue of immigrant job opportunities. As a follow-up to our class discussion, I asked them to carry out a mini-survey on their immigrant family members or friends to find out how satisfied they were with career prospects in this host country. We also read two newspaper articles on immigrants and how they dealt with the English demands at school and at work, and how they overcame the challenges. I will come back to this last assignment in the later section of this chapter.

Making inferences and understanding points of view Most of our class discussions were based on points of interest or questions that students had bookmarked while we were reading the story together in class. Baoh found the ending of the story interesting:

Never ever trust your parents’ words.
No, bad grammar. It should be, *Never trust your parents’ words.*
Teachers say shorter is better. It should be, *Don’t trust your parents.*
(Yee, 2006, p. 74)

Da-ren’s mother decides at the last moment not to take Da-ren with her to go back to China, believing that it would be the best for his education and future. Da-ren ends the story by saying that one can never trust their parents since they do not always keep their promise. Baoh bookmarked this passage and said that he thought it was bad of Da-ren to say something like this since one should not lose trust in their parents. This triggered an interesting discussion on whether Da-ren is really mad with his mother for leaving him behind or that he is somehow happy that his mother backs out the last minute despite his professed anger towards his changeable parents. I invited them to think if Da-ren is really disappointed with his parents’ decision or that he is actually happy to stay. As students paused to think over my question, they began to see the complex emotions that Da-ren is
having. Most of them now thought Da-ren actually had very mixed feelings. I went on to invite them to find evidence from the story to support what they thought might make Da-ren happy and/or unhappy to stay in Canada since this would also tell if he really means what he says, “Don’t trust your parents”.

**Excerpt 9.28: Class recording on April 08, 2008**

R: Why do you think that he has these mixed feelings?.. Why he is mixed about staying in Canada?  
Melody: Happy that he can learn English and he can have a better future and angry because his mother lied to him.  
R: Yes, very good. What about the others?  
Mike: I think he is unhappy.  
R: He is unhappy. Why?  
Mike: He has told his friends what he will go back, and then his mother changes her mind, so he is embarrassed.  
R: Oh, very good, very good. Oh, I’m so surprised. So you think he is unhappy because he is embarrassed. Right. He has told all his friends that he is going back.

In Excerpt 9.28, both Melody and Mike gave excellent ideas on why Da-ren is having mixed feelings. Melody thought that he is happy because now he would have the chance to continue with his English studies and his life in Canada, but unhappy because his mother does not keep her promise. Mike added that he might feel unhappy since he would feel embarrassed to tell his friends about his change of plan. Both answers showed great inferencing skills. Da-ren does not literally mention these points, but the two students made conjectures about this character based on the information that they got from the text. Later Al brought up another reason why he thought Da-ren was unhappy: “He is unhappy because he lost his girlfriend.” Da-ren did break up with his girlfriend, Shelley. What Al and some other students could not see was that Da-ren does that on the spur of the moment when he finds that Shelley is not supporting his decision to leave Canada. He did not really intend to break up with her at all. Therefore, at the end of the story when Da-ren finds out that his mother is not taking him back to China, he decides to make amends and apologise to Shelley: “I have to call her. What should I say besides I’m sorry. I’m sorry” (Yee, 2006, p. 74). In order to help students understand the gap in the narration, I raised the question: “Did he really mean it when he suggested breaking up with Shelley?” Some students said yes and some said no. When I invited them to read the story again, Melody was able to tell me immediately that the answer should be “No”. She went back to the story and quoted a line to support her answer: “I can’t believe I said
that’ means Da-ren does not mean to say that” (lesson recording on April 08, 2008) Da-ren is surprised at himself that he suggested breaking up with Shelley. Hence, from this, one can tell he does not really mean to separate from Shelley. Together with the ending when he decides to apologise to Shelly, we could be quite certain that Da-ren is actually quite happy not to go back to China. Of course, whether Shelley would take him back is another matter, but there is a great possibility that she will, judging from her desire for Da-ren to stay. By the end of the class, we were able to come up with quite a substantial list of reasons for Da-ren’s mixed feelings about staying in Canada, all based on the evidence we found from the story. The following was the table that I wrote on the board showing the ideas the class came up with by the end of the class:

**Figure 9.14: Field notes taken on April 08, 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Unhappy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ he could get back together with Shelley</td>
<td>♦ embarrassed cos he told his friends he would leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ he could learn more English</td>
<td>♦ need to study hard, may fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ he might have a better future</td>
<td>♦ employment might not be easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ there is a good environment</td>
<td>♦ Shelley might not take him back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ there is political freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea of this whole inferencing exercise was to allow students to see the contradictions between Da-ren’s alleged anger with his parents and the possible relief and happiness that he feels for not leaving Canada. The aim of our discussion was to problematise the text and help students to see how the narrator constructed our understanding. In this case, Da-ren, as the first person narrator, is trying to hide some of his feelings. He may not be deceiving the reader deliberately but definitely, he is trying to portray a certain persona across to his audience, the Da-ren that he wants us to believe him to be—carefree, rebellious and not vulnerable.

After we finished discussing the story, I asked students to complete some comprehension questions (see Appendix J) which required them to locate and synthesise information, and to make inferences. On the whole, students did very well and were able to incorporate ideas that we came up with in class discussions. For example, one of the questions was about why Da-ren’s friends Leon and Ming are jealous of his going back to China. Baoh wrote that they were jealous because Da-ren “can do whatever he likes”
and “can be invisible”. These were ideas that we had discussed in class. There was another question which asked them to describe the different characters. For this question, students needed to gather all information from the text, not just the narrator’s (Da-ren) description and opinions of them, but also what they do and how they do it, how they relate to other characters; and most importantly, to beware of any discrepancy between Da-ren’s depiction and how they actually behave. Some characters are easier to describe than the others. For example, our knowledge of Shelley, Da-ren’s girlfriend was pretty much from Da-ren’s point of view, but it all coincides with what she does and how she behaves in the story. Therefore, it is relatively easy to describe her and students were able to come up with a range of adjectives to describe her: helpful, loving, intelligent, beautiful, strong-minded, determined, hardworking and smart. This showed students’ great improvement in the use of adjectives. However, when we came to Da-ren’s mother, I found that students had a whole list of negative adjectives that almost turned her into an evil monster: rash, heartless, mean, bossy, evil, demanding, troublemaker. In addition, in answering the question on why they thought Da-ren’s mother went back to China shortly after their immigration, most of them just wrote that she was selfish or that she did not love Da-ren nor the family. Obviously, students had taken the side of the first person narrator Da-ren who still bears a grudge against his mother as a result of her decision to leave them. Also, I found that students tended to polarize the characters that one is either a good or a bad person, and take on the surface description of a character given by the narrator without weighing it against what actually happens. Hence, they often failed to grasp the complexities and the three-dimensionality of a character. In the story, we did not hear too much of the mother’s voice, but there were a couple of instances when she explained to Da-ren why she chooses to leave the family, though all these reasons are dismissed by Dar-en. Without a job and the necessary English skills, Da-ren’s mother soon finds life in Canada unbearable and decides to leave. She is unable to take Da-ren with her because of financial difficulty, but she has not forgotten her promise to take Da-ren back one day. So when the business she sets up in China begins to thrive, she returns to Canada to offer Da-ren the chance to fly back to their homeland. Of course, Da-ren dismisses all her effort to reconnect, being still angry for her abandoning him in the first place. I invited students to think once again why she decides to leave the family and
whether the decision is an easy one to make. I also reminded them of her effort to come back and her offer to take Da-ren back to China with her as well as her final decision to give up her plan thinking it would be the best for Da-ren’s study and career. Students then came to understand that words like “evil”, “mean” or “heartless” are definitely way too strong and negative to describe the mother. One can say she is independent, demanding, or rash in some way, but definitely she is not an evil or trouble maker like what Da-ren would want us to believe.

This discussion was significant in so many ways. As I mentioned before, it helped students once again to see how often our understanding and knowledge is constructed by how the author and/or narrator positions us. It also helps them to be aware of perspectives on reality and appreciate complexities of life situations and personality. This brought us to the project of character interview in which we saw students incorporating what they learned in our discussions and becoming more conscious of different perspectives. Their answers showed more complexities rather than just one-dimensional regurgitation of just what the narrator says. I video-taped their character interview just to enhance the authentic nature of the interview. Here is Terri and Melody’s character interview of Da-ren that was transcribed from the videotape (“I” as the interviewer and “D” as Daren):

**EXCERPT 9.29: TERRI AND MELODY’S CHARACTER INTERVIEW:**

I: Do you like the idea of moving to Canada?
D: When I first came to Canada, I didn’t have any positive experience.
I: How did you feel when you first arrived in Canada?
D: I felt strange. Nobody came to talk to me. And when I speak English, I had an accent.
I: Do you still want to go back to China?
D: Uh.. I’m not sure. I want to stay in Canada and learn English. But I still miss my mom and my friends in China.
I: Why do you want to go back to China?
D: Because my mom and my friends are all in China. And I was born in China. China is familiar to me.
I: What did you feel when your mom left you?
D: I felt sad because when my mom left me, I just a kid and now she was gone back.
I: Do you want your whole family live together?
D: Yes. I want them to live together and be happy forever. I didn’t want they separate again.
I: Were you angry that your mom lied to you?
D: I was angry but not very. If I go back to China, then I would lose the chance to learn English.
I: How did you feel when your mom told you to stay in Canada?
D: I felt embarrassed. I also worried that they would make fun of me.
I: Could you pass the TOEFL exam easily?
D: Yes, I do because I learned English very hard in the past few years.
I: Do you want to learn English anymore?
D: I will learn English, because living in Canada, it is a need.
I: How do you feel when listening to Cui Jian’s music?
D: I feel relaxed and happy, and I like the lyrics of the songs.
I: Will you trust your parents anymore?
D: No, I will not trust my parents anymore because I don’t want this to happen again, so I won’t trust them anymore.

Character interview is not just an excellent exercise to train students’ inferential thinking. It is also through the impersonating and enactment that they come to step into other people’s shoes and explore the characters’ thoughts and motivations through the emotional and experiential engagement (Misson & Morgan, 2006). Here we see Terri and Melody making inferences of Da-ren’s thoughts and feelings through the answers he gives to the questions that they made up. I really liked the details that they had with Da-ren’s experience when he first came to Canada. They were able to tease out all the relevant information in the text and showed us how strange Da-ren felt when he first came and how embarrassed he must be because of his accented English. For the question on whether Da-ren still wanted to go back to China, Terri and Melody were able to show his mixed feelings since he loved the idea of staying in Canada for further studies but at the same time he missed his friends and family. I liked especially their question on how Da-ren felt when his mother first left him. They were able to imagine from Da-ren’s point of view that he must be feeling very sad as he was such a young kid at that time—a point which was not mentioned in the original story. They also raised the question if Da-ren was angry with his mother, and the answer—“I was angry but not very. If I go back to China, then I would lose the chance to learn English” – also shows their ability to see the complex feelings that Da-ren was having.

Al and Chicken’s group also showed a greater depth in their understanding of the character. They worked on Da-ren’s father (“I” as interviewer and “F” as the father):

**Excerpt 9.30: Chicken and Al’s Character Interview on April 17, 2008:**

I: Why do you move in Canada?
F: First my wife is excited about move to Canada. She heard about the exchange program and I move here to learn some new method.
I: What did you feel when you first arrived here?
F: I feel pretty strange when I first arrived here because all things in Canada is in English.
I: You came here with your family?
F: First I came here with the exchange program, and my son Da-ren and my wife is staying in China.
I: How can you find a job?
F: First I went to an institution to learn English. And I tried to find a job as a doctor but I can’t find it, so I think find a nurse job is more easier, so I.
I: Is it easy to find a job in Canada?
F: It is very hard to find a job in Canada because I do not speak English very well.
I: You get a better in China or Canada?
F: I get a better job in China and the social status is higher, and here I’m a nurse, so the social status is lower.
I: Why do you miss China?
F: I miss my mom and dad and my friends.
I: If you go back to China, will you take your son with you?
F: If I go back to China, I will not take Da-ren with me, so he can pass his exam and get into a university.
I: Why did you let Da-ren go back to China?
F: I want him to get better job and life in Canada.
I: Why your wife don’t want to live with you?
F: I think she was embarrassed because I cannot find a job as a doctor and there are so many things she had to learn, like learning English.
I: You have been a nurse in Canada and you have been a doctor, what do you feel?
F: I think it is okay to be a nurse or a doctor because both jobs can help people and I like to help people.
I: Do you want to stay in Canada?
F: I want to stay in Canada because my son can get a better job and learn more.

As far as accuracy is concerned, Al and Chicken still needed to work further on their correct use of tenses, but they showed great understanding of the father. For example, they were able to articulate the difference in the social status of being a doctor in China versus being a nurse in Canada, and how it impacted on the father. Again, this is the piece of information that Da-ren as the narrator does not tell us. They were able to infer also that the father had great job satisfaction despite the change in status, that he is just as happy to be able to help people. Regarding the father’s feelings for his wife, they were able to show understanding of what difficulties that his wife was going through when they first came to Canada: “I think she was embarrassed because I cannot find a job as a doctor and there are so many things she had to learn, like learning English.” On the whole, students showed great improvement in collecting information from the story and making inferences of what characters are thinking and feeling, and the motivations behind their acts. They learned to beware of the limited perspectives offered by the narrator and to try to get into the characters themselves and try to understand the situation from different perspectives. Their character interviews might not be sophisticated but were definitely a major success on their part since it was their first time handling such a challenging task.
As mentioned earlier, in order to increase the authenticity of the task, we arranged to video-tape all the interviews. This helped students to have a greater sense of purpose. They did feel like they were being interviewed, hence giving more meaning to their presentation. This is especially useful for them since it was hard to find an audience in their own core class. We hoped by giving them this sense of the audience through the use of the video camera that they would master the skills of presentation. What we did was to show the taped interview to students afterwards as they had peer assessment together. After filming three groups, there was unfortunately not enough memory and I had to use my cell phone to continue filming Baoh’s group, which turned out to have a poor reception. Therefore, I did not include the transcript of the interview of Baoh’s group here.

9.3.2.1. Commentary.

Students enjoyed doing this task and Ms. Li asked them to write in their journal what they learned from this activity, what they thought they did well and what they could have done better. Almost all of them talked about how much they had learned about oral presentations and their improvement in mastering the skills. For example, Baoh wrote:

**Excerpt 9.31: Baoh’s Journal**

I learned when you are presenting, you must to show your action and don’t just look at your paper. That I can do better at next time. And I learned some English words.

When I’m asking question, I speak clearly and I didn’t always look at my paper. And I had used action from my face. And I was speak loudly.

Melody also shared something very similar to Baoh on presentation skills:

**Excerpt 9.32: Melody’s Journal**

I learned many vocabularies, they can help me to write better next time. I had to know something from this presentation. First, if we want a good mark, we must study hard. Second, if we always look at the paper, it’ll make the interview like a drama show. Last, speak loudly is very important, that’s the responsibility to the audience.

Like Baoh, she mentioned about having learned a lot of vocabulary. This is also found in Chicken’s reflections: “I learn some more how to make a question and some new words”.

What was most interesting with Melody’s entry (Excerpt 9.32) is that she realised that it is the “responsibility” of the presenter to make her speech intelligible to the audience:
“Last, speak loudly is very important, that’s the responsibility to the audience”. This shows her understanding of the purpose of oral presentation. In her journal, Terri also showed an improved awareness of what a good presentation, and in this case an interview, is: “I have few things need to improve like we can try to write more good questions, and I need to do better during the presentation, and try to make it as a real interview” (Terri’s journal entry). Apart from this improved sense of purpose for the task, Terri also shows meta-cognition of the meaning behind the whole activity: “I learned to see something from other people’s point of view. It helps me understand what other people thinks” (Terri’s journal entry).

This awareness of perspectives and the limitations and possible bias of narrators was definitely a first step for students to start problematising the authority of texts and resist the position constructed by the text. Third person narration does not necessarily warrant a more objective narration, because it can also be supporting values of certain social groups or certain worldviews while marginalizing others. By raising students’ awareness of points of view and how they construct the implied readers, we can then work on resisting the constructed positions offered in the text that often privileges certain groups of people over others based on class, gender or race. We can then go on to create alternative readings that enact new possibilities for more equitable power relations (Botelho, 2004; Botelho & Rudman, 2009). This was what we did when we came to the last unit on Critical Reading Strategies which I will describe in the next chapter.

### 9.3.3. Issues Faced by Immigrants

Literacy learning is only meaningful when students can see its connection with their own lived experiences. Apart from teaching them all the literary concepts, I also hoped that our discussion of Yee’s short story could also help them to relate to the issues they were facing as new immigrants. Hence, the last task was to get them to think for themselves what immigrants need in coping with all the social and financial changes. When I was planning this unit, I did not have a clear agenda of what issue we were going to explore. I just had a general idea that the short story would generate some meaningful discussion on some common problems that immigrant families face in the process of cross-cultural integration such as language barrier, shifting homes and family separation,
cross-generational relationship, job opportunities, etc. I intended to let students’ discussion lead us to areas with which they were more concerned and together then we could explore ways to deal with those issues.

As mentioned earlier, students had a heated debate when we came to the part where Da-ren expresses frustration over his future prospects if staying in Canada. He says, “They think big opportunities await them here. But as soon as an employer hears their fractured, accented English, they’ll be dismissed like yesterday’s fish” (Yee, 2006, p. 68). Students were divided in their opinions about employment opportunities and language barriers; some supported Chicken who held an optimistic view while others supported Melody’s view which leaned more towards Da-ren’s less optimistic view (see Excerpt 9.27). At the end of that lesson, I thought perhaps students were interested to know a bit how immigrants were faring as far as employment was concerned. I wanted them to start their research with the family and friends around them. I designed a mini-survey and told them to ask their family and friends these questions:

**A mini survey on employment in Canada**

1. What was your job before you moved to Canada?
2. What are you doing now?
3. How happy are you with your present job? (point 1 to 5, 5 being the happiest)
4. In your opinion, is it hard to find a job? (point 1 to 5, 5 being the hardest)
5. In your opinion, is it hard to find a job in your field? (point 1 to 5, 5 being the hardest)
6. What could be the reasons for the level of difficulty in find a job in your field?

I also had two newspaper articles that I thought were relevant to our discussion and felt that students would be interested to read more about the general immigrant employment situation in Canada. I told Ms. Li about my tentative plan. A few days later, she emailed me expressing her concern over the task’s level of difficulty. She had an opportunity to talk with one of her colleagues about this and wrote back to me telling me what her colleague thought about my plan:

**EXCERPT 9.33: EMAIL COMMUNICATION FROM MS. LI ON APRIL 09, 2008**

...He also believes that the notion of jobs is too far removed from the student’s prior knowledge and experiences that it may be challenging for them to do and relate to.

What do you think? If you would like to go ahead with the job unit, I think we would have to look at how to modify it for Peter and Sakura. The articles may
not work for them, and be too complex, but if there were some picture books that
would be suitable, that could work for them. Also, depending on the task that
they are being asked to do, Peter and Sakura could be assigned a similar task but
in a different modality or to a lesser degree. I think a vocabulary list would also
be good, so at the very least, Peter could do this and it’s still related to what all
the other students are doing....

Ms. Li’s colleague opined that our activity on immigrant employment was too
challenging and remote to students. She especially expressed concern over two students’
ability to participate in the learning. Sakura was the student about whom we had concerns
throughout the term. She had limited language skills and what made it worse was that she
could be easily distracted in class and was unable to concentrate on her work. Peter, on
the other hand, was a brand new student who had just arrived, having been in Canada for
less than a month at the time we were doing this unit. I could understand Ms. Li’s
concern and I totally agreed with extra accommodation for the two students.

Ms. Li’s email made me pause and re-think once again if CL work was really not
doable for beginners. I tried to look at the whole matter in an objective way. First of all,
the topic of immigrant employment emerged in our class discussion. Students seemed to
be very interested in the topic itself and had such a heated debate on what Da-ren says
about job prospects in Canada. I did not impose this on them except that I did make an
effort to have them follow up on the issue through a mini survey and some newspaper
reading that I was about to assign them to do. Second, I would definitely simplify the
newspaper and have them just focus on the main ideas. The first article (M. Rizvi, 2008)
(see Appendix K) presents some data on the present employment situation of immigrants.
Despite the high percentage of skilled immigrants coming to multicultural provinces like
Ontario or British Columbia, the rate of unemployment and underemployment remains
high. The second article (Keung, 2008) (see Appendix K) was about the New Pioneers
Award winners. I just wanted students to focus on one winner named Ellen Xi Yang. As
a 13-year-old Chinese immigrant, Ellen joined the school’s ESL program, and with
perseverance and determination, she obtained awards of achievement throughout her high
school years and was admitted to the Western Ontario University to study to become a
cardiovascular surgeon. In my opinion, the article could not be more relevant to our
students. I would like them to see how this Chinese immigrant overcame the initial
difficulties that she encountered in her study. This was, on the one hand, to offer them
some positive encouragement; and on the other, to see for themselves the possible difficulties that immigrants might face and get prepared for them. I deliberately put the two articles together in order to provide two very different perspectives. The first one gives a broad stroke on systemic barriers immigrants face in finding employment; the second talks about how one can always rise above the situation, and through hard work and determination achieve success. The mainstream discourse on immigrant employment is often that either immigrants are not good enough or that they do not try hard enough. The two perspectives would hopefully provide a more balanced view on immigrant employment and generate more interesting discussion on both the individual and the government’s roles and responsibilities.

I explained my thought and plan to Ms. Li once again after I received her email. After that, she had a better understanding of what I was planning to do and was supportive of the plan. However, the email did allow me to rethink a lot of about CL education and ELLs. The first response of Ms. Li’s colleague to my plan was that those job-related issues would be far too removed for ELLs. Intuitively, my sense was that this was the very problem they were facing on a day-to-day basis. From what my student participants told me, their study and job prospects had always been a major topic in their discussion. This was true especially with Chinese immigrant families who are very concerned with their children’s academic achievement which they perceive as the main determinant in job prospects. I also found that teachers have certain perception of ELLs’ learning abilities, i.e., that they are incapable of dealing with complex ideas. The fact that they do not have the language to express themselves adequately in English does not mean that they are incapable of higher order thinking. The question is how you scaffold their learning and make it accessible to them. Their work might not be as sophisticated as their English speaking peers, but they need to be cognitively engaged and be given the opportunity to engage in more complex learning that improves their academic literacy.

Coming back to the mini-survey, I asked students to bring their survey results back to the class before we started to read the simplified newspaper articles so that they would have some background as they started to read the news article. There were 9 students who brought back their survey results. Most of them asked their family members or relatives to do it for them. On the last question about the difficulties for them to find a
job in the same field, some of them provided the answers in English and some in Chinese. I invited students to share the results with the class while I tallied them on the board (see Table 9.4). I also invited students to elaborate further the kinds of difficulties that their family members faced in finding jobs in the same field. For example, Baoh shared that his father was a math teacher before in China and found that language was the major barrier for him to find a teaching job here. He also mentioned culture as another barrier. I went on to ask what cultural aspects with which his father had problem. He said that for example there were differences in the school culture between the two countries, like in the use of corporal punishment, homework, teacher authority, etc. I also took the opportunity to teach students related vocabulary for this topic.

**Table 9.4: Students’ Survey Results on Immigrant Employment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>jobs before</th>
<th>jobs now</th>
<th>happy 0-5 (5 being the happiest)</th>
<th>how hard to find a job 0-5 (5 being the hardest)</th>
<th>how hard to find a job in same field 0-5 (5 being the hardest)</th>
<th>Reasons for the level of difficulty to find a job in same field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>cook</td>
<td>cook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>a. language barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>electrician</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b. not as healthy as before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>cook</td>
<td>cook</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>c. different culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>electrician</td>
<td>electrician</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>d. keen competition here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreman</td>
<td>stock broker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(with the Canadian-born)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>math teacher</td>
<td>office worker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>e. not easy to get re-training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>police officer</td>
<td>cook/driver</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>f. people may not trust new immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>immigration consultant</td>
<td>librarian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>g. different ways of dealing with things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>cook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We analysed the survey results together (Table 9.4). There were some interesting findings, such as only one-third of the survey participants could find work in their own field, and they were all in the skilled trades. Most of them found it hard to find a job in
the same field, and their satisfaction level with their job was slightly above average. We then used our findings as a background as we worked through the news article (see Appendix K). Students expressed great interest in the articles, especially the one on the New Pioneers Award winners. I also included some comprehension questions to guide and check their understanding of the texts. On the whole, students could follow the discussion and had no problem in finishing the questions. One of the questions we had for the Rizvi’s article “New Immigrants Need Good Jobs” (2008) was “What do you think the government can do to help immigrants find jobs in their own field?” Students had discussion on this and in the end, they turned their ideas into a poster to call for government’s support for immigrant employment. Here are the four participants’ works:

**Figure 9.15: Chicken’s poster on immigrant employment**

![Chicken’s poster on immigrant employment](image)

Chicken’s poster was a bit plain. In terms of creative use of graphics, there was still room for improvement. However, since there was less text message, it was easier to be read. The title, though it might not be as eye-catching the others’, was suitable for the purpose of the poster. The suggestions that he gave were also sensible, which included offering immigrants training classes at a lower price or free in order to learn to work in Canada.
Terri did a great job here (see Figure 9.18). Apart from having an eye-catching and creative title, she also used effectively the information that she obtained from our class discussion, survey results and the news articles that we read in order to provide a background for the immigrant employment situation and the difficulties they face. The graphics are related to the topic and display great creativity. The poster shows a very clear sense of purpose and the audience. The many suggestions that she listed for the government are all sensible—“make some classes for immigrants to learn English”, “send them to retrain on their filed’s job”, or “make some community centres to help them find jobs”, etc. (as shown in original work).
Melody’s work, like Terri’s showed a great sense of purpose and awareness of audience. Again, she provided background information for the immigrant employment situation with the information that we discussed in class. However, unlike Terri, Melody’s is more concise and easier to read. She tactfully used colors to highlight all the suggestions of what government could do to help immigrant employment. The use of short sentences suited the purpose of the poster. She showed a great improvement in her media literacy skills compared to the work that she submitted previously.
Baoh, on the other hand, did not show such a good sense of audience. He must have missed the word “help” in the title “Please them!” as it sounds a bit strange. The two suggestions that he gave suited the purpose but could be written in a more concise way to aid reading. He downloaded two pictures from the web, which did help to illustrate his point on provision of English classes and community service for job search.

On the whole, most students showed an improved understanding of the requirement for this genre of writing. They had a better sense of purpose and awareness of the audience. The suggestions that they gave revealed some deep understanding of the issue. What we found most amazing was that Peter and Sakura, despite Ms. Li’ worry they would not be able to follow the class discussions, were able to accomplish the task and in fact, for Peter, with surprising excellence:
The title Peter used is ‘Government should help new immigrants to have a good future”. Though it may seem a bit too long or not very powerful, it suits the purpose of the poster. Through the good use of the color, the title does stand out well. His graphics were creative, relevant and effective in conveying the topic. The use of the red arrows helps illustrate very effectively the possible differing consequences to immigrants who are provided with and those who are deprived of government aid. The sentences he used are simple, though not without grammatical mistakes. The overall design and the message, however, showed that he completely understood the purpose of this writing.
Sakura’s poster, on the other hand, just provided one suggestion, i.e., to provide immigrants with free English classes. To her credit, the poster showed a great sense of purpose with the graphics and color and an eye-catching title.

9.4. Conclusion

This module “Canada and I” took us almost four months to finish. In each of the three units—“Interesting facts about Canada”, “The Greatest Canadian” and “Don’t Trust Your Parents”—we invited students to study and examine the different aspects of life in Canada. It ranged from simple interesting facts like Canadian symbols, geography and different cuisines to Canadian history and values as reflected in peoples’ choice of the Greatest Canadians. The idea was to enhance their cultural literacy with an aim to empower the new immigrant students in terms of their understanding of the country and also preparing for their academic study. In getting to know this new country better, we also encouraged students to question the mainstream values especially with the choice of the Great Canadians and decide for themselves what greatness meant to them. We also focused on the life of immigrants and the struggles that they had as they adjust to their
new life and identity in a new country. By doing so, we hoped that literacy learning became more meaningful to them as they explore different ways to cope with immigration related family issues and employment. On the one hand, I infused a lot of school-based literacy skills in the in-class activities like research skills, class discussion and oral presentation skills while building up their subject-related vocabulary and grammar structures. On the other hand, we also infused CL in relevant tasks and had them introduced progressively as students were getting more used to the culture of a learning community. In this module, we worked specifically on extracting and synthesizing information; formulating, refining, elaborating and supporting arguments with reasons. Literary concepts were introduced to aid reading literary texts and through analyzing the use of illustrations and narration, students developed awareness of how both the visual and textual narratives construct an implied reading position. This paved the way for our later focus on how to create alternative texts that resist such reading positions.

On the whole, students’ literacy skills improved greatly. Their work displayed great sense of audience and purpose and ideas were more complex and well supported. Students’ involvement in class discussion was on the whole better and hence lessons could often go smoother. Even though most of the time I was still the one leading the discussion, there were more students getting involved and we also began to see students responding to each other’s ideas as shown in the debate on job opportunities for immigrants in Canada. In our discussion on how the use of illustrations positioned us as readers, students showed that they could grasp the skill very quickly. They did have problem at the beginning when they were asked to question the authority of the narrator--his bias and impartial views. Importantly, after continual work on examining the text and weighing different evidence from the text, they were finally able to make logical inferences about different characters’ points of view. In their character interview and poster design on immigrant employment, we saw mature growth in their CL even though language accuracy still needed improvement.

Mid-way through this unit as Ms. Li and I had to decide what we would do next, Ms. Li expressed once again that she found what we did this year was really interesting and that she learned a lot more about CL. The one aspect that she liked most was that she
came to understand more the critical issues related to her students, which helped to mould her identity more as an advocate for ELLs:

**Excerpt 9.34: Interview recording with Ms. Li on April 08 2008**

Ms. Li: I think critical literacy work helped you to get to know the students better as well, I think I can empathize with them even more, and so because I understand the struggle as they are going through, so I have to make sure that they are getting what they need. And also like .. even this whole research project as well, it seems that it has provided me with more insight into critical issues, like in terms of ELLs in general, and I think the workshop as well that we need to bring the ESL issues to the attention to their core teachers, so...

R: Hmm, very good. It’s like you knew it before, but now you are given the opportunity to really understand the difficulties the individual students are going through more vividly.

Ms. Li: Yeah, especially like when they did those stories, the *Spoken Memories*, like that ... I knew they have difficulty, but when they are actually expressing it in their own words and thought, and how many things they have to go through, I think this gave me a greater sense of responsibilities. I really had to advocate for them and make sure that their needs are taken care of and are not being ignored.

Another aspect about CL was that she became more positive about what beginning ELLs could accomplish:

**Excerpt 9.35: Interview recording with Ms. Li on April 08 2008**

Ms. Li: I’ve been worried about the beginners, but it’ll be interesting to see what they can .. I think my answer is more positive about that the beginners can still do CL work, and it’d been interesting to see what they came up with...

Regarding the question whether ESL beginners could handle CL work, we both agreed that it is more a matter of exposure than a matter of ability. Despite Ms. Li’s initial worry that the issue of employment and also the reading of newspaper articles were too challenging to new ELLs, she was now more positive of what they could achieve. Given very different school learning experience, ELLs might find a lot of school-based literacy skills such as classroom discussion, oral presentation, or independent research very difficult. As our experiences proved, given enough exposure, guidance and scaffolding, they could gradually master the skills. The more they were exposed to this type of learning, the more they became proficient in it. It is the same with CL development. The more experience students had, the better they could master it. We both agree that it might take more scaffolding and guidance with ELLs and their work might not be as sophisticated with their English-speaking peers, but they were totally capable of critical work:
EXCERPT 9.36: INTERVIEW RECORDING WITH MS. LI ON APRIL 08 2008

Ms. Li: … like at the beginning, I’m more sceptical about the beginning students with.. like writing a fairy tale with a multicultural (perspective) ... or something along those lines... from a different, or a more critical perspective, but I think now like I can see, I think they may still take more time, but I think they can still do it.

When I looked back at what we did in this module, I began to have a different understanding of what scaffolding meant. Yes, we introduced a number of literacy skills in a gradual manner, like supporting arguments with facts, striving for precision in thoughts, extracting and synthesizing information, etc. We revisited them in all the units and consolidated students’ mastery of those skills. We broke down the literary concepts to help students understand and analyse the short story they were reading. We even singled out individual concepts, like the use of narration or illustrations, to help them come to a better understanding step-by-step of how readers can be positioned differently through these literary devices. We invited students to have different CL practices like problematising the narrated story and looked for its gaps, or challenging the list of Greatest Canadians to dig out its hidden exclusionary values. In retrospect, I think all these scaffolding strategies would not have worked if we had not allowed students to have the space to explore what these texts might mean to them. The character interview for “Don’t Trust Your Parents” and the mini-survey on employment of their family and friends helped them to make deeper connections to what they were reading. Through the emotional and experiential engagements, students came to a better understanding of the complex decisions involved in immigration, no matter whether it was about jobs, study, or to leave or stay, and how each had significant impact on their own lives. Another example is the Greatest Canadian. Students had to see what the Greatest Canadian title meant to them before they could understand what values they upheld as compared to the dominant values held in society. Scaffolding then means more than just breaking things down with concrete explicit instruction and guided practice. It also involves the negotiation of a space for emotional and experiential engagements to make personal connections and reflections. Comprehension in this sense then does not mean understanding of the factual or superficial message, but rather deep understanding. The former suggests a deferential attitude towards texts; the second suggests an in-depth and
critical understanding of what the text means to one and its implications to our lived realities and what actions can be taken to make changes.

There was, of course, still room for improvement. For example, Melody’s strong resistance to the study of the stories of the Greatest Canadian, especially that of David Suzuki, reminded me of the contingencies involving in CL practices and the necessity to keep up with the reflect-act-evaluate cycle (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Despite that, students in general showed significant interest in the module and great progress in their critical/literacy development. As a result of that, we decided that for the remaining months, we would like to focus on some critical reading strategies so that they might use them, not just in the language classroom, but also other subjects.
Chapter 10: Critical Reading Strategies

As mentioned earlier, Ms. Li and I both found that students were making remarkable improvement in their language skills and we thought that they were ready for something more challenging. We found students had gotten used to the class routines and understood our expectations for them. For example, they were keeping their vocabulary lists and would study them either for the weekly quizzes or for their own learning. In addition, the class library was functioning well and students were handing in their reading log on a regular basis. Most important of all, we felt that students had got used to the kind of collaborative learning environment that we had been trying to establish in the class and readily took part in class discussions. They might not be very fluent orally, but they were definitely thinking and participating actively in discussions and activities. They understood that I would always push them to think and invite their opinions. They also knew that they always had to support their ideas with reasons, which would then be subject to the class interrogation. For reading skills, they had started to learn to question the authority of the text and what positions were structured for them by examining how different literary devices like the use of narration and illustrations were used. I felt that it was time to push them further for critical textual analysis in order to see what subject and ideological positions were implied for us as readers and how we might problematise and deconstruct them, and recreate alternative or resistant positions.

The design of this unit followed strictly the instructional framework that I proposed in this research—-a fluid crisscrossing between the textual, personal, critical and transformative dimensions (see Table 10.1). Our goal was to continue to promote students’ comprehension and critical inquiry. To achieve this, we continued to build up their literary knowledge of story writing, which we started when studying “Don’t Trust Your Parents” (Yee, 2006). The different literary elements (like the use of narration, illustrations, setting, characters, etc,) would offer to them categories along which they could examine the text. At the same time, we focused on teaching them how to make questions around the literary elements (textual dimension), questions that helped them make personal connections to the text (personal), and lastly questions on the social issues or ideological messages in the text that helped more in-depth critical scrutiny (critical and
transformative dimensions). We hoped that they could also apply these critical reading strategies in other subjects to help facilitate accelerated learning.

The two main texts we used were *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) and *The Korean Cinderella* (Climo, 1993) which was to be compared and contrasted with the Walt Disney version of the fairy tale.

Table 10.1: Unit Plan on Critical Reading Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading (text types)</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
<th>Language and Skills Focus</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes/Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. *The Other Side* (a picture story by Jacqueline Woodson) | • get to know the major literary elements, e.g., plot, characters, point of view/ narrators, illustrations, style & genre and how they position us as readers  
• examine the issue of race in the story *The Other Side* by learning to pose questions to help them connect and reflect on the social issue  
• examine the ideological values as embedded in *Cinderella*  
• rewrite *Cinderella* to challenge the embedded ideological assumptions | Vocabulary: from the 2 stories  
Critical/Literacy:  
• learn how different literary elements like illustrations, genre, & the use of narrators position us as readers  
• pose questions on personal, textual & critical dimensions to help understand, make connections with, have personal reflections and critique the text  
• identify and challenge the ideological values in texts by rewriting them | Ss are expected to…  
1. write an short essay on a social issue that parallels the one shown in *The Other Side*  
2. re-create an alternative text to *Cinderella* and present their stories to class. |
| 2. *The Korean Cinderella* (a fairy tale) | | | |

10.1. The Other Side

*The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) is about Clover, an Africa-American girl who is puzzled by the fence that separates the African-American from the whites in town. Her mother instructs her not to climb over the fence. One summer day, she notices a white girl on the other side who climbs up the fence and looks at Clover and her friends play. One day, Clover works up her courage and walks close to the fence. Soon both start talking to each other and decide that a fence like that is made for sitting. The two spend time together playing or talking while sitting on the fence throughout that summer. The story ends with expressing the wish that someday the fence will be knocked down.
I chose this story for its thought-provoking message about friendship across the racial divide. I also wanted my students to read a book on racial discrimination from an African-American narrator’s point of view. Some of them had been saying how they were scared of their Black peers, and some actually disliked hanging out with them in school. I would like to know if their perception of the Black would be changed after reading this book.

10.1.1. Posing Questions--The Literal Dimension

One major focus in this unit was to train students to pose questions so that they would be able to critically interact with the text as they read. Specifically, we wanted to help them to pose questions on these three dimensions: the literal, the personal and the critical (M.C. Lau, 2006). The literal dimension refers to questions that promote comprehension of the text. Questions could be about the use of illustrations, the setting, or the plot. Now that my students were more familiar with the literary elements, it would be easier for them to pose questions along those lines. I wanted to go beyond the traditional Reciprocal Teaching model (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, 1989) where generation of questions often stays within the parameters of the text. The idea was to move students from the literal to more thought-provoking questions (relating to self and the world) so as to have a more meaningful engagement with the text. What I planned to do was to start with some direct instruction of how to pose questions. Ms. Li and I gave them some stock phrases or questions with which to start, and we also modelled how to pose questions as students gradually got involved in guided practice on their own.

The first thing Ms. Li and I did was to review the literary concepts with students again since we would be examining the story along the literary elements such as the use of illustrations, narration, setting, characters and themes. We started off with questions on illustrations first since students seemed to be sharp with visual images and their intended messages.

With some guidance and prompting, students were able to come up with some interesting questions regarding the use of illustrations on the book cover. Melody came up with a very thought-provoking question—“Who is the author? Is she a black person?” This really surprised me since I thought students would just focus on the visual image.
first but obviously the author’s name on the cover caught her eye. Indeed the author Jacqueline Woodson is African-American and the narrator of this story, Clover, too. I wanted to know what prompted Melody to ask that question and why she would find it significant to know if the author was Black or not:

**EXCERPT 10.1: CLASS RECORDING ON MAY 15, 2008**

R: Is the author a Black person? Why is that a significant question?
Melody: Because the book “The Other Side” is about racial discrimination or racial separation.
R: Okay. Racial discrimination. Racial separation. so you are assuming that a Black author would look at the issue... First of all, are you assuming that a Black author will be interested in such a topic-- racial separation? Is that right?
Frank: Yeah.
Chicken: The author is ..the Black person’s side.
R: Sorry?
Chicken: The author look at the side is not the white girl’s side.
R: So you are saying if she is a Black person, she may look at it from the side of the Black girl. Is that what you are saying?
Melody: Because these people are standing on the Black girl’s side.
R: Because these people .. it is from the point of view of the Black girl.

The first answer that she gave me was that because it was a book about racial discrimination or racial separation. I wanted to clarify if she was thinking that perhaps a Black author was more interested in a topic like this (In hindsight, I should have used a more neutral word like “‘thinking” than the word “assuming”). Frank thought that there was such a possibility, but as I pursued on, Chicken joined in to clarify for Melody that because they found that the illustration is showing the Black girl in the foreground so it is like the book is written from perspective of the Black girl. Actually if they started reading the story, the narration is really told from the point of view of the African-American girl. From Excerpt 10.1, I found that even though students might not have the technical language (nor grammatical accuracy) to express exactly what they meant, they were already conscious of the concept of perspective and how the writer’s standpoint, values or beliefs might construct a certain point of view (“focalization”) that is intended for the reader. This was a great improvement on the part of the students after the character interview we did in the previous module. I then went on to introduce some concepts like the foreground and the background in an illustration so as to help them see how the use of space structured our understanding of the text. With the White girl shown in the
background and the Black girl in the foreground, the picture definitely allows us to see from the side of the Black girl looking over towards the White girl.

As we went on, one student came up with two other good questions: “Why are they alone? Where are their parents?” This sparked a very interesting class discussion. Chicken immediately objected since he found a page showing the kids with their parents. We looked at the page together and examine together what message the visuals convey:

**EXCERPT 10.2: CLASS RECORDING ON MAY 15, 2008**

R: This is very important because this is the only page where we see the adults, but what happens? Yes, Terri?

Terri: We cannot see their...

R: We cannot see their faces. Okay ask yourself a question. Chicken? Anyone? C’mon, ask yourself a simple question.

Frank: Why?

R: “Why?” Very good! Why? And then think. Yes, Chicken?

Chicken: The Black girl and White girl is the main character

R: Okay. Very good! Possible. Because they are the main characters. The author doesn’t want us to focus on the adults. Possible. Give me another possible answer.

Here we see that students showed greater awareness what message(s) an illustration was trying to convey to readers. Terri noticed immediately that even though the adults were shown in the illustration, their faces were out of the frame. I then invited students to pursue this further and prompted them to ask a follow-up question. Frank aptly replied that they should ask the question “Why?” Chicken came up with a wonderful answer using the literary element he learned. He thought that since it was these two girls who were the main characters, the adults should not be the focus, which I thought was a good inference. I continued to invite them to make guesses why we were not shown the adults’ faces:

**EXCERPT 10.3: CLASS RECORDING ON MAY 15, 2008**

R: Any other possibility why the adults’ faces are not shown here?

Melody: Because there is nothing about the adult.

... 

R: It is not about the adult....

Mike: How come?

R: Yes?

Chicken: It is the same with the adult. They learn the different colors [XXX].

R: Louder, Chicken. Louder. Very good! So Melody said it has nothing to do with the adult but Chicken said, no, no, it’s the same...If they are separated like this, it would be the same in the adult world, because actually it is the adults who tell them not to what?

Mike: Look at each other.

R: Not to stare at each other, not to go to the other side. Is that right?
In Excerpt 10.3, Melody came up with another conjecture that the story has nothing to do with the adults; it is just about the world of these two girls. Mike at once questioned the validity of this conjecture and Chicken joined in saying that actually the children learned this separatist behaviour from the adults. What I like about this exchange is that students were getting more used to interacting among themselves and challenging each other while I was playing more of a facilitator’s role. Most of what I did was to expand a student’s idea, making sure that it was phrased properly and helping all the others understand what points had been raised. This allowed them to move on with their discussion. Another thing I saw here is that Chicken was influenced by the discussions and changed his mind. He was the one who said earlier on that it was the girls who were the main characters, not the adults. Even though he was right about that, as the discussion went on, he realized that the adults do have a role to play here since it is the adults who taught the children about the racial divide. This shows that there was genuine thinking going on.

The discussion went on for a while, and then Frank came up with a different idea:

**Excerpt 10.4: Class recording on May 15, 2008**

Frank: Cos the point of view is the Black girl, right? And the Black girl... the point of view... umm, she just look at the other White girl, not her parent.

Frank thought that since the story was told from the point of view of the Clover, the Black girl in the story, hence this would be the perspective that she would see--she is looking at the White girl and not the parents. What he said was partially correct. As far as this picture is concerned, the point of view is not from the Black girl, but rather from a third person’s perspective. It would be true to say that the two girls were curious about each other; hence the focus was on each other rather than on their parents. Again, I think Frank’s answer showed that he was trying to use the concept of point of view to help him understand the intended message here. I then moved on to ask what emotional impact the picture had on them:

**Excerpt 10.5: Class recording on May 15, 2008**

R: Okay but by showing the picture like this, what feeling do you get?
Mike: sad
R: Why sad?
Mike: I don’t know.
R: By showing a picture like this, what do you feel?
Ss: Sad
R: Why?... First of all by cutting away the head, you are sending a message. What kind of message is that?
Melody: Maybe they are cold and detached.
R: Very good! Cold and detached. You know cold? Very cold, and detached, especially when you cut away the faces... Listen, actually most of you get that, most of you when you look at this picture, you get this sad feeling, but you don’t know why. And then you can continue to ask yourselves, “Why did I get this sad feeling?” First of all there is no eye contact here, but it is also like they are pulled apart. They are apart; they cannot be together, right? And the two people here, especially when their faces are cut away, you can’t see their faces, that means what? There are no feelings shown, so cold and detached. Do you understand? So it is almost like they are pulled away by a person, and you don’t know who that person is. They are separated, and especially, some of you mentioned there is a lot of empty space here, the empty space emphasises the big gap between the two worlds. Do you understand? So when you look at the picture, there are so many things to look at. You can ask yourselves, “What is in the foreground? What is in the background? From whose point of view are we looking at it? Why there is so much space here? Why the space is not shown? Because they are all conveying... they help to convey the message.

Students were able to describe to me what they felt on seeing a picture like this. Mike said he felt sad and some other students agreed too, but it was Melody who was able to describe very concretely her feelings--“cold and detached”. I did not expect that Melody would be able to come up with such an answer let alone knowing those two words. I was so excited to hear her answers that I did not follow up and ask her to explain to me why she got that feeling, but instead I just jumped in and explained for her how those feelings might be created by the picture. I could have pushed her a little further by letting her expand a bit more on how she got those feelings.

After our discussion on the use of illustrations, I moved to other aspects of the story book and invited students to think up questions to ask. I gave them some suggestions and modelled for them and they came up with their own questions. Here was the list of questions students came up with in that lesson:

| Title          | Chicken: Why is the story called “The Other Side”?  
| Melody: Why is the story called ‘The Other Side”, but not “The Fence”? |
| Setting        | Melody: Where and when does the story take place? |
| Story          | Frank: What is the story about?  
|                | Yolanda: How does the story end? Is the ending perfect? |
| Characters     | Chicken: Are the girl’s family immigrants?  
|                | Melody: What do the characters think about the separation? |
By this time, we had not actually read the story in class in detail. Students just read the story on their own and had a general idea of what it was about. Ms. Li and I wanted to set aside some time just to teach students how to make questions and what questions to ask first before we delved into the story and had more in-depth discussions.

I found that in those lessons when we just focused on question generation, students were very engaged and came up with very interesting questions. They might not be all concise and accurate and I had to rephrase for them. There were times when they felt frustrated especially when they could not think of the right words to express themselves or when they found that I could not understand to what they were referring. I found that I had to keep encouraging them and reminding them all the time that it was a process of putting the thoughts together in words, and this was the process we all have to go through. The more mistakes we make, the more we learn.

10.1.2. Class Discussion: Posing More Questions

After teaching students how to pose questions on the textual or literal dimension, I found that students were all revved up to talk more about the story. I decided to delve into the story with the students and invited them to raise questions as we read along. I also gradually introduced to them the types of questions related to the personal dimension and critical dimension helping them to make connections to themselves (personal) and to inquire critically the social issues covered in the story (critical). It was like doing the text-to-self and text-to-world reflection but by teaching students to generate self-posed questions on the two areas, I hoped that it became more explicit to them.

We started reading the first page:

That summer the fence that stretched through own town seemed bigger. We lived in a yellow house on one side of it. White people lived on the other. And Mama said, “Don’t climb over that fence when you play.” She said it wasn’t safe. (Woodson, 2001, unpaginated)

I invited them to make questions. Edison asked “What is the meaning of the word ‘stretched’”? I explained to him what it meant and took this opportunity to raise their awareness of the importance of choice of words since the word “stretched” indicated that the fence which is symbolic of the divide running through the whole town. Another student asked “Why wasn’t it safe?” The answer might seem obvious. However, as we
thought more carefully about it, the question actually helped us to think over what actually Mama was worrying about. Was it the climbing itself she is against, or the fear of what might happen to her girl when seen playing on the other side? What danger actually is she worrying about? Another question they raised was “Why ‘that summer’”? If the fence has always been there, why is it that just that summer it seems bigger to the narrator? The answer could be that the Black girl or the White girl perhaps just moved to this neighbourhood that summer. We could not find answers to some of the questions at this point; we had to read further before we could do that. It was evident that through posing questions, the students became more focused and it also led them to make meaningful inferences.

What jumped out to me on this page was Mama’s ban on Clover’s climbing over the fence. I thought it would be a good point to teach how to raise questions to make personal connections, so I modelled for them a personal question one could ask: “Have I ever experienced a similar situation where my parents asked me to do something that I didn’t feel right or happy about?” Edison, who just joined the class in the second term, shared with us that when he first came to the school, there was a Black student in his class who would like to make friends with him. However, when he went home to tell his mother, she reacted strongly and warned him not to play with Black students because to her they were nasty and mean. Edison ignored her mother’s injunction and made friends with his Black classmate anyway and found that he was not at all like what his mother said. Edison’s sharing of his own experience sparked another discussion on stereotypes and social assumptions, which conveniently took us to the critical dimension. As we were getting deeper into the discussion, I found that I needed to introduce concepts like stereotyping images, bias, assumptions, and racial and gender discrimination to them as well. Students needed those concepts to help them understand the social issue better. I also noticed that not many students could see the parallel of the racial divide described in the book to other kinds of divide like gender or class difference, or even to other races. As we were discussing, I found that students had difficulty in transferring this Black-and-White divide to other kinds of segregation and power distance. They had no problem in understanding the racial focus of the story. Like Edison, students could see the discrimination against the Black in the story and also in their life like in the school
campus but what they could not see right away was the parallel between this racial divide and the gender or class differences. Some of them even had difficulty in seeing themselves in the story—they assumed that Chinese people had never been discriminated against. One student said all the images people had of Chinese were positive and that Chinese were always perceived as smart or hardworking. I was quite surprised to hear that since by that time most of them had already studied the part of history on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway and how the Chinese imported labourers were badly treated. To show them that discrimination against the Chinese community still existed, I related a recent incident about a city councillor who used derogatory remarks about Chinese workers who were thought to be working too hard (“like dogs”) especially when their shops stayed open on major holidays while all the others were closed. The councillor was later pressured to make a public apology to the Chinese community for making such disparaging remarks. I found that I had to make the transference very explicitly to help students to see themselves in the picture, that the story *The Other Side* might be about the Blacks but it could also be about other racial minorities like Chinese. It was only when they saw themselves in the story that they began to see the harm discrimination could bring and started to think how they would react to it. I also had to show how this could as well be about other types of segregation like gender stereotypes. Again, I had to make the reference very clear and explicit so that they understood better how this story could be applied to other types of social segregation. I believed that this kind of analysis of social issues was very new to students. Not only were those concepts like racial or gender discrimination all new to them, they had also never come to think about them in depth. They might have heard of it in the media but had never had the opportunity to pause and think what it had to do with them. That could be the reason why it was hard for them to see themselves in the story and comprehend that this kind of social segregation could happen to them too. After we finished reading and discussing the story, I asked students to write about a social issue which was similar to the one described here. This was to help them to see the relevance of the story to our life worlds. I will come back to this in a later section entitled Assignment (section 10.1.3).
When I did this part again with another group of students who came the ESL class later in the day, Terri shared a situation she experienced similar to the one shared by Edison. In this instance, it was with poor performing students: “Some parents like my mom before, she said, ‘You need to play with people who get high marks’” (lesson recording on May 15, 2008). She found that some of her classmates did not play with her because of the same reason: “Some students with high marks. I just have low marks, so they don’t play with me.” She went on further to say that she would not take her mother’s advice since she had experienced being discriminated against for that reason. Terri’s example showed her ability in seeing the relevance of the story to her own life experience, and making the transference between the Black-and-White divide to other kinds of social divide. In her case, it was about ability--people considered to be disabled in a certain area were often discriminated against. Again, I used the opportunity to introduce to students other forms of discrimination along the lines of race, class, faith, gender, ability or sexual orientations.

In both cases, whether it was with Terri or other students who immediately failed to see the connection, I found that by introducing the social concepts helped them define and name the issues, which then facilitated our examination of them. This also helped them to begin to see the similarities among the different types of social divides.

As we read on, I found that the class discussion became less organized than I expected, since now the class discussion was completely based on the questions students came up with as we read along the book page by page. Students could be asking questions related to the characters or the plot, or could be making personal connections. Questions were from different dimensions, hence we could be moving from the literal dimension to the personal or to the critical dimension. At the same time, I was also modelling to them how to make a good question. I found that in general the questions they asked on the literal dimension, i.e., questions relating to the plot, characters or narrator were much more interesting than those on the personal dimension. One thing that I noticed was that they were not sure what to connect, which I am going to explain in greater detail in later paragraphs. Let us look at some of the questions they asked on the literal dimension first.
As I was having the class discussion with them, I found that some questions were more genuine and thicker than the others—genuine in the sense that students were genuinely interested to find out the answer or that the questions could help us make inferences or comprehend the story or the characters better. At least this was the impression that I had when I was conducting the class discussion. As I was going through my recording, I found that when students came up with what I thought was a thin and not-so-genuine question; I tended to redirect him/her to think of a different question. However, as I re-examined my data and field notes again, I found that actually no matter whether a question was thick or thin, it still helped us better understand the text and it depended on what the teacher did to help students to see that. One example was when we came to the page where Annie and Clover, the White girl and the Black girl, decide to sit on the fence together. One student asked “Why do they want to sit on the fence?” I thought the answer was way too obvious and therefore, did not take it as an interesting question. Students, however, came up with some very different and interesting answers:

**Excerpt 10.6: Recording from class discussion on May 29, 2008**

Mike: They want to have fun.
S: Because they want to be friends.
R: They want to have fun; they want to be friends. It is still a very easy question. How would you change this question so that we will learn more about the character?
Melody: They are ignoring the racial discrimination.
Al: They are tired.
Chicken: Because their mom don’t let them pass over the fence, so they just sit on it.
R: So you are extending the answer a little bit. Because they do not dare yet to push down or cross over the fence yet… They can only sit on it, cos they don’t have the courage to push it down or cross over it yet.

Both Mike and another student saw the question as asking them what the two girls would like to achieve, in other words, the practical outcome they could want to attain. In this case, it is fun and friendship. I thought the question was still too straightforward and might not help us to know more about the character, so I pressed them for a better phrased question. Melody ignored my request and gave another possible answer to the question. This time, she looked at their action from another angle: “They are ignoring the racial discrimination”. By sitting on the fence, they are actually making a statement to the whole world that they would not care about the racial divide that the adult world is trying to impose on them. Melody shrewdly answered the question by
showing the symbolic social significance the two girls seek to achieve by choosing to sit together on the fence. Chicken, on the other hand, took the question as to mean “Why do they just sit on the fence?” What he answered was that since their mothers were just telling them not to cross over the fence and had said nothing about sitting on it, they conveniently choose this option so that they do not feel they are violating their parents’ rule. Al’s answer about the two girls being tired and hence sitting on the fence was possible, but as the context suggested, they were attempting to make friends despite the social barrier, it was quite unlikely that fatigue was the only reason why they decided to sit on the fence.

What I want to point out here is that I went into the classroom with a preconception of what a good question was. I wanted to hear students asking a question that showed their understanding of the story or the character. Hence, to me some questions were better than the others. However, what I did not see was that all questions opened up a space for more discussion and exploration. In the case I showed above, the simple question which seemed to be asking for an obvious answer actually prompted students to look at it from different angles. I could have gone over students’ answers again with the whole class and showed to them how we could approach a question from different angles, which would then help expand their way of thinking together.

Take another example. One student asked the question: “Why did the girl ask for the Black girl’s name?” This again looked like a very simple question with an obvious answer. One’s instinctual response would be that they would like to be friends or they would like to know each other better. This question could be another uninteresting question. However, if we look carefully, the question actually helped us to see the very core of the matter. This was the first question which Annie, the White girl, asked and which also started their conversation. She could have asked Clover, the Black girl something else, like her age or talked about the weather. Annie’s asking for Clover’s name showed that she was interested in knowing Clover as a person. Clover was no longer just “the Black girl” or “a neighbour” (this is how she is referred to in the book before), but rather a friend with a name. I explained to the class why the act of asking somebody’s name was so important in the context of a racial divide. The problem with stereotyping images or racial biases is that people refuse to see each other as individuals
but rather as types. Therefore trying to know a person by his or her name was so significant here. It was a major step in moving beyond the stereotypes to getting to know the person as a person.

Another question a student asked was: “Why did the girl get herself all wet?” The story says that summer rained a lot and on rainy days, Annie, the White girl would go out and dance around in the puddles. When the student raised this question, my first reaction was that it was such an uninteresting question because it just required some obvious answer—she dances around the puddles, so she gets wet. What I did at that time was to divert the student to ask a more “interesting” question instead of trying to get the class to answer it together. As I looked carefully at my field notes and my recording transcripts again, if not because of my preconception of what a good question was, I missed an opportunity. I could have actually led my students to address the questions from different angles. Annie’s letting herself to get wet in the rain, perhaps is telling us how bored she is and how much she wants to play with a friend instead. This could also be telling us more about Annie’s character, for example, that she loved nature and would not mind about getting wet by the rainwater. It could also be showing us that she was quite a carefree person, hence making this friendship across the racial divide possible.

Again, this showed that no matter how simple a question might look, it can actually help us all to delve into the issue more deeply and allow us to understand what is actually going on. What I learned from this was that I should not assume whether a question was “genuine” or “thick” enough in terms of helping us to comprehend the text or characters. Rather, I should treat each and every question as basically all genuine and thick and work with students to tease out the relevance of the question to what we are discussing and guide them to approach it in a way that opens up different perspectives and helps us to see things in greater depth.

With posing questions on the personal dimension, I found that students had no problem formulating questions, especially after Ms. Li and I taught them to use some stock phrases like “Have you ever...?” or “What do you think of...?” or “Have I been in such a situation like...?” This helped them easily form questions that related to themselves. However, as we went on with the class discussion, I began to find that students actually were unsure of the purpose of connecting to the story on a personal
level. The idea of making personal connection is to help readers to connect the story to their own life experience in order to gain insight into the feelings and motivations behind a character’s action and into their own too. Students had no problem coming up with questions and trying to make connections. A lot of times, however, I found that students just asked a question on how they themselves would react were they in the character’s situation without going back to the character for comparison and contrast so as to gain a better knowledge of both the character and themselves. For example, a lot of their personal questions were about what they would feel or do if their parents did not allow them to do something or go somewhere, like what Mama does in the story. This sparked a very good discussion and they had a range of answers: “I would fight on”, “I would be very mad”, or “I would ask my parents for a good reason”, or “I would go back to my room.” After sharing how they would react were they in the character’s situation, they would just stop the discussion there. I found that I always had to bring students back to the story and push them to do a bit more reflective thinking: “Now that you know you would react in this way, does it help you to understand the character and/or yourself better? If yes, in what way?” I found that I had to keep doing this with students so that I could gradually build up this reflective thinking in them, that when they read, it would become natural for them to always compare and contrast themselves with the characters, and imagine what they would do were they in those situations.

For example, Yolanda raised the question “What do you feel on rainy days?” Annie, the White girl, would go out in the rain, dance around in puddles and get herself all wet. The question Yolanda asked could help us understand more what kind of person Annie is. Again, students were eager to tell me what they felt on rainy days, like most of the boys would say they felt unhappy because they wouldn’t be able to go and play ball games. Students could get very excited and carried away when they started talking about themselves. I had to pull them back to the story so that they would then compare and contrast their own experience with the character’s so as to achieve a better understanding of both the story and themselves:

**EXCERPT 10.7: CLASS RECORDING ON MAY 26, 2008**

R: Some of you said you are not happy because you can’t go out on rainy days, because you like outdoor activities. Okay. What about this girl? What do you think is the girl feeling here?
S1: Happy.
R: You think she is happy?
Ss: Yeah
Ss: Lonely.
R: Why do you think she is lonely?
Yolanda: Because no friend.
R: Because she has no friends.
Mike: And also this picture, we cannot see her face.
R: Good and so..?
Mike: So maybe she is crying.
Chicken: How come crying...she is still dancing?

What I liked about this discussion was that students did draw from their experience to try to understand what the character was feeling. Importantly, they were also looking at it from different perspectives, challenging each other’s ideas by going back to the book to find support. Some students thought that Annie is happy while the others disagreed and thought she is lonely. Then Yolanda came up with the point that she had no friends playing with her. Annie is there just by herself. Mike agreed with this by using the illustration saying that her face is not shown in the picture because she is crying. Chicken then challenged Mike’s point and argued that there was no way she is crying and dancing at the same time, that meant Annie must be feeling okay, at least happy enough to be enjoying her dance in the rain. What I liked about the discussion was that students were really trying to use different clues to help themselves to understand the story better. The debate went on for a while and in the end, I summed up all the arguments they had and I invited them to think again if the girl was happy or not:

**EXCERPT 10.8: CLASS RECORDING ON MAY 26, 2008**
R: Do you think she is happy?
Ss: No/Yes.
R: No, right? Okay Chicken and Al, let me ask you again, if she had a choice to play with a friend, would she go for that?
Chicken: //Yeah
Frank: //Yeah, but she is still happy. If she had a friend, she would be more happy.
R: Okay, I accept that.

Frank and Chicken pointed out that the girl did not have to be sad even though she is playing in the rain alone, which I thought made a lot of sense. What we could say then was that she would be “happier” if there was a friend for her to play with. I was very impressed with the two of them, how they weighed the different evidence, challenged my assumption and came to a precise conclusion. It was also impressive that students were responding to each other’s points, showing agreement or disagreement.
What I found from this part of question generation was that it helped students to relate the story to themselves. They often required close guidance as they tended to be carried away and did not know how to get back to the story to continue the reflection. The idea of getting them to think of questions in the personal dimension was to help them have some concrete prompt by which they would pause and compare and contrast their own response against that of the character in order to gain insight into the character’s actions and their own. I found that explicit instruction of how to make meaningful connections with the text was much needed. Yes, students would respond to the text variously based on individual or cultural differences or preferences but this would not guarantee that these personal responses would factor into some kind of reflection that helped students better understand the characters and/or themselves. This needed to be taught explicitly, for example, through teacher’s modeling, and greater exposure would definitely help. Students were still at the initial stage of beginning to develop this habit and skill of self-reflection. Hopefully with more experience of this exercise, it would become natural for students to make personal connections as they read and, at the same time, keep reflecting on how different or similar they were from the characters so as to gain a better understanding of themselves, the characters and of course the story.

10.1.2.1. Commentary.

Despite the fact that students might not always pose the best questions, I found that by asking them to do so, they became very focused and engaged. Our class discussions on this story The Other Side were completely led by the questions generated by the students. Often, we could only focus on a few since there were more than we could deal with given the limited time. I also gained insight into what a teacher might do to ensure that there was meaningful discussion that not only helped students’ understanding of the text, but also helped them reflect on their own values and some pertinent social issues raised in the text. I learned that some questions regarding the text might look simple and/or call for obvious answers, but as a teacher, I could actually help students to address the question from different angles, allowing them to see the possible complex layers and different perspectives. As for the questions that help students to make personal connections, the teacher should show to students how to make the connection in a meaningful way so that it would help them to better understand the character’s choices.
and actions as well as their own. As I said, students showed great enthusiasm in formulating questions and trying to answer each other’s questions. They became very focused and engaged. Ms. Li (personal communication on June 09, 2008) told me later that she noticed in her core history class, she would often ask students if they had any questions but they never had any. She thought it was because they didn’t know how to ask, and she found the ESL class was now ahead of the core class in terms of knowing what to ask. She found that the question generation exercise was very good for the ELLs.

10.1.3. Assignment: “That’s The Way Things Have Always Been”

Throughout our class discussion, we had been touching on issues relating to racial discrimination and other types of alienation but we had not had a chance to really hear what the students had to say about this. In order to help them make the connection to the critical dimension, we started a discussion on one of the statements made by Mama in the story. Clover, the Black girl in the story, is puzzled at the beginning of the story about why people have to be separated into two sides and they never interact with each other. Clover decides to ask her mother about this but Mama’s answer is, “Because that’s the way things have always been.” (Woodson, 2001, unpaginated). I asked the students to write in their journal their opinions of Mama’s statement and think of a social situation and relate it to her statement. Here are the students’ written responses (as shown in their original works):

Figure 10.1: Melody’s assignment on “That’s the way things have always been”

In the society now, women’s positions are same as man. But a long time ago, women were been treating like slaves, and men were been treating like masters. What a big difference between “slave” and “master”? If you are a woman, can you imagine, you are a humble person in the society, and every body treat you like a slave? Of course you don’t want to. But a long time ago, people think that women are useless, stupid, and weak, but men are useful, strong, smart and nobel.

The reasons why people think of this way are, men are stronger than women, only on muscle. In general, men are strong, this is the things always happen, we can’t change. But not means men always have wit. Some men just have well developed limbs but a moronic head. Express easier, means they just have muscle and very stupid. Yeah, some women are stupid too. So men and women should be equal on every where.

If every one knows this, “males are better than females” this thinking won’t been known in so many countries! Maybe government should tell people this thinking is wrong. Or even change some people in government to be women, whatever. And when they ask “Why we should tell every about
Melody had always held strong opinions. The social situation that she chose was gender difference which was relevant to Mama’s statement. She did try to address the issue and explain why there was this power difference—men are biologically stronger but that often made people believe that they were stronger in other areas. In her opinion, since there could be women and men who were equally strong physically or men and women who are equally weak intellectually, they should always be treated equally. Her solution to the problem was that the government should educate people about gender equality and they could start with employing more women in the government to show that they value female talents. She concluded by arguing that if anyone questioned why she challenged such a long standing social belief, she would simply say because women are also part of mankind too.

Of course, in terms of grammatical conventions and use of precise vocabulary, there was much room for improvement. However, this assignment was meant for students to reflect on some social issue that they could relate to after reading the story. It was not meant to be a serious piece of expository writing but just a journal entry. We did not teach them systematically how to write expository writing yet. We had not taught them specific concepts like biological differences, gender equality or affirmative action nor had we analyzed gender inequality in detail. It was hence understandable that Melody did not have the technical vocabulary to express some of her ideas precisely. Despite this, her arguments were strong and on the whole, she managed to maintain focus throughout and the progression of ideas in a logical manner. There was also elaboration of ideas with some specific details.

**Figure 10.2: Terri’s assignment on “That’s the way things have always been”**

> I always saw only girls on the cheer team, but not boys? Why some men say “Women doesn’t need jobs, earn money is the what men do. Women’s job is cook, wash clothes…

> Why some of the people say this? I think is because they think women are all weak, I will say yes. Some of the girls are very easy to cry… but does it means girls can do nothing? How about the other girls? Are they also can’t do anything? That is not fair. ..

> The thing boys can do, girls also can do, look at the Female Athlic get how many medal for their
country! Will you believe me now?

A lot of prisoner they just come out of the jail, they starting their new life. So they try to interview for job. Then their manager asked “did you do this kind of job before?” A man said: “No.. I just come out of the jail...” The manager said: Oh! Thanks for coming. I’ll call you later, after we discuss. Bye, they only ask few questions when they heard the person just come out of the jail, they fail that person. It’s very unfair to that person who just come out of the jail.

I think the reason why the companies not using the people who were in the jail before, because those companies afraid the prisoner will do the bad thing as they did before. So companies won’t employ them.

Maybe those companies use them for sometime. And don’t talk to them in a hard way. Let them try few days then decide employ them or not.

Terri tried to connect Mama’s statement to two social phenomena--discrimination against women and that against former jail inmates. Like Melody, she managed to maintain the flow of ideas and elaborate her arguments with some specific details. For example, she used the example of female athletes who won many medals in international sports competitions to illustrate the fact that women can also be physically strong and agile like men. I like the way she started the piece by using some everyday examples of gender stereotypes to introduce the topic even though she did not state the topic explicitly. As for the second point on prison inmates, the writing might look a bit clumsy, but the fact that she could think of the social stigma on former jail inmates reflected that she understood the connection. There was much work to do with her use of punctuation and other grammatical conventions, but the ideas were there.

Figure 10.3: Baoh’s assignment on “That’s the way things have always been”

When I finished read the book, “The Other Side”. In the story, the black girl’s mama was statement “That’s the way things have always been.” I think it is really important.

And I thought many things of socials situation. The black people and white people always discriminated the immigrants of Chinese people in the school.

Because they have biased to the Chinese people, a lot of immigrants from China do not speak Chinese. Maybe they think Chinese people don’t speak English, Chinese people are short, they are nasty and mean... So maybe people don’t play with Chinese people and don’t like to talked and be close to the Chinese people. And in the class, teacher tell us to choose partners or teams, they usually would not choose the Chinese people. Cause they thought Chinese people are bad, stupid.

I think the immigrants of Chinese people should know some English, that could talk to them, but
Baoh related Mama’s statement to what was happening in his school. He found that a lot of his White and Black schoolmates were not playing nor talking to Chinese immigrant students and/or ELLs. When it came to group work, he found that it was the Chinese ELLs who often could not find a group. He thought that it could be because of some bias students had of these new immigrant students or Chinese in general. He argued, however, that these immigrant students should also be more proactive in that they should help other people to understand their problem by trying to communicate in English. If they did not understand what the others were saying to them, they should just tell them. Baoh addressed a very important issue—often cultural bias arises because of misunderstanding and miscommunication. What he proposed was that we should make sure that people understand us. Of course, what he did not mention was that all of us should also learn to appreciate differences. It was good of him to think of what the immigrant students or ELLs could do to in a positive way in dealing with racial discrimination. As for Chicken, he lost his journal, so I did not get a copy of his work.

On the whole, for this part of the unit, students reacted very enthusiastically, especially to the generation of questions and the discussions following it. Their writing on a social issue related to the story also reflected their understanding of the story and its relevance to their lives.

10.2. Cinderella

The second text we worked on was The Korean Cinderella (Climo, 1993). There were a few reasons why I chose Cinderella to work with students. First of all, we had had quite a lot of discussion on race and I thought a topic on gender stereotypes would be of interest to students. Second, Cinderella should be an accessible text to students since most of them had either heard of or studied the story. It would be interesting to see how they reacted to it now that we were looking at it from a very different perspective.

What I did was to have a group re-tell of the traditional Cinderella story. I knew that students might have learned the different versions, but my aim was not to get down
to the exact detail but to help students to form the story arch and later to have it compared to the Korean version to see how the same ideological messages repeat themselves despite surface differences in the setting or character names.

The retelling of the story was fun. All of them had heard or read the story before, so everyone could contribute their ideas. There were disputes over some details (like whether Cinderella did see the fairy turning an ordinary dress to a beautiful gown or that she fell asleep by the fireplace and just woke up to find herself in the new dress). The focus was just to refresh their memory of the plot development and get them ready for the comparison. I then handed out two versions-- the Korean Cinderella (Climo, 1993) and the Walt Disney’s (Walt Disney’s Cinderella, 1995)--and asked students to compare them along the lines of setting, characters, plot and theme.

Let me first give a synopsis of The Korean Cinderella. In this version, Cinderella takes the name of Peach Blossom who has a jealous mother, Omoni, and stepsister, Peony. They force her to do impossible tasks like weeding rice paddies. Instead of the fairy godmother, it is some magical animals who help her accomplish all those tasks so that she can get to the village festival in time. The magistrate is also on his way to the festival, and as Peach Blossom makes way for the magistrate’s palanquin, she drops one of her straw shoes into the stream. The magistrate shouts to his servants to stop the palanquin, intending to help her retrieve her sandal, but Peach Blossom flees away in fright thinking that the magistrate is shouting at her. The magistrate goes looking for her with the sandal he found, and in the end, they get married. The illustrations show all characters in colourful traditional Korean costumes and the intriguing setting and depiction of Korean rituals add to the strong exotic flavour of the story.

As we started the comparison, it was not difficult for students to notice the differences, especially the details regarding the setting and characters. For example, they noticed that there was only one stepsister in the Korean version, while there were two in the Walt Disney one. Both were set a long time ago, but in the Korean version, there were magical animals, while in the other, there were fairies. They also noticed the differences in the names, the clothes they wear, and the details regarding the family. For example, in the Korean version, we were actually told a bit about Peach Blossom’s family before her mother died and her father remarried the stepmother.
In order to show them there was not much difference between the plots of the two stories, I used a story map to help them identify the similarities in the beginning, middle and the ending of the story. Both share the same story arc with Cinderella/Peach Blossom being ill-treated by her stepmother and stepsisters, then how she is then helped by either the fairy or the magical animals and in the end gets married to the Prince/ Magistrate:

**Excerpt 10.9: Class Recording on June 16, 2008**

R: Can you tell me what’s the problem here?
Chicken: Her mom die?
R: Okay, so what happened?
Chicken: Die.
R: I know but that’s not the only problem.
Melody: And the stepmother.
R: And the stepmother what?
Melody: The stepmother and stepsister…
R: The stepmother and stepsister torture//
Melody: //torment her.
R: Torment Cinderella. Very good! So this is the problem. Is this the problem in both stories?
Ss: Yes.
R: We have the same problem, except that there is only on stepsister in the Korean version. And the climax is what? What is the climax? In the original version, they’re going to have a what?
Ss: Ball.
R: Right, a ball, and in the second version, it is a what? It is a ..
Ss: A festival
R: A festival, right? And Cinderella in the original version is helped by..
Ss: Fairy
R: By the fairy, right? And in the second version, she is helped by..
Ss: Animal.
R: By the magical animals, so she can go to the// ball=
Ss: //festival
R: =or festival. So that is the climax. She is helped by the fairy or the animals so that she can go to the ball or the festival. But there is a problem here..
Frank: Her shoes are dropped.
R: In both cases, right? And in the end, how is it resolved?
Al: The same.
R: How? Okay. Find the right person for the shoe (writing on the story map on the board), and the ending is ....
Frank: They get married.
R: In both cases, right? Get married (writing on the board). Okay, my question is, is there any difference between the stories?
Ss: No, not really.

The discussion went very smoothly. It was easy for students to find that there was actually not much difference between the two versions of Cinderella given the same problem, the same resolution and the same ending. I then asked them to think what
message these stories are telling us. To guide their thinking, I first of all asked them to
describe to me the characters Cinderella/Peach Blossom, and the Prince Magistrate. They
came up with adjectives like nice, kind, merciful, weak, lucky and beautiful for
Cinderella/Peach Blossom; and handsome, rich and powerful for the two male characters.
When I did it with another group of students, they actually discovered the hidden
message of the fairy tale very quickly:

**Excerpt 10. 10: Class recording on June 13, 2008**

R: What about the message of the story? ...... Think! (students are talking in Mandarin). What
is the question?
Mike: I don’t know how to say in English.
R: What is the problem? Ask me.
Mike: The good people.. in the beginning, the good people always..
R: Suffer?
Mike: Yeah, and the end, they always get good…
R: Ending.
Mike: So bad people always..
R: Okay, very good! That can be … that’s the message. Good people will have a good ending;
bad people will have a bad ending. Good people will be rewarded; bad people will be
punished.

R: What is the happy ending in both stories?
S: Marry.
R: And so what, what is the message? Yes, Terri?
Terri: The beautiful girl always can marry a rich..
R: Very good! Tell the whole class.
Terri: A beautiful girl always can marry a powerful and handsome man.
R: The beautiful girl can always get married to a rich and powerful man, right? Very good!....
R: Another message is what? Beautiful girls are..
Mike: Good.
R: Right! This is what the stories say. Both stories are the same--beautiful girls are good, and
who are bad?
Mike: Ugly girls.
R: Ugly girls are bad (all laughing).
Google: The author like pretty girls.
R: Very good, Google. Actually, it is not just the author, if you look carefully; it is not just
these stories.
Mike: Yeah, everyone.

At the beginning, Mike did not know how to put his ideas in English and he was
talking in Mandarin with his friends. I thought he had a problem, but he was actually
trying to figure out how to put it in English. He tried to put his idea together using simple
expressions. I asked him to tell me so that I could help him to put in a simple sentence:
“Good people always have a good ending; bad people always have a bad ending.” He
was on the right track; that is the ideological message behind the fairy tale. We went on
to work out other messages. Terri pointed out that beautiful girls could always get married to a rich, powerful and handsome man, and Mike said beautiful girls were good while bad girls were always ugly. Google pointed out from this he could conclude that the author must like pretty girls. This showed that he was aware how the author was constructing a certain point of view for the readers. I agreed with him but went on to argue that this viewpoint was not exclusive to the author and Mike followed up the point by saying that actually most people held this belief too. The social assumption is that beautiful people are good while ugly people are bad.

We did not have time to go on and talk about how they themselves thought about this assumption. They were all laughing about it, suggesting that of course they would not fall for such belief. Frank did admit. “Marrying a beautiful woman is every man’s wish” (lesson recording on June 16, 2008). It would have been interesting to get students to reflect on their own stance on this if we had had more time for discussion. It was near the end of the academic year and a lot of ESL lessons were cancelled due to various special programs or competitions. It would have been really interesting to see how they relate to all these assumptions—what value they assigned to appearance, how they looked at marriage, and the sexual power relationships. Looking back, this was something that I most regretted not having the time to further explore with students. Mike was right that we tend to like good-looking people better, at least for the initial stage of acquaintance. I am also saying for myself that we tend to associate goodness with beautiful people. Frank was very “frank” in saying that it is every man’s wish to marry a beautiful wife. Without providing them a space to explore their aesthetic and emotional responses to the fairy tale, the activity was just boiled down to just an intellectual exercise.

When we were reading The Korean Cinderella, one interesting question that Mike brought up was this: “Does the story also mention that the girl loves him?” In order to find out the answer, we went back to both stories to check. In Walt Disney’s version, it says, “When the dance ended, Cinderella and the Prince walked in the garden. They were falling in love. Suddenly the clock began to strike midnight” (unpaginated). In the Korean version, however, there is no mentioning of them falling in love. The story just says when the magistrate finally finds Peach Blossom, he immediately proposes to her and “Peach Blossom smiled, too shy to speak, and slipped the sandal on her foot”
First of all, it would be against the culture to say “no” to a marriage proposal from a man of such a high social standing. Secondly, the marriage proposal was like a dream come true—a rags-to-riches story of a poor lady marrying a rich and powerful man. Whether there was romantic love involved was beside the point. It was very interesting to see how this reflected the fact that marriage was still very much gauged in economic terms. It was unfortunate that we did not have enough time to further discuss students’ views on this. Mike’s question on whether or not Peach Blossom loves the magistrate or not did help us to further understand how sociopolitical and economic hierarchies, and power relations among people are established by social constructions like gender and class.

10.2.1. Re-writing Cinderella

As mentioned earlier, we were coming to the end of the term. There was just a week before the summer holiday began. The last assignment was to write an alternative text for Cinderella which challenges the ideological assumptions embedded in the story. We could not give students time to write in class since some ESL classes were cancelled for various year-end school functions, so we gave students three days to complete the task at home. Both Ms. Li and I did not expect too much from them due to the limited time. To our surprise, on the day the assignment was due, they all came back with their stories all well written. What’s more, they had also practiced and rehearsed before coming into the class and they did the oral presentation one by one. Here are the stories of the four students as shown in their original versions:

**Figure 10.4: Baoh’s alternative Cinderella--Ugly girl**

Ugly Girl

Long time ago in the south, there was an ugly girl named “Anne”. People said she was beautiful. Because she had a beautiful and kind heart.

Anne lived with her stepfather and one stepbrother and one stepsister, named Peter and Kelly. Her stepfather always treated her badly, but her step brother and sister always helped her.

Anne had to do all the housework, like cooking and sewing and washing and scrubbing…

One day, Anne went shopping for dinner, she heard some people say these robbers would come to this town. Then Anne came to the market. When she finished choosing the food and paying money, suddenly two robbers rushed into the market. They saw Ann had the money and they robbed her money and ran away.

Then Anne cried, because she thought if her stepfather knew her lost the money, her stepfather would hit
her. After she finished crying she went home with heavy footsteps. Suddenly she saw an old lady tumbled on the street and her arm was bleeding. Then Anne immediately went to her side.

“What’s your name? Are you ok?” Anne asked.
“I’m fine. My name is Alisa, could you help me to go to my house? Please.” the old lady said.

Then Anne was helping her to go home and healed her wound. The old lady was greatful to her, when Anne looked at the sky through window, the sun was gone already. Anne immediately went home. When she came home, her stepfather knew she lost her money she was late coming home, then her stepfather hit her and shut her into her room. And Anne started to cry.

The next night Anne was washing dishes. Suddenly she heard someone knock on the door. Her stepbrother opened the door. He saw two robbers standing there and he yelled and ran away. Anne heard Peter yelling and she went to the door and saw two robbers and they had knives in their hands. Anne immediately told her father and her stepsister.

“Give us your money!” the robber roared, and they were going to poke Anne’s stepfather. Suddenly Anne immediately ran to the front. Anne was got stabbed then she fell down on the floor, and bled.

Her stepfather’s heart was touched. Because he didn’t know his step daughter would do this for him. Suddenly an old lady flew. In fact she was a god. She used her magic to punish the robber and she saved Anne, then Anne lived.

Anne woke up, her stepfather told her what happened. Anne was surprised.
“Thank you Alisa!” Anne said with a smile.
“You’re welcome, you helped me once, that I should help you” the old lady said.

After that, she suddenly disappeared. After time, Anne’s stepfather never yelled to Anne and never hit her. And they were in turn to do housework. They lived happily after.

Baoh (see Figure 10.4) made the greatest changes to the story. Apart from the step-parent and step-children relationship, and the help from a fairy kind of old lady, one could hardly recognize that the story was adapted from Cinderella. He challenged the stereotypes of the evil nature of step-fathers and stepsisters. Instead, we have a stepfather who is cruel at first but is capable of change when he sees what Anne has done for him. Anne’s stepbrother and sister are helpful and kind to her, contrary to the original version. The most interesting part is that the romance between a rich and powerful man falling in love and/or getting married with the main female character, is absent in Baoh’s revised version. What we have instead is the reconciliation between Anne and her stepfather. It was made possible by Anne’s courage and self sacrificial spirit. Although she is ugly, she is beautiful at heart. In the class discussion after each presentation, Baoh said this was what he wanted to challenge--a challenge to the usual stereotype that
beautiful women are kind-hearted. The absence of the romance between a dignitary and a poor girl also sent out a different message that marriage is not the ultimate good ending for the main female character; that her reconciliation with her stepfather and harmonious familial relationships can be as important, if not more.

Terri (see Figure 10.5), on the other hand, did not introduce a lot of changes to the original story. Like Baoh’s Anne, Terri’s Cinderella is ugly but with the most angelic heart. This is the major change Terri did to her story but this time her focus was on the romance. What enchanted the Prince is not Cinderella’s beauty but her gentle and sensitive heart. Cinderella actually declines the Prince’s proposal but he manages to persuade her to marry him after re-assuring her that it is her kind and honest heart that he finds most attractive. The story is well developed and organized, and there is much attention to the setting of the story.

**Figure 10.5: Terri’s alternative Cinderella**

_A long time ago. There was girl just born in a small town. And her parents were very happy with this, and gave her the name “Cinderella.” She was not beautiful when she grew bigger, but she had a kind and honest heart. She was kind to every one. All the animals were her family members. She always play with the animals beside the river in the forest._

_When Cinderella grew more bigger, her mother got sick and they had no money to treat, so her mother dead. A year later, her father married a woman who had two daughters. The two step-sisters always teased her because she wasn’t look good, and they took away all the things that Cinderella’s father brought for her. Her step-mother controlled everything. She didn’t like Cinderella either, so she always tortured Cinderella. But Cinderella’s father, could not help her because every thing were controlled by her step-mother._

_One day the prince made a big announcement, said he is going to choose a wife, and he wanted every women to come of the ball. But Cinderella’s step-mother didn’t let her go. And told her go to the forest and find the firewood. So she ran into the forest and started swinging and crying, all the animals were around her. This time the prince was going to the ball so passed by the forest. Then he heard the beautiful voice, and he saw a girl who was singing to the animals with stroking. But he only saw the back of the girl._

_After that day the prince looked for Cinderella. “Find the girl who was sang in the forest!” Because no one saw Cinderella before so they could not found Cinderella. So the prince decided to go door by door and tried to find Cinderella. When the prince came to Cinderella’s house. Her step-mother locked her in the kitchen. “Please tell all the girls come out.” The prince said. But the step-mother only told her two daughters came “Thanks you very much they are not the person I’m looking for...” When the prince began to leave, he heard some one was singing with crying. “I’ll never forget this melody!” So he went to the kitchen and told the step-mother to open the door. He saw Cinderella and said: “That girl was you I’m sure!! Married me please!!” “I can’t be your wife! I’m ugly... you must find other girl that is beautiful to marry you!” Cinderella said with cried. “No, you are beautiful because you have a kind and honest heart. I will not regret this decision I made.” Cinderella promised so they married and every day was happy to them._
Melody’s story was nine pages long. It was like a story book on its own. She put in great effort and gave quite a twist to the original Cinderella fairy tale and combined elements from a couple of Chinese legends. I’m showing just the last three pages of the story (Figure 10.6) because of its length. The story takes place in a country called Mangla a long time ago. The story begins with Mrs. Lawrence who gets a promise from a fairy (who is disguised as a carp) that she would soon be pregnant. Soon she gives birth to a pair of twin girls, Lilian and Lynn. To celebrate, they hold a grand ball, but forget to invite the oldest witch which angers her and she casts a spell on one of the daughters (Lilian) that she would grow up to be heartless and mean. Soon they both grow up, both looking beautiful but of course, Lilian is heartless and mean under the spell but everyone forgives her and is sympathetic for this unfortunate girl. One day, the Prince is looking for a wife and every girl is invited to the ball. Both Lynn and Lilian got invited, but Lynn already has a boyfriend named Ray and does not want to attend the ball. Lilian, on the other hand, would love to get married to the Prince. In the end both go to the ball and the Prince falls in love with Lynn who is not only beautiful but also graceful and gentle. The next day, the king and queen declare that the Prince is going to marry Lynn. In order to get out of this marriage, Lynn agrees with Lilian to let her disguise as her and get married. However, soon after the marriage, the Prince discovers his wife is not that gentle and graceful sister that he would like to marry, and issues an arrest warrant to all three of them. Figure 10.6 shows the rest of the story when they are taken to the court for trial:

Figure 10.6: Melody’s alternative Cinderella

[The speech bubbles are transcribed here:]

The king was very angry, and he arrested Lilian, Lynn and Ray.
“Lilian Lawrence,” the judge asked seriously, “Why you replaced Lynn Lawrence to be the bride?”
“I …” Lilian didn’t know how to explain.
“Judge! That wasn’t Lilian’s fault”, Lynn shouted, “I threatened her to replace me, because I didn’t want to marry Prince Charles!”
“Is it true? Lilian Lawrence?” Judge asked.
Lilian saw Lynn nod to her, “Yes.”
“So now, you are free, thank you to tell the truth. Never do this things again. Promise to the god.” Judge said.
Lilian promised, and went out.
“Then, Lynn Lawrence, Ray Eaton, can you guys explain all the things clearly?” Judge turned to Lynn and Ray.
Lynn and Ray explained all, and judge declared, that Lynn and Ray should be killed on the gallows.
“Wait.” Prince Charles said, “Lynn, I give you a chance. If you marry me, I will send Ray to home, give him freedom, and never mention this thing. If you don’t, I just kill him now. Let me ask you. Lynn, will you
“Marry me?”

“No!” answered Ray, he shook his head crazily.

“Let her answered!” A servant slapped Ray.

“Don’t hurt him! I will! Send him to home now!” Lynn cried, despairingly.

“Not now, when we finish our wedding.” Prince Charles turned to the servant, “Send him to the jail first, keep him alive.”

Then, there was a majestically wedding for Prince Charles and Lynn.

Lynn was on the way in the coach. She started from the palace, and travel around a part of the city, then back to palace, marry with Prince Charles.

The coach through her house, she saw Lilian, looked like she was leaving home. She got all the money from her parents, she’s a rich woman now.

Then the coach through a little path, she saw her friends played on the bridge.

After, she cross a lake, through a wood, she felt the rest of her freedom was flying away.

Last, she saw a cemetery.

“Coach man,” a servant said, “change a way to palace, here’s a cemetery, it’s unfortunate.”

“No, don’t”. Lynn stretched her head out of the coach, “I saw Lilian.”

The coach drove in the cemetery.

That was Lilian. But, why she was there?

Lynn ordered coach man drive close, and she saw the name on the gravestone.

Ray Eaton

She couldn’t believe her eyes.

A few hours ago, Prince Charles’ servants sent Ray’s remains to Lilian, and Lilian felt sorry to Lynn, so she bought the best place in the cemetery for Ray.

“Prince Charles... killed Ray...” Lynn murmured.

Suddenly, lightning flashes and thunder rumbles.

Ray’s grave split a big crack.

Lynn run through to his grave without thinking.

Her tears fall.

And she was crying out Ray’s name.

She ran through, didn’t stop.

And never stop.

Until she went straight into Ray’s grave.

The world was silent.

The grave closed.

Dusts were still flying up around the grave.

But Lynn and Ray were disappeared.

And Lilian screamed out.

Everyone saw that.

Two butterflies, fluttered around the grave.

And little by little, disappeared.

THE END

Postscript

Later, Prince Charles searched the grave, but there was nothing left... Two butterflies, no one saw them again. Maybe they lived somewhere between the Heaven to the Hell...

Both Ms. Li and I were impressed by the effort and time that Melody devoted to this story. Despite some common grammatical mistakes, the writing is very well organized and contains many vivid descriptions that showed her great imagination. She
also managed to use creatively details from other Chinese legends to weave out a very entertaining story that grabbed our attention throughout. The ending where Lynn and Ray were turned into butterflies was a reference to the famous Chinese legend *The Butterfly Lovers* or *Liang Zhu* where the two lovers, because of family’s opposition, can only rejoin each other in the grave when their spirits turn into a pair of butterflies emerging from the tomb. Melody also used dialogue in an appropriate way and the use of short sentences at the end almost gave it a poetic touch, making it ever more emphatic. After the presentation, Melody pointed out that in her story she would like to challenge the idea that all kind-hearted people will be duly rewarded and bad people punished. In her story, the Prince is no longer a saintly young handsome noble, but rather someone who is fallible, who can be consumed by his selfish desire and power which leads to Lynn and Ray’s deaths. Also, the two biological sisters, not stepsisters, and Lillian’s evil nature could be attributed to some unfortunate events that were no fault of her own. Yet in the end, despite the spell, she shows sympathy to her sacrificial sister and uses all her money to buy Ray the best lot of land in the cemetery, which shows growth and change in her. This is to challenge the type cast of the bad sister(s) in the traditional Cinderella story too.

**Figure 10.7: Chicken’s alternative Cinderella**

*The English Cinderella*

Long ago in England, a girl named Cinderella. She had born into a poor family. But one day her mother was dead, so her father remarried. Her stepmother is proud and haughty. Her stepmother had two daughters, and their age were same as Cinderella’s. The two stepsisters were bitterly envious of Cinderella because she is beautiful.

One day the village having a festival, the prince invited all the girls in the village to it. But the two stepsisters don’t let her go, she was very sad that she can’t go to the festival. Suddenly some one knocks the door. When she opens the door, she saw Jesus. Jesus give her beautiful cloth and shoe, and than help Cinderella to get there.

When she gets there, her two stepsisters saw her wearing beautiful cloth and shoe. They were very angry, and they are going to beat Cinderella up. Cinderella ran away, at that time the prince saw Cinderella, he commanded her to stop. But Cinderella couldn’t wait cause her two stepsisters are going to beat her up. As she fled. She lost one of her shoes. The prince wants to find the girl whose fits the shoes, At last the prince had find Cinderella was the girl that he was finding. And than the prince marry her and live together happily.

Chicken’s revised version of Cinderella (Figure 10.7) was the least interesting among the four. He did make changes to the original story, like the setting and some details in the plot, but basically, the story still followed the same problem-resolution arc
as the traditional one. Chicken must have mistaken my instructions for the assignment, since he had always been very active in class discussion and would always come up with interesting ideas. One would have expected that he could produce some thoughtful work when it came to written assignments. Chicken, however, was never strong in his writing, as shown in his other assignments. Despite the absence of any challenge to the ideological messages of the original version, Chicken’s *The English Cinderella* was quite well developed on its own and he did pay attention to the details so that the story ran quite smoothly.

### 10.2. Conclusion

On the whole, students seemed to enjoy this unit and had fun especially in writing their own version of Cinderella. In the end-of-unit interview with the four students, all of them found that the unit was useful and interesting. To Melody, the work on the fairy tale was most interesting. Since she had read them in China and in Chinese, she found it familiar and hence easier to understand and carry on discussions about it. Terri, on the other hand, thought that the unit helped her to learn how to think and more importantly, “It help us don’t follow *what other people think and have our own way of thinking*” (interview recording on June 19, 2008, words in italics show original speech in Cantonese). Melody also shared that she started using the questioning technique to help her understand the texts she read and when she did her book report:

**EXCERPT 10.11: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON JUNE 19, 2008**

Melody: When I start reading, I begin to think about some questions… When I wrote the report, the book report, I can use the questions and write the comments.

Chicken, on the other hand, even though he thought the reading strategies he learned were useful, he could not see how he could apply them in his study. For example, he said it was quite time consuming to always think and raise questions as he read along:

**EXCERPT 10.12: INTERVIEW RECORDING ON JUNE 19, 2008**

Chicken: You haven’t had much time to think of it… Like you have to study, right? You don’t really need this..

Melody: Umm.. I think we need, but we don’t have so much time to do it.

Chicken did not really see the relevance of raising questions or how it would help him in his study. In the previous interview, Chicken had mentioned that learning how to
formulate and support one’s opinions with reasons was good for his study of other subjects like science (see Excerpt 9.16). He would not mind the teacher asking him questions and pushing him to think, but he would think it was time consuming to pose questions on his own. Melody disagreed with his point about not needing to pose questions, but she admitted that it did take up much time. I could understand their concern since when you interact with a text, you begin to question, make inferences, look for clues to clarify, anticipate or draw conclusion, etc. In short, it involves more work. Chicken later also shared that it was quite hard for him to keep thinking or posing questions as he read.

Baoh as usual was very quiet. He just said the unit was useful for him but was not able to say in what way he found it useful.

One of the reasons I chose the story *The Other Side* was to see how they looked at the issue of race now after we discussed the issue of bullying in the first term. Melody said that there was still racial discrimination at school, but “in [her] mind, black, white, and yellow is the same” (interview recording on June 19, 2008) and she would treat everyone in the same way. Chicken, on the other hand, said there were still people whom he disliked, not because of their race, but because of the behaviour and personality. He gave an example of a classmate who always said “bad words” to him. When asked if this would affect his opinion of the race this classmate belonged, he admitted that it did. Terri shared to me that what she learned most from *The Other Side* was the importance of taking the first step in ending the racial divide. What the Black girl, Clover did in the story was to walk closer to the fence, hence starting the conversation as well as the friendship between her and the White girl. Her thoughtful answer showed great reflection on her part and the study of the story did have an impact on her at least on the level of awareness.

On the whole, both Ms. Li and I were very impressed by students’ performance and progress in this last unit, especially in terms of their active participation and interest in class discussions and their written assignments. There were a few things I learned about CL from this unit. In helping our students to critically interact with the text they are reading, they need some tools or methods to begin with in order to develop a critical stance or disposition. Question generation could be a starting point, especially for
beginning ELLs since it is less intimidating to pose questions than to answer them. By guiding them to pose questions around the textual, personal and critical dimensions, they were made aware of a range of aspects they could focus on in reading a text. Students showed great interest in posing questions and it helped them to stay focused and engaged. However, it was I who tended to pre-judge their questions and nudge them to re-phrase a question in such a way that I thought would be more genuine or interesting. What I could have done was to just work with the questions they posed and find answers by exploring different perspectives. I found that no matter whether it was a “good” question or not, students’ responses reflected that it could actually help them dig deeper and expand their thinking. It is the job of the teacher to tease out the relevance of any question and help students to approach it from different perspectives. The second thing I learned was that students actually needed to be taught explicitly how to make personal connections with the text and how to reflect. Students might respond to a story differently but this might not guarantee they would reflect on their emotional and/or intellectual reactions. Cai, quoting Bleich (1978), pointed out that readers’ aesthetic responses can be categorised into three basic modes—perception, association, and affection:

In the perception mode, the reader notices what is interesting, meaningful, surprising, confusing, or whatever catches her attention; in the association mode, the reader relates to the characters, events, or any other aspect of the story; and in the affection mode, the reader expresses her feelings and emotions at what happens in the story. (Cai, 2008, pp. 215-6)

What Cai argued is that these aesthetic responses can form the basis for critical reading, which echoed Misson and Morgan’s (2006) argument that CL work should start with students’ experiential and emotional reactions to the text (rather than jumping right into rational textual critique) and allow them to explore the different social conditions that structure the emotions that are generated by reading the text. I am in total agreement with their arguments but what I want to add is that ELLs, especially when they have no prior experience of making personal connections and/or engaging in reflective practices, need to be taught or shown clearly how to do it. Teacher guidance, explicit teaching (like through modeling and thinking aloud) and more exposure to this kind of practice will definitely help beginning ELLs to gradually develop the habit of critical reflection. Also as they were more engaged in CL practices, they needed important concepts like
stereotypes, gender and racial bias or power relations to help them name the social issue as well as to carry out discussions. Of course, without a space for personal reflections on their emotional engagements, students would only be involved in an intellectual exercise. This was something that I regretted not having enough time to practice with my students when we were reading the Cinderella stories.
Chapter 11: Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings of this one-year research on CL work with ELLs, and will discuss them with reference to some of the theoretical concepts that informed this study.

My research on CL work with ELLs was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the processes involved in implementing an integrative approach of CL with regard to the instructional choices the teacher and/or researcher make, and the negotiation of teacher and student identities?
2. What are the possible dilemmas, challenges, constraints, and limitations the teacher and/or researcher, and students face in the process?
3. And to what extent does the project facilitate students’ critical/literacy development?

To present findings for these questions, I am going to divide this chapter into four main sections. The first section focuses on the instructional choices the researcher and/or teacher made in the planning and implementing of the integrative CL program that was geared to the purpose of student empowerment. The second focuses on the teacher—the changes that she went through in her conception as an ESL teacher and the role of CL in the ESL classroom. The third section deals mainly with the student participants (the four main participants Terri, Melody, Baoh and Chicken in particular)—their perception of themselves as ELLs, and the extent to which their critical/literacy development was improved in the process. As I am discussing the instructional choices, the changes both the teacher and students went through, and students’ progress in critical/literacy development, I will also touch on the challenges, limitations and constraints that they faced in the process. In the fourth section, I will mainly focus on those challenges and constraints that I as the researcher and teacher of CL faced in the whole process and some of my reflections on CL work.
11.1. Instructional Choices

The design of this integrative CL curriculum followed very closely the theoretical concepts of sociocultural theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2005; Vygotsky, 1987) which emphasise the social aspects of learning and the importance of helping students to become a legitimate member of a learning community that scaffolds learning and engages in critical inquiry. The design was also informed by the theory on literacy engagement (Guthrie, 1996, 2004) and the Academic Expertise Framework (Cummins, 2001, 2004) which calls for the integration of transmission, constructivist and transformative pedagogical orientations that are built on collaborative power relations between the teacher and students. This collaborative teacher-student interaction encourages students’ identity investment, hence promoting cognitive engagement. The integrative instructional model that I devised based on the theories mentioned above allowed me to have a dynamic structure that dealt with students’ urgent structural language needs (textual dimension). At the same time, it helped them make meaningful connections between what they learned and their lived realities (personal dimension), encouraged critical reflection and analysis on assumptions as conveyed by different cultural texts and lastly, supported their creative reconstruction of these texts to address those social issues. I found that at the beginning of the program, the focus was more on the textual and personal dimensions as shown in the work that we did in the bridging period and the module on “Me and My Family”. As we moved along, students were more and more engaged in critical discussions and analysis (critical dimension). They were given the opportunities to create counter texts that resisted or challenged the ideological messages found in social texts (transformative dimension). Deliberate effort was also made to help students make connections between the texts that they read and their emotional investments in them. This was to encourage reflections on some personal tacit beliefs of different social issues we discussed. Having said that, what was reflected in the program was not a linear “progress” from the textual dimension to the critical and transformative dimensions, but rather it was more like a spiral learning model by which we strove to crisscross the four dimensions in each module/unit. We kept asking ourselves what possibilities that there were for students in terms of their learning of the linguistic skills for decoding and comprehending textual messages, as well as critiquing
and creating alternative texts. At each stage, new linguistic resources and critical reading strategies were introduced building on the old ones which were revisited and integrated into the present activities or tasks. This study did show that there was a relatively long lead time and the pacing was slow especially at the beginning, I will explain the reasons for that later in this chapter. Importantly, the findings showed that ELLs--even at their beginning stage--with careful scaffolding of learning that was meaningful for their lived realities, were completely able to handle CL work. In the following section, I am going to highlight some of the key instructional options made in the implementation of this integrative CL program that were empowering for the ELL participants.

11.1.1 Students’ Experience as the Curricular Texts

One of the main curricular choices made was to have immigrant students’ experiences as the main focus for the curricular material. Both Ms. Li and I made sure that the topics chosen allowed students’ “voice” to be expressed. We wanted them to be able to talk, write, or read about their unique cross-cultural experiences and struggles as immigrants going through the acculturation process. For example, the module “Me and My Family” allowed them to share, explore, and negotiate their unique cultural and linguistic heritage and identities. Giroux argued that the notion of voice “constitutes the focal point” for a critical theory of education as it “represents the unique instances of self-expression through which students affirm their own class, cultural, racial, and gender identities” (1988a, p.199). I did use mixed codes (Chinese and English) judiciously to facilitate explanation and instruction (Cook, 2001), and to motivate students to question and express thoughts they would not able to express in English. Apart from that, we used a range of multicultural texts which included My Name Jar (Korean-American experience), Painted Words and Spoken Memories (Mexican-American), “Don’t Trust Your Parents” (Chinese-Canadian), and The Other Side (African-American). Students found their cross-cultural experiences and struggles reflected in these multicultural texts, and hence could easily relate to them in a meaningful way. We did not just read these multicultural texts with students but also engaged them in critically examining the struggles immigrants went through and exploring ways to deal with them. I will come back to this point in the next section. The idea of having minority students’ life
experiences as the curricular material and allowing their “voice” to be heard helped send out a message to them that their unique cultural and linguistic experiences mattered in the ESL classroom, and were valuable as an integral part of their new cross-cultural and linguistic identity. Through the reading of the story *My Name Jar*, for instance, and the series of identity-affirming activities related to name origins and the story of their family, together with the writing of “identity texts” (for example, the “I Can” and “I Am” poems), students were repeatedly sent the message that their cultural and linguistic resources and heritage were highly valued in the ESL classroom.

As mentioned in the Background section (Chapter 1 section 1.1), ESL education embodies an inherent paradox (Rockhill & Tomic, 1995). It is both empowering and alienating at the same time. Given English as the dominant official language in Canada, helping students to master the language is empowering. Yet under the hegemony of English, the colonizing discourse is that non-English speakers or even speakers of English with an “inferior” accent are deficient and incapable. All their experiences, credentials, degrees, cultures and histories are subjugated by English language policies and practices. Rockhill and Tomic (1995) pointed out that the “immigrant” identity brings the constant message that “one is an ‘outsider’, does not belong, is inferior… English is used as a tool in this take over when it serves to judge, to segregate, to demean a person’s knowledge--when it serves to subordinate certain knowledge and communities” (p. 211). Rockhill and Tomic proposed a “situated ESL” approach which challenges both what we talk about in the ESL classroom and in what language we talk about them. To counter this linguistic dominance, immigrant students’ cultural and linguistic identities and experiences which are often relegated as irrelevant in an ESL classroom should instead be validated and appreciated. Bilingualism and bi-culturalism should also be appreciated as an asset rather than dismissed as a liability. The different activities that we did around students’ name stories, family photo stories, and the various poems that validated who they were and their talents and abilities became a very powerful affirming message to these students that they were not inadequate, inferior and deficient as the mainstream discourse would describe them. The “critical” aspect of this CL that was built on the validation of immigrant students’ identities and experiences lay in its challenge to the colonizing effects of the linguistic dominance. I had always
believed in the importance of helping students to feel confident about themselves, but I only started to fully understand the urgency of the identity-affirming aspect of CL for immigrant students when I came to know how they were discriminated against in school on a day-to-day basis because of their lack of English competence. As more and more students were sharing their hurtful stories of discrimination to me, it became even clearer to me that there was the urgent need to counter the discursive practices of subjugating immigrant children’s native language and identity.

Of course, when I used the term “voice”, I do not intend toessentialise students’ experiences and treat them as if they were unitary. As much as their “immigrant identity” is a discursive formation, their “voice” as channelled through their identity texts and/or personal stories, was similarly discursive in nature. “Voice” in this sense refers to students’ representations of aspects of themselves, which is situated and not universal or unitary. By allowing them to re-imagine and re-present themselves from a perspective that resisted the dominant derogatory discourses on ELLs, they came to see the possibility of change, at least on the personal level, if not on a grand scale level (Kamler, 2001). The writing of identity texts not only allowed them to affirm their cultural and linguistic identities, but also helped them take on a “literate identity” (Flores-Dueñas, 2005) that countered the dominant discourse that ELLs were illiterate.

The ELL participants showed great interest in the activities mentioned above and were able to come up with very creative stories and poems exhibiting great levels of creativity and engagement. Ms. Li found this aspect of the CL program very valuable and mentioned in an interview that she would definitely include this aspect in her planning for the following year:

**Excerpt 11.1: Interview Recording with Ms. Li on March 12, 2008**

R: If next year, when you’re planning you curriculum, what would be your focus? Would this program also affect the way you plan your program next year?

Ms. Li: I think in terms of helping them to negotiate their identity, I would include more. I would include that unit for sure, and also in terms of recognize their experiences, and that kind of stuff, for sure.

After the research, I had the chance to present with Ms. Li on the project we did in various conferences (which showed a great change in Ms. Li’s attitude towards CL which I will discuss later). In a follow-up interview, conducted a year after the conclusion of the research, she shared with me her reflections on the research:
**Excerpt 11.2.: Interview Recording with Ms. Li on February 18, 2009**

Ms. Li: I think the research was very valuable. As I reflect on it more, it made me realise even more how important it is with the curriculum to have a critical approach in the class, and also adopting the different approaches of critical literacy, not just the critiquing the text, but also giving them their voice. I still try to do that with my ESL class this year. So this year, I have a different set of students. They are handling different messages, like the ELLs are not good, or they don’t know anything. So I read with them *The Name Jar*. They did a story of their name as well, and they did the acrostic poem with their name. And I can see how many of them emerged with a better sense of themselves, and that they are not worthless and useless.

... I think the ESL has been very successful, especially with the whole identity theme, what they can do, focusing on themselves, and their own cultural knowledge, their own prior knowledge. That part was very successful.

Of course, not long into the program, both Ms. Li and I soon realized that this pedagogy of inclusion had to be embraced by the whole school before students could really feel that they were accepted as legitimate members in this learning community. This proved to be the major constraint we encountered in the implementation of the CL program. We did try to push the inclusive agenda further through the Lunch and Learn PD session which however was not as well received as we had hoped. Despite that, teachers who came to the session did gain insight into how they could better relate to and accommodate ELLs (see Excerpts 8.19 & 8.20). The identity-affirming agenda in our CL education also proved to be a significant first step in engaging these students’ learning.

**11.1.2. Participatory Education--Critical Literacy in Action**

The idea of reading multicultural texts and having students’ experiences as the central curricular material was intended not only to affirm their cultural identities, but very importantly, also to engage them in critical examination of the struggles that they were going through in the acculturation process. It also sought to encourage them to find creative ways to effect and envisage possible changes to their immediate social environment. Pennycook (2001) argued that it is important to start “ESL and literacy classes with a critical exploration of student contexts rather than an *a priori* concept of what they need to know” (p. 102). His stance is supported by Norton Pierce (1995) who similarly called for classroom-based social research where students are involved in a dialogic process of exploration and action on their social realities while learning the
target language. When I found out that students—especially the girls—were faced with different forms of verbal and even physical abuse and alienation, I made an immediate decision to insert a unit on bullying, which was strongly supported by Ms. Li. As we read the combined stories of *Painted Words* and *Spoken Memories* (Brandenberg, 1998), we used the categories of target, bully, perpetrator and bystander to understand why people bully and explore ways to deal with it through a range of literacy activities. For example, students designed an anti-bullying poster addressing the bullies or the targets. They re-wrote their own bullying experiences through which they negotiated and re-imagined a more assertive and self-affirming identity. What’s more, students were engaged in critical discussions on related social issues like stereotyping along race and gender categories. Through the discussions, students’ attention was drawn to their own contradictions and biases. For example, James believed that all Vietnamese people were impolite; hence, his Vietnamese classmate Jerry was no different. Terri realised that, because of the family and media discourses circulating around her, she held a very biased belief that all the Blacks were “trouble makers”. Definitely more time was needed to effect any significant change in these students’ beliefs, but the discussion provided a very important first step in raising their awareness of how pervasive and entrenched a lot of these social biases were.

On the other hand, in order to get the school’s attention and involvement in stopping these bullies, Ms. Li and I encouraged students’ active involvement in the Lunch and Learn PD session by inviting them to read their own “Spoken Memories” bearing witness to their own struggles. For the first time, these ELLs had a real audience listening to what they were going through and showing interest in and concern for their personal problem. This did not only give them a “voice” of their own, but also became a great incentive for them to perfect their writing and oral presentation skills through numerous practices and rehearsals. Although the session was not as well attended as we would have hoped, it did effect a change on those who attended the session. For example, one science teacher decided to take a different approach in her assignment. Instead of relegating these students to a made-easy task, she let them choose to work on an earthquake project which everybody else was doing. Also, she allowed ELLs to research and work in Chinese and had their work translated back in English afterwards. What
motivated the ELLs to do their best was this teacher’s trust and respect in them as independent and capable learners. The teacher was not disappointed--these ELLs produced an earthquake project of high quality, even better than some of their English-speaking peers (see Excerpt 8.20). In addition, the PD session helped get the attention from the administration level and subsequent disciplinary actions were taken to ensure that the ELLs were free from bullies.

Another example was the “Canada and I” module. In reading the story “Don’t Trust Your Parents”, students were engaged in exploring the difficulties faced by immigrant families in terms of the stress from finding employment and pursuing English study. Through analysing the perspectives of different characters in the story, students came to a better understanding of the complex struggles immigrant families face (e.g., the choice between returning to home country or staying; the strains and stresses immigration brings to marriage, parent-child relationships and financial situation, etc.). Students also did a mini survey on the employment situation of their family and relatives, which was in response to their heated debate on immigrants’ employment opportunities as we were discussing Da-ren’s pessimistic outlook for his own future. The survey helped them to get a clearer picture of the barriers immigrants faced in employment. They then designed a poster proposing different measures the government could take to help immigrants integrate. Some of their ideas might not be very sophisticated, but definitely, their language skills developed as they became involved in this exploration of their own social situations. Through this kind of emergent curriculum and participatory education (Auerbach, 1995) which involves students in a critical exploratory process of their real concerns, they are able to simultaneously develop their language skills and come to a better understanding and control of their own situations. This echoes CL advocates’ insistence on reading and writing as “part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82).

11.1.3. Critical and Academic Literacy

Perhaps the major feature of the present CL study was that it spoke against the general assumption that ELLs are unable to handle complex literacy learning. The year
before this research study when I volunteered in Ms. Li’s ESL classroom, I found that most of her time and effort was spent on building students’ basic vocabulary and comprehension skills out of her best intention to make learning “more accessible” to students. But they were often introduced out of context and compartmentalised into discrete skills like sounding out words, or answering comprehension questions. Students were often given comprehension passages and asked to write out the answers on their own, without any meaningful interactions and discussions on the topics covered in the texts. Ms. Li was very empathetic with her students and would like to do whatever she could to support their learning, but like many ESL teachers, accommodating student needs was often equated with withdrawing challenging concepts or activities from these students fearing that they might not be able to handle them. Sokolower (2006), for example, pointed out that “writers and publishers tend to ‘accommodate’ ELL students by eliminating the complexity and contradictions in the content. But limited English doesn’t mean limited capacity for critical thinking” (p. 46). Haneda (2006) viewed this general practice of withdrawing complex learning from ELLs as social tracking that involves labelling students and relegating them to a particular form of instruction. Cummins (1993b) further argued that this practice reflects an unjust societal power structure:

The public focus and apparent political commitment to improving the ability of students (and adults) to “read the word” represents the façade that obscures an underlying societal structure dedicated to preventing students from “reading the world.” This reality implies that educators who strive to create educational contexts within which culturally diverse students develop a sense of empowerment through acquisition of cultural and critical literacy, are of necessity challenging the societal power structure.(pp. 9-10)

It is hence a social justice issue to ensure immigrant students’ literacy education does not just limit them to decoding and surface-level comprehension, but rather encompasses more complex critical and analytical skills that enable them “read the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Student participants in this research were exposed to intellectually challenging activities. For example, in the unit on the Greatest Canadians, instead of just passing the historical information of great achievements of famous Canadians, we invited them to go
beyond the available social text and examine what values were conveyed through the inclusion and exclusion of certain social groups in the list of Greatest Canadians. Students were then invited to actively decide for themselves what qualities they thought would make a country’s hero. In the various activities that led up to the last written assignment on their own Greatest Canadian, students were asked to do independent research, synthesize and organise information, and present their ideas with support in a logical manner that met the stylistic conventions of the genre. Similarly, in reading the short story “Don’t Trust Your Parents”, we systematically introduced literary concepts like the use of illustrations, narration, setting, characterisation, and themes to guide students’ analysis of literary texts. By juxtaposing the same picture stories but with different illustrations on book covers, students were made aware of the intended message authors and/or publishers would like to convey and how the messages are often tied in with the whole production economy. The study on the use of first person narration and activities like the character interview raised students’ awareness of limited perspectives and how a reader could resist the imposed reading constructed by the author. In the last unit on critical reading strategies, students were encouraged to raise questions about literary texts along the lines of narration, characterisation, themes, and setting. Some students’ questions might show better comprehension than the others and might seem more meaningful at first glance. But as I re-examined our taped discussions, I found that despite what I thought as “good” or “bad” questions, they all helped students to further explore the text (even in ways I had not expected) and students become more focused and engaged with their reading. The last project we had was to rewrite Cinderella which enabled students to challenge the social assumptions around issues like gender and marriage after comparing and contrasting the Walt Disney and the Korean versions of the fairy tale. Although I should have provided an opportunity for them to explore deeper their emotional investments in fairy-tale romance and some commonly held gender assumptions, students’ production of alternative texts on Cinderella proved that they were fully capable of high order literacy activities.

This study shows that with careful scaffolding and guided practice of functional, cultural and CL skills grounded in a collaborative learning community that set high expectations in relation to students’ critical and creative abilities (Cummins, 2001;
Guthrie, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991), students achieved a significant degree of critical/literacy engagement and development. In terms of scaffolding, apart from the usual breaking down of learning into manageable units embedded in meaningful contexts and introducing them in a spiral manner, one major finding in this research is that immigrant students needed the common school-based literacy skills required in order to partake meaningfully in a collaborative learning environment. School-based literacy skills are often culturally specific. I found that my ELL participants did need a lot of lead-in time for CL work. Partly it had to do with their limited English abilities, but mostly because they did not have any prior school experience of meaningful participation in collaborative inquiry. A lot of common school-based literacy practices in the North American setting like posing questions to both teachers and peers, formulating personal opinions, sharing ideas, taking part in class discussions, evaluating each other’s ideas, etc. were completely new to these immigrant students. Most of their prior school experience was characterised by teacher authority and model answers, and individual opinions were rarely valued or sought after. Because of the lack of such collaborative inquiry learning experiences, students were often misunderstood as incapable of handling more complex literacy practices because of the lack of language proficiency. In this research, right from the beginning, students were progressively introduced to the workings of a learning community through a range of online and class activities and discussions whereby they learned how to formulate opinions, express ideas with precision and support, and interrogate ideas that were imbued with contested beliefs or assumptions. In particular, much time was spent on teaching them how to make personal connections with their reading through modelling and guided practice. They were constantly invited to step into the shoes of a personality (like Terry Fox) or character (Da-ren’s mother in “Don’t Trust Your Parents” or Clover in The Other Side) through different literacy practices (like character interview or posing questions on the personal dimension) to explore his/her thoughts and motivations. This kind of embodied engagement with the text also allowed students to explore and reflect on their own thoughts and emotional investments in certain issues (like barriers immigrants face, or racial and gender stereotypes, etc.). Students were gradually “acculturated” into the literacy practices through which they step-by-step took on a “literate identity” (Flores-
Dueñas, 2005). They assumed responsibilities in the learning community—sharing their own opinions, supporting them with reasons, at the same time respecting the opinions of others’ and being prepared to make revisions if their ideas were found to be erroneous.

One major conclusion I would like to draw is that like any other literacy skills, CL involves a gradual “acculturation” process whereby students are introduced to and immersed in critical inquiry for continual growth and development. One question that often baffles teachers is “When can students, whether native speakers or ELLs, be introduced to CL?” Proponents of sociocultural theory (e.g., Vygotsky, 1987; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1985; Wertsch & Stone, 1985) and CL (Gee, 1996; Luke & Freebody, 1997) have informed us that literacy development is basically a social practice: In the incessant initiation-response-feedback cycles, students gradually adopt what counts as learning, what knowledge is valued, what ways of seeing are acceptable, etc. Similarly, CL education is a social practice that involves learners being slowly acculturated into skills and practices of critical inquiry, and reading texts and viewing issues with a critical orientation. The question then that educators should ask themselves should not be “At which grade or language level can students be introduced to CL?” This is still premised on a linear view of literacy development that until the basic skills are mastered, students should not be exposed to reading and writing that require critical skills. The question we should ask ourselves is “Are we providing support and scaffolds to student learning that are geared towards helping them to gradually become a critical language user?”

11.2 Teacher’s Changes in Identity and Conception of Critical Literacy

Ms. Li experienced quite a significant change in her identity as an ESL teacher and in her conception of CL education. To start off, I found that Ms. Li was wrestling with a few contradictions she had. On the one hand, she held great expectations of herself in terms of helping her students in their language learning, but at the same time, with limited experience and little guidance and curricular material passed on from the former ESL teacher, she often found herself unsure of effective methods in teaching her class. Her uncertainty and frustration as an ESL expert was further aggravated by a school culture where collegiality was not much practiced and valued. She often felt that her expertise was challenged by her colleagues who placed much emphasis on seniority.
Because of this, she welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with me on this research project but at the same time, she was not without reservations about her students’ ability to handle CL work.

Hence, our collaboration at the beginning was not the ideal kind of participatory research inquiry that I would have expected. Instead of collaboration, I did most of the curriculum planning and design on my own, and Ms. Li would also feel reluctant to teach the main activities that involved critical discussions or reading and writing. This was also partly due to her fear that her limited experience with CL would jeopardize my research study. But despite my invitation for more collaboration and open discussion and negotiation of our possible different takes on CL, she still remained quite distant. In spite of this, I continued to seek her advice on the curriculum design especially in terms of its compliance to the mandated curriculum guidelines and the school’s policy on assessment. And we both did manage to reflect on and evaluate the program and students’ progress on an ongoing basis via email, phone or even short face-to-face conversations in between classes. Ms. Li, being open to professional development and eager to assist her students’ learning, became more and more involved with the research project as it went along.

11.2.1. Advocate for ELLs

One major change in Ms. Li was when we were into the third month of our study; she began to identify herself more strongly as an advocate for ELLs. The identity-affirming aspects of the CL program and the whole focus on critical exploration of students’ immigrant experience helped Ms. Li to come to a closer understanding of what her students were going through. For example, students’ stories about their struggle with cultural adjustments and bullying at school as expressed in their Spoken Memories allowed Ms. Li to hear students’ own “voice” on the issue. This made Ms. Li empathize with them more and gave her a greater sense of her responsibilities—“I really had to advocate for them and make sure that their needs are taken care of and are not being ignored” (Ms. Li, personal communication on April 08, 2008).

This advocacy role became more evident in her growing commitment to make her colleagues aware of her students’ experiences, for example, by arranging a Lunch and
Learn PD session for her colleagues, and involving the ELLs in taking a higher profile in school-wide activities like the Chinese New Year’s celebrations. As she related:

**EXCERPT 11.3: INTERVIEW RECORDING WITH MS. LI ON MARCH 12, 2008**

Ms. Li: I think now that I begin to see myself more of an advocate, I enjoy the role more. Before I enjoyed working with ELLs, but putting issues to the forefront, it becomes more personally rewarding... and because... I want the other teachers to know... to be concerned with the ELLs. They can’t forget them and leave them at the back of the classroom, so with the opportunity to put on the PD session, it is really good.

But as the PD session had shown, the new role she carved for herself was not without challenges. She anticipated that it would be much more difficult for her to enlist her colleagues’ support of her advocacy for ELLs once the research ended. She said that my presence in the school as a researcher and her participation in the research gave her advocacy work more “legitimacy”. Given her junior status among the staff and limited experience as an ESL teacher, she found it difficult to go up and tell teachers what they could do to help an ELL in their classroom or even offer them resources without making them feel that she was “checking up on them” (interview recording on March 12, 2008). Despite this fear of lack of collegial support, in our discussions throughout the year, it became clearer to Ms. Li that she could make better use of the curriculum team meetings where she could take a more proactive stance for her ELLs. This included bringing up ESL issues for team discussions, and introducing ESL teaching resources to the team as a whole (rather than to individual teachers to avoid misunderstanding). She could also share more of what was happening in the ESL classroom (e.g., what topics they were covering at the moment) in hope of better coordination with other core classes. She thought if the ESL issues became a regular item in the team meeting agenda, it would definitely help better coordination and cooperation at the school level. She also mentioned that she would continue to bring ESL to a higher profile like involving students in the Chinese New Year celebration and the Asian Heritage Week. In a post-research follow-up interview (February 19, 2009), she divulged to me that with the change in administration in the year after the research, ESL advocacy work had become more challenging. But she would still try her best to advocate for her students, and one thing she found she could do was to have more cooperation with teachers who taught
with a social justice orientation. At the time of this follow-up interview, she was already thinking of some collaboration work with those teachers.

11.2.2. The Place of Critical Literacy in the ESL Classroom

As mentioned earlier, Ms. Li’s conception of CL changed as her perception of herself as an advocate for her students got stronger. In the different interviews, both before and after the research, she repeatedly mentioned that the participatory education aspect (cf. Auerbach, 1995) of CL work helped her understand her students better (see Excerpts 9.34 & 11.2), hence urging her to take on a greater responsibility for them (see Excerpt 11.3). She found the aspect on identity and voice most valuable since not only did it help to motivate students to learn, but it also helped them to “emerge with a better sense of themselves” (follow-up interview on February 19, 2009). She liked especially how the different language skills and grammar aspects were integrated into these meaningful activities (see Excerpt 6.4), making learning more relevant and practical to students.

Despite her appreciation of the meaningful content of CL work, she did worry about students’ ability to handle complex literacy work, especially those who were “fresh off the boat”. For example, when we planned to read some news articles on immigrant employment, she worried that it might be too challenging for a couple of new students, especially when her colleague expressed to her that “the notion of job [was] too far removed” from students’ prior knowledge and experiences (email communication from Ms. Li on April 09, 2008; see Excerpt 9.33). I had to explain to her that the topic of immigrant employment came out of students’ discussion when we read “Don’t Trust Your Parents”, and of course, I would never hand out something to students without modification to suit their level (for details see Section 9.3.3.). As it turned out the two students about whom she worried most were able to produce some very creative and interesting work. By the end of that module, Ms. Li admitted that she had been “worried about the beginners” but then she was “more positive about that the beginners can still do CL work, and it’d been interesting to see what they came up with” (interview recording on April 08, 2008, see Excerpt 9.35). This also led us to work on the last unit on critical reading strategies in which we engaged students in more critical analysis and the writing
of alternative texts. In the post-research follow-up interview, Ms. Li expressed that one of the major impact of this research was her changed belief in the transformative power of education:

**EXCERPT 11.4. : RECORDING OF FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW WITH MS. LI ON FEBRUARY 19, 2009**

Ms. Li: I think it’s broadened my perspective and understanding of education in general. First of all, like in terms of um…the potential of education can be very transformative, I think. Like I had been speaking to you earlier about, like not so being constrained by the curriculum, which I think last year I was a lot more constrained, like in terms of trying to make education more relevant to students, and making education more transformative. I think that changed my philosophy of education… my perspective of education on the whole. And also .. it helped me definitely understand ELLs better as well, like what they were going through, and it is important to develop this in teachers, because I can better empathize with what they were going through and I also had to make their voices to be heard, to empower them so that they would not be marginalized, so it is on that level too. And on a third note, I think the research had made me more confident and stronger.

R: In what way?
Ms. Li: Umm.. In terms of my belief and my own ability to seek out for those students, and my own ability to persevere with those issues as well.

Ms. Li admitted that she felt constrained by the curriculum requirements before and that with the research, she realised that she had the “power” to make it more relevant to student learning and more socially transformative. And she also felt “more confident and stronger” in her “belief and ability to seek out for these students”, to make learning transformative and meaningful for her students.

Ms. Li’s attitude towards CL changed from being sceptical to being more positive as the research progressed. She strongly believed that there is a place for CL in the ESL classroom. What she would suggest though was to have better differentiation in terms of work expectations from students at different stages. The peculiar situation in her class was that she had to teach both Grade 7 and 8 students, some of whom were at Stage 1 while others at Stage 2. As we were close to the end of the program, Ms. Li was no longer saying that we should withdraw CL work from new beginners, but rather calling for better differentiation in terms of the work requirements from new beginners. For example, instead of asking these students to write a whole story on *Spoken Memories*, she would suggest letting students just hand in one or two short paragraphs if they so wished. I did find the suggestion useful and practical and definitely worth trying.
11.3. Student Participants

On the whole, students enjoyed the program and found it useful, which was evident in their enthusiastic participation in class activities and discussions, their creative production of personal stories, poems, and alternative texts, and Ms. Li’s observation of students’ great interest in their learning. Ms. Li and students had both repeatedly expressed that they liked the explicit teaching of grammar and vocabulary (e.g., Excerpts 6.4, 9.3, 9.13, etc.) which were embedded in topics and activities of students’ concerns. In this section, I will focus on the findings I had with the student participants in term of students’ negotiation of their “identity” and progress in critical/literacy development. In particular, my discussion will be based on both my more in-depth observations and interviews with Terri, Melody, Baoh and Chicken and on their work samples.

11.3.1. Student Identity

All ELL participants started off having a very low self-image. This was aggravated by the increasing bullying they encountered from their peers. Terri, for example, found it hard to write her “I Can” poem at the beginning since she believed that she was “stupid” and “useless” (see Chapter 7 section 7.3). She wanted to leave the ESL class when she first came because she felt that people were looking at her as if she were “a monster” (see Excerpt 7.4). Melody had an even harder time when she found that her classmates were not at all friendly to her: “All she [i.e., her mother] said are wrong, almost nobody want to be my friends, even nobody want to talk to me and not friendly at all” (see Figure 8.3). She found herself constantly sneered at and bullied: “I’m ESL, too many people laugh at me” (see Excerpt 7.6). She was completely frustrated in the first few months of our program. Baoh and Chicken, on the other hand, did not report any bullying incidents, but they both had their different ways of dealing with stress from the acculturation process. Baoh, for example, would resort to physical exercise to decompress himself. Chicken, on the other, having received more English education in Hong Kong before he came, would always try to resist the “ESL” label by showing to his peers that he did have “some English” and was very capable.

As the program continued, the focus on students’ identity affirmation and the enlisting of school support in combating bullying through the PD session, helped students
to feel more positive about themselves. This was especially true for Melody and Chicken who were praised for their high quality earthquake project by their science teacher (see Excerpt 8. 20). Of course throughout the year, they still had to wrestle with discourses of their inferior status from time to time, but on the whole they grew in confidence about their English ability. In the last student interview (June 19, 2009), I asked them to rate their level of self-confidence before and after the program on a scale of 10 (10 being the greatest). Here were their ratings:

**Table 11.1: Students’ Confidence Level Before and After the Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of confidence</th>
<th>Chicken</th>
<th>Melody</th>
<th>Terri</th>
<th>Baoh</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>before</td>
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<td>before</td>
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<td>before</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 as the highest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

From Table 11.1, we can see that most of them became more confident about themselves as ELLs. Melody’s was an exception as she indicated that her self-confidence remained zero. Despite what she said about her confidence, when I asked her to rate her level of improvement in language skills, she gave herself 9 out of 10 after the program versus 1 out of 10 before the program (see Table 11.2). Actually Ms. Li and I would agree that she was the one among the four who had the greatest language improvement which could be shown in her various assignments like the alternative Cinderella, and the Greatest Canadian; and of course in her increasing meaningful contribution to class discussions. In a follow-up student interview via email one year after the program’s completion, I asked for students’ thoughts about the program. Melody had this reply:

**Excerpt 11.5: Email Interview from Melody on January 07, 2009**

What I like is when we (ESLs) work together, we won't have any negative perspectives or tease each other. What I don't really like is we didn't have a chance to communicate with native speakers. What I learned most is grammar and vocabularies, we did these a lot in ESL class. What I remember most is when the whole class was discussing about a theme just like the part "The Other Side", we shared our opinions, and we learned a lot from each other. I think there were two parts I think they were the best. One is about our home town, it reminds me

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24 I sent out an email (on January 06, 2009) to these participants as a follow-up to see what they thought about the program after a year’s time. Terri and Baoh had left for a high school while Melody and Chicken were still in David Allen School. Only Melody responded to my questions: “What are your thoughts about the program—what you liked and what you didn’t, what you learned most, what you remember most, what you think was the best, what could be better, etc.”
about my life in China. Another one is the part was about Canada, Canadian symbols, it tells me a lot about the country I'm living in now.

What Melody cherished most about the program was when she could collaborate with her ELL peers in a cooperative learning environment where each was seen as a full participant with a “positive literature identity”, to use Flores-Dueñas’ (2005, p. 239) term, where they all “shared their opinions” and “learned a lot from each other”. Her only regret was not having the “chance to communicate with native speakers”. This shows her wish and eagerness to be able to participate in a learning community with native English speakers who would also recognize her literate identity. As Melody shrewdly pointed out, it takes more than the single-handed effort of the ESL teacher to combat the debilitating deficit discourse in relation to ELLs. Concerted effort was needed among all teachers and at the different levels of school administration to ensure students’ cultural and linguistic identities were not just respected but capitalized on for maximized learning.

Another interesting point Melody made in that email reply was that she found the module on Canada very useful, especially the Canadian symbols, since she was now living in Canada. I remembered when we were working on the Greatest Canadians, she complained that the topic was not really relevant to her. She had a strong repulsion in studying David Suzuki’s contribution to Canada, probably because of an ingrained hatred towards Japan which once caused great destruction to China. She did not bring this up again in her email reply. When she wrote in her email that she found that part on Canada useful, I was not sure if she also had the section on Greatest Canadians in mind, or that she just thought the part on Canadian symbols useful. But no matter what, her opinions on that unit made me rethink the way to introduce necessary cultural literacies that would not be alienating to ELLs. One way to approach it would be to have the curriculum built more around students’ community funds of knowledge (Comber, 2001b). Still using the Greatest Canadian as an example, I could ask students to compare a great person in their country/community with one in Canada. In that way, students would still be exposed to complex literacy skills like researching, synthesizing information, formulating and supporting opinions with reasons, etc. But they would definitely have more to contribute and hence the unit would be more relevant and engaging to them.
11.3.2 Students’ Critical/Literacy Development

Ms. Li had repeatedly expressed how she liked the thematic approach of the program that related to students’ identity and cultural concerns and integrated with all the necessary language skills and structural aspects like grammar and vocabulary (see Excerpts 6.4 & 8.18). Student participants also appreciated greatly the explicit instruction of grammar and vocabulary of which they were encouraged to use in meaningful contexts. All our language activities had a clear form-focused component and students were shown how to use these forms in a meaningful way not just for surface-comprehension, but also for deeper level linguistic and cognitive processing. For example, the use of present tense and vocabulary of family members in the writing of their family photos, the use of past tense in relating their Spoken Memories, or the use of literary concepts like illustrations or narration for critical examination of literary texts, etc. With the spiral learning model, students were revisiting and recycling language forms they learned in the production of identity texts and critical analysis of their own situations and other cultural and social texts. The many works students produced throughout the program, which were included in the previous chapters, showed their growing control of the spoken and written modes of English, and great levels of creativity and cognitive ability.

We also found a growing level of control over the cultural and linguistic resources necessary for critical engagement with written texts. For one, as the program went along, students showed greater ease and comfort in taking part in critical discussions. They understood and took up the role of responsible contributing members in the collaborative learning community in that they formulated their opinions, shared, elaborated and explained their ideas, raised questions and were prepared to change or abandon opinions which were found to be biased. They might still need more practice to sharpen their thinking skills, but they had already been “acculturated” into and become accustomed to a community where critical inquiry was valued. They were also taught systematically different comprehension skills like making personal connections, inferences, posing questions along textual, personal and critical dimensions for more critical understanding. By the time we were working on The Other Side and Cinderella, students were already using concepts like the use of illustration and narration or
characterisation to question the limited perspectives the readers were offered. Their last assignment on rewriting Cinderella, for example, showed great level of critical and creative ability. Melody’s piece was nine-page long weaving in different literary resources she learned from Chinese legends to produce a very creative and touching story and at the same critically challenge the assumptions in the original fairy tale. Baoh and Terri’s versions were also good with commendable degree of creativity challenging different social beliefs they thought were important to them. Chicken might comparatively seem to have the least improvement in terms of critical/literacy skills, but he being stronger in his oral ability had been making more and more contribution in our class discussions, engaging us in critical conversations around stories and social issues. For example, he was the one who raised the issue of immigrant employment which started a great discussion on the barriers faced by immigrants.

In the last student interview, apart from self confidence level, I also asked them to rate their progress in language skills and CL skills. Here are their ratings:

*Table 11.2: Students’ Ratings on Their Language and CL Skills Before and After the Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chicken</th>
<th>Melody</th>
<th>Terri</th>
<th>Baoh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 as the highest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 as the highest</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As far as language skills were concerned, all the four ELL participants reported improvement though of varying degrees. Melody reported the greatest improvement, with which both Ms. Li and I agreed. She did make tremendous progress so much so that Ms. Li decided that she was ready to leave the ESL class the following year. As for CL development, all of them except Terri reported great improvement. Ms. Li and I were surprised by her own rating of herself because her participation in class discussion and all her work showed her thoughtfulness and reflectiveness. She showed great receptiveness when I pointed out her bias towards Black students (see Chapter 8 section 8.3.3). In her journal, she showed great empathy to victims of racial discrimination (see Chapter 8
section 8.4) and her essay on gender difference and social alienation among prison inmates all showed great commitment and embodiment of CL (see Figure 10.4). And in our observation, as the program progressed, Ms. Li and I found that Terri more and more took on the role of a “big sister” in the classroom, offering different kinds of help to new ELLs. We could see her high level of self-reflexivity prompted her to commit herself more to the cause of social justice. Perhaps it was also this capacity for reflective thinking that enabled her to see there was always room for improvement with the result.

It is important to note that the focus on CL in the program produced only partial shifts in students’ attitudes and behaviour. For example, we saw some in Melody as she showed great empathy towards bully victims and vowed not to perpetuate racial discrimination of any kind (see Excerpt 8.11). But her expressed hatred towards Japanese (as we were studying David Suzuki’s works) showed that she still had blind spots especially with things she was heavily invested in. In Baoh’s writing, for example his alternative Cinderella did show his deep thoughts on the social assumptions embedded in the traditional version of the fairy tale. But we did not see any overt change in his behaviour. Chicken’s writing did not show great levels of reflectiveness but his ideas in class discussions often reflected deep thinking. As far as the value of CL was concerned, all four participants agreed on its practical value in that it helped them with their academic literacy (see Excerpts 9.14, 9.15 & 10.11). They did not seem to see or at least articulate its liberatory value yet. But after all, this was students’ first experience of CL, interrogating social issues and their own tacit beliefs. More embodied engagement--for textual ideological critique as well as personal interrogation of beliefs--is needed. This aspect definitely warrants further research. But indisputably, they had started to demonstrate a critical orientation in their reading and writing of texts.

11.4. Constraints and Limitations as a Critical Literacy Researcher/Teacher

In this section, I would like to focus on the constraints and limitations I experienced as a CL researcher and teacher during the research project. Throughout the program, one major issue I wrestled with was how to push forward a meaningful agenda while at the same time maintain an open attitude for alternative perspectives and for ongoing reflection.
As I was teaching, because of time constraints (since I just went into the class twice a week) and sometimes my preoccupation with the predesigned curriculum, I would push forward my thoughts and my particular take on the story in class discussions, without listening carefully enough to students’ responses. This happened more often at the beginning of the program. As I tried to rush them through an activity in order to finish it within a given time. I sometimes missed a very important point or a critical remark made by a student. For example, in the unit on “The Story of My Name” when I was trying to get students to discuss if difference is necessarily always either good or bad, Melody suddenly burst out in tears telling us a run-in she had with a Black classmate who accused her of using the ‘n’ word (see Chapter 7 section 7.1.2.1). My immediate reaction at that time was to brush aside her story and got students’ focus back on our discussion on the book. I could have seized the teachable moment to discuss with students the issue of racial discrimination and the powerful political implications of language use.

At other times, I was blinded by my own preconception with a certain subject and failed to see it from the different perspective a student brought up. This could be seen in my preconception of what a good question should be like, and hence I failed to direct students’ attention towards the different possible ways of addressing a question even though it might seem to entail obvious or easy answers (see Chapter 10 section 10.1.2). As the program went on, I learnt to listen more intently and be more flexible with my teaching, bearing in mind that students’ talk in the classroom is also a kind of social text which is as important as our critical analysis of a written story. There were also quite a few instances when students expressed opinions on topics which I had not anticipated, like Al’s strong opinion on dancing as a female-only activity (see Excerpt 8.8), or James’ blatant expression of his stereotyping image of Vietnamese as impolite people who lack family education (see Excerpt 8.7), etc. These conversations were often imbued with great emotions and involved different dynamics among students. I realized that I should not be bound by my own agenda and should remain open and responsive to where students’ conversations were leading. I also learned the importance of being prepared to deal with “uncomfortable conversations”, students’ “unpredictable questions and spontaneous outbursts” (Tolentino, 2007, p.50). The idea of doing CL should not be just limited to engaging students in critical analysis of textual characters and messages, but
also in problematising our own tacit beliefs and assumptions, both the students’ and teacher’ included. I should have pushed myself as much as I pushed my students to apply CL practice in what I do and say in the classroom. It was not easy since more often than not, even though I strove to establish a more egalitarian learning community, I still held the teacher authority in trying to push through a certain agenda or perspective. I found that throughout the whole research process, my continual reflection on classroom observations, and ongoing evaluation and member-checking with Ms. Li and with students through the focus group interviews about their progress and opinions on the program helped ensure the kind of “reflection-in-action” Carr and Kemmis (1986) have called for. I definitely see a lot of my limitations as a CL teacher especially when it came to my own limited perspectives and inclination to still stick to my teacher authority. But my willingness to engage myself in a spiral cycle of reflection and implementation did help make the teaching and learning more democratized and more amenable to students’ needs.
Chapter 12: Implications

Based on the discussions and conclusions I have drawn in the previous chapter, this CL research has brought forth some important practical implications. I am going to focus on four major areas: (a) CL and ELLs, (b) practising CL with CL practices, (c) critical education for all teachers of ELLs, and (d) more collaborative research on CL education.

12.1. Critical Literacy and English Language Learners

The findings of this research show that ELLs, even those with limited English language proficiency, were able to practice CL work. The integrative model allowed students to gradually master functional literacy skills and at the same time with careful scaffolding and guided practice to begin to develop a critical orientation to their literacy learning. Scaffolding here is not just about the usual breaking down of learning into manageable parts embedded in meaningful contexts and introducing them in a spiral manner. Scaffolding here also means introducing systematically the necessary school-based literacy skills required in order to partake meaningfully in a collaborative learning environment. School-based literacy skills like expressing one’s thoughts and ideas, formulating one’s argument, agreeing or disagreeing in group/class discussions, and independent thinking are highly valued in the North American school setting but may not be the case in some of the educational environments where immigrant students come from. ELLs’ limited English proficiency and lack of prior collaborative inquiry learning experiences often mislead teachers to think that they are incapable of handling more complex literacy practices. But as Comber (2001d) argued, despite where the student is from, they are “only too aware of what’s fair, what’s different, who gets the best deal, long before they start school” (p. 2). What teachers need to do is to identify and mobilise students’ analytic resources, and engage them in issues related to their real concerns and interests. In the case of immigrant ELLs, it is imperative to tie literacy learning to the social realities students are dealing with. Second language learning involves an inherent paradox: it is both empowering and alienating (Rockhill & Tomic, 1995). Teenage immigrant students not only have to deal with culture shock but also the turbulence of adolescence and identity formation (Epstein & Kheimets, 2000). Having said that,
poststructural feminists (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992; Kamler, 2001; Weedon, 1987) have informed us that the notion of “identity” and “voice” should not be treated as if they were unitary, fixed and universal. Therefore it is all the more necessary to critically explore the student contexts in an ongoing dialogic way so that students can be involved in a classroom-based social research that acts on their lived realities while learning the target language (Norton Pierce, 1995; Pennycook, 2001). This kind of emergent curriculum and participatory education (Auerbach, 1995; Norton Pierce, 1995) allows ELLs to simultaneously develop their language skills and come to a better understanding and control of their own social situations. The integrative CL model adopted in this research study allowed a balance between access to and critique of the dominant language while providing students a space for personal reflection on emotional investments in different literacy practices and engagement in transformative practices, albeit their small scale.

Literacy learning is always a social practice. This is supported by both sociocultural theorists (e.g., Vygotsky, 1987; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1985; Wertsch & Stone, 1985) and proponents of CL (Gee, 1996; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Students are “acculturated” through the repeated initiation-response-feedback cycles in literacy classrooms to adopt a certain view and orientation towards what learning is, what knowledge and opinions are valued, what ways of seeing are acceptable, etc. This research study has demonstrated that CL education is similarly a social practice that involves learners being slowly acculturated into the skills and practices of critical inquiry, and reading texts and viewing issues with a critical orientation. Teaching involves many political choices, whether one likes it or not. Some may choose to take on an autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1995) seeing literacy learning as purely mental operations which have nothing to do with the larger social, cultural and political contexts. This view of literacy is no less political that the view of “literacy as social practice”. By treating literacy as purely a cognitive process of reading and writing, students are only invited to learn the superficial meaning and deprived of deeper understanding of the text: How is the text structuring my understanding of the world? What impact does it have on my lived realities? What action can I take to resist the message? Comprehension is not comprehension when students do not know what social, economic and political positions the text is structuring for them. The general practice of withdrawing complex learning
from ELLs is a way of social tracking (Haneda, 2006). Furthermore, preventing them from real comprehension in “reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) is a social justice issue that we should combat.

Research on CL with young learners (Vasquez, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004) have shown that engaging students with emergent literacy skills in CL practices is both workable, and socially and politically significant. These young learners, similar to the study discussed here, showed remarkable improvement in critical/literacy development. The implication of CL as a social practice for ELLs is then similar to that for very young learners: we cannot engage students in “simplistic and reductive” learning thinking that the “more complex and sophisticated” (Comber, 2001d) will come later and that students will gradually develop their critical orientation when their language ability improves. As mentioned before, the question we have to ask ourselves is not “when”: “At which grade or language level can students be introduced to CL?” Instead, we should ask ourselves “how”: “How do we structure student learning so that it is geared towards helping them to gradually become a critical language user?”

12.2. Practising Critical Literacy with Critical Literacy Practices

The integrative CL model that I adopted for this research was informed by Janks’ (2000, 2010) synthesis of CL education as well as the poststructural feminist considerations for embodied engagement and self-reflexivity (Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1992; Misson & Morgan, 2006). The distinct features of this model included an explicit focus on helping students to have access to the formal structures of the language, engaging students in critical examination of social texts that related to their lived worlds, and involving them in creative literacy practices that helped address those social issues. One deliberate effort I made was to invite students to make connections between the texts we read and their own emotional investments. The purpose was to push critical education beyond the intellectual plane to develop the ability to draw connections between social realities and personal desires, beliefs and values. It is by exploring the emotional experiences that a text generates in us that we come to a better understanding of how our desires and values are shaped. This better sense of self-awareness is much needed for any social changes (Silvers, 2001). Without embodied engagement, ideological critique
purely based on textual analysis will only be reduced to analyzing other people’s problems.

Despite my “well thought-out” conceptualisation of CL, it did not always work and might not be easy to do. Sometimes it was the time constraint. For example, when we were writing the alternative Cinderella story, the hectic end-of-term schedule did not allow us time to explore further students’ personal beliefs on romance, marriage and gender equality. Other times, it was me, the teacher/researcher, who had a particular agenda to push forward and started to judge and to evaluate rather than to “listen to understand” (Covey, 1997). For example, I pre-judged that the question a student asked was not a “good” question and tried to dismiss it instead of having the patience and willingness to listen and explore the different answers and perspectives that might emerge. There were also times when students were willing to share their personal experiences and emotional investments, but I was the one caught off-guard and was at a loss as to how to handle these “real” issues. Examples were Melody’s sharing of her story about being slapped by her classmate who misinterpreted her of using the “n”-word, Jerry’s accusing of James of being biased against him because of his Vietnamese background, or Al’s claim that dance was not for boys.

As I reflect on my own CL practice, I have learned how important it is not to be bound by my own agenda and to remain open and responsive to where students’ conversations were leading. In practicing CL with students, there can be “uncomfortable conversations”, “unpredictable questions” or “spontaneous outbursts” (Tolentino, 2007, p.50) but it is often these “real” responses that reflects what students’ immediate needs and concerns are. The CL practice should not be just limited to engaging students in critical analysis of textual characters and messages, but should involve both teachers and students reflecting of our own tacit beliefs and assumptions. This study points to one important indispensable dimension of CL education—to practice CL with CL practices. The participatory action research method I adopted for this study pushed me to engage in a continual “reflection-in-action” cycle (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) that helped me to notice any discrepancies, limitations or difficulties and think of ways to handle them in a timely manner (although there were still times when I was not that successful). In order that CL can achieve its “empowering” effects, reflective practices have to be an integral part of
CL education. The three types of reflection that Rearick and Feldman (1999) proposed should be practiced: (a) *autobiographical reflection*—researchers and/or teachers reflecting on their own values, beliefs and background that they bring into the classroom; (b) *collaborative reflection*—researchers and/or teachers interpreting each other’s ideas and perspectives for problem-solving, and (c) *communal reflection*—researchers and/or teachers collaboratively reflecting on whether their actions/teaching promote or obstruct their transformative ideals. One way to go about this is to have a genuine interest and understanding of the needs of immigrant students and frame the curriculum with their sociocultural concerns. The curriculum should also be porous so that any immediate concerns can be added *into* and/or *as* the CL curriculum (Vasquez, 2004, p. 32). The bottom line is to have a curriculum that is socially significant to students. To ensure there is continual reflection, systematic channels like student-led class meetings or after-class student groups should be in place where students can voice their opinions or feedback on the different aspects of teaching in a safe and non-judgemental environment.

**12.3. Critical Education for All Teachers of Ells**

This research study also points to the need for better teacher education for both ESL teachers as well as subject teachers of ELLs. First of all, both groups of teachers need to understand the sociopolitical dimension of language use and second language learning (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). Teachers need a sociolinguistic awareness that the dominant position of language or language variety within a particular social context involves power relations and often times, as Lucas and Grinberg argued, it is more of a power issue than any linguistic factors that impact on the academic success of minority students. Whether one is recognised as a full member in a learning community (Lave & Wenger, 1991) affects one’s access to “the right to speech” and “the power to impose reception” (Norton, 2000, p. 8). Bartolomé (2002) argued that teachers of ELLs need to have “border-crossing” experiences in place in the teacher education program, whether simulated or replicated in course work or practicum. An example is to simulate situations where teacher candidates’ strengths are turned into disadvantages so that they come to experience themselves the arbitrariness of marginalisation and subordination. Another example of such border crossing experience is to require teacher candidates to visit,
observe and/or have practicum experience in culturally diverse classrooms to learn about cultural “differences” (Friedman, 2002; Gebhard, Austin, & Nieto, 2002). Such practice can also help prospective teachers to have an understanding of the connection between language, culture, and identity, and to avoid making easy assumptions about students’ responses or intentions based merely on their own cultural framework.

Besides, both ESL teachers and subject teachers of ELLs also need to have affirming views of linguistic diversity and bilingualism (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). This will affect their approach to (English) education, whether to turn students’ linguistic talents into an asset or a deficit, or to promote assimilationist or intercultural learning experiences for ELLs. This research study reaffirms the urgent need for identity-affirming practices that CL proponents are calling for (Ada, 1991; Chow & Cummins, 2003; Comber, 2001d; Cummins, 1993a, 1993b, 2000, 2001). An affirmative view of diversity will help prompt teachers to capitalize on students’ linguistic and cultural experiences as well as resources to set up a curriculum that is built on students’ prior knowledge to support their learning. Last but not least, all teachers of ELLs should have an understanding that literacy is inherently a social practice (Luke & Freebody, 1997) and that teaching is never an “apolitical undertaking” (Bartolomé, 2002, p. 182). Our choice in deciding what kind of literacy learning is available for ELLs is a political decision which can have great social and political consequences. Students can be engaged in piecemeal literacy practices that focus on superficial understanding, like filling in blanks, copying, repeating what the writer says, etc. Or they can be engaged in complex literacy practices where they explore the social implications of textual messages in their immediate realities; question, and reflect their own or others’ assumptions and beliefs; and make personal and social changes possible. Of course, teachers of ELLs also need to have an understanding of what CL practices are and how they can frame their teaching to make it equitable. This leads us to the last area related to collaborative research on CL.

12.4. More Participatory Action Research on Critical Literacy

Despite the initial reservations that Ms. Li had for the place of CL in a beginning ESL classroom, her understanding of CL changed as the program evolved. She came to
understand that CL is not just about textual critique, but also about helping students to come to a better understanding of their social conditions and to find creative and constructive ways for social change and betterment. Gradually she took on the role of an advocate for her students: she pushed forward the Lunch and Learn PD session, she planned to take a more proactive role in the curriculum team meetings bringing up ESL issues for team discussions, and introducing ESL teaching resources to the team as a whole, etc.

What these point to is that teachers need to *experience* what CL practices are and how they affect their students before they feel safe to practice it themselves. Teachers may initially find CL a bit intimidating and impossible to do in face with the pressing curriculum mandates. As Vasquez (2004) pointed out, teachers’ conceptualisation of CL and negotiating spaces for it in curriculum is a *recursive* process. If teachers have a changed belief in CL, that it is possible to engage students in CL practices, this changed conceptualisation of CL will lead them to create more spaces for CL in the curriculum, which will in turn create further opportunities to deepen their understanding of CL (Vasquez, 2004). What I am suggesting is that there needs to be more collaborative action research between CL researchers and literacy teachers, which will allow more teachers to experience what CL looks like in the classroom, what impact it has on their students critical/literacy development, and the fun and possibilities it can create for both teachers and students. This research study was in part a response to Comber’s (2001c) call for more detailed practitioners’ accounts of innovative CL practices amidst their particular material and cultural locations and circumstances. Hopefully this CL research would serve as an invitation, if not an inspiration, to other educators to take similar ventures in engaging their students, whether ELLs or not, with such politically and educationally significant learning journey.
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Appendix A: Information Letter and Consent Form--Principal

Dear Principal:

Research on doing critical literacy work with ELLs: An integrative approach

I am a doctoral student presently studying at OSET/UT. The purpose of this letter is to request your formal permission to conduct my doctoral thesis research project captioned above in your school during the 2007-2008 academic year.

The aim of critical literacy education is to help students to gain the necessary skills to analyze and critically dissect all the forms of culture they interact with, so that they can gain understanding of how these cultural forms construct their knowledge of the world and the different social, economic and political positions they occupy within it. This project adopts an integrative approach to critical literacy which does not just focus on students’ rational ideological critique of textual constructions, but also on their access and mastery of linguistic formal features through engaging them in reading a variety of texts. Their personal reflection and emotional engagement of social and cultural realities as conveyed in the texts are also encouraged. And last but not least, they will be involved in creative and constructive literacy practices that address those social realities. The specific objectives of the project are to explore collaboratively with the ESL teacher and ELLs the pedagogical options that can best maximize students’ identity investment, literacy engagement and critical literacy skills. The research will also help in extending current ESL programs beyond the traditional functionalist approach to one that embraces a greater degree of cultural and social sensitivity that helps students to become active readers and writers of cultural texts.

I will work closely with the ESL teacher in co-developing a critical literacy program that is tailor-made to suit the needs and language levels of the ELLs and that complies with the Ontario curriculum guidelines. I will work in a participatory research mode at least two half days a week in the classroom throughout the research period. Both the teacher and I will collaborate and explore ways to alter, if needed, instructional practices and ways of support to enhance students’ literacy engagement and critical literacy skills. I will maintain a record of classroom events that may be instructionally significant with respect to students’ literacy development. These field notes will be written up after each class period. The field notes will be shared and discussed with the teacher on a regular basis in order to ensure accuracy of observation and interpretation, and for ongoing improvement of the program.

The program will constitute part of the ongoing curriculum, causing no interference to the teachers’ instruction, nor adding any additional workload to the students. I will record the students’ performance and collect their classwork and assignments, and other literacy-related activities only with the written informed consent of teachers, students themselves, and their parents/guardians. Students’ participation or lack of participation in the research study will not affect how the classes are taught. I will make every effort to avoid disrupting the regular routine of the class.
As part of the research, I will interview the teacher on three occasions (before, during and after the program) regarding aspects of her literacy instruction and their students’ literacy practices. The interview will be audio-taped with her written permission. She can review the audio recordings at any time. I will also interview participating students on two occasions, one before the program and the other a month later, regarding their perception of themselves as ELLs, their opinions on ESL learning and the critical literacy program. Students’ and parents’ permission to interview will be sought.

Confidentiality:
In all documentation and communication regarding this research project, I will maintain strict confidentiality with respect to the identities of the participating teacher, students and your school. I will provide pseudonyms for all participants and the school in our documentation process and in any published work that might come out of this research. The information provided by the teacher and students in the interviews will be used exclusively for research purposes. I will store all the information collected during the study in a locked filing cabinet in my office at OISE/UT. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the research data.

Duration:
Classroom participation and observation will take place on average about two half days per week in the participating class. The three interviews with the teachers will last for about 45 minutes each and interviews with the students about 30 minutes each. These interviews will be conducted at a mutually convenient time that does not interfere with teachers’ and students’ normal classroom routines.

Refusals:
No one is under any obligation to participate in this research study. Participation is totally voluntary. Participants have the right to refuse to answer any interview questions or withdraw from the study at any time. The refusal to participate in the project will not result in any adverse consequences for either the teacher or students. If any participant decides to withdraw from the study, I will destroy all data pertaining to him/her at the time of his/her withdrawal.

Research Results:
The overall goal of this project is to improve ESL education and the literacy attainments of ELLs. By participating in this research, you will be contributing to research regarding ESL education, critical literacy education and literacy pedagogical instruction. Findings from this research can potentially help in the design of the ESL curriculum and professional training and preparation of ESL teachers. I will present what I find and learn at national and international conferences and will publish the research results in professional and academic journals. I would also be happy to provide you with a summary or a complete report of the results of the research and present them to all the participants involved in the research.
Inquiries & Concerns:
I will be happy to answer any questions you might have about the research. Please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail, or by telephone. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Student Researcher:
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Consent:
Please complete the following consent document keeping one copy for your records and returning a copy to Sunny Man Chu Lau in the attached envelope.

Your signature below indicates that you have carefully read the information provided above. You understand that participation in this research is voluntary, and that you have willingly consented to allow the ESL teacher and the students of your school to participate in this project. Your signature also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. You may withdraw your consent at any time without any consequences. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Please check the appropriate box for each line:
I agree that the ESL teacher and students in my school:
[ ] Can participate in this study.
[ ] Can be interviewed for this study.
[ ] Can be audio-recorded for this study.
[ ] I do not give consent for the teachers and the students of my school to participate in this study.

Name (please print):____________________________________________
Position: _______________________________________________________
Signature: _______________________________________________________ 
Date: ___________________________________________________________
Appendix B: Preliminary Semi-Structured Interview with the ESL Teacher

1. How long have you been teaching ESL classes?

2. What training did you have for ESL teaching? How do you find those training?

3. How do you like teaching ESL classes?

4. Is there anything you find particularly challenging as an ESL teacher?

5. What are the major challenges faced by your students in strengthening their literacy abilities?

6. Are there any characteristics or aspects of the curriculum that are particularly challenging for them?

7. What instructional approaches have you implemented to address the challenges that students face?

8. Have any initiatives or approaches proved particularly successful?

9. How do you think of the support and resources available in your school for ESL classes?

10. How do you perceive yourself as an ESL teacher? And how do you think the school administration and your colleagues perceive ESL teachers in general?

11. What do you think critical literacy is?

12. Do you think critical literacy has a place in ESL classrooms/ in your ESL class? If yes, why and how? If no, why?
Appendix C: Mid-Program Semi-Structured Interview with the Teacher

1. What has/have been the major challenge(s) in the implementation of the critical literacy program in the ESL class so far?

2. What reactions did your students have for the program? Were there any aspects that they liked a lot or disliked a lot?

3. Which part of the program by far is the most successful/ unsuccessful? What do you think contribute to its success/ failure?

4. After doing some critical literacy work with students, has your understanding of critical literacy been changed? In what way has it been changed, if any?

5. What is/are the major challenge(s) faced by your students in the implementation of the critical literacy program?

6. To what extent did you and your students find the critical literacy program useful in improving their literacy attainments and critical literacy skills?

7. What is your general reaction to the implementation of critical literacy work in your ESL class and ESL classes in general?
Appendix D: End-of-Program Semi-Structured Interview with the Teacher

1. What has/have been the major challenge(s) in the implementation of the critical literacy program in the ESL class?

2. What reactions did your students have for the program? Were there any aspects that they liked a lot or disliked a lot?

3. Which part of the program is the most successful/ unsuccessful? What do you think contribute to its success/ failure?

4. What is/are the major challenge(s) faced by your students in the implementation of the critical literacy program?

5. To what extent did you and your students find the critical literacy program useful in improving their literacy attainments and critical literacy skills?

6. What is your general reaction to the implementation of critical literacy work in your ESL class and ESL classes in general?

7. What role do you think critical literacy education has in ESL classroom?
Appendix E: Pre-Program Semi-Structured Interview with Students

(Focus Group)

Background information
1. How long have you been in Canada?

2. Could you tell me about your school life before and after you came to Canada?

3. Did you have English language education before you came to Canada? If yes, for how long and do you find any differences in the way it is taught and it is perceived in the two countries?

ESL learning
1. How important do you think English language learning is to you? And what are your family’s opinions on this?

2. Which aspect(s) of the English language learning do you find most challenging?

3. What, if any, have you done to address those challenges? To what extent have they been successful?

4. To what extent you find the ESL program at school useful in helping you improve your English language proficiency?

5. If you could improve the present ESL lessons, what would you suggest?

6. Is there anything that you like/ dislike about being in the pull-out ESL program?

7. How do you perceive yourself as an ELL? And what do you think other students and teachers perceive you as an ELL?
Appendix F: Worksheet on the Name Jar

The Name Jar
5. Unhei felt n_________________ and e_________________ on the way to her new school.
6. She had a block of w_________________ inside her pocket, which was a s___________ with her name on it.
7. The stamp was given to her by her ______ at the _______________ in K___________. Her name was carved in K__________ characters.
8. When she touched it, she remembered her grandmother’s ________________.
9. On the school bus, the children asked her what her name was. She said, “Unhei”, but the children could not read her name correctly and Unhei felt herself b__________.
10. In the doorway of her classroom, a boy with c______ hair said “Hello” to her and took her into the classroom.
11. Mr. _____________ was their teacher.
12. Someone in the class asked for her name, Unhei said she hadn’t picked one yet. All students were c___________ about it.
13. At home, Unhei told her mom that she would love to have an A____________ name. Her mother thought “Unhei” was a b__________________ name and they went to a name m___________ for it.
14. “But it is difficult to p______________”. Unhei said, “And it is d___________ from all American kids.”
15. “You are d__________________, and that’s a good thing,” Mom replied.
16. The next day, they went g___________ shopping and they went to ____________ Market.
17. They bought some k___________ and s______________. They still loved to eat K___________ food even if they had moved to America.
18. When Mr. Kim at the counter asked Unhei what her name meant, she said it meant ________________.
19. That night, Unhei thought of some American names but nothing felt right. She thought American kids would / would not like her. The next day at school, she found a glass ______ on her desk. There were pieces of ____________ in it and there were ________________ on them.
20. Ralph wrote the name “Wensdy” for her because she came to the school on ____________.
21. When Joey asked her what her name was, she showed him her name s___________. She pressed the stamp on the paper and Joey said, “That’s b__________________”.
22. Every day, the jar got fuller with more names. Unhei found a few names she liked --- Miranda, _________ and ____________. They sounded i__________________.
23. One day Unhei received a ______________ from her grandmother. She told her that no matter how different America was from Korea, she would always be her _____________.
24. On Monday, Unhei came to the class early to look at the names one last time, but the name jar _________________ on her desk. Instead there was just a piece of ____________ with a name on it. All students helped to look for the name jar.
25. Soon Mr. Cocotos came in. Unhei said she was ready to introduce herself. She wrote her name in both E_____________ and K_________________. She said she liked the names her classmates gave her but she thought her own name was the b___________ because it meant g___________.
26. When she got back home, J___________ was there. And in his arms was the ____________ _____________. He said he took it because he thought Unhei should ________________.
27. Joey got a Korean nickname from Mr. Kim, which was Chinku which means ________________.
Appendix G: My Family: A Photo Story

I have a big family. There are nine of us altogether—my parents, my 4 elder sisters, 1 elder brother and 1 younger sister.

This picture shows my elder brother and sisters and me outside a park in Hong Kong when I was very small. Do you know which one is me? Yes, I am the one who is crying. I want my brother to give me a candy.

We took this photo in our old home in Hong Kong in a Chinese New Year celebration. My father and mother are sitting in the middle. I’m the one with my hand over my mom’s shoulder.

I moved to Canada with my son when he was 6 years old. His name is Janan. We are in our old apartment and are having a birthday party for him. He is unwrapping his birthday presents in this picture. Does the dog look real to you?

In this picture, Janan and I are standing on a bridge in Montreal overlooking Saint the Lawrence River. We are wearing very thick jackets, scarves and woollen caps. It’s very cold!
Janan and I are in a ski resort in Blue Mountain. We are learning how to ski. Janan loved it, but I hated it. I kept falling down!

This picture shows our new home. We moved to Newmarket this summer. My friend and I are standing in front of a painting that I put up in the dining room. I like the painting a lot. Do you like it too?

In this photo, I am kneeling down beside Janan. The girl wearing a cap is my niece, my sister’s daughter. She is just 3 months younger than Janan. Janan likes to play with this cousin because they are of the same age.

This photo shows Janan with his 4 cousins. The chubby boy on the left is my eldest sister’s son. The little girl in pink is my fourth sister’s daughter and the two boys standing behind her are my third sister’s sons. They are all my nephews and niece in Hong Kong, and I miss them all.
What Janan and I miss most of all are our two dogs, Samson and Jerry. Samson is the little dog with black and gold silky hair sitting *in front*. He is a Yorkshire terrier. Jerry is the big golden dog lying *behind* him. He is a golden retriever. They both died before we left for Canada.
Appendix H: Students’ Spoken Memories

Baoh:

1. I was born in Fujian on February 23, 1994. I am the first and only child in my family. I did not live with my grandparents. But we lived close to them. We kept close contact with each other.

2. My home town is Fujian, China. It is a small city. There are 1 million people in our town. It is located near the sea. There are tall buildings in the city. But there are too much garbage on street. The weather is warm.

3. Our family was not rich, but our life was peaceful, happy and safe. The people in our community were very friendly and kind. They always helped when my family had problems. Usually, every morning my father went to work on foot at 7:00 am. My mother went to work by bus at 7:30 am and I went to school on foot at 7:30 am. We came home by 5:00 pm.

4. Once, I had one unforgettable incident in my childhood. Before I left China to Canada. My friends and teachers gave me many presents. Then my best friend sung a song for me, so it was very unforgettable.

5. My family wanted to move a country to Canada, because in China, we had heard how beautiful Canada is. There is a good environment, good welfare system and good education. And we have relatives living in Canada. These are the reasons we decided to move to Canada.
When I arrived in Canada, I was scared and felt strange, because the language and culture is different from my country. But now, I am not really nervous. I am much better than when I first came to school.

Terri:  

Chapter 1: My hometown

My hometown is Guangzhou. It is also called the “Flower City”. It is a big city. There are almost 100,000,000 people living there. Guangzhou is a good city. It is very noisy at night. In New Year or Christmas some people will celebrate on the street, or inside the shopping malls. The famous thing in Guangzhou is the “Five Goats” rock. It has a story behind:

Long time ago, Guangzhou was a poor city. There was no food and no money. Then one day an old man with five goats appeared. But later the old man went away and he left those goats there. From that time on, people in Guangzhou became richer, because they sold the goats to make money. Now people think that it is the 5 goats which brought them the money and saved them. This is why the “Five Goats” rock is famous.

Chapter 2

I was born in Guangzhou in 1994. I’m the only child in my family. But I have a lot of cousins. My mom told me that we lived with my grandparents for about 3 months after I was born. But in my mind, I didn’t remember living with them.

Chapter 3

When we lived in Guangzhou, I felt people were close to each other. But it was only among people who they knew. People always go to the restaurant together in the morning. But I guess we went out to meet people we knew too.

Chapter 4

There is one unforgettable incident in my childhood. When I was 4 years old, I fell into the corner of the washroom. And I hurt the corner of my eye…
## Appendix I: Information Sheets on Canadian Symbols

### Moose on the Loose Information Sheet

1. How many moose live in Canada?
   - about ____________________.
   - there are moose in ____________________.
   - Ontario and ____________________.

2. Are moose really Canadian?
   - No, but Canada has ____________________.

3. How much food does a moose eat?
   - Moose have ______________ appetites.
   - In summer, they can eat ____________________.
   - In winter, they can eat ____________________.
   - they have four ______________ and can ____________________.

4. Who came up with the name “moose”?
   - the Algonquians called this creature ______________ meaning ____________________.

5. Why do moose have large antlers?
   - only ____________________ have antlers.
   - Antlers can grow up to ____________________ and weigh over ____________________.
   - Moose use the antlers to ____________________.

6. Why do moose have that hairy thing hanging under their chin?
   - it is called ______________ or ______________.

### Make way for Birds! Information Sheet

1. How far north do birds fly in Canada?
   - Ivory gulls fly over the ____________________ in summer.
   - Arctic tern migrate from ______________ to ______________ in the fall, then back to the ______________ again in the spring.

2. Why don’t birds’ feet freeze in winter?
   - snow owls have ______________.
   - owls and ravens’ soles have ______________ that ____________________.
   - some birds cut the heat loss by ______________; or ______________.
   - seabirds and waterfowl have ______________ but warm blood flows through the rest of their bodies.

3. Why do some Canada geese fly south for the winter while others stay?
   - Some birds ______________ their feathers and ____________________.
   - Others ______________.
   - Canada geese migrate to the south when ____________________.
   - Some Canada geese fly to southern part of Canada, some fly further south to ____________________.
   - Some geese just stay on ____________________ and ____________________.

4. Why geese fly in V-formation?
   - there is less ____________________.
   - it is also easier ____________________ because they can ____________________.
Raise the Flag!
Information Sheet

1. Why does the Canadian flag look the way it does?
   ✦ A committee was set up to decide what ____________________ to use for the flag, e.g., beavers chomping down trees, or three green maple leaves between two blue borders.
   ✦ The final design was a ____________________ maple leave on a white background and two ___________ bands on the two sides.
   ✦ On ____________________, the parliament voted to accept this new Canadian flag.

2. Why does Canada’s flag have a maple leave and why is it red?
   ✦ Maple leaves have been a Canadian symbol for ___________________________.
   ✦ In 1867, a song called ________________________________ was written to celebrate Canada’s becoming a country.
   ✦ Why red?: _________ and _________ were accepted as Canada’s official colours by the King of England in 1921.

3. What year did the Canadian flag start being used?
   ✦ On _________________________________ at _________________.
   ✦ The prime minister at that time was ___________________________.

4. Does the original Canadian flag still exist? Where is it kept?
   ✦ ___________ Canadian flags were considered the “original”.
   ✦ One was ________________, the other one was raised on Parliament Hill on ________________, but was _________________ for years. It was found in Belgium in _________________.

_________________________
Appendix J: Comprehension Questions on “Don’t Trust Your Parents”

Understanding the Story:
1. Who are the characters in the story?
   Main characters:
   a. Da-ren (Darren)
   b. Ruo-neng (Ronnie), Da-ren’s father
   c. __________________________
   d. ______________________________

   minor characters:
   a. Leon, Da-ren’s friend/ classmate
   b. _______________________________
   c. Zhao-shen, Jing-dan, Shi-cong, Da-ren’s friends in China
   d. Rosa, __________________________
   e. Miss Carr. __________________________

2. When the story starts, how is Da-ren’s family situation? (Whom does he live with?)

3. How did they come to Canada? Did they come together as a family?

4. Why do you think Da-ren’s mother went back to China after staying in Canada for some time?

5. How would you describe these characters:
   a. Da-ren:
   ______________________________
   b. Da-ren’s father:
   ______________________________
   c. Da-ren’s mother:
   ______________________________
   d. Shelley:
   ______________________________

6. Why does Da-ren like Cui Jian’s songs that much?

7. To Da-ren, which part of the TOEFL exam is the most difficult?

8. Why didn’t Da-ren’s mother take Da-ren with her when she decided to return back to China?

9. Why made Da-ren’s mother decide to bring Da-ren back home this time?

10. Did Da-ren’s mother get the Canadian citizenship?

11. Why are Leon and Ming jealous of Da-ren when they know that he can go back to China?

12. Why does Da-ren’s father decide to ask Da-ren to visit his workplace?

13. Why do you think Da-ren’s mother decides not to take Da-ren back to China in the last minute?
Appendix K: Worksheet on Immigrants’ Job Opportunities

New Immigrants need good jobs
by Mehdi Rizvi
Toronto Star   March 25, 2008

… The immigrant process does not conclude with
the stamping of a visa at the airport. It should be
considered complete only when the landed
immigrants find a skills-oriented job with pay
adequate to meet household expenses; otherwise
it is merely an exercise in increasing poverty in
Canada and frustration in immigrant families.

During the period 2001 to 2005, nearly 1.1
million immigrants came to Canada. More than
28 percent of Ontario’s and 27.5 percent of B.C.’s
population is foreign born. In Toronto, it’s more
than 45 percent.

What percentage of skilled immigrants
secured jobs in their own fields? What kind of economic
situation do they face on arrival? Do we have any
measure of poverty among new immigrants?

If a doctor delivers pizza, the government
considers him employed; in fact, he does not
work to his potential and is unable to earn wages
in keeping with his education and skills. Most
newly arrived professionals are forced to accept
survival jobs….

…..

In 2006, the estimated 70,000 recent African-born
immigrants had an unemployment rate of 20.8
percent. Indeed, the relatively higher education
level of recent immigrants does not translate into
higher income. Instead, they become a source of
educated but cheap labour.

Questions:
1. How many immigrants came to Canada
between the years of 2001-2005?
2. What is the percentage of the foreign born in
Toronto?
3. Does the writer think that it is a good thing to
have doctors delivering pizzas? Explain your
answer by finding support from the text.
4. In your opinion, do you think it is enough that
immigrants are employed, no matter what kind
of jobs they have?
5. In your opinion, what could be the reasons why
new immigrants often cannot find jobs in their
own field?
6. What do you think the government do to help
immigrants find jobs in their field?

Achievers of Canadian Dream
by Nicholas Keung
Toronto Star   February 25, 2008

It takes perseverance to succeed here, says
honouree who toiled to regain engineer status
…..

In the youth category, New Pioneers Award winner
is teenage Ellen Xi Yang, who at age 13 left
behind a privileged lifestyle in China to move with
her parents into a rodent-infested basement
apartment in Toronto.

With little conversational English, she was
constantly taunted for poor pronunciation by other
students at Riverdale Collegiate. That motivated
her to work harder.

Believing “practice makes perfect”, Yang stepped
out of her comfort zone and challenged the school
bullies to help her learn English---surprisingly,
many accepted. Yang needed only a month in an
ESL program at Riverdale before joining a regular
Grade 9 class. She’s been an exceptional student
ever since, last year earning the school’s top marks
in biology, physics, art, psychology/ sociology/
anthropology, math and accounting.

…..

Not everyone is as successful at making the
transition.

Yang’s father and mother, an engineer and
accountant respectively in China, have given up
trying to requalify here. Their hopes now rest on
the shoulders of their only child.

“…..

“I’m really honoured with New Pioneer Award,”
she said.

“It recognizes not only my successful integration
into society, but thousands of others who have
done what I’ve done to overcome hardship to excel
in school or at work.”

Questions:
1. What is the message of the by-line? Do you
agree with that?
2. What is Ellen’s motto?
3. What did she do when her schoolmates laughed
at her poor English?
4. What is the quality in Ellen that you admire
most?
5. Do you think just perseverance or practice alone
will guarantee success?