INTERACTING NARRATIVES AND THE INTENTIONAL DESIGN OF PERSONAL PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: EXPERIENCED ENGLISH TEACHERS’ MULTILITERATE INNOVATIONS IN THE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEM

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is an exploration of the lived experiences of three secondary teachers who have developed innovative approaches to English education in response to the needs of diverse, multi-literate urban students. The research marries multiliteracies pedagogy with narrative inquiry, and explores themes and discourses in the teachers’ narrations of their practices. From the new perspective developed from this pairing emerge two significant findings. First, the study contributes to teacher development by synthesizing concepts of design in multiliteracies pedagogy and personal practical knowledge in narrative inquiry. From this synthesis arises the notion of the intentional design of personal practical knowledge occurring through self-directed professional learning that leads to innovation in teaching. Second, the study develops the concepts of interacting narratives and professional knowledge landscape, offering a method of analyzing the multifaceted interactions of Self and Other narratives in the context of a professional knowledge ecosystem. This method provides a specific framework for contextualizing interacting narratives and provides a new clarity of focus in narrative research texts.
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1.1 Gabriel’s Message

Gabriel entered the classroom, his whelp, B.J, bopping along behind him. They were only 15 minutes late for grade 10 English today. The teacher was giving instructions at the front of the room to the class of students, most of whom were repeating the course. She was just explaining about turning in the assignment that was due, and had bristled when she heard the knob turn, sniffing a fresh conflict. Now she stood, hackles raised and back to the wall, facing them.

“Gabriel, B.J., sit down. I told you to come in without disrupting the entire class if you’re going to be late!”

“Yo, chill lady,” slurred Gabriel. His eyes, red from his lunchtime exploits, met hers in a fierce challenge as B.J. snickered at his elbow.

The teacher’s mind raced to find some response to his provocation, knowing that she could not allow herself to slip into the trap of rage he had baited for her. Today, thankfully, she skirted it, but felt its hair trigger brush her while forcing herself to focus on her capabilities and responsibilities as she faced their jibes. Prickling but not fuming, she responded with an observation, “I see you haven’t brought anything with you to class. Does that mean you haven’t finished your assignments?”

The tension shifted and she saw the flash of defensive anger in Gabriel’s eye, which he quickly buried under his coat of bluster and bravado. “Duh, what assignment, Missss?”

As Gabriel spat out, Miss, her anger dissipated, evaporating into sadness. She did not want to fight. In a second she took in what she imagined to be this boy, breathed in his suffering while believing that it did not have to be so. Her voice, its edge blunted, sounded out into the
now focused silence of the classroom. “Gabriel, why don’t you just hand in your assignments? You’re too smart to fail. You know my guarantee: if you hand everything in, no matter what, you will pass this course.” He stared at her, his breath audible, but no words came, so she continued, addressing the entire class. “You all know that there is very little you can do these days without high school. Think of this course as a hurdle or a hoop you have to jump through to get what you want in life.”

Gabriel shot back, “What makes you think that you know what I want? Lady, you have NO idea.”

She gasped quietly, stunned by the venom of this honest and open attack, feeling it hit its mark. After a pause, a quiet response came. “You’re right, Gabriel. I have no idea what you want.”

* * *

1.2 Research Questions

The story above is my account of an interaction between me and a student in the spring of 2001. I had been a teacher for three years, and had recently started working in a large public school board in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) after returning from Japan, where I spent the beginning of my career. The story, “Gabriel’s Message”, reveals to me how at the time, I did not know how to listen to what my students needed, and I did not know how to respond when my ignorance of their needs reached a crisis point. This dissertation, which has emerged from a study undertaken in January 2006, flows out of this story of Gabriel and me.

The topic of the study is secondary English teachers who have learned over time to respond to the varied voices and contexts of students in multicultural, multilingual, socio-
economically diverse urban classrooms and in so doing have changed their teaching practice through innovation. The inquiry asks the following two questions: what have three experienced English teachers learned in order to respond to the diverse literacy and language needs of their students; and what conditions allowed them to engage in that learning? The three participants in the research, Tanya, Anandi and I, are all experienced English teachers in a large, public Canadian urban school board who have developed teaching practices that are innovative in their application of instructional strategies that respond to and build upon the multiple literacies of our students. The study employs a narrative methodology to examine the learning processes the participants have undergone while adopting transformative approaches to teaching. The framework upon which the research is based is rooted in three theoretical pillars: narrative inquiry, teacher development and multiliteracies theory.

1.3 Definitions

In order to frame my perspective on the research, I will present a glossary of definitions here for important terms that are used throughout this dissertation. One of the primary areas involving specific terminology is my frequent reference to concepts within the field of narrative inquiry. These definitions are not introduced in alphabetical order, but instead in order of conceptual importance, with the most fundamental terms presented first with extensions of the concepts proceeding. These include:

*Narrative Inquiry:* a branch of qualitative research concerned with the way in which experience is shaped and mediated by story. Narrative inquirers study how stories are lived
and told, utilize narrative methods to construct and co-construct meaning, and create research texts using narrative techniques.

_Narrative:_ any experience, real or imagined that is uttered or conceived as a story. A narrative can be lived, imagined, or remembered; told, written or depicted by other means (e.g. visual); heard, read or viewed; broadcast or received; composed about and/or by an individual, a small group, a large group or an institution. Narrative is the means by which human beings negotiate meaning in the world.

_Narrative account:_ is a story about a research participant that is the result of the construction of a range of narrative data (from interviews, observation and artifacts) and the negotiated meaning making between the researcher and the participant. A narrative account is a research text that offers a representation of the experience and knowledge of the participant in storied form and an interpretation of that story through analysis of its details.

_Narrative excerpt:_ is a segment of a participant’s story from the raw data of the study (interviews, observations, artifacts) that is represented as a segment of a narrative account for its illustrative purposes.

_Personal practical knowledge:_ is the accumulated, often tacit, knowledge of a practitioner that is the result of experience, which allows an individual to engage in practice. This knowledge is the result of past experience, is enacted in the present and directed towards the future. In this study, we see how it is possible for personal practical knowledge to
develop through a process of inadvertent evolution from the conditioning effects of experience over time. It is also possible for practitioners to engage in an intentional design of personal practical knowledge from the interaction of narratives chosen for their conditioning effect.

Lifeworld: a term borrowed from multiliteracies theory that conceptualizes an individual’s experience of life in the social, linguistic, cultural, and gendered context in which she/he lives. In this study, a lifeworld is the multifaceted totality of an individual’s lived experience.

Self narratives: are stories about the self that hold knowledge and memory of personal experience and identity (e.g. affiliations with gender, sexuality, culture, spirituality, aesthetics, politics, profession etc.), which emerge from an individual’s lifeworld. Some Self narratives are not chosen and these are called life narratives in this study. Some Self narratives are chosen “for their conditioning effect” (Beattie, 2009, p. 5), and in this study these are called chosen Self narratives and chosen professional narratives.

Life narratives: are narratives not selected by the participant. Such narratives include and are not limited to parentage, ancestry, place of birth, biological sex, biological age, most illnesses and so forth.

Chosen Self narratives: are narratives selected by the participant for their conditioning effect on the personal realm of his/her life.
Chosen professional narratives: are narratives selected by the participant for their conditioning effect on the public realm of his/her life.

Other narratives: are narratives originating from sources external to the participant. These narratives may be by or about other individuals, groups or institutions. The participant can have any range of close or distant affiliation with these external narratives.

Interacting narratives: is a conception of the ways in which the myriad narrative threads an individual encounters interact with and influence one another, resulting in individual change and potentially transformation. In this dissertation I consider prominent interactions among various types of Self narratives and between Self and Other narratives.

Professional knowledge landscape: a conception of the environment within which a practitioner develops personal practical knowledge through interactions along three dimensions: the temporal plane, the social plane and the physical plane of location.

Professional knowledge ecosystem: an elaboration of the concept of professional knowledge landscape arising out of this research that emphasizes the nature of interactions between an individual and the professional knowledge landscape as being characterized by dynamic and varying movement of personal practical knowledge through various phases of existence.
**Narrative authority:** is the agency (or lack of agency) that an individual experiences in framing and authoring her/his life narratives, including chosen Self and chosen professional narratives. Narrative authority is influenced by conditions in the professional knowledge ecosystem and interactions between Self and Other narratives.

**Design** is a concept borrowed from multiliteracies pedagogy and involves intentional meaning making. In terms of literacy, individuals design meaning when they are literate in a particular form. They design meaning both as “readers” and “writers” of any given text. I also apply this concept in discussions about narrative authority and its role in the development of intentional evolution of personal practical knowledge. A practitioner who wields significant narrative authority over his/her chosen Self narratives in effect becomes a designer of his/her own meanings and author of his/her professional learning and practice.

**Frozen stories:** are narratives that have solidified from review and/or retelling into a story with unchanging mythical status for the individuals to whom they belong. Frozen stories slow or prevent change or knowledge development, and frequently their effect on an individual is tacit.

**Resonance:** is the unity one individual feels with the narrative of an Other. This unity is usually a personal connection when an individual recognizes that there is a parallel between some elements of the Other narrative with a Self narrative.
Transformation: is the ongoing process of change that over time results in radical shifts in knowledge of practice. It emerges from the sometimes tacit, sometimes overt interaction of past and present narratives in pursuit of future goals.

1.4 Significance

The study is significant for two major reasons, which I explain below. First, its conclusions demonstrate the implications for transforming teaching practice in secondary English education, necessitated by an urgent need for innovative educational transformation in an era of rapid cultural and epistemological shifts. The study also offers significant interconnected implications to theoretical knowledge in the fields of teacher development and narrative inquiry.

1.4.1 Innovation in the face of pedagogical hegemony. Conclusions drawn from the research offer timely and necessary understandings that will help those who support secondary literacy and language teachers to adopt practical approaches that respond to changes in society. One contemporaneous change is the entry of postindustrial societies into a period of innovation rivaling the Industrial Revolution in the ways in which technological advances are altering culture and society. With our entry into a Technological Revolution dominated by communication technologies which are altering the ways in which people interact and the way people think, educators in postindustrial societies around the globe need to be increasingly concerned with how these changes will affect the language and literacy needs of their students. In addition, in many contexts, and specifically in the urban Canadian context, global migration is altering the nature of English language communication and the expressions of individual and
group culture. While there has been a response to multiculturalism in the field of education across Canada, not all students find their lifeworlds or their Englishes to be represented or even welcome in the context of schools. As differences increase between dominant discourses in schools and the forms of discourse used and accessed by students in their lives outside schools, the potential for alienation increases. Of all educational players, classroom teachers have the greatest impact on students’ experiences and learning in schools; which makes it necessary for teachers to respond to societal transformations through their classroom practice in order for formal education to remain relevant. How well teachers are able to make connections between students’ lifeworlds, including linguistic experiences, and the school curriculum, directly affects the degree to which students are able to connect to their schooling.

Making such connections is, however, not a simple affair. While there is a need for teachers to respond to social change in practice, there are also significant challenges for them to overcome. Such challenges include hegemonic cultures within education that perpetuate conservative notions about what constitutes knowledge, what texts merit study, and even what the role of a teacher is. This study demonstrates how its participants overcame or avoided such challenges and innovated in response to changing needs of students by incorporating strategies that could be described to varying degrees as multiliteracies pedagogy.

1.4.2 Contributions to narrative inquiry and teacher development. Stories about what teachers can do to develop inclusive multiliteracies pedagogy that reflects the changing nature of communication and literature is one contribution of the study. Perhaps more important are the study’s two main contributions to narrative inquiry and teacher development.
The major contribution of this study to the field of narrative inquiry is twofold. First, it offers a method of conceptualizing and analyzing interacting narratives through the development of the metaphor of the professional knowledge ecosystem. This method is detailed in chapter three, *Research Design and Methodology*, and applied in all three narrative accounts, which are presented in chapters four through six. This new conceptualization of interacting narratives helps to advance knowledge about the organic process in which both tacit and explicit knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through the interaction of complex, interwoven chosen and unchosen narratives. Through this advancement in our understanding of the nature of interacting narratives the study arrives at a second finding, which crosses over into the field of teacher development.

The study details how engaging in the act of narrative inquiry can lead a practitioner to an innovative transformation of personal practical knowledge and practice, a process I call *intentional design*. This process is examined in detail in chapter six, *A Patchwork Panorama of my Professional Learning*. This advancement in the knowledge of teacher development is nested within narrative inquiry and the examination of how narrative interaction and the enactment of narrative authority can be instrumental in fostering innovative practice. The research examines how the conditioning effects of selecting as a chosen professional narrative a pedagogy like multiliteracies, which emphasizes what Bakhtin (1999) has termed *polyphony*, can transform a practitioner’s personal practical knowledge from a mostly tacit application of prior experience to an intentional design of practice.
1.5 Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research questions and arrive at the implications discussed above, I drew on three theoretical fields to frame the study: narrative inquiry, teacher development, and multiliteracies pedagogy. Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research paradigm (Spector-Mersel, 2010) that is arts based and which considers narrative or story to be both the phenomenon and method of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is the foundation of this research. In this study I examine themes and discourse in teachers’ narratives, lived and told, with the intention of understanding how we participants author our teaching lives and compose our teaching futures through the interactions of various Self and Other narratives. Research in teacher development, a theoretical pillar rising out of the study’s narrative foundation, is another important piece of the conceptual framework. I draw on research which focuses on teachers’ knowledge and learning, which underlies my research questions: *how do experienced secondary English teachers learn to effectively respond to the rapidly evolving needs of their students? And what conditions support the learning required to respond?*

The second pillar, multiliteracies theory, also addresses these research questions, and is a field of literacy education concerned with recent social, cultural and linguistic developments leading to greater diversity in all these areas in urban, post-industrial nations. With such diversity comes a demand on schools for responsive pedagogy, which acknowledges the multiple literacies of students, and from this demand, multiliteracies pedagogy is evolving. None of the participants in the study have been mandated to employ multiliteracies pedagogy in their teaching practice, but all use some of its features. Multiliteracies theory offers a philosophical and epistemological grounding that provides a point of comparison for participants’ innovative responses to diverse and multiliterate urban students’ needs and to individual teaching practices.
and approaches to secondary English curriculum. In this study, multiliteracies pedagogy is viewed as a powerful and radical response to our rapidly changing society, and a conceptualization of how secondary English teachers can engage in an intentional evolution of personal practical knowledge to design curriculum that responds to those same societal needs.

### 1.5.1 Scope and limitations of the research

In my use narrative inquiry, an arts based research methodology, my study offers the particular kinds of insights that arise from aesthetic contemplation: close reflection on the particulars of individual cases. Barone & Eisner (2012, p. 3), in their attempt to broaden prevailing understandings regarding what constitutes social science research, explain the contribution of arts based research in the following way:

> (T)he contribution of arts based research is not that it leads to claims in propositional form about states of affairs but that it addresses complex and often subtle interactions and that it provides an image of those interactions in ways that make them noticeable. In a sense, arts based research is a heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world. (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 3)

Barone & Eisner (2012) note how available meanings are shaped by dominant forms in social science research, which insist on the generalization of results and literal representations of data and produce a finite range of possible meanings. By opening up to aesthetic forms concerned with the particular and the figurative, arts based research reveals other possibilities of making meaning in research, which are already prevalent and accepted in other disciplines.

The intention of this study has never been to offer the broad generalizations found in quantitative research on similar topics about how teachers should practice or develop their
approaches to teaching. When I examine the particulars of each case in later chapters it will be clear how different each narrative is; however, many educators will find narrative resonance (Conle, 2000), or the recognition of their own experience in our stories. Such resonance differs from generalization in that it does not provide prescriptive conclusions, but it raises points of connection that serve as grounds for the development of understanding, empathy and action. Below I briefly discuss the origins of the study in my teaching practice, and afterwards point out some of my preconceptions while outlining my epistemological stance.

1.5.2 Storied origins of the study. The story at the beginning of this introduction holds evidence that I faced considerable challenges in February 2001 when I began teaching at Viceroy C.I., a diverse school in Toronto, Ontario. The encounter I had with Gabriel did not end on the day it happened. My inability to develop a positive relationship with him and others in his class caused me great anxiety. The following narrative conveys a sense of how that feeling of failure dominating my professional narrative was affecting my Self narratives:

* * * * *

It was March break, finally, and I had escaped from Gabriel, from B.J., from all of them, at least temporarily. I was in Honolulu on a bus, creaking towards Diamond Head from Waikiki with a friend who had met me there, halfway from Japan. I sat beside him in the window seat, happily basking in all the warmth of this day, far away from Viceroy Park and my daily nightmare of fear and anxiety. It was a perfect moment. I can still conjure the sensations of warmth, air and colour: the sun shining onto our laps through the breezy window and the lush green and fuchsia gardens flashing by. The looming igneous giant is etched in my memory as if it were a postcard on my desk at work reminding me of best times.
It was an utter shock when I lost sight of paradise as two local teenagers climbed aboard and triggered a muted eruption. My eyes registered their money dropping into the fare box when the tremors began: tightness in the ribs and throat, dryness on the tongue. As they quietly paced to seats at the back I quaked, red coursing through veins, sweat oozing through pores and nerves rattling muscles and bones. My friend quickly registered the seismic change. “Are you okay?” he asked, concerned.

“No. Teenagers,” was all I could spew out through wildly chattering teeth, my vision tunneling, blurry red and ears muffled by the roaring of my internal meltdown.

“You need to relax,” he said calmly. “You’re on vacation. You don’t even know them.” Eyes fixed on the dormant crater out my window I listened to the serene voice of my friend, which cooled the irrational burst of tension wailing just below the surface of my outward composure and called me away from danger as we rode on towards the volcano’s crater. Somehow, with effort I managed to suppress my anxiety and stay on that bus. I calmed and the rest of our day was without incident, as we hopped happily about on the crust of that famous volcano, snapping bright tourist shots of each other high above Waikiki. The memory of our hilltop hike has blurred into an image of yellow, blue, green and grey, but I have often remembered in visceral detail the bus ride. It rumbles whenever I reflect upon reactions to my early experiences and how those reactions have affected the direction of my career.

* * *

After just one-and-a-half months of working at Viceroy C.I., from February 6, 2001 to the March Break, I had reached a point of burn out where I wanted to quit. I held out, perhaps because of my vacation in Hawaii, until June, when I learned that because of low seniority and staffing allocations, I had been “bumped” out of my position at this school into another. When I
returned from the meeting in which I received the news from the principal, my colleagues patted me sympathetically on the back. My friend Rosemary asked, “Are you okay?” concernedly. Inside I was celebrating; it was such an easy and graceful departure from the shame of failure, from the feeling of illness I experienced each day, which I swallowed in anticipation of teaching.

In September 2001, I moved to Mapleforest C.I., a shift that did not solve my professional problems, as I had anticipated it would. I faced more students, several of whom reminded me of Gabriel, and I relived the patterns established at Viceroy. Again I ran from my shortcomings, this time back to Japan for the 2002–2003 school year, where I taught in an arts-based preschool and kindergarten. When I returned to Mapleforest C.I. in September 2003, I was met yet again with students not unlike Gabriel. Despite the many instances of conflict involving my reactions to students reluctant or defiant in my classroom over these years, it was always Gabriel’s story that echoed whenever I considered problems I was facing in my teaching. This episode held a mysterious significance and a critical place, which I would later understand in the arc of my professional development and chosen professional narrative.

The inquiry that has unfolded as a result of recording my narrative about Gabriel, since the first time I put it on paper in a methods class in narrative inquiry has led to an ongoing practice of qualitative research. The results arising from the inquiry that ensued are embodied in this dissertation and in a transformation of my professional practice. This for me was one of those pivotal moments in life that stand out because of their potential for transformation. The moment depicted in this story haunted me for several years while awake and asleep and its memory spurred me on in my graduate studies.

I undertook doctoral studies in September 2006 as a means of understanding and overcoming the struggles I was facing. Unaware at the time, selecting an arts based form of
inquiry allowed me to re-imagine and re-design my teaching practice. I had encountered the research methodology of *narrative inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) during my Masters studies in a course taught by Mary Beattie. I had been working as a research assistant on her project (Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge, 2007) and had apprenticed in the art of this qualitative methodology. To me, narrative inquiry was a natural method of interpreting our storied lives (MacIntyre, 1984), and likely appealed to me because of my familiarity with literature and narrative thinking, which emerged during my undergraduate studies in English.

My initial goal for doctoral research was to solve the problem of all the Gabriels in my teaching life. I first looked at the landscape around me. At the beginning of my inquiry, the horizon was murky, and I had vague notions about studying teacher burnout and resilience and learning about self-directed professional development and its role in helping teachers become “good” at teaching. I engaged in a pilot narrative inquiry in the autumn of 2003 with a colleague who taught English, who I believed was good at his job, and who seemed to be thriving in it. I observed his class and interviewed him about the directions his professional learning had taken him in. I wrote a narrative about the class I observed that captured in both our minds the essence of his approach to teaching English. When I sat down to write about my own practice, “Gabriel’s Message,” then untitled, appeared effortlessly on the screen in front of me, its arc familiar from many retellings. When I began to compare our narratives, I was surprised to hear a radical difference between them.

I faced a moment of epiphany. Like a baby recognizing for the first time that the face in the mirror is her own, the narrative implications of the two stories of teaching written for this initial project first shocked, then delighted me. For the first time, I observed during my analysis that I narrated my story in the third person, distancing the teller’s voice from the teacher
character in the story. I saw that I had used hunter/prey imagery, but had cast my prey, Gabriel and B.J. as hostile and dangerous. I had storied myself into a corner where I was set upon by students, curriculum and the institution; an impotent, well-meaning heroine unable to prevail. Suddenly aware that I had crafted this version of myself from the very language I used to hold it in my memory, I was shocked to understand my own critical role in this classroom drama. I recognized that in all my re-imaginings and retellings of this story over several years it had become frozen (Conle, 1999), a narrative congealed in my mind, affecting my practice at all levels: my approach to curriculum, my interactions with students, and my feelings about my job. While sobering, this was a delightful recognition, because having understood that I had storied myself into the role of the teacher in Gabriel’s Message, I could story myself out of it. In the years since I engaged in the pilot study, I have come to see Gabriel as a messenger who gave me insight into my own narrative authority (Olson & Craig, 2001). This recognition is the story’s gift to its author, the seed of a radical transformation.

Now, years later, “Gabriel’s Message” holds two essential meanings for me. The first significance I recognized was that I had storied myself a victim in my classroom. Through narrative analysis, I learned that I had storied myself into a situation for which there was no solution; in this frozen narrative, I was not part of the problem. In my story I had rendered myself powerless, externalized blame for my problems, and abdicated my narrative authority (Olson & Craig, 2001) by not allowing my character a narrative voice.

Having understood this first lesson, a second direction emerged: I could rewrite my narrative, provoke change in my practice and learn to tell and enact a new story. I recognized that “Gabriel’s Message” was such a powerful story in my life because it was a narrative that captured a pattern of behaviour I habitually enacted in my classroom. It was a chosen, if
unwanted, professional narrative. I had met many ‘Gabriels’ by the time I understood this lesson – and they had met me playing the powerless teacher-hero, a Laura Loman limply peddling a spurious social justice pedagogy. When I learned I could re-story this frozen narrative, I was able to rehearse a new way of being, which helped me play a different role in subsequent interactions with students who sparked this reaction. I re-imagined the ending and in doing so, gave myself a chance to rehearse another way of being. I also made the third person narrator a first person narrator, and in so doing took some responsibility for my reactions. These simple changes radically altered the meaning of the story and the possibilities it held, as seen below:

* * *

Gabriel reacted to my trite motivational speech with anger. “What makes you think that you know what I want? Lady, you have NO idea,” he spat at me.

I gasped quietly, stunned by the truth of this honest and open defense, its veracity sending me reeling, searching for a response. After a pause during which I scrambled to collect my thoughts, I found something to say. “You’re right, Gabriel. I have no idea what you want. So why don’t you sit down and tell me what that is. Maybe we can work something out.”

* * *

This re-imagination of my teaching narrative became the focus of that pilot study paper (Hegge, 2007) and it also allowed me to begin with myself so that I could make way to inquire into the narratives of others (Beattie, 1995). I now knew that my practice was something I could re-conceptualize through the creative process of narrative inquiry, which led me to envision graduate studies as a forum for conducting research that would help me to transform my teaching practice. I decided to find some experienced secondary English teachers willing to share their successes and make them a focus of my doctoral research. Of the lessons held in “Gabriel’s
Message”, the first taught me the profound possibility for narrative inquiry to transform understandings about teaching and learning, and the second inspired me to find ways to change.

1.5.3 My preconceptions and epistemological stance. In order to discuss the epistemological stance I take in this study, it is first important to make a statement about some of my preconceptions. Important ones to consider are: the aesthetic lens through which I interpret the phenomena of study; the storied nature of the data; the location of the researcher to and within the study; and my aims as an educator.

I come to this research with a strong background in the arts. My field now is primarily education, but my background is in drama and English literature. Because of my training in examining human beings through story on stage or page, I believe it is valuable to examine the narratives in order to glean understandings that surpass the narrow scope of individual lives and contain wider relevance. Others share this epistemological stance that aesthetic analysis is an effective means of developing relevant and rigorous understandings about elements of human experience and interaction; Dewey (1934) wrote extensively about the importance of aesthetic experience in education. Greene (1995) built on his work and discussed the educative potential of art and aesthetics. Eisner (2002) and Barone (2007) (see also Barone & Eisner, 2012) have argued convincingly about the importance of educators and educational researchers to recognize and utilize aesthetic understandings in their work. In this research I have leaned on the work of these theorists and my aesthetic training and attempted to use an aesthetic framework for analyzing data and presenting findings.

The study is built upon stories, and in making this choice, I make a number of assumptions about the validity of stories in research. The three participants, Anandi, Tanya and I tell stories about our teaching. Through these narratives I build three cases with intersecting
themes and motifs. In order to gather detail and to do justice to the stories in this study, I limited the number of participants. By beginning with Clandinin & Connelly’s methodology of narrative inquiry (2000) I engaged in a process of collecting data through the creation of narrative accounts, which were then read and responded to by my co-participants, whose feedback is included in the work.

I place myself at the centre of this work. I am explicit about my personal connections to the topic of inquiry and structure the narratives from my first person perspective. I make this choice in order to highlight the fact that all stories within this dissertation are shaped by my narrative authority as the author of the research; all selections and omissions are filtered through my experiences, knowledge and understandings. Aware of arguments against this decision, I posit that personal filters and biases are present in all research, whether qualitative or quantitative in method, and that the approach of using the first person voice of the researcher throughout has a degree of honesty because it openly highlights the researcher’s presence in the research. Craig (2007) criticizes the prevailing perception in academia against qualitative researchers, marginalizing us and requiring continual defenses of the validity of our work. On the other hand, quantitative methodologies seem to be left unchallenged with an assumption that quantitative research and validity are causally linked.

Barone & Eisner (2012) posit that aesthetic inquiry has different purposes than conventional research and that validity is not connected to general claims or “truths” arising from a given study. Instead they consider aesthetic research to be of value if it disrupts equilibrium, promotes scrutiny and revisiting, and contains surprise (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 16). Following Craig (2007) and Barone & Eisner’s (2012) lead, I remind the reader that I make no general claim in presenting our three stories of teaching multiliterate students. I hope instead that
the reader will question and scrutinize our stories, and perhaps find resonance (Conle, 1996; 2000) between their own experience and the experiences depicted in the thesis. Stories serve a different purpose than scientific data in research about human experiences, but a purpose that is equally important.

I need also to comment on my reasons for labeling the work a piece of narrative inquiry instead of a self-study, given the prominent role I hold. I note above how a first person narrative voice throughout the study is apt not only to highlight my personal stance as a researcher throughout, but also because I am a co-participant in the inquiry. I tell the story of the research from within it. While it does not qualify as a self-study (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008), the research shares some qualities with this genre. Similarities involve how I investigate my own story of teacher development, my practice and the challenges I have faced throughout my career are the foundation of the research. I examine my own practice and how I am striving to improve it.

Two major differences, however, place this research firmly in the field of narrative inquiry. First, my story is relational; I explicitly examine the interactions between my story and the other participants’ narratives. Second, I examine how my practice changes as a result of my interactions with the narratives of those participants. The relational nature of this study is a critical element of its design and outcomes and because of this it is not a self-study.

In this study, I am both a practitioner and a researcher; I have an insider-outsider perspective. My relationship to the knowledge produced by the study is continually filtered through and evaluated by my practitioner’s stance. This is important because my aim in conducting this study is to present insights into the changing nature of secondary English education from the perspective of practitioners. While my epistemological stance is
predominantly focused on practical knowledge and praxis, I am also interested in the intersections the findings have with theoretical knowledge; in particular how narrative inquiry can be used as a tool for teacher development; and how multiliteracies theory can be used as a framework to understand the changing needs of students in multicultural settings.

In summary, this study is a narrative inquiry, employing an aesthetic lens that investigates and interprets the practical knowledge of three experienced English teachers who have been learning to respond to multiliterate students through curricular innovation. Its findings describe how I have understood and articulated the development undergone by all participants and the connections these practical results have with educational theory in narrative inquiry, teacher development and multiliteracies theory.

1.6 Parameters of the Study

Facing the frozen narrative of Gabriel allowed me to understand the type of inquiry I wanted to conduct for my doctoral thesis. I knew that I wanted to understand teacher development in the arena of English education. I knew that my experiences had shaped my practice; I had learned to teach English in part by being a student of literature and had brought that academic training into Gabriel’s class without learning how to meet him and his peers in a place they valued outside of school in their own lifeworlds. My narrative about being good at English had clashed with my experience of being bad at teaching it to students like Gabriel, and I wanted to solve the conflict. I wanted to know what “successful” teachers had learned to do, and what it was about their Self narratives that had encouraged them in that direction, despite training that failed to meet the changing requirements of the modern, urban secondary English classroom (Cummins, 2006). I wanted to show that teacher education was failing pre-service English
teaching candidates by not preparing them to teach either basic literacy or multiliteracies
(repeating a pattern of externalizing blame which I demonstrated in my story.)

Eventually, with the input of many and the guidance of my research supervisor, I
narrowed my focus. My goal in this thesis is to examine how teachers’ interacting narratives can
shape the innovative development of their practical knowledge over time in the professional
knowledge ecosystem. While reading for my doctoral coursework, I found the work of the New
London Group (1996) on multiliteracies, an approach to language education that employs
multimodal conceptions of literacy and a commitment to inclusivity of students’ language forms
and lifeworlds in the classroom. In multiliteracies pedagogy, students are considered to be
designers of meaning who learn a situated practice with the aim of transforming that practice
with their own meaning-making. I felt that multiliteracies pedagogy was a theory for good
teaching in secondary English and was something I recognized to varying degrees in the
classroom practice of colleagues I admired, and so I decided to make it a focus of my
dissertation.

After much reworking, my dissertation has become a narrative inquiry into the
multiliteracies practices of three experienced secondary English teachers: Tanya, Anandi and me.
While we all have at least ten years of teaching experience, our facility with multiliteracies
pedagogy varies. Anandi has a flourishing multiliteracies practice in her children’s literature
course offered to grade 11 and 12 students at her school. Tanya has a well-developed practice of
teaching multimodal meaning making. In her narrative account we hear how she continually
strives to engage students ever more richly in the processes of making meaning in her classroom.
Of the three, my narrative account spans the most time, and readers will observe the process of
someone revolutionizing her teaching practice. The narrative accounts about my co-participants
were derived from data collected over the course of nine months and which represent our co-created understandings about their respective practices at a particular moment in time.

In this dissertation my stories frame the narratives of my co-participants. This framing has been to me a natural, but unintended, outcome of the personal impetus for my inquiry. While I present co-created narratives about Tanya’s and Anandi’s identities and knowledge, mine shows how engaging in the reflective, aesthetic practice of narrative inquiry radically transforms the personal practical knowledge of the researcher/practitioner. It is a study of the interacting roles narratives of Self and Other play in teacher development, and in particular, on the development of innovative multiliteracies approaches to secondary English education.

The study has an intentionally small number of participants so that it can achieve one of its aims, which is to examine the narratives of participants in detail. With a larger sample, it would be difficult to effectively examine particulars in each story, and the study would only be capable of presenting broad strokes rather than unified narratives. The two co-participants, Anandi and Tanya, were selected through a process that involved an instructional leader at the school board in which the research was approved, who identified English teachers that fit a description I provided of someone who used multiliteracies approaches. After I contacted participants with a recruitment letter, they volunteered to participate.

I selected interviews and observations over the course of one school semester as the main means of data collection for several reasons. The first reason was that in wanting to understand how the teachers conceived their own practice and the development of that practice over time, I needed to hear their stories about practice. I also intentionally asked teachers questions that would require them to make connections to their past and to their conceptions of themselves as teachers and learners. Interviews made the most sense for digging up this kind of data. The
observations were held so that I could get a sense of how the participants lived their stories in the day-to-day experiences of the classroom. Observations allowed me to verify how these teachers lived their practice and to see how students responded to the strategies they employed. The timeline was short for pragmatic reasons; in particular an ethical concern for the amount of time teachers were offering me amidst the busy schedule of their teaching semester.

My own narrative has been composed from a range of sources, which include academic and personally motivated writings spanning the nine years from 2003 to 2012. I also responded to the questions I posed my co-participants in a journal. Since the study is shaped by the arc of my professional development journey, the documents and writings from which my narrative is drawn spans a much longer time, and is intended to track in much greater detail the transformation of my pedagogy, while the narratives constructed about my co-participants serve a different purpose: portraying a snapshot of their understandings at the particular time and place of their practice when I met with them in the winter/spring semester of 2009.

1.7 Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two: Theoretical Pillars of Narrative Inquiry, Teacher Development and Multiliteracies Pedagogy, outlines existing knowledge in these fields and draws connections between the paradigmatic foundation and theoretical pillars on which the study is based. Chapter Three: Methodology examines the method of examining narrative interactions that emerged from this project. Chapter Four: Landscaping an Octopus’s Garden: Anandi’s Story examines how Anandi has built an advanced practice of multiliteracies pedagogy through the influences of mentors and Other narratives within her professional landscape. Chapter Five: Tanya: a Teacher First examines the interacting narratives of knowledge and identity in her practice. Chapter Six:
A Patchwork Panorama of my Professional Learning, examines my narrative and the transformation of my practice through the process of conducting a narrative inquiry. Finally, Chapter Seven: Findings, examines the connections between the narratives and weaves a series of implications for practice and further study based on the findings of the study.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PILLARS OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY, TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND MULTILITERACIES THEORY

The theoretical pillars framing this study are narrative inquiry, teacher development and multiliteracies theory. In this chapter, I first examine the emergence of narrative inquiry and its application to my research in 2.1 Narrative Inquiry in Educational Research on Teachers’ Knowledge. Next, I discuss research that supports this study in 2.2 Teacher Development: Teachers’ Knowledge and Innovation. In 2.3 Multiliteracies Theory: A Design for Innovation, I examine the emergence of this field and its links to narrative inquiry and teacher development. Finally, in 2.4 Three Pillars: An Aesthetic Foundation I summarize the interconnections between the theoretical field and their relevance to the study.

2.1 Narrative Inquiry in Educational Research on Teachers’ Knowledge

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research paradigm (Spector-Mersel, 2010) that embraces aesthetic understandings and transformational approaches to negotiating meanings. In this section, I:

1. provide an overview of the emergence of narrative inquiry in educational research;
2. examine its application as an aesthetic paradigm which can frame new understandings about how teachers construct knowledge, using the concepts of personal practical knowledge, the professional knowledge landscape, narrative authority and interacting narratives;
3. evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology and make a case for its application in the design of this research; and
4. explain how this research extends existing knowledge in the field of narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry has its philosophical roots in epistemologies that highlight the importance of experience and the multifaceted nature of meaning making. John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy of experience and its connection to education (Dewey, 1934; 1938/1997; 1956/1990) provide a foundation for narrative inquiry’s focus on the role of experience in knowledge and its continued acquisition. In addition to considering the experiential nature of human knowledge, narrative inquirers also consider hermeneutical questions regarding how such stories are formed and re-formed, interpreted and re-interpreted on the temporal landscape of our individual existence, or lifeworld (Gadamer, 1975; Ricœur, 1984). Critical Theory, postmodernism and post-structuralism raise concerns with positivism’s focus on quantifying and objectifying human experiences and have influenced the emergence of narrative inquiry. Foucault’s concepts of discourse (1969/2002), Derrida’s deconstructionism (1976), and
Bakhtin’s *heteroglossia* (1981) are three concepts regarding the complexity of language and meaning-making that provided theoretical grounding for the development of narrative as a research methodology that examines the particular instead of the general and that strives to explore the complexities of human interaction.

Interest in narrative inquiry and its place in the field of education has grown as more researchers acknowledge the storied nature of our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McEwan & Egan Eds., 1995). Narrative is foundational to human understanding; it is the basic way by which we make sense of our world and the experiences we have in it (Polkinghorne, 1988). Clandinin and Huber (2002) describe narrative as an artistic and aesthetic phenomenon and method for attending to wholeness in research. Spector-Mersel (2010) asserts narrative has become so prevalent across disciplines and so broad in its application it should be viewed as a qualitative research paradigm. She says:

> Considering the narrative paradigm as the essence of narrative inquiry conceives the latter as a full-fledged research world view that closely binds up the “hows” of investigation (methodology)to the “whats” and “whys” (ontology and epistemology). (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 220)

Spector-Mersel considers this research paradigm to also include orientations towards inquiry aims, inquirer posture, and participant/narrator posture. These orientations are heuristic, interpretive views of human interaction and knowledge development that consider truth as a social construction in the context of the interaction of lives.

In this study I adopt a conceptual framework that assumes:
…life is both more and less than a story. It is more in that it is the basis of a variety of stories, and it is less in that it is unfinished and unclear as long as there are no stories told about it. (Widdershoven in Specter-Mersel, 2010, p. 211)

In order to raise a new awareness about how experienced teachers learn to innovate, transforming personal practical knowledge, the research offers stories about some of the complex interactions from which teachers author their professional narratives of learning and curricular innovation. In so doing it captures glimmering moments of meaning that hold contextualized understandings about how professional knowledge is created and transformed.

2.1.2 Foundational concepts: personal practical knowledge, narrative authority, and interacting narratives. Personal practical knowledge is:

in the teacher’s past experiences, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher’s practice. It is, for any one teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25)

Polanyi’s (1958) conceptualization of personal knowledge and Schon’s (1983) work on practical knowledge were major contributions to our current understanding of how teachers develop their professional knowledge over time in an active, embodied process. This dynamic process develops dimensions of teachers’ knowledge beyond the theoretical, encompassing qualities such
as the personal, social, moral, cultural, naturalistic, aesthetic, imaginative and spiritual. Elbaz (1983) describes teachers’ practice as being an expression of their embodied understandings, which is a blend of theoretical, situational, social, personal, experiential dimensions of knowledge. Clandinin (1985) acknowledges the moral and emotional dimensions of teachers’ knowledge, without elaborating on either one. Kooy (2006) examines knowledge construction through the social narratives of teachers in learning communities. Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge (2007) and Beattie, Thornton, Dobson & Hegge, (2005) examine the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of teacher’s knowledge. Beattie (2009) continues this work, while Dobson (2005) focuses on the aesthetic dimension of teachers’ knowledge in the process of teacher development. The personal practical knowledge of a teacher is a significant part of her lifeworld, being drawn from multiple narratives in her life and dealing with both the inner world of the Self and the outer world of Others.

Personal practical knowledge, constructed within the context of a lifeworld, is not held in isolation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 50) define the complexities of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space:

Our terms are personal and social (interaction); past, present and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)
This metaphorical narrative inquiry space exists also on the *professional knowledge landscape* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1992), which is the school context and broader socio-political arena where teachers live their professional lives and enact their personal practical knowledge on a day-to-day basis. In her doctoral thesis, He describes this landscape as one shifting with teachers’ identities and processes of enculturation and acculturation, explaining:

> It is this professional and personal nature of teachers’ knowledge constructs that formulates the professional knowledge landscape, and which is embedded in teachers' curriculum planning. (He, 1998, p. 57)

Through the dimensions of narrative interactions that occur between teachers’ personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape in which they continually develop and enact that knowledge results in ongoing professional learning.

The development of narrative authority (Olson, 1995; Olson & Craig, 2001, 2005) is an important factor in teacher development. Teachers are often unable to reconcile their practice with the image of teachers they want to be because they are faced with institutional narratives, school narratives, or narratives of more experienced teachers that are in conflict with what they believe (Craig 2004). They learn to tell the story of the institution, which Crites (1979) would call the “cover story,” or the publicly endorsed narrative. Experienced teachers’ narratives are influenced by both the cover stories and the “real stories” (Crites, 1979) of their professional knowledge landscapes. The quality of interaction between personal knowledge and the knowledge landscape affects the quality of teacher development over time. Recently, this concept of narrative authority influenced different fields concerned with innovation. The
importance of narrative thinking, and the ability to story new possibilities that lead to innovation is gaining ground (Pink, 2006). A sense of authorship is required for innovation, and such narrative authority is required if teachers are to make substantial changes to their teaching practices.

The concept of interacting narratives exists within the body of literature in narrative inquiry, but has not been explored exhaustively. Beattie’s work is the most extensive. She says:

Lives meet lives…and interact and inform one another, influencing and changing one another in the process as the energies of each are harnessed in the service of the other, and new possibilities, relations and forms are created. (Beattie, 1995, p. 143)

Clandinin & Connelly’s “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space,” (2000) provides a setting for the development of the concept of narrative interaction (which Craig builds upon in her research on school reform later (2001; 2009a; 2009b)). In Clandinin & Connelly’s model, the interactive dimension is personal and social with interactions between narratives of the inner world of personal beliefs, morals, feelings and aesthetics and those of the outer world of a person’s social and cultural environment. In 2001, Beattie advanced her conception of interacting narratives:

Interacting narratives are not only about lives meeting lives, but also about the interaction between the given (i.e. non-chosen, internal) “life narratives” and the “chosen narratives” of their external lives – aesthetic and mindfulness practices, professional practices and context and other chosen aspects of their lives. (Beattie M., 2001)
This thinking about narrative interaction paved the way for the consideration of ways in which the personal interacts with the Other and the ways in which different stories of self influence each other. Beattie’s research into interacting narratives (Beattie 2001, 2004, 2009; Beattie, Dobson, Thornton & Hegge, 2007; Beattie, Thornton, Dobson & Hegge, 2005) broadly extends the nature of individuals’ stories of experience and closely examines the transformative effects such interacting narratives can have on professional development. This method of examining how narratives from the outside world are internalized by educators, interact with each other and are then reflected back in their enactment of personal practical knowledge has greatly influenced my approach to narrative inquiry.

Richardson, building on Beattie’s work developed the idea of collaborative inquiry in her doctoral work (2006). Participants in her study were pre-service music teachers who shared stories of teaching experience and through their interacting narratives co-created professional knowledge. Richardson describes the process:

As each individual co-constructed new knowledge through the resonance of interacting narratives, three distinct stages of this shared journey emerged from the participants’ stories: *reflecting and reconnecting, reframing through relating to others, and re-imagining and rehearsing co-created knowledge* (emphasis in original). (Richardson, 2012, p. 189)

This research advanced our understanding of the potential for interacting narratives to result in the development of professional knowledge and also the value of narrative inquiry as a
collaborative means of rehearsing practice. This work attends in particular to the social
dimension of personal practical knowledge with the focus on beginning teachers co-constructing
understandings about teaching.

Craig has also developed a growing body of work on interacting narratives. Her
application also focuses on the social dimension of interaction and mapping relationships of
influence. Craig’s work is distinguished by its attention to the relationships among and between
individuals and the institutions they work in on the professional knowledge landscape (Craig,
2007; 2001). She develops “story constellations” in her work on teachers engaged in school
reform movements, building on earlier concepts in narrative inquiry that consider how teachers’
knowledge is held in stories that exist in time, context and place, and which form multilayered
webs of knowing. Craig (2007) says:

This plethora of shifting narratives, each with a unique spiraling pattern, necessarily
involves many plotlines, which, in turn, bring multiple meanings to bear on teachers’
knowledge as shaped in their reforming school contexts. (Craig, 2007, p. 176)

Craig’s work traces the threads of storied experience held in the professional knowledge
landscapes of four schools involved in reform by examining a matrix of narrative interactions;
school stories and stories of school, teacher stories and stories of teachers, community stories and
stories of communities and reform stories and stories of reform, in which the former narrative in
each pairing is told by insiders and the latter is told by outsiders (2007). She uses broadening,
burrowing and restorying to shift the narrative perspective of the research texts from broad to
narrow focus and from participant to investigator’s perspective. Craig’s work on the impact of
interactions with what I term *Other narratives*, the stories of other individuals or groups on a teacher’s professional landscape, and in particular her method of broadening, burrowing and restorying, has in addition to Beattie’s work on interacting narratives, influenced the method of narrative analysis that has emerged out of this study.

The concepts of personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape, narrative authority and, most prominently, interacting narratives are central to this research. The participants practice in professional knowledge landscapes that do not uniformly accept multiliteracies as a pedagogical approach. The discourse of multiliteracies has arisen in Ontario policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, 2007b). While multiliteracies pedagogy offers potential for innovations in secondary English which could improve the quality of students’ learning experiences, some teachers associate any “literacy” pedagogy with the implementation of standardized testing at the turn of the century and the accompanying protest in public education (OSSTF, 2001). This conflict is a recent and bitter memory for many established teachers, and their opinions about what constitutes literacy education and what qualifies as quality teaching pervade the professional knowledge landscape of their schools. Research shows that mandated curricular change often meets resistance in teachers. In Craig’s longitudinal study on teachers engaged in school reform in Texas, she notes how enforced curricular changes, even those considered positive, can raise tensions among teachers and between them and school administrators (Craig, 2009b). In a case study about one teacher, drawn from her twelve-year study, she shows how mandated reforms imply current practices (i.e. teachers’ personal practical knowledge) are “wrong” and should be corrected (2012). Craig concludes that mandated changes in Texas have affected “knowledge associated with the profession, respect accorded the profession or professional, and relationships with and among professionals” (Craig, 2012, p. 99).
My research examines the other side of the curriculum reform story: when educators possess the narrative authority to develop into innovators. The study shows how teachers have embraced multiliteracies approaches and become authors and designers of their own stories of curriculum making and classroom practice. Drawing on interacting narratives of Self and Others, the participants have developed the narrative authority to innovate by authoring their own approaches to teaching based on personal educational philosophies. These practices are not aligned with hegemonic traditionalist approaches to English in their professional knowledge landscape, but each participant has developed authorship of her classroom practice and become a designer of curriculum in the same way they hope students to become designers of meaning.

2.1.3 A rationale for this narrative inquiry into teacher development. In this section I examine the strengths and weaknesses of narrative inquiry, and then justify its application in this study.

Narrative inquiry makes sense of complex human situations without reducing them to de-contextualized elements or stripping them of their lived, experiential character. Narrative inquirers examine the discourse of participants and consider elements such as voice, character, setting (temporality and place), and themes while conducting analysis. Narrative inquiry, as an arts-based form of research (Barone & Eisner, 1997), uses narrative language to represent findings, often drawing heavily on literary techniques. Eisner (1998) observes:

One must be able to use language to reveal what, paradoxically, words can never say. This means that voice must be heard in the text, alliteration allowed, and cadences encouraged. Relevant allusions should be employed, and metaphor that
adumbrates by suggestion used. All of these devices and more are as much a part of the tool kit of those conducting qualitative inquiry as analysis of variance is for those working in conventional quantitative research modes. (Eisner, 1998, p. 3)

Narrative inquiry gets at the primacy of experience by expressing meaning in its research products, rather than stating it. By using the descriptive language of literary arts in its research texts, narrative inquiry allows researchers and readers to pay attention to the particular, rather than the general. Like other forms of arts based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012), narrative inquiry intentionally deals in detail rather than abstraction, because it is aimed at exposing complexities, rather than simplifying them.

Through its ability to expose and examine complex relationships between human knowledge and experience, narrative has the potential to portray multiple perspectives. The researcher exists in the research process as a co-constructer of meaning (Beattie, 1995; Kitchen 2005b) and in the product as a story on the professional knowledge landscape. Because of its ability to present multiple voices and multiple perspectives (Coulter & Smith, 2009), and its assumption that knowledge is temporal and that all meanings and stories are reshaped and retold over time, narrative inquiry presents contextualized accounts of practice. A concern for the benefit teachers receive from teacher development research is a central aspect of narrative inquiry (Beattie, 2007; 2009; Feuerverger, 2007; Kooy, 2006; Richardson, 2012), and is a logical and ethical one given the discipline.

Narrative inquiry’s methods are ethical because of the way participants’ voices are involved in the research process and product (Beattie, 1995; Beattie, Dobson, Thornton & Hegge, 2007; Beattie, Thornton, Dobson & Hegge, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000;
Richardson, 2012). Narrative inquirers strive to place participant interpretations before researchers’ (see Kitchen, 2005b; Phillion, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). In education, this is of particular interest because it undermines the myth of the researcher in the ivory tower, and may aid in bridging the divide between the academic world of theory and the practical world of the classroom. It is especially relevant in this research with its focus on teachers practicing outside hegemonic understandings of their discipline.

Criticisms of narrative inquiry include narcissism (Vickers, 2002), “authorial surplus” (Smith M. , 2009) and illegitimacy of knowledge claims (Barone, 2010). Many dismiss narrative inquiry as a form of therapy for the researcher of little interest to others, a criticism Vickers (2002) counters by proposing that researchers’ knowledge is an equally valid topic of inquiry as any other groups’. Barone (2010) notes how most narrative research in education favours the voice of the teacher or researcher, to the exclusion of students, parents and other important educational stakeholders, highlighting a need for more heteroglossic research texts (Bakhtin, 1981 in Barone, 2010), which embrace multiple voices. Smith’s concern that narrative researchers need to “share, as fully as they can, how they have gone about constructing their research reports,” (Smith M. , 2009, p. 607) to avoid authorial surplus, in which an invisible layer of researcher-crafted narration shapes readers’ interactions with the voices of the text, connects to concerns about the dominance of researchers’ voices and objectives. The dominance of researcher intentions lays grounds for questions regarding claims to knowledge. Barone (2010) raises several:

What are we to make of the continuing references to knowledge (of one sort or another) that may serve to elevate the vantage point of one sort of constituent over another? A
sceptic (like myself) may indeed (against the prevailing grain within the field of narrative research) inquire as to where, especially when it comes to multiple perspectives that are in commensurable, knowledge ends and belief begins. More pointedly, how can we continue the discourse of knowledge claims when textual ambiguity is a characteristic seen as central to the epistemology of doubt and uncertainty? (Barone, 2010: p.151)

Barone is concerned about the monolithic dominance of researchers’ voice over co-participants’, about the prevalence of teachers’ stories and the paucity of students’ stories. The questions he raises serve as a warning against complacence in narrative inquiry, which can lead to belief in “knowledge” that is unfounded.

I recognize that this study focuses on teachers’, not students’ knowledge, and that by aligning my work with Spector-Mersel’s (2012) claims that narrative inquiry is more than a methodology, but also an ontology and epistemology – in other words, a paradigm – some may argue that I enter into the borderlands between knowledge and belief. It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore this epistemological territory, but I raise the issue in an attempt at exposing my role in shaping the meanings in this text so that my readers may read claims to knowledge with a critical and interrogative eye. I apply narrative inquiry in this research in a similar process as multiliteracies pedagogy, where new meaning is designed using available stories.

2.1.4 Contributions to narrative inquiry. This study builds on current knowledge in narrative inquiry by linking its concept of personal practical knowledge to multiliteracies theory, extending our understanding of interacting narratives, and providing a new method of analyzing such interactions.
By linking narrative inquiry to multiliteracies theory this study develops a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of personal practical knowledge. Borrowing concepts of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice from “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (New London Group, 1996), the study highlights parallel processes in the development of teachers’ knowledge. The research finds that there are two modes of developing personal practical knowledge: inadvertent evolution and intentional design. Inadvertent evolution of personal practical knowledge occurs through the sedimentation of day-to-day experiences (the buildup of routines of practice and “what works”) that align with previously held knowledge or which emerge through erosion from a process of repeated exposure (the repetition of “shoulds” and “how tos” that can eventually alter what was done before), into knowledge for practice.

Much of teachers’ learning comes about through this inadvertent process and is not consciously selected. Inadvertent evolution of personal practical knowledge does not usually lead to innovation. Intentional design of personal practical knowledge arises when teachers develop the narrative authority to author a new way of being by choosing to interact with narratives that have a conditioning effect on their knowledge for a self directed purpose. In this process, teachers recognize methods of situated practice, seek overt instruction in new forms, critique hegemonic practices through critical framing and redesign curriculum and instruction, resulting in transformed practice. This study’s findings illuminate how features of this mode of knowledge construction have the potential to result in the development of innovative practice.

A second significance is the combination of Beattie’s concept of interacting narratives with Craig’s story constellations. Beattie’s work examines the inner lives of participants and the interactions between life narratives and narratives of a chosen spiritual or aesthetic practice (Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge, 2007). Craig’s (2007) concept emphasizes external
interactions in complex social networks on the professional knowledge landscape. In this study I examine how inner interactions between and among Self narratives couple with interactions with Other individual and group narratives on the professional knowledge landscape to influence the conditions that direct the course of a teacher’s learning for practice. Recognizing the organic, interdependent nature of interacting narratives Beattie and Craig have described, I reconsidered the metaphors of the professional knowledge landscape and story constellations, and recognized a degree of stasis implied by these terms, despite the dynamism described by He (1998) in her study about culture and teacher identity.

A landscape seems like a moment frozen in time on a canvas or through a lens. Stars that make up a constellation maintain their orientation to each other in the sky. To me a professional knowledge ecosystem seemed an accurate metaphor for the interactive narrative phenomena emerging from my data. In this metaphorical ecosystem exist narrative organisms, which are individuals living interdependent lives that change over time through contact. Changes in an individual arise from interactions within the Self and from the conditioning by Other individuals, groups and features in the landscape. This new conception of the nature of narrative interactions that determine professional knowledge is one contribution of the study to the field of narrative inquiry.

Another contribution of the study is methodological. In order to analyze the complexities of these interactions, I have devised a method of analysis, outlined in the following chapter. It involves a system of identifying and sorting data based on their span on the three dimensions of narrative inquiry space and helps to clarify the nature of the stories told. In providing such clarity, the study levels some of the pitfalls of narrative inquiry by framing more clearly the type
and limitations of stories told in research texts, allowing readers a stronger foothold from which to evaluate the validity of the texts and their resonance with them.

2.2 Teacher Development: Teachers’ Knowledge and Innovation

The Canadian Educational Association (CEA), founded in 1891, recently featured “innovation” as a special topic (Hurley S., 2012a; 2012b). The call for innovation by the CEA goes beyond the call for new technology to involve new structures and curricula in schools that better reflect the cultural, social and economic realities of our time; one that echoes the call of the New London Group in their pedagogy (1996). In his statement, “Transformational Innovation: This Is No Time for Tinkering,” Henke (2009), a former educational policy maker in Alberta wrote:

(E)ducators have approached innovation as a way of improving and sustaining the systems that are in place rather than using it as a method for transforming those systems. In essence, we have been tinkering with a system that was developed in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to meet the demands and needs of a different time. (Henke, 2009, p. 5)

Henke calls on leaders in education to drive change, while recognizing that “(u)nexplained and unmanaged change creates anxiety, confusion, and pushback.” (2009, p. 5). Craig (2012) and others have demonstrated this pushback when educational change is mandated, even when change is justifiable. This study examines how teachers independently become innovators and my examination of the literature in teacher development will focus on literature examining conditions that motivate teachers to engage in self-directed learning.
Teacher development is an immense and diverse field. Under examination in this study are the complex interactions of elements of teachers’ knowledge, teachers’ self-identities, the professional knowledge landscape and teachers’ narrative authority as curriculum makers. In this section of the chapter, I examine two branches of literature involving concepts of teachers’ knowledge and teachers’ identity: 1. teacher knowledge and learning and 2. teacher identity.

### 2.2.1 Ways of knowing: narrative understandings of teachers’ learning

Teachers’ knowledge is considered both personal and practical within the context of this study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I situate this view in research on teacher development. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) describe three conceptions of teacher learning in terms of *knowledge-practice* relationships. They apply the term *knowledge-for-practice* to the dominant conception of teacher learning that considers only pedagogical and subject knowledge produced by researchers for use by teachers. *Knowledge-in-practice* is the term they use to describe knowledge that teachers construct and use in the context of their practice to develop a reflexive and reflective understanding of their teaching. *Knowledge-of-practice* describes collectively constructed understandings of practice gained through systemic inquiry into educational practice from a critical, emancipatory stance.

Clandinin’s (1985) early conceptions of personal practical knowledge fall within the boundaries of Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) knowledge-in-practice, as these descriptions of teacher knowledge and learning largely concern individual practice. Many narrative conceptions, especially those involving discussion of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Craig, 2001, 2004; Craig & Huber, 2007), interacting narratives (Beattie, 1995, 1997b; Beattie, Dobson, Thornton & Hegge, 2007; Beattie...
& Hegge, 2008; Beattie, Thornton, Dobson & Hegge, 2005), resonance (Conle, 1996) and multicultural education (Phillion, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Rosiek & Sconiers, 2000) fall within the boundaries of Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) knowledge-of-practice, as does multiliteracies theory (Cole and Pullen, 2010). This research utilizes each of Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) conceptions of teachers’ knowledge while focusing on participants’ knowledge-of-practice to examine understandings of the social implications of teaching practice and the role that literacy education provides or denies students access to transformative experiences.

2.2.2 Identity and teaching. Since teacher self-identity conceptualizes a professional narrative that is constructed and reconstructed through internal and external influences (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006), this study considers the role of professional identity narratives. Kelchtermans (2005) describes teacher self-identity as a form of narrative self-understanding. Ben-Peretz’s (1995) notion of professional memory demonstrates teacher self-identity is a construct in the present that is built on memories of past experience and directed toward future goals. Narratives of self-identity are linked to the life narrative of each individual, in that they arise from life experience and in turn they affect the direction of narratives chosen for future conditioning. In this way, self-identities both originate from and influence future directions of the life narrative. The multiple interactions of the life narrative, the narratives of self-identity and chosen narratives influence decisions made in the present and goals for the future. The complex nature of teacher self-identity, reveals that both personal and professional aspects of identity are interwoven, yet paradoxically distinct at times conflicting and always in flux (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005).
Images of teaching often play an important role in the ongoing construction of teachers’ professional narratives. Elbaz (1983) and Clandinin (1986) hold teacher images as a metaphorical means of holding and applying practical knowledge. Clandinin (1986) noted: “Images may be connected to a concrete incident; have a metaphorical quality; have an affective dimension; have a moral coloring; be thought to exhibit specificity in their detailed construction and in the meanings they convey,” (Clandinin, 1986: p. 33). Images can help teachers consciously understand their tacit knowledge and its relationship to the often conflicting narratives in the professional knowledge landscape, and thereby help to consciously develop teaching identities.

Teacher images that align with teachers’ self-identity can help teachers to develop their personal practical knowledge. Kooy’s (2006) study of women teachers in book clubs shows how images of teaching gleaned from the study of fiction can help both novice and experienced teachers reconcile aspects of their self-identities with external expectations. Feuerverger (2001) explains how teachers’ identities are shaped by the image of teaching held in The Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam school, a jointly run Jewish and Palestinian school in Israel. The “Oasis of Dreams” that this school provides students and teachers through its “border crossing” (Feuerverger, 2001: p. 33) approach to pedagogy and curriculum strongly influences the identities of all in its community.

Internal images of teaching, consciously nurtured, can have lasting positive impact on teachers’ self-identities. Palmer (1998) shows how internally authored images, in the form of metaphors of teaching, can help teachers to understand their practice by examining the light and the shadow that is captured within them (Palmer, 1998: p.148-149). Teachers can reconcile conflicting issues in their self-identities and to learn acceptance of themselves as teachers. Others
examined how internal teacher images can be used for transformative professional development purposes (for example, Beattie, 1995; Bullough, 1999; Clandinin, 1986; Hunt, 1987, 1992). Both external and internal images of teaching can provide rich sources for teachers in the process of authoring their professional narratives, and that the conscious reflection on and use of images to understand tacit knowledge of teaching is a valuable exercise for new and experienced teachers alike.

It is important for teachers to self-identify as good teachers (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006). When the external images of teaching available in the professional landscape do not match internal images, teachers must find ways of reconciling this difference. Farhi (1999) and Rousmaniere (1999) discuss the monolithic North American mythology surrounding good teaching and the counterproductive repercussions of cultural images on teacher development. Neilsen (1990) explains:

The specter of the good teacher, like a finger-wagging parent, reminded me of my weaknesses. As I’ve grown away from that model, I’ve learned that this mythological schoolmarm (or master, as the case may be) shadowed my colleagues as well, reinforcing our collective belief that success in our profession is measured largely by unwavering focus and encyclopedic knowledge. One of my rites of passage was to recognize that teaching, like life, isn’t always focused, the path not always straight. Another was to value the wisdom of practice. (Neilson, 1990, p. 152)

Neilsen realized through experience and reflection that the story of the “mythological schoolmarm” plagued her colleagues as well, and must therefore be flawed. She constructed her
own image of teaching as a journey like life, with many twists and turns. Because she was able with increased knowledge of practice to develop an image of good teaching that fit with her self-identity, Neilsen developed the narrative agency to determine her own story of teaching within her professional knowledge landscape.

Participants in the research explored the influence of internal and external images of teaching on their self-identities and subsequently on the development of their professional knowledge over time. Since one of the primary concerns of the study is how some teachers are able to develop the narrative authority to construct professional narratives that lead to multiliteracies pedagogy, it is important to consider how Self and Other narratives of teaching have aided in that process.

2.3 Multiliteracies Theory: Designing Innovation

English education, more than any other academic discipline, because of its focus on language and representation, contributes vitally to the process by which our society defines, understands, maintains, and transforms itself. (Alsup, et al., 2006, p. 278)

Literacy is an important goal of education, but definitions of what constitutes being literate are changing. Multiliteracies, new literacies, or multimodal literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kist, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2006) are new approaches to English education that attempt to address recent socio-cultural, economic and technological change by broadening the definition of literacy beyond print text and in the case of multiliteracies, beyond standard linguistic forms. Alsup et al. (2006), quoted above, use the rhetoric of “a call to arms” in the title
of their vision statement by the National Council of Teachers of English. This vision embraces new literacies and uses militaristic language, reflecting a history of disciplinary skirmishes between politically conservative and progressive orientations towards English education. In this section on multiliteracies theory I examine 1. socio-cultural influences in English education, 2. the emergence of multiliteracies theory and 3. three areas of multiliteracies research.

2.3.1 Progressive and traditional influences in English education. In North America, secondary English has changed very little in the last century (Sewell, 2008). When he compared curricula from the United States, Tremmel (2006) concluded that recent policy codifying standards and benchmarks differs little than that of the early twentieth century. He posits the reason for stasis is prevailing attachments to Cartesian-Newtonian philosophies that have aligned well with the “Taylor System” (Tremmel, 2006, p. 14), an industrial model of schooling that aligned public education with the needs of contemporary business. English education, despite its stasis, is contested ground. The conservatism concerned with the social homogenization of populations through standardized forms of language and literature of the dominant cultural and economic group has been countered by progressive orientations involving more broadly constructed conceptions of literature and linguistic forms. (Sewell, 2008).

In twentieth century North America, orientations of conservatism and progressivism have resulted in two major educational movements with significant effects on English education today: the standards movement and the progressive movement. Dewey’s theories (1938/1997; 1956/1990) focused on student-centred approaches to problem solving real life tasks (Tremmel, 2010). Standards education emerged in the United States in conservative opposition to what was perceived as the failure of the progressive movement after World War II, and today the focus on
outcomes and standards reigns in most of North America (Tremmel, 2010). Standards based education is mechanistic (Tremmel, 2006), associated with \textit{back to basics} conservatism and a molecular view of education as a transmission of knowledge and cultural artifacts from distinct subject disciplines. Multiliteracies pedagogy calls for a transformation of educational practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), but progressive English educators, influenced by Dewey (1938/1997) and multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 1996), have been largely pushed aside at the level of policy. Alsup et al. (2006) note:

> The ideas, values, and aesthetics that energize our field—ideas about the social and political nature of literacy; about the wondrous and unsettling power of literacy and the imagination; about the rich and multifaceted texts that embody cultural ways of being; about the sheer confoundedness of language, especially in its written forms; about the transformative role of technologies in defining new literacies—have been mostly ignored. (Alsup, et al., 2006, p. 276)

While public education has been associated with these two broad camps secondary English has several orientations to curricular content focus, including literary study, literacy and what has been dubbed \textit{new literacy} (Willinsky, 1990) or multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). These movements in English education emerged out of philosophical, cultural, social and political developments throughout the twentieth century, with literacy and literature being the focus of early debates and new literacies emerging with the rise of personal computers and the internet (Tremmel, 2010). English education has straddled both sides of the general educational contexts: progressives and traditionalists have been interested in both literary studies
and the literacy movement, and throughout the history of the subject area, there has always been an overlap of these two areas in which emphasis has been placed differently. English as literary studies defines *literature* as texts included in the literary cannon established by universities, while progressives have made a broader definition including diasporic voices, non-canonical or avant garde text forms and genres.

Regardless of aim, all of these orientations to curricular content and philosophy use language as a political tool. In his discussion of the history of teaching English literature as an act of cultural politics, Green notes:

> It is my contention that the category ‘literature’ has played a particular rôle in the practice of English teaching as cultural politics, such that it is important to recognize in English teaching a *contradictory politics* (emphasis in original), with both progressive and reactionary phases (Green, 1990, p. 135).

The contradictory polictics Green observed are evident today, where standards based education reigns, and with its persistance curricula that are focused on educational outcomes and standardized evaluations (in Ontario the OSSLT). Some claim that the standards movement “is not going away anytime soon” (Zancanella & Alsup, 2010). An interesting sign of this occurs in Ontario with the use of progressive language in curriculum documents that claim to value multiculturalism, critical literacy, media studies and metacognition, yet maintains a standardized test of print literacy. It is possible that this cross-polinization of aims is a result of a new era in which a partially conceived multiliteracies pedagogy has created a new paradigm of hybridization with Cartesian structures.
2.3.2 Emergence of multiliteracies theory. Literacy is a vague term, a result of widely accepted new applications of language in the virtual world of technology combined with the emergence of International English and its various forms such as English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008) and the powers of the people in Canada and emerging economies who speak new Englishes. In addition to these social phenomena, there has also been a cultural shift reflected in English education from the modernist movement to postmodernism and its associated fragmentation (Kohn, 2008). Traditionally, literacy education involved teaching students to develop basic competency with print text. As understandings about the nature of meaning making evolved to include multiple modes of representation, so too did available practices. Wells (1990), whose work in literacy marks the shift in thinking towards a postmodern understanding of literacy as a dialogic process of meaning making, names the process of textual negotiation the epistemic mode of literate behaviour and ranks it as the most important. He explains:

It is in this mode that the text is treated, not as a representation of meaning that is already decided, given, and self-evident, but rather as a tentative and provisional attempt on the part of the writer to capture his or her current understanding in an external form so that it may provoke further attempts at understanding as the writer or some other reader interrogates the text in order to interpret its meaning. (Wells, 1990, p. 373)

Evolving from this change in attitude towards literacy education described by Wells comes the increased inclusion of diverse text forms and students’ lifeworlds in English classroom
discourse. This refocusing of English curriculum is partially an outcome of changing social orientations that result from global changes in social, linguistic, economic and technological transformations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Despite the attachment by policymakers to the homogenizing force that educational outcomes dictate, the cultural fragmentation in post-industrial societies is driving the progressive change in the content of English curriculum despite efforts by politicians and policy makers to enforce standardized outcomes. A diverse English curriculum is a response to some of the current social realities of modern English language classrooms.

Multiliteracies pedagogy emerged after a meeting between an interdisciplinary group of scholars who, over a week in September 1994, met to discuss the future of literacy. The foundational paper resulting from their meeting responds to two contemporary social changes: increasing globalization and “the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (New London Group, 1996, p. 9). In answer to these challenges, multiliteracies pedagogy proposes teaching students about “Design” through situated practice, overt instruction, and critical framing leading to transformed practice. They explain:

The idea of Design is one that recognises the different Available Designs of meaning, located as they are in different cultural contexts. The meta-language of Multiliteracies describes the elements of Design, not as rules, but as an heuristic that accounts for the infinite variability of different forms of meaning-making in relation to the cultures, the subcultures, or the layers of an individual’s identity that these forms serve. At the same time, Designing restores human agency and cultural dynamism to the process of meaning making. Every act of meaning both appropriates Available Designs and recreates in the
Designing, thus producing new meaning as The Redesigned. (New London Group, 1996, p. 36)

Redesigning is at the heart of multiliteracies pedagogy and addresses both concerns identified by the New London Group.

In making transformed practice the goal of literacy education, multiliteracies pedagogy attempts to address systemic inequities in pluralistic societies. Gee (2000) discusses systemic inequities between poor and advantaged students that are not being addressed by current educational shifts, proposing multiliteracies pedagogy “seek(s) to produce people who can function in the new capitalism, but in a much more meta-aware and political fashion than forms of new-capitalist-complicit schooling.” (Gee, 2000, p. 67). Kalantzis and Cope (2000) argue that multiliteracies pedagogy encourages pluralism, and thereby true equity for students whose lifeworlds do not offer equal access to school literacies. Smolin and Lawless (2010) claim:

Using multiliteracies facilitates culturally relevant pedagogy because they enable teachers to soften the boundaries between school and community; personal identity and disciplinary modes of thinking; academic work and life skills. Finally, a focus on multiliteracies enables students to become more than consumers of knowledge, but producers of it as well, building their knowledge from what is relevant to them and enabling them to contribute their knowledge to the growth of their communities and their future place in the world. (Smolin & Lawless, 2010, p. 178)

One of the ways multiliteracies pedagogy achieves its cultural relevance is through its multimodality. Kress (2000) asserts the materiality and multimodality of meaning making:
Human bodies have a wide range of means of engagement with the world; a wide and highly varied range of means of perception…That, from the beginning, guarantees the multimodality of our semiotic world. How a culture selects from its range and chooses to develop these possibilities of engagement with the world is quite a different matter.

(Kress, 2000, p. 184)

When schools privilege print literacy they exclude other important sources of meaning closely connected to students’ lifeworlds and neglect opportunity to redesign meaning. Cope and Kalantzis (2010) articulate what new media contribute to multiliteracies pedagogy by outlining what is new about digital media and how that novelty changes learning. New media: a) offer greater agency to the user, which leads students to become designers; b) enhance perception of divergence which equalizes learner differences through differentiation; c) increase multimodality and lead to greater synaesthesia for learners; and d) require conceptualization, higher order thinking that leads to metacognition (Cope & Kalantzis, 2010, pp. 90-103).

Multiliteracies pedagogy is rooted in a progressive orientation that begins with student experience. Its social justice stance aims to level systemic inequities by including student lifeworlds in curricular choices and by empowering students to become designers of meaning. Its concern with cultural and textual pluralism is an attempt to change literacy education to address rapid social and technological change in post-industrial societies.

**2.3.3 Three areas of research in multiliteracies.** Since traditional definitions of literacy, centred on standard forms of print text, fail to meet the needs of socio-culturally diverse students and the range of meaning making experiences they encounter, multiliteracies pedagogy has
emerged. In the final section in this chapter on multiltieracies, I discuss current research proliferating in Canada and elsewhere. There are three key areas in which the bulk of research is being done: multiliteracies in elementary and middle school classrooms (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, & Leoni, 2005; Walsh, 2009), new literacies and student identity (Cummins, 2006; Kist, 2007; Skerrett, 2009), and most commonly, new technological or multimodal literacies (Albers, 2006; Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008; Doering, Beach, & O’Brien, 2007; Kist, 2007; Kohn, 2008; Mills, 2010; Nahachewsky, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2010).

The findings demonstrate benefits to students as a result of new literacy teaching strategies. Despite benefits, some studies point out the difficulties teachers have in implementing new literacies strategies in their classrooms, which range from experience with the content or media (Skerrett, 2009), teachers’ educational values and philosophies (Nahachewsky, 2007), and their perceived barriers to successful implementation (Kist, 2007). Many of these studies demonstrate what teachers who use new literacies do. But while there are examples of how students in teacher education programs can learn how to develop such strategies (Albers, 2006) and the American organization NCTE outlines desirable qualities that enable secondary English teachers to develop and enact a new literacies approach (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006), no study I am aware of presents detailed cases of how experienced teachers have learned to transform their classrooms from more traditional models of literature education or literacy education to develop a multiltieracies pedagogy. In response to Alsup’s “call to arms” (Alsup, et al., 2006) which bemoans the lack of influence progressive English educational theory has had on contemporary practice, this study provides an explanation of how the shift to new literacies or multiliteracies practice is happening in three experienced teachers’ classrooms. The
emphasis is not on what new literacies English teachers learn to teach, but how they learn to develop and implement innovative curricula and to create a learning environment in which dialogical and meaning making processes are explicit.

2.3.4 Three pillars: an aesthetic foundation. Multiliteracies and the space it has recently carved in the history of English education, narrative inquiry and teacher development theory are the three pillars on which this study is based. Each pillar has a particular orientation towards aesthetic ways of knowing. Multiliteracies embraces design and multimodal meaning making that is engaged with interconnected lifeworlds that intersect in the classroom. The richness of experience available within this pedagogical framework offers great aesthetic potential. Narrative inquiry involves qualitative exploration into the knowledge-of-practice held by teachers by examining their stories as both phenomenon and method of investigation. By creating cases that are not only descriptive, but also metaphorical and thematic, narrative inquiry is an aesthetic form of research that encourages reflection. Multiliteracies involves meaning making about and through texts. The concept of design is closely related to the aesthetic concept of creativity in that imaginative and reflective processes are used to make something new. Teacher development is concerned with teachers’ learning and the evolution of classroom practice. It can also be viewed through an aesthetic lens as a creative process. Eisner (2002) conceives of good teaching as artistry, “informed but not controlled by the products of social science,” and using an old definition, (Eisner 1965 in 2002) elaborates:

*By artistry I mean a form of practice informed by the imagination that employs technique to select and organize expressive qualities to achieve ends that are aesthetically*
satisfying (emphasis in original). Artistry – the artistic performance of a practice – is enhanced as artists of that practice learn to see and reflect upon what they have created. (Eisner, 2002, p.49)

This thesis aims to capture an aesthetically satisfying portrayal of teachers’ experiences with learning to respond to multiliterate students. The goal is to enhance our understandings of secondary English education by understanding how people who do it well developed their practice. The study looks closely through an aesthetic lens at the particulars of each case and the complexities of narrative interactions that compose teachers’ stories in order to capture the creative processes of that learning. In the retelling of these stories I aim to represent them through aesthetic forms that will allow readers at points to vicariously experience the narratives and in their own process of re-designing make their own new meanings from the texts that follow.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Phenomenon and Method

This study is designed to examine the knowledge and learning processes of three experienced secondary English teachers. It employs narrative inquiry, a qualitative, arts-based research methodology that regards narrative as both the phenomenon under study and the method of analysis, and advances the concepts of personal practical knowledge and interacting narratives. It is also contributes to current knowledge of teacher development, in particular how and why certain teachers are able to innovate in their classroom practices.

These contributions have their roots in the origins of the research. The study began with a pilot investigation into the narrative identity of a secondary English teacher who considered himself good at teaching, which I then compared to my narrative of teaching. In this pilot study, I noticed how radically the way we characterized ourselves in our respective narratives of teaching affected our experiences in the classroom and our interactions with students. The research led to a paper I presented at the Imaginative Education Research Group’s annual conference (Hegge, 2007) in which I discussed Conle’s (1999) concept of frozen stories and their impact on teaching practice and reported how by developing an awareness of the way I characterized myself and applied my narrative authority (Olson & Craig, 2001) I was able to change my practice. In this early paper, I touched on ways in which the phenomenon of narrative interaction and the process of applying narrative analytical method to teachers’ stories could transform professional knowledge. This dissertation evolved from the findings emerging from the pilot study and conference paper into a project designed to consider the impact of experienced secondary English teachers’ narratives on their knowledge and learning.
The pilot study helped me to identify my pressing professional and theoretical question: what makes a good English teacher, and what allows that teacher to feel competent in his or her practice? As I revised my research design, I decided to focus on teachers whose practice displayed characteristics of multiliteracies pedagogy, a relatively recent development in English education. This approach addresses through curricular innovation both contemporary educational issues of cultural pluralism and changes to modes of communication brought on by new technologies. This focus provided a means of ensuring that participants were actively involved in curricular innovation.

The following research questions form the basis of the investigation:

• What have three experienced English teachers learned in order to respond to the diverse literacy and language needs of their students?

• What conditions allowed them to engage in that learning?

These questions informed three semi-structured interviews and were the focus of classroom observations and the analysis of relevant documents, such as classroom handouts or assignments.

Subsequent sections of this chapter are organized as follows: 3.2 Research Design and Methodological Assumptions; 3.3 Participant Selection; 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis; and 3.5 Ethical Considerations.

3.2 Research Design and Methodological Assumptions

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that is phenomenological in its approach in that it examines stories as they are lived and told by participants. My selection of this methodology stems from an educator’s concern with meaning making. The assumption in all narrative inquiries is that narrative is the means by which people make meaning of their
experiences and communicate that meaning to others and the context in which they hold knowledge. Bruner (1998) observed, “(Facts) live in context; what holds most human contexts together is a narrative.” (Bruner, 1998, p. 26). Because narrative inquiry involves the investigation of participants’ experience as they make sense of it through retelling, it is an appropriate methodology for developing the close up picture of how individuals construct and hold meaning, such as their professional knowledge.

I assume by choosing this methodology that I will re-construct the stories of all participants, and that in so doing all the research texts will have omissions, simplifications and other such flaws that always occur when a writer tries to re-create experience. I assume that this is inevitable in research, regardless of one’s epistemological stance, and that my findings offer a way of looking at three professional practices that ring true to the people telling the stories. I also make the assumption that these re-constructions which ring true hold valuable knowledge about how and why teachers learn, and what conditions are required for teachers to innovate, and that this knowledge emerges because of the way in which narrative can convey various viewpoints.

The study involved two phases; a) I applied analytical methods acquired during my research training, and b) I synthesized narrative methods and multiliteracies theory into the development of a new analytical approach to understanding interacting narratives and teacher development. In the first phase, I prepared three narrative accounts from data collected, one for each participant that acted as “snapshots” of professional practice. In the second phase, I re-examined the narrative accounts and described how the interaction of my co-participants’ narratives with mine had transformed my teaching using the new analytical tool described below. This two-phase design results from narrative inquiry being both about phenomenon (stories of teachers learning to innovate) and method (analyzing how Self and Other narratives interact to
transform knowledge). Because interacting narratives are still largely unexplored in educational research, very little has been written regarding methods of analyzing them (I am currently only aware of Beattie et. al. (2005; 2007) and Craig (2007)), so before I move on to practical considerations of how the study unfolded, I must first outline the method I devised through this study.

Through the synthesis of the work of Dewey (1934; 1938/1997) and Gadamer (2006/1970) and a number of narrative inquirers (Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 1999; Craig, 2007; Beattie, 2007), I devised a metaphor that captures the complexity of narrative interactions and which provides a description of an analytical method for examining interacting narratives. The inductive process of developing this method and the process of its application is summarized below as I outline the metaphor, and then explain the process in each phase of the study.

As I worked through this study, it occurred to me that the process of interacting narratives could only be captured with a metaphor that held a sense of depth and movement, scope and change. The organic metaphor of a river landscape held qualities of experience, knowledge and narrative. A natural ecosystem, or series of conjoined ecosystems as of which a river landscape is often comprised, allows for all the complexities of interaction that exist when teachers navigate the professional knowledge landscapes of their workplaces. This metaphor is variable and can be re-constructed to capture the unique experiences of different individuals. The metaphor illustrates the phenomenon of interacting narratives, because it provides a way of looking at three elements of interaction: a) individual and group interactions, b) internal versus external interactions, and c) the shifting knowledge horizon. I use this metaphor in phase two of the study to examine interacting narratives at specific moments and over a span of time.
3.3 Participant Selection

Three participants were selected for this study. They include me, the researcher and co-participant with more than ten years of experience, Anandi, a teacher with more than twenty years of experience at the time of data collection, and Tanya, who had approximately ten years of experience when I observed her teaching. The study investigates how experienced secondary English teachers learned to respond to the multiple literacies of students in diverse urban settings and an examination of the conditions that facilitated innovations in our teaching. The section below will describe the rationale for and process of participant selection.

3.3.1 Process and rationale. The sample for this study is small to mitigate the volume and nature of data collected and the limited scope and resources of the research project. Beyond my own case, I found two experienced teachers who met the following criteria:

- more than five years’ teaching experience
- a teaching practice holding commonalities with multiliteracies pedagogy
- a position in a publicly funded urban setting teaching secondary English

After acquiring ethical approval from the University of Toronto and the participating school board, I emailed the participant criteria to a secondary English curriculum consultant for the board who was a teacher seconded to the position, and I asked him to suggest people he had met through professional development sessions that met those criteria and who may be interested in my study. He suggested three teachers, all of whom worked at different schools, and one of whom was working in the elementary panel in a middle school. I contacted the two secondary teachers and their principals by email following approved ethical protocol, and after an initial meeting with me, both agreed to participate.
In a meeting with my doctoral committee, we agreed I would be a co-participant in the study because of my position of praxis; throughout the course of my doctoral research I remained a secondary English teacher actively working on innovation in my approach to curriculum and instruction, meeting all the selection criteria. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is usually positioned within the research, as opposed to being an outside observer, because the nature of the inquiry requires the development of relationships with participants and the co-construction of meaning of the research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Often, because researchers are drawn to inquiries closely connected with their personal stories, they must include their own narratives to make the story of the research whole (see Beattie, 1995; Feuerverger, 2007; Kooy, 2006). It was a logical choice to include my teaching practice in the study because my professional learning problems were its source.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In this section of the paper, I explain the process of developing and applying the two phases of the study.

3.4.1 Phase one: known territory. I did not have the insight to label this phase of the study known territory until much after its preliminary completion in December of 2010. At this point in time, I had completed two steps in the process: a) collected data on all participants, and b) completed a preliminary analysis, reported in first drafts of narrative accounts.

I collected narrative data about my co-participants through interviews and observations and the analysis of classroom documents. These interviews and observations took place between January 2009 and June 2009. Participants gave their feedback on my interpretations in
September 2009. The process of data collection for my own narrative account was slightly different and will be addressed separately below.

3.4.2 Collecting data from my co-participants. I interviewed each participant three times within the period of the study as I have been trained to do. Semi-structured interviews of about one hour occurred at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the observational period (see table 1 for prepared interview questions). Participants received the list of sample questions by email one week before the scheduled interview. They were informed that the questions were possible topics of conversation and that we need not address them all or discuss them in the order listed. I received consent to record each interview.

I conducted observations of my co-participants after the first interview. The schedule of observations varied with each participant, based on the participating school board’s ethical review regarding respect for participants’ time. This resulted in four observations of each participant over the winter/spring semester of 2009, each observation covering two classroom periods. No electronic recordings were made during observations. Observations of each participant were recorded in handwritten field notes, which were taken both during and immediately after the observation, and I transcribed them into electronic documents.

During observations I was present and visible to the participant and students in the classroom. I was introduced on the first day as a teacher at Maplewood C.I. who was doing some doctoral research on teachers with interesting methods, and students were given the opportunity to ask questions.

I collected handouts and assignments the teachers provided to students, some dating back to the beginning of the unit of study. These documents became a resource for analysis and another
slice of the teachers’ curricular knowledge and artifacts that revealed the nature of their written communication with students.

### 3.4.3 Collecting data about myself.

I collected data about my own teaching from three sources. To begin the process, I answered the sample questions I had prepared for my co-participants’ semi-structured interviews (see Table 1). I wrote the answers to these questions in my research journal. I also drew from my files of teaching materials, which include unit plans, student handouts, lesson plans, and my teacher daybooks from the past ten years of teaching. The third source of narrative data came from the range of narrative accounts and narrative reconstructions I have written about my practice in the last ten years of my graduate studies, including reflective narrative essays written about my own teaching practice for a range of courses, my Masters’ thesis (Hegge, 2005) and the pilot study for this research (Hegge, 2007).

### 3.4.4 Narrative case studies.

Initially, I characterized the research as narrative case study, closely examining individuals’ narratives. Preliminary analysis occurred from January to July 2009, when I was collecting data, writing interim research texts, and seeking feedback from my co-participants to use when composing narrative accounts. This step of the project focused almost entirely on my co-participants’ narratives. During this early period of applying known analytical processes, I was examining the cases of Anandi and Tanya as separate stories distinct from my own.

| Table 1 |

_Sample Questions from Semi-structured Interviews_
Interview 1

Questions:

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your teaching history? (For example, early experiences, important experiences, memorable events, etc.)
2. What is it about teaching that you enjoy most?
3. What are some of your strengths as a teacher?
4. What type of teacher would you say you are?
5. Are there any examples of teachers, real or fictional, that you would say are a model or an inspiration for you?
6. What would you say is the most important characteristic for an English teacher to have?
7. What would you say every English teacher should know?
8. What do you know how to do really well (i.e. what is your teaching expertise)?
9. How did you learn that?
10. If you had to rank knowledge and character as important qualities for a high school English teacher, which would come out on top and why?

Interview 2

Questions:

1. Do you have any comments about the process we went through last time?
2. After reviewing the transcript, are there any issues you want to talk about in more detail, or is there any point you wish to clarify?
3. Why do you think you became an English teacher?
4. What metaphor or image best captures your approach to teaching English?
5. Why do you think that metaphor suits you?
6. Is there a moment or memory that captures what is important about what you do?
7. What was your most important lesson?
8. What do you think you need to learn more about? Why?
9. What activities have resulted in meaningful professional development for you?
10. Where do you see your career being in ten years from now?

Interview 3

Questions:

1. Do you have any comments about the process we went through last time?
2. After reviewing the transcript and reading the letter I sent you, are there any issues you want to talk about in more detail, or are there any points you wish to clarify?
3. What are the things that have most helped you to build your approach to teaching English?
4. In what ways do you think your personality has affected your development over your career so far? What impact have your characteristics had on your teaching practice?
5. Conversely, what impact has teaching English had on your self-identity?
6. What has it been like for you to go through the process of participating in the observations and these interviews, and of giving feedback to me about what you’re seeing in the transcripts and the letter?

To begin, I composed interim research texts for participants, Tanya and Anandi. They took the form of letters to participants written in the second person in which I presented each participant with excerpts from the data about her teaching and my initial analysis of those narratives. I composed the letters by reading and rereading available transcripts, deriving unique
themes applicable to each participant, and then coding the transcribed data. Themes were used to organize the discussion in the interim research texts, which I sent to participants in advance of our third interview to provide them with the opportunity to read and respond to my preliminary findings. They were asked to co-create meaning with me by providing feedback on the veracity and comprehensiveness of my initial findings and in addition to how well the language I used to capture their stories matched ways they would describe themselves and their contexts.

After the feedback and the final interview, I coded the remaining transcripts using my preliminary themes and began composing the narrative accounts, which was the next step in my initial analysis of the research data. During this process I observed a parallel between the themes in the interim research texts. I began grouping Anandi and Tanya’s themes under three headings that emerged from the initial research questions: what they know, how they learned, and why they learned. This grouping, which I incorporated into their narrative accounts, led to the transition between narrative case study of my co-participants and the next phase of analysis, when I synthesized my knowledge about narrative inquiry to develop a new analytical method. This transitional period began when I composed the narrative account of my teaching practice and began paying closer attention to the interacting narratives in all of our stories.

3.4.5 Interacting narratives: transitioning to phase two. This second phase began in January of 2012 when I resumed my studies after a medical leave, which lasted all of 2011. It was difficult to begin my own narrative account. I had volumes of data and many threads to discuss. To simplify the process as I transitioned between the analysis of data on my co-participants to the construction of my narrative account, I began by comparing my story with theirs. I saw how the three groupings applied to all three participants and began analyzing my data using the
themes: what I know, how I learned and why I learned. I conceived of these headings as the framework that would lead to new findings about the nature of interacting narratives. When comparing the narrative accounts, I noted the importance of highlighting the interaction between the motivational stories of why we had learned to innovate and the explanatory narratives of how we had learned.

As I revised my theoretical framework, I returned to my work with Beattie and her conception of interacting narratives (Beattie, Thornton, Dobson, & Hegge, 2005; Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge, Interacting narratives: Creating and recreating the self, 2007), Conle’s concepts of frozen narratives and of narrative resonance (Conle, 1999; 1996), and Olson and Craig’s work on the multi-layered narrative tensions in the development of teachers’ knowledge (2005). I also returned to Clandinin and Connelly’s three-dimensional inquiry space (2000), Gadamer’s dialogic concepts of “horizon” and “fusion of horizons” (2006/1970), Dewey’s “experience” (1934) and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s “portraiture” (1997). I read Craig’s work on “story constellations” (2007) for the first time, and through a synthesis of these concepts, devised the method to complete my analysis of the intricate interacting narratives in my study.

This method provides a framework for capturing complexity and frames the researcher’s interest, focus, descriptions, examination, and perspective on data. Being aware of whether I am zooming in or zooming out to examine the individual’s Self narratives or how she is situated on her landscape, allows me to be precise about what kind of narrative interaction I am discussing, and this precision allows me two important things.

Table 2
### Ways of Looking at Interacting Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoom in interest</th>
<th>Portrait</th>
<th>Landscape</th>
<th>Photojournalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>• Primary interest is practitioner</td>
<td>• Primary interest is effect of immediate context on practitioner</td>
<td>• Primary interest is effect of immediate context on practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>• focus on Self narratives only</td>
<td>• focus on Other narratives in close contact with immediate context</td>
<td>• focus on Other narratives in close contact with immediate context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine</td>
<td>• identify and describe dominant features of Self narratives</td>
<td>• identify and describe dominant features of these narratives</td>
<td>• identify and describe dominant features of these narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>• examine interactions between different Self narratives</td>
<td>• examine interactions between Other narratives and prominent Self narrative(s)</td>
<td>• examine interactions among prominent Self narratives and between those and Other narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• outside looking in</td>
<td>• outside looking in</td>
<td>• inside looking out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoom out</th>
<th>Portrait</th>
<th>Landscape</th>
<th>Photojournalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>• Primary interest is practitioner in context</td>
<td>• Primary interest is on historical events on practitioner over time</td>
<td>• Primary interest is on historical events on practitioner over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>• focus on Self narratives in context of some Other narratives</td>
<td>• focus on terrain traveled</td>
<td>• focus on terrain traveled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine</td>
<td>• identify and describe dominant features of Self narratives</td>
<td>• identify and describe dominant features of the landscape that have affected course taken</td>
<td>• identify and describe dominant features of the landscape that have affected course taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>• examine how Self and Other narratives interact</td>
<td>• examine interactions at turning points to determine which spurred change</td>
<td>• examine interactions at turning points to determine which spurred change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• outside looking in</td>
<td>• outside looking in</td>
<td>• inside looking out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, I am able to acknowledge the multitude of views unexplored, while second, I can focus more clearly on the particular interaction I am foregrounding in any given discussion. The clarity of focus strengthens the research because it provides the reader with an easier task of assessing how accurately the findings resonate with their own experienced knowledge.

### 3.4.6 A procedure for applying the method to the data. Once I had conceived of this extended metaphor and devised my method of framing narrative accounts, I considered how it and my
method applied to my research. The timing of this development nearing the end of my doctoral journey created the problem of having to re-assess the narrative accounts and my analysis of the data while being in the midst of the project. I determined the following procedure:

1. determine primary interest (i.e. how research questions are situated on grid)
2. situate given data
3. zoom as necessary on narrative excerpts to create focus for answering research questions
4. analyze interactions between narratives in focus

I determined that I had already completed many aspects of this four step procedure, without explicitly naming them during the first phase of the research. In the narrative accounts about my co-participants, I had zoomed in to create portraits of their practice and purpose, and then zoomed out to examine the portrait in its context. I had also traced the interaction of Self narratives while zoomed in and had determined some interactions between Self and dominant Other narratives in the context of their immediate environments on the landscape when I zoomed out. My narrative was in a different place altogether, and my problems wrestling with its composition had been the current driving the synthesis which led to this analytical method.

Because the nature of the data about my practice was radically different than the data about my co-participants, I had become bogged down when attempting to analyze the interacting narratives in my story. The ten-year span of material made the job of finding a defining set of narratives difficult. Having developed this four-step method of analysis using the river landscape metaphor, I was able to quickly determine when I began to situate my data that I had assembled not a portrait, but a landscape. Recognizing this, I was then able to re-assemble my narrative account into the depiction of how my knowledge landscape changed over time because of my
engagement in the research, a narrative which will in chapter 6, provide a contrasting viewpoint to the narrative accounts of my co-participants.

The two phases of analysis this project underwent were a result of its design and my position as the researcher. A beginning inquirer, I started the process with what I knew how to do. However, the design of the project, which aimed to examine the range of narratives that interacted to spark innovative professional growth, required a method of analyzing interacting narratives that did not yet exist. So far in this section of the chapter on data collection and analysis I have focused on these two phases of the study. Before moving on to discuss limitations of the study in 3.6 I make some notes below about problems during data collection and about triangulation of the data.

3.4.7 Problems during data collection. There were some minor problems during the data collection period, only one of which applied to my co-participants. This problem was technical. During Tanya’s third interview, my recording device malfunctioned. I did not notice until I arrived home and tried to transcribe the data. I quickly typed field notes in the third person using the interview questions as a guide and completed these notes the same day. I sent the transcript to Tanya via email for her approval, explaining the problem. She did not make any changes to my field notes and responded that they seemed to be an accurate reconstruction of what she remembered discussing.

The other problems concerned collection of data about myself, and involved access to old, remembered documents that I was unable to locate. Although inconvenient, this problem was compensated for by the sheer volume of data at my disposal, and I was in all cases able to substitute examples from other sources.
3.4.8 Triangulation of data: establishing credibility. Triangulation is a concept often used to support findings in qualitative research and to provide assurance of their validity. Based on Denzin’s (1970) discussion of triangulation in social science research, this study involved data triangulation, which concerns collecting different slices of data about different people at different times, and methodological triangulation, which involves the use of several methods of data collection. The concept proposed is that through triangulation, the research has more depth and therefore is more likely to hold reliable findings. I will detail ways in which the data is triangulated and then provide a caveat about this project’s findings and issues of reliability.

Methodological triangulation involved collecting three forms of data from co-participants and from myself. Co-participants were interviewed, observed in classroom practice, and provided documents for analysis. I answered interview questions about my practice, engaged in document analysis, and engaged in reflective, narrative writing about my practice.

Data triangulation was employed when I created interim research texts (Clandinin J., 2006). These included personalized and detailed letters, written in the second person, that outlined emerging themes and analysis arising from data in the middle of the data collection process. Each participant was asked for feedback and with this feedback they co-constructed the narrative accounts that were presented to them after the data collection period was over. Again, they were asked for feedback on the third person narrative accounts that formed the basis for the chapters on respective co-participants. In this way, the data sampling evolved over time from tacit understandings to a stronger influence of reflective storytelling. In the case of the narrative account of myself, the data collected covers a span of more than ten years, dating back to 2001.
and through the span of time documents show the temporal nature of my knowledge and its evolution over time, providing slices of narrative for analysis.

Mentioned earlier was the use of triangulation to assure reliability of qualitative research. The reliability that triangulation in this research provides is that the narrative accounts herein represent the understandings of the participants at the time they were collected. As in all narrative research, there is a temporality (Clandinin J., 2006) that assumes that these stories are not objective accounts of a-temporal facts, but the evolving knowings and identities that arise from lived experience. There is no objective generalization to find in this kind of research. Instead, it is a way of looking closely at particular cases.

Because narrative inquiry is both methodology and phenomenon, I do make generalizations about innovations I have made to the methods of narrative analysis of data in this research, which I have discussed earlier in this chapter. I also observe a pattern in the narrative processes of all participants and how these processes are connected to teacher development. I make the case that data triangulation lends credibility to my discussion of this pattern and my suggestion that there should be further investigation into how it contributes to understandings of teacher development.

3.5 Limitations

In my theoretical framework, I have already discussed some of the limitations of narrative inquiry as a research methodology. Here I discuss more specifically the constraints of this study and the choices I made to ensure the quality of my analysis within the scope of this project. Ways of looking are inevitably limited, and in this study I opted to explore small range perspectives in considerable detail instead of presenting multiple perspectives superficially. I
limited the research perspective, the number of participants and the professional environments in order to develop a coherent narrative arc for the research text.

For narrative coherence I constrained the perspectives presented in the narrative accounts. The findings in the following chapters arise from my way of looking during observations and document analysis, and the questions that I asked to elicit participants’ stories compounded with my analytical lens during the composition of the narrative accounts. In this study I offer four angles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-Participants</th>
<th>Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Portrait view</td>
<td>• Landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Zoom in to zoom out</td>
<td>• Zoom in to zoom out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I notably omit the “photojournalist” perspective, which would result in a variation on the research story, preferring to offer a reflective distance to the narrative accounts. I made this choice so that I could adequately address the portrait and landscape views within the scope of this thesis.

In order to understand the impact of complex narrative interactions among participants’ Self and Other narratives in addition to the impact of their narratives on mine, I decided to limit the number of participants to three. Collecting and analyzing narrative data is onerous and time consuming. As a solo researcher acting as a co-participant, I felt that I could pay adequate attention to two accounts other than my own. Since narrative inquiry focuses on the specific, rather than the general, the small number allowed me to explore each story in considerable depth and to explore the impact of interactions as the research unfolded. Anandi and Tanya compliment my story with different approaches to learning, teaching and innovating practice and were selected not only for their expertise and innovation but for the alternate perspectives they
offered to mine. Within the scope of the project the limited number of participants allows for a coherent presentation of their narratives and my professional and research interactions with them.

A third important constraint imposed by the scope of the project is the range of professional environments I was able to explore. For several reasons, which included ethical approval procedures, I decided to select participants working in different schools. This choice prevented me from trying out the landscape or photojournalist perspectives with my co-participants’ data and narrative accounts, but also allowed me to focus on creating portraits of them as individuals within their unique professional ecosystems. In contrast, my narrative account offers a landscape perspective, including interactions with participants as I stepped into their teaching and learning environments. The size of this study has granted the opportunity to explore how individuals’ narratives interact in new and revealing depth.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The ethical review boards of the University of Toronto, and the participating school board vetted the research proposal. This study was found to have minimal risk for participants. Ethical considerations involved informed consent and protection of participants’ rights and information.

Recruitment involved an informed consent process in which participants were made aware of their voluntary participation in the study and their right to withdraw without penalty at any stage in the process. Participants were reminded of this right, and the right to not answer any or all questions at the beginning of each interview. In addition, participants were provided with transcripts and presented with the opportunity to censor any material they did not want included
Participants were invited to co-construct narrative accounts and had editorial control over how they were depicted in these accounts.

Participants’ identity has been protected by the use of pseudonyms for them and their schools. In addition, I have declined to mention the specific school board which is the context for this study. Printed data has been kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic data in a password protected form, available only to me. Participants will be made aware of any publication involving data about them.

3.7 Summary

This narrative inquiry is an investigation into the interacting narratives of three experienced secondary English teachers that examines what they have learned in order to respond to the diverse literacy and language needs of their students and what conditions have allowed them to engage in that learning. The research is a phenomenological study that examines how and why teachers develop knowledge through the intricately complex interactions of the narratives on the landscape of professional knowledge.

Narrative inquiries are about narrative, using narrative, and the stories and meanings that unfold from them are inductive in nature. Undertaking this study involved questions that required a new method of analyzing narrative data, which was devised as the research took place. Narrative inquiry is about ways of looking, and the method described in this chapter, which has been applied to the narrative accounts that follow, helps to frame that looking so that the reader can interact with the study with a clear understanding of its vantage point.
CHAPTER FOUR: LANDSCAPING AN OCTOPUS’S GARDEN: ANANDI’S STORY

Anandi is the most experienced participant in this study and has a highly developed teaching practice, which she continually refines. In this chapter, I create a pixilated portrait of her that highlights some prominent narratives that have interacted in the ongoing development of her multiliteracies teaching practice. First, I situate her in the professional ecosystem in which I encountered her in 4.1 Variegated Landscape: Leaving and Returning. Next, in 4.2 Reflecting on the Garden: Why Anandi Sought a Multiliteracies Practice, I examine the motivation to learn that arose from interactions between life narratives and chosen narratives in Anandi’s personal and professional realms. I then discuss ways in which these influences affected how she selected interactions with Other narratives to intentionally shape her professional learning, and how her professional ecosystem also influenced her growth in 4.3 Making Multiliteracies Connections: How Anandi Learned. Finally, I outline her knowledge horizon as it was during my time in her classroom in 4.4 The Octopus’s Garden: What Anandi Knows, connecting my observations to her interacting narratives.

4.1 Variegated Landscape: Leaving and Returning

Nestled in quiet streets of an upscale area, Anandi’s school is an old building populated by students who mostly commute from less affluent neighbourhoods. The large brick edifice, surrounded by tree-lined streets, houses three schools, the most populous of which is Urban Commercial and Technical School, where Anandi has taught for around twenty years. An alternative school and a collegiate are housed in a separate wing of the same building. As I approached on the day of my first visit, I paused to notice the sports field, blanketed in snow, giving the building a stately appearance. Inside its heavy wooden doors, the building seemed old
worn, and pleasant. Over the course of my time with Anandi I learned more about the student body at Urban. The school attracts a diverse group of students from many areas in the city because of its broad range of programs. It has a gifted and enriched program, a cyber-arts and robotics program, and a leadership program, with which she is heavily involved. Almost half of students speak a language other than English at home, and about 35% of the students are identified as needing support from the special education department, excluding those identified as gifted.

Upon meeting, Anandi suggested that we go up to the staffroom for our conversation, with its tables, kitchen amenities and some worn but comfortable sofas. There were other teachers in the room working, drinking coffee, and having conversations. I commented, “This is nice in here.” She effused about the collegiality of the staff and noted that the staff lounge at Urban is a hub where teachers meet and make exchanges throughout the day.

I told her about the study, and Anandi agreed that what I had described as multiliteracies pedagogy coincided with her teaching. She invited me to come and observe her children’s literature course, which best captured the principles I had mentioned. When I got up to leave, thanking her, she remarked, “I’m happy to help you. I really like to help.”

I later learned Anandi attended a teacher preparation program in the United Kingdom, and when she returned to Canada began to teach secondary English and ESL at Urban. After teaching there for ten years, she left for two to teach grade five ESL in Korea, a trip she credits with developing new knowledge about how to address classroom diversity at her school. The children’s literature course, which I observed, is one she developed with a colleague to address some concerns they had about how English instruction was not meeting the literacy needs of all students at Urban. They drew up a proposal, received approval, and wrote the curriculum
themselves, working outside published curriculum documents. By examining interactions that have shaped her professional development and led her to instructional practices in the children’s literature course, I link her personal and professional narratives to the transformational approach to pedagogy she has developed.

Anandi feels a deep connection to Urban; it has become her school. She says, “It’s interesting. I came to this school twenty years ago. I left three times and I always came back here.” As the following pages show, she returned to Urban again and again because of the deep sense of community she experiences there, a community that has fostered her professional development, and that she in turn has tended to like a garden.

4.2 Reflecting on the Garden: Why Anandi Sought a Multiliteracies Practice
In this section of the chapter, I examine underlying motivations that informed Anandi arising in part from the complex interactions among three prominent Self narratives: 1. a life narrative involving her ethnic identity; 2. a chosen Self narrative of being a reader; and 3. a chosen professional narrative of community building. Interwoven with these Self narratives are Other narratives of teaching on the social and environmental planes of her three dimensional professional learning ecosystem. After discussing these interactions, I examine the intrinsic motivations that emerge which have allowed her to continually engage in transformative professional learning.

4.2.1 Life narrative meets socio-cultural context: inspiring social justice practices. When I asked Anandi why she became an English teacher, she began her answer with a memory from childhood:
I love reading. From when I was five or six I loved reading; I loved literature; I loved writing. And if I was going to become any kind of teacher I think I wanted to be an English teacher. A lot of English teachers want to pass on that love of literature from childhood.

She cites many experiences from her childhood as formative narratives in the development of her professional practice. Her mother and father were both significant influences that shaped her notion of teaching as a social justice practice.

Her mother influenced Anandi’s belief in the importance of community building, an important feature in her pedagogical approach to social justice. She believes that the values around contributing to community, which she was taught both explicitly and tacitly in childhood, have characterized her approach to teaching. During her childhood, her mother was a special education teacher in a secondary school who would bring students home for parties and celebrations. When I asked her how she learned to develop the flexible structured activities that build community in her classroom, Anandi credited family:

I do think I had some of it in me because of being around my mother. I live my life in this way of structuring activities. At home it’s organized, “Okay – this is what we are going to do now – Let’s do this!” Even with my kids, “Now we’re doing a recipe!” Since I have the whole street over at my house, I need to keep things structured like that all the time.

Anandi’s life narratives and chosen professional narrative are blurred. She credits her upbringing and her mother’s influence to structure activities for individuals while building community. Saying, “I had some of it in me,” implies that she feels this ability is more than simply a skill,
that it is a character trait, a way of being for her, which connects to her earliest experiences. She explains how she operates the same way at home with her husband and children as she does at school, remarking at the necessity of doing so because of having “the whole street over”. She feels compelled to reach out and build community through hospitality and organized group activity.

Anandi’s commitment to equity, an important principle underlying multiliteracies pedagogy, is rooted in her childhood experience and her personal identity as a biracial person who grew up “different” in a homogenous community. She says:

I come from a mixed background: my father is Indian, my mother is Welsh. I grew up in the suburbs and the school I went to wasn’t diverse at all. I think being mixed had a lot to do with why I became an English teacher. I never felt a part of anything and I frequently masked my background. I was born in the 60’s, and in the 70’s and 80’s when I was growing up, people weren’t really mixed. So I think that awareness I have now, that my first focus is to make kids feel comfortable, is because I know they’ll be successful if they sense that they belong. Because I saw it a lot with students that were like me, students that were different ... Sometimes it was difficult when you were mixed back then because you didn’t feel like you fit in, so you were always trying to think of ways to blend in or to mask your difference. That’s stressful and it affects your academics – I’m sure it affected mine. It was interesting, when I moved from elementary school I was an A+ student, and then when I went to high school my marks dropped. It was more because I was stressed all the time about all these kinds of issues.
Anandi has a prominent life narrative of being biracial. She thinks this became prominent because of its interaction with the Other narrative of the socio-cultural context of her schooling in a predominantly homogeneous community in her childhood and adolescence. The interaction between the unchosen stories arising from the life narratives of her parentage and the place in which her parents selected to live during her childhood, resulted in the story she tells in the excerpt above about a girl who hid her identity, particularly during adolescence, because she felt she did not belong to her peer group.

Because it is a story that features school as a milieu, Anandi readily connects her childhood experience to her professional role. She is keenly aware of how the lifeworld of the student, the unchosen details such as parentage and heritage, geography and ethnicity, can have a profound effect on how that individual interacts with the school landscape. When young, she chose to hide this internal narrative from peers, feeling intense pressure to do so in a homogeneous cultural environment. Anandi wishes she had felt supported in publicly living her internal life narrative in her high school community, so that she could have spent her energy on academics instead of on navigating the social realm of conformity to the established norms of the dominant group. As a teacher, she watches for systemic oppression and makes it her “first focus” to make space for cultural diversity in her teaching.

Having embraced diversity as a philosophical foundation of her teaching because of her story of racial identity, Anandi engaged in school and classroom activities that helped her to grow professionally, and also positively impacted her colleagues’ professional development. Her early leadership activities with students, creating workshops for teachers and students on topics such as anti-racism and anti-homophobia arose out of her desire to create a learning environment that embraced diversity and that would make all students feel safe and welcome. She chose to
pay particular attention to her professional learning in equity and diversity. Her work in curriculum related to multiliteracies pedagogy connects to interactions between the story of Self discussed in the next section, her chosen narrative of being “a reader”.

4.2.2 Chosen Self narrative: lover of stories. Anandi’s struggles as a child from a mixed race background helped to form her love of literature and inspired much of her teaching. She explains she became a teacher to pass on her love of literature, and that the children’s literature course which she now teaches was in part inspired by memories from childhood:

I had a very strict upbringing, and honestly reading was my escape; it saved me. I didn’t have a great relationship with my father. I grew up in a very strict South Asian household even though I was a mixed child, and I was dealing with all those issues of my father’s values being different than my friends’ parents’. And back in the 60’s and 70’s it was very different. It’s not like here where there are a lot of multi-race families. So it was really a struggle, and a struggle I think with my parents as a first couple dealing with it. My dad wanted to hold on to his cultural ideals through his kids. So at home we had a really strict upbringing, and to read for me was a profound release. You name it I read it: from National Geographic to everything in the house. I was one of those kids. I would go to other people’s houses for a play date and I’d read their books. My girlfriends would say, “What are you doing?” It would be a sleepover and there was me reading a book in the corner. So I think part of why I became a teacher is because of that whole sense of what you can do through literature and English. And I think that’s why about ten years
ago a colleague and I developed this children’s literature course, that whole memory of how they enjoy children’s stories and what they love about them.

Her life narrative involves conflict in her childhood interactions with her father. She chose reading as “an escape” that saved her from being overwhelmed by the life narrative of her biracial identity and the conflict that it created between her and her environment. In her chosen practice of being a reader, Anandi found solace and pleasure. Her strong association between reading in childhood and escape from oppressive forces in her lifeworld allowed her to see the potential for children’s literature to have an emancipatory effect on students in her school, some of who struggle with identities as poor students and non-readers.

Anandi’s chosen narrative of being a reader and lover of children’s stories has imbued a sense of purpose into her teaching. She knows from personal experience that literature and literacy can open up doors of opportunity and pleasure. She believes the excitement a child who loves to read experiences is something many students can relate to and experience in school. The interactions between her life narrative of being from a biracial family and her chosen narrative of becoming a reader led her to collaborate with a colleague, resulting in the children’s literature course.

**4.2.3 On being an octopus: chosen professional narrative.** Anandi is intrinsically motivated by two major sources of professional satisfaction that stem from Self narratives. These sources of satisfaction are: (a) witnessing the pleasure of students who are engaged in a community of learners and (b) enjoying the challenge of building the connections that allow that to happen. Anandi’s teaching practice is the chosen professional narrative of being a community builder.
both inside and outside of the school building, embedded in her characterization of herself, and evident in the following narrative excerpts. When I asked her to find a metaphor that captured her teaching identity, she thought for a moment and then said with a laugh:

I guess I’m like an octopus. So I’m stuck here, trying to be grounded, but I feel like my hands are everywhere trying to reach out. I’m not always successful, but at least I’m trying to reach out to everybody and make them feel like they count, like they’re part of the community. I’m trying to do my best to reach them and to get them to be engaged in what we’re doing. That’s how I always feel about how I’m working. And beyond my classroom too, even in the school I feel this reaching out. Sometimes I feel I’m spread a little too thin. And you wonder; are you doing a good job – are you servicing everybody?

Anandi’s metaphor shows her drive to create community in her school and classes. Her desire to reach every student and her awareness that she is not always successful motivates her ongoing professional learning, and her ongoing revision of curriculum and learning activities. She feels like a hub in the activities of her school. With her many arms, she keeps different community building and leadership projects and activities moving forward. She indicates challenges of balancing the needs of so many include making her feel stretched to her limits. When I asked how she addresses this problem, she replied:

I don’t know. That’s one of the difficulties. I think sometimes I need to shift and do different things. So I went to Korea because I think I needed a change – I was spread thin. And then later when I had kids my priorities shifted. That’s not why I had kids, but your
priorities shift, and I think that’s healthy because it allows you to not get so immersed in things.

The changes rejuvenate her resources, altering her direction in the professional ecosystem, and lead to professional learning and growth. When she describes how she learned to structure lessons for diverse groups, she credits trying new experiences that kept her from spreading herself too thin and burning out. She rejuvenates and develops teaching practice when she learns in new contexts. About learning she says:

When I have to learn things it helps me understand students. Like when I went to Korea and had to learn language. I also went to Guatemala for a summer, and I didn’t know any Spanish, but it was a language school, and you live with a family. But those challenging experiences connect you to what other people are going through when they’re learning. And at the end of the day I just wanted to sleep and not talk to anybody. But that’s what many of our kids go through. So it helped me to just recognize learning is exhausting.

These travel experiences put her in the position of a learner and the change allowed her a new perspective on what she was doing professionally.

Anandi offers numerous examples in narrative excerpts of the rewards that motivate her to continue reaching out her many arms in and beyond her classroom, despite being worn thin. I examine one example to demonstrate how she uses experiences to renew her resources and her motivation. She describes an outreach activity of her children’s literature class, providing workshops on graphic texts for students and teachers in grade seven at a local elementary school:
When they did workshops for the elementary kids, it was all about literacy. And my students got it, structuring the workshops themselves. One of them loves manga (Japanese style comics), but the whole issue is he’s not passing the OSSLT literacy test. He’s not doing well; he’s in credit recovery. But I know he loves manga, and I thought, “Oh we can do a workshop on manga and comics.” And he got excited, talking about all these books, pulling them out, saying, “If you’re a girl, you might enjoy the theme of this.” He didn’t really understand the extent of his accomplishment. He got what we wanted him to do head on, and he talked about being a boy and how he never read and how manga engage him. For a kid like that who teachers are not passing, for him to go and do that for 70 grade seven kids and twelve teachers, rotating through, I thought, how amazing is that? And the response from the elementary school was, “Oh, this is an expert. This kid must be on the honour roll.” And you know Urban’s kids aren’t the cream of the crop. My response is: this is what happens when you allow a kid to excel in his area. So for me seeing kids like that is amazing. I think, oh they’ve got this community, and they’re serious about their school, and they feel very important, and they’re proud. They’re proud to work together. They did it in groups of three, except that student who did the manga workshop was on his own with a little support. After the day was over, they wanted to celebrate, which really showed their commitment to the group. We went to a restaurant and they all paid for themselves. It happened to be somebody’s birthday, and there were about fifteen of us sitting around the table and they got a cake for this kid who they don’t really know, and they were singing. It’s just that touchy feely good thing. Then afterwards they all took the bus to the park and walked around, which the younger kids loved. So that for me was a real sense of, “Oh
yeah,” that’s where community counts, that’s where the kids see that it’s important to be part of a community.

Anandi had to work with each student group, including the reluctant boy who worked individually on the manga project, to find a topic for their presentations. This required her to engage and learn about their interests. To structure the activity, she reached beyond the walls of the school, cultivating relationships with teachers at the elementary school where the workshops took place. The intrinsic motivation is the good feeling that arose from watching the students being recognized as experts, celebrating their collective achievement, and forming a close learning community. These rewards, which she did not experience when she was a high school student, allow Anandi to find the means within herself to stretch her arms beyond the walls of the classroom.


Her professional learning has resulted from a complex series of interacting narratives. While impossible to represent, and even unlikely that Anandi herself could sort out the multiple interactions that formed her octopus’s garden, her account demonstrates that some strong currents in the professional ecosystem shaped the development of her professional knowledge. In the previous section I focused on interactions among Anandi’s Self narratives, with a secondary concern for Other narratives. In this section of the chapter, I focus on the Other narratives and examine how these positively interacted with her Self narratives and developed
her professional learning. There are two areas of significance: 1. social interactions with teachers and 2. interactions in new contexts.

4.3.1 Gifts from others: learning about teaching by interacting with leaders. Anandi developed her practice through both personal and professional experiences whose boundaries blend. Her mother also influenced the way Anandi learned to teach. She describes how her mother’s professional interest in literacy, and more importantly in people, influenced the development of these same strengths in her teaching:

I have a mother that was in the system. An amazing literacy teacher, very warm and kind, many people know her. And she was a great example of how to be with people, and how to act in different situations. I mean I now have students that knock on my door and bring my family cookies – they know my kids. And I think it’s that whole pay it forward thing – you do something for them and then they shift. I do think that. It sounds touchy feely, but I do think it works … I think just growing up and seeing my mother I learned this. She had parties for students in the back yard, and all that kind of thing. It was just what you did in our home - you gave back. She just did it, so my siblings and I just learned…I think every kid in the family is like that. That’s part of it. And I think that’s my strength.

The way she characterizes the interactions of her and her mother’s narrative indicates the importance of this influence on Anandi’s professional development. Her mother acted as both a leader in the home community and her school community. Growing up, she witnessed and internalized community-building activities. Her frequent use of the word “just” implies an
expectation that giving to others was the only acceptable option for conducting oneself in the world. Anandi’s home world and her mother’s professional world interacted, because of her mother’s belief in building relationships with students, meaning not only did she interact with her mother’s personal family narrative, but she also interacted with her mother’s professional narrative.

As she observed her mother in her role as teacher, she learned that teaching was about building relationships with and among students. In addition, Anandi also witnessed firsthand her mother’s literacy leadership in her secondary special education classes. While she grew up loving books and literature, she realized that this was not everyone’s experience. Because her mother invited students into the home, Anandi interacted with learners whom her mother was helping to make meaning through reading and writing. By meeting her mother’s students and hearing her mother’s stories of teaching, she developed a sensitivity to others who did not share her pleasure in reading, which laid the foundation for developing her passion for teaching students who struggle with literacy. This indirect, lifelong mentorship shaped her teaching self-identity as a person who creates community and guides students with compassion.

Anandi emphasizes the role of leaders in communities, and reveals the social nature of her professional development. It was through mentorship that she learned to engage students. She observes:

What I think is lacking in the system today is they don’t have as much mentorship. I had a phenomenal English department head. I came to this school twenty years ago and I left three times, and I always came back here. I still remember my mentor always said, “Teach to your strengths.” That was her motto: teach to your strengths and lead by
example. I always remember that. She was really inspirational. She wrote books. I’m still friends with her – I mean, she could be my mother but she’s one of my closest friends, and she’s amazing.

She considers her mentor’s knowledge to be exemplary and finds inspiration in the way this educational leader recognized that teachers have a range of skills and knowledge. The message, “teach to your strengths,” implies many good ways to teach, depending, in part, on the strengths of the individual teacher. She recalls her former department head’s motto, which she still finds inspiring, because it enabled her to identify strengths in her personal practical knowledge and to continually refine them.

Anandi observes how her mentor helped her to understand how to engage students:

She loved literature. I’m constantly reading, and she did the same thing. And she inspired kids even to the day when she retired; kids loved her classes. I mean it’s like a show, right? You are a performer. If you make Shakespeare exciting and relate it to them, they’re going to want to come and show up. So she was a real role model, really helped me understand how to teach. Because I don’t think they do that [at faculties of education]. I mean here you are, you’ve been at university for four years. So you’ve read Paradise Lost and done all this kind of stuff. But how are you going to get kids motivated? How are you going to teach them how to read and write, especially if they’re having difficulties or issues around that? That was my big thing.
Her desire to become a role model encouraged her to follow her mentor’s example and harness her enthusiasm for learning and love of literature in a professional inquiry into how to motivate and teach students who struggle with literacy. Her mentor, “wouldn’t tell you what to do, but she would give you advice and coach you in a positive way.” This coaching allowed Anandi to extrapolate from her experience for her teaching. Her mentor encouraged autonomy and shared a purpose for inspiring a love of literature in students. This mentor continues to inspire and motivate her. Clearly, Anandi began teaching in an environment supported by a senior teacher who saw English education as more than teaching literature – it was about engaging students’ interest in meaning making. She learned her “big thing” about engaging multiliterate students because she found a “role model” who encouraged her inquiry and supported her efforts in the beginning years of her career. She identifies her interactions with this leader to have had a strong influence on her developing professional knowledge. This worked for her because her mentor’s narratives interacted with hers in a supportive and encouraging way, allowing her Self narratives space to influence the development of her chosen professional narrative. Anandi’s mentor showed her how to take the available forms of English education, which she had learned in university and to design new practical knowledge aligning with values of her Self narratives.

4.3.2 Beyond the walls of the garden: alternate settings and professional learning.

Experiences outside of traditional secondary English education also played an important part in Anandi learning to re-design her pedagogy. Two areas she speaks about in particular is her work with English language learners (hereafter, ELLs) and developing the Children’s Literature course.
The combined experiences of teaching ESL early in her career in and time in Korea to teach in an elementary school helped her to learn how to challenge students with a range of abilities:

I was hired as an English and ESL teacher, and I did the ESL transition classes, which were the higher grades that were studying texts, but English wasn’t their first language. And I also taught a bit of English. I did that for about the first nine years. What I found there was it really taught me how to promote literacy and to teach literacy, and I think it made me a better English teacher. Then I went into full-time teaching English. In my eleventh year I went to Korea, and taught in an international school for two years. I actually taught elementary grade 5. I taught a grade five homeroom but with the ESL students and so it was really promoting literacy again. And that experience in the elementary sector developed me as a teacher and an English teacher by understanding how we teach students and how we should promote literacy, and how to make them better readers and effective learners. Then I came back to Canada and I went back to teaching English as well as leadership programs within my school, which is a school that really needs to promote literacy in all areas.

Teaching ESL and elementary students taught Anandi to break learning tasks into manageable chunks for students and how to include and address students’ varying needs. Addressing the multiple Englishes of her ELL students moved her beyond presuming first language facility with standard forms in students (Yoon, 2008) and learned to recognize literacy needs as a crucial part of her practice. She moved beyond subject specialization and academic
streaming that exists in the secondary panel by stepping into a generalist position as grade 5 homeroom teacher for ELLs in Korea. This experience helped her to develop a differentiated approach to instruction, which she now employs in her secondary teaching, developing lessons and learning activities geared to students of multiple levels.

Another important experience that helped Anandi learn to design multiliteracies curriculum was developing the curriculum for the Children’s Literature course in co-operation with a colleague. They identified a need for a course beyond the scope of the core secondary English curriculum and envisioned one that would teach a range of literacy skills while simultaneously cultivating student excitement about learning:

I think there is a lot you can get out of English education. Not just the ability to read but how you can relate to what you’ve read. I want students to use reading as escape, as enjoyment. And finding those things is not just about computers, that you can gain something from reading all kinds of things…I want kids to love reading.

She wanted to develop a course that rekindled some of the excitement about reading from childhood, dampened in many of her students by repeated poor results in the school system. She and her colleague felt that developing a new and different course they would address some issues around student motivation and literacy:

In 1998 we developed the course, and it hadn’t really been done before. Children’s literature in high school is not really common. We went and we tried to get funding for the course development, and I remember we took about five days in the summer. We went to my colleague’s brother’s cottage. This was before I had kids as well. My colleague had a
daughter who we took with us, but she was about ten or eleven – so she played and we worked. I remember we were so excited about it. We applied to the school board for approval of the course and we just started writing out the curriculum. There was nothing on which to base our course, so we were just writing out what we would do. And when the course ran for the first time, we team taught it together. She did a period and I did a period, which was great. And then it evolved from there. It’s a very difficult course to teach because of the multiliteracies and you’re dealing with so many different areas and levels of student ability - not just language grasp, but everything else. Because it’s such an open course it’s really a struggle to teach it, I think. There have been other people that have taught it, but I do also think it requires a certain kind of personality – you have to be really flexible and open minded to teach it.

Like her work with student leadership, Anandi collaborates as she innovates, this time with a colleague who shared her excitement about the course. After the initial curriculum document, they worked through the course they had created together making refinements. She described how the course changed over time to respond to the ongoing struggle to address the multiliteracies of her students, to find modes of communication rooted in their strengths and building upon them, to find other multiple and alternate modes for student learning. Interactions between her Self and Other narratives allowed Anandi to develop the multiliteracies pedagogy I examine in the next section.
4.4 The Octopus’s Garden: What Anandi Knows

Despite her unfamiliarity with the term multiliteracies pedagogy before agreeing to participate in this study Anandi ability to design curriculum that addresses plurality in students and in text forms shows in 1. my observations of her classroom and 2. how she describes her teaching.

4.4.1 A walk through the octopus’s garden: creating a community of learners. When I first walked into Anandi’s classroom, I observed colorful displays on the walls: posters of children’s films and books and examples of student work. Lined up on a ledge by the side chalkboard, stood a series of student-authored picture books. Students had taken these books to a nearby elementary school and read them to the children. Thumbing through several of them before class, I considered the effort students had put into making them. One student was early for class, and she excitedly pointed me toward her book and that of her friend. She proudly explained the concept behind the book, designed for children to get involved and draw their own pictures based on textual prompts. As I read, I inferred from the simple nature of the text and drawings and the student’s sincere and effusive pride in her work while showing it off to me, a stranger in the classroom, that this girl struggled to do well at school. I read her friend’s story and noticed the sophistication of the narrative, a tale about a mother who repeatedly tells her young daughter that it is “not time” for this or that, to the child-protagonist’s ongoing disappointment. The conflict resolves when the mother finally tells her daughter that, “it’s always time for a hug.” I noticed the skill in this second, more complex book, yet I thought each student has made an equally high personal accomplishment in this work. The student’s confidence in her work, which was less sophisticated than her friend’s, indicated to me that she was strongly supported by her classroom
community. My hunch was that her teacher helped her to believe in herself, and attempt something she might otherwise have shied away from.

The Children’s Literature course is open to students in all academic streams who are in grades 11 or 12. Anandi describes the course as a literacy course that attracts a range of students, some of whom are struggling with literacy and some of whom are in the gifted program at the school and highly literate. During my observation period, I recognized inherent teaching challenges in the varying levels of skill and ability amongst the students, which she addressed through multimodal and culturally relevant instruction, complex thinking tasks with simple texts and with authentic audiences for student projects.

Anandi regularly used multimodal classroom materials, presented multiple voices and perspectives, and encouraged students design new meanings. She provided direct instruction in multimodal design skills providing students with print, graphic, oral, spatial, and kinesthetic texts and teaching concrete methods of interpreting, analyzing and comparing those texts. While English was the sole language of instruction, she exposed students to multiple Englishes in the range of selected texts, and she invited students’ various Englishes into the classroom in the range of projects they were asked to complete.

Anandi used simple texts to teach complex concepts, which helped her to overcome some students’ difficulties with reading print text. During my observation period, she taught a unit of study on fairytales and folktales. They studied the Cinderella story, its numerous versions in text and film, and its patterns and implications and discussed cultural implications of the various versions. Anandi orchestrated a feminist deconstruction of the gendered messages in Cinderella stories. Following these discussions, students went on a field trip to see Coraline (Zoumas & Selick, 2008) the film of a graphic novel of the same name, and they compared the genre of
horror and fantasy to that of fairy tales. During the same period, students finished reading an independent children’s novel of their choosing, and designed and presented projects ranging from a video to a series of paintings, a board game to a rap. During the unit of study, Students also read and analyzed folktales and composed their own stories in groups, employing observed patterns in the form and drawing inspiration from a photo they selected from a set Anandi provided. In this unit, she provided overt instruction so that students were able at its culmination to redesign meanings of the texts they had encountered in their culminating projects.

Anandi organized opportunities for students to present their projects to authentic audiences. The first day of observations, I learned that several students spent their lunch hour broadcasting stories in celebration of Black History Month on a local community radio station. These students had previously performed the same stories for younger children at a nearby school, and now she had them broadcasting to a primarily adult audience. I imagined the amount of confidence it must have required these students, some of whom were identified as at risk of failure by the school, to read on air and was amazed that Anandi knew how to build it in them and then supply opportunities for them to exercise it.

During my observations I witnessed a flourishing learning community, saw students with diverse backgrounds and skills work together in supporting each other’s learning. I saw students participating contributing to the classroom activities she structured and speaking with pride about what they had produced in class.

4.4.2 The octopus speaks: what Anandi says about her teaching. In addition to my observations I conducted three semi-structured interviews to discuss her understandings of teaching and my observations. When I asked Anandi how she manages to orchestrate student
engagement I witnessed in her classroom, she discussed three important things: (a) building classroom community, (b) taking direction from students, and (c) differentiating student learning.

4.4.3 At the heart of a learning community. Anandi works hard at the beginning of a semester to build a sense of connection and community within each class. She structures activities “that shift the kids around so they’re forced to work with different people all the time.” Through games and co-operative learning activities, she creates community by teaching students to work with and learn about every member of the class.

In addition, Anandi recognizes students by displaying their work in class and school and actively includes the samples in her lessons. She says:

I have a lot of stuff up in the room, but it’s welcoming. A lot of people think in high school you don’t have show kids’ work – but I can’t tell you how many people pull their friends in to see it. I usually take samples and display stuff in the library. So many kids have come over and read the books. I think it is really important. We think they’re teenagers, but they’re still kids, and they want to have their work up. We have a website on our school, so we write about the kids who have gone and done things, so I think celebrating accomplishments is important for a community.

She refers back to the samples hung on the walls, and she believes that this gives students a sense of pride in their work, which adds to their feeling of confidence and therefore belonging in the classroom. She notes that students who are celebrated want to come and participate in class.
Anandi creates a warm and welcoming environment by caring for students. She takes an active interest in their activities and provides time in class for students to promote their schoolwide activities and causes. She provides water for students and occasionally food as a celebration for success. She says, “Sometimes I’ll make a meal and we have it together. I think those kinds of things are important – they feel comfortable enough, but they know there’s a line.” She openly fosters community, enlarging the reach of her teaching beyond the walls of her room.

Classroom community is also strengthened by the many excursions the class takes into the neighbourhood. The class visits a local elementary school to read their books and to give presentations, students participate in the radio broadcast mentioned, and they tell stories in a local public library. Anandi believes her outreach beyond the school to provide authentic audiences for students bring the classroom community together and builds students’ confidence in their individual and collective abilities.

4.4.4 Holding up student voice. Anandi values student voices and actively works in the development of student leadership. She has often taken students away for leadership retreats, and has had students create professional development workshops for teachers. One student developed and led workshop was about developing multicultural, multimodal, cross-curricular literacy activities. This project was recognized by an invitation to present their work at an international conference on equity. She says:

I think that was a highlight not because of me, it had nothing to do with me, but it was valuable because I saw how quickly and easily kids can absorb and understand this stuff if they are presented with the different tools and different styles of how to approach
things. And it was great to see how our staff who, let’s face it, don’t have the same experiences as the students we teach, clicked with what the students were doing … And people were responding. We had teachers asking, “Can I get this? I really want to do a project about scientists from all over the world.” So they were getting resources from our group. We took cross-curricular field trips, for example taking a math class to the board’s equity library. At the same time as looking at equity it totally promoted literacy because they were taking books out on inventors from different backgrounds. We were doing literacy across the curriculum before it became board policy.

Anandi credits the success of this innovative venture to the involvement of the students and downplays her own role. Clearly, though the students developed the materials, she acted as an expert learner, offering the “different tools and different styles” that helped them to put the presentation together. She facilitated an opportunity for students’ voices to influence teaching at the school as staff who attended workshops implemented student-prepared materials in their classes.

Another highlight involved a student-developed professional workshop on homophobia. Anandi describes how, given the opportunity, students rose to the occasion:

And to actually stand up to teachers. You know, twenty years ago people didn’t feel comfortable about discussing homophobia. These kids got up and they actually presented workshops and were guiding teachers and saying, “This is what you need to do, you need to be comfortable.” It was pretty amazing – I mean they were only 17 years old, and here they were speaking in front of a huge audience. And on a P.D. day, let’s face it,
sometimes teachers aren’t really into it…The students ran the P.D. session. It was totally organized from the food down to everything else.

She identified these two events as highlights in her career because of the scope of these accomplishments, although she regularly encourages such student involvement in her classroom. Anandi believes that meaningful opportunities for students to discuss issues that matter to them result in an engaged learning community.

4.4.5 Focusing on individuals within the learning community. In addition to building community in her classroom, Anandi tailors the curriculum to suit students’ individual needs and abilities. She devises ways to meet their needs and provide appropriate challenges. She provides some context regarding the classroom dynamics of her children’s literature course before discussing how she manages the range of student ability.

There are a lot of challenges in this course. There are about three kids that don’t read. One student sometimes comes in quietly and I’ll read to her on her own. That’s why I read aloud a lot in class. Yesterday were reading traditional Grimm fairy tales because they really wanted to read them. They had packages in their group and they had a choice to either read individually or together. And I know that student who can’t read has a friend in her group, and the friend knows, and we have that kind of relationship, and she read all the stories in the group. So there’s that which goes on in here. The other issue is that some of them are in here just trying to get that last one or two credits, and are not really interested. One of boys in here, he’s dealing with a lot of those kinds of issues just
trying to get through and get his credit. There are certain kids in here that I’m trying to engage that aren’t even engaged in reading or anything else, so I’m trying to think of creative, innovative ways that are going to reach them. So in this course you’ve got a gifted student who can write a novel on their own, and then you’ve got someone who can only write four or five words and who can’t read. The assignments that work involve choice.

Anandi notes the “kind of relationship” with students needed for “that which goes on in here.” The choices she offers relate directly to her knowledge of each student’s skill, prior knowledge, interests and struggles. As she gestures to groups of empty student desks, imagining their inhabitants as she explains how she plans lessons:

It takes a lot to prepare a lesson for them and for me to think it out. In my mind, it goes like this - so these guys are going to need the structure on the chalk board, those guys don’t. In our lesson, we’re going to go over story elements, but I also need it on paper in front of them because that’s how those kids learn. And then I’m going to do a chart paper because I know those four work through getting it read to them orally and talking it out in group work, and then they need a concrete instruction page on their desk. So even though it’s on the board I provide the same information in different formats, leading them into it. So sometimes it takes a long time to prep the lesson to make sure it’s successful for all the kids in the class. And then it just seems so easy but it’s not.
Anandi laughed as she explained of her thought process while lesson planning. The same careful planning goes into the projects and assignments she gives her students:

For example, if you look around the classroom, they did all their presentations and they all had a writing piece, but I think when you leave an assignment open you are more likely to engage more students… The first assignment gave them nine or ten choices and if they didn’t like those, then they could create their own choice. I think I’m very big on process and skills, so the product doesn’t matter as much. They think they’re getting marks all the way through the process, which is rewarding. We have one or two meetings. They have to do a write up. They have to do an analysis sheet. And finally when it comes to the real writing, since they’ve already done the thinking, they have something to write about. It’s actually quite thoughtful what they’ve written. And then they have an oral presentation. So at least we’re covering all the areas: they’ve got their oracy, they’ve got a media component in there, as well as the writing. They’re really working on tailoring what they’re doing and then they’ve peer evaluated each other during the presentations.

Just like her daily lessons, assignments are scaffolded for students to develop skills and knowledge and designed so that students can meet with small early successes that develop the confidence to do well. Anandi commented how the successes of individuals are celebrated within the learning community. She says:

And it’s really thoughtful, you know, what they did well. Because this was really their first big presentation, and for three of them, they said, “I don’t do presentations.” But
they actually got up and did it. And one girl brought in her son because it was really
important for her. The whole class becomes elevated because of just having a different
audience here and recognizing how important it is. The students were cheering for this
girl that went up. I was tearing up at the back, and they were so happy that she did it
because she doesn’t speak. Because of her dyslexia she’s dealing with a lot of issues and
she didn’t feel comfortable … Just things like that.

She offers a range of options through which students can demonstrate the same skill. Because
she supports individual learning needs while emphasizing students’ value in the learning
community, they are often motivated to do their best and grow in new directions.

The narrative account above represents a snapshot of Anandi’s teaching practice in the
winter and spring of 2009. The scenes depicted in my narrative re-construction of her practical
knowledge, situated in her professional landscape, give an impression of what she knew at that
time.

4.5 In Summary

How Anandi develops her personal practical knowledge, creating innovative pedagogy
that aligns with multiliteracies practices, depends on many interacting narratives. Narratives on
Connelly and Clandinin’s (2000) three-dimensional narrative space work in a complex matrix of
interactions across time, space, and between people. These are external narratives that support
Anandi’s learning and include narratives from the professional ecosystem of both colleagues and
students. She is most excited about developments made in collaboration with others, whether
working side by side with students or colleagues, or sharing information by talking about
classroom experiences with a mentor. Anandi developed skills that have allowed her to cope with the struggle of meaningful learning, tailoring curriculum to individual students’ needs, teaching in alternate settings and collaborating with students and colleagues on large-scale projects. This required her to consciously alter her course through the professional ecosystem, identifying new experiences that would stretch her skills and help her to develop new pedagogical strategies. These narratives in the present, those on the professional landscape, also interact with older stories from her past, which provide the inspiration to keep up the effort it takes her to continually develop her practice. Anandi has learned to take the situated practice in English education and redesign curriculum and instruction to address the pluralism in her school.
CHAPTER FIVE: TANYA: A TEACHER FIRST

Tanya is a teacher with over ten years of experience in variety of diverse urban high schools. This chapter presents a portrait of a teacher in the process of innovating practice towards multiliteracies pedagogy through self-directed learning. I alter the focus throughout my discussion on various interacting narratives in Tanya’s professional ecosystem. First I introduce her current school in 5.1 Viceroy Revisited. Next in 5.2 Emerging from the Chrysalis: Why Tanya Responds to Multiliterate Students, I focus on interactions of her Self narratives to analyze her motivations for professional learning. In 5.3 Making Multiliteracies Connections: How Tanya Learns, I focus more explicitly on Other narratives in her professional ecosystem and interactions encouraging her to teach innovatively. Finally, I present a portrait of Tanya’s practice at the time of data collection in 5.4 A Teacher First: What Tanya Knows.

5.1 Viceroy Revisited: Enlisting Tanya in the Study

Tanya was one of a handful of secondary teachers recommended for the study, however, contacting her meant returning to Viceroy Collegiate, where I taught the year I met Gabriel. Tanya was the department head of English and literacy there. It was a Friday afternoon in December 2008 when I parked my car on the quiet side street outside the school building and nervously hurried in to meet her. As I approached the familiar red brick exterior and walked through the unassuming main entrance, I passed a table and a few plastic chairs sat off to the right, which drew attention away from the few small display of pennants and trophies which lined the walls. I was surprised by some cheerful students hanging around the foyer. They smiled, and I returned the gesture. I had not been expecting a friendly welcome. My view of the school was still tinted with the bleak palate of my memories of working there. The rosy
expressions of the girls sitting in the entrance warmed me and I found myself thinking, *It’s changed.*

Turning right and proceeding down the corridor, I turned again and knocked on the door of the English office. A familiar woman whose name I could not recall, answered and invited me into the office to wait. We chatted for a few moments, me deliberately mentioning that I was a working teacher so I would not be pegged as an outsider or an academic, and then Tanya came in.

She sat down at a desk opposite where I had laid my head many years ago after coming in from a particularly disastrous period teaching Gabriel’s class. I mentioned I had worked there before. “It is strange to be back. Everything is the same as I remember.” But it was not the same, and neither was I.

After hearing about the study and asking some questions, Tanya agreed to participate. She was rightfully concerned that it may increase her workload; she was a busy department head, responsible for the literacy committee that administrated the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). In addition, she was a regular host teacher to candidates and wanted to ensure that my visits would not interfere with the spring practicum. I assured her that the timing of my observations and interviews was entirely up to her, and we agreed tentatively to set observations for April. We also set a date for our first interview in January. I left the school, relieved that I had secured a second co-participant, and happy to find my impressions of Viceroy C.I. were changing.

Investigating later, I learned Viceroy had made drastic improvement in student achievement measured by provincial standardized testing, a questionable measure of school success, but interesting nonetheless. The school population is ethnically and linguistically
diverse, with 32% of students listed as ESL and 13% as having special needs (Cowley, Easton, & Thomas, 2012). I wondered if some of this academic change resulted from shifts in teaching made under Tanya’s leadership.

Viceroy Park is a diverse, urban school, located in a diverse urban neighbourhood with a large population of families new to Canada, establishing themselves in their adoptive country. Because of this, Viceroy’s students call over 140 countries home. There is great linguistic diversity and many students speak English as a second language. In addition to its population of new Canadians, Viceroy also draws students from nearby streets with pricey homes, lived in by established families with mostly middle class incomes. In addition, the school has a significant population of students born in Canada who rely on social assistance. Viceroy Collegiate houses a cross-section of the population in this urban residential neighbourhood.

Tanya has been teaching for over ten years in the same school board. In that time, she has taught at three different schools and has taught math, drama and English. The first school, in which she taught English and mathematics, was an institution with a high proportion of “at risk” students working at what the Ontario Curriculum labels the “essentials” or “workplace” level, which means that these students are ineligible for post-secondary education upon graduating. After working at that school for three years, she applied to teach drama at a collegiate housing a diverse student body with varied socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and academic backgrounds. In her second year there, she began teaching English in addition to drama. After five years at this school, Tanya applied to be a Curriculum Leader of English at Viceroy Park Collegiate Institute, where she now teaches and heads the English department and Literacy Committee.
5.2 At Home and School: Why Tanya Responds to Multiliterate Students

Self narratives from play prominent roles in interactions that have led to Tanya’s chosen professional narratives. Experiences from childhood, at home and in school, influenced her desire to become a teacher and informed her philosophy of teaching and learning. These life narratives and chosen Self narratives influenced the direction of her classroom practice and professional learning. Here I examine some of her stories and discuss their impact on her teaching.

5.2.1 Perseverance and responsibility: stories from home. Stories from Tanya’s early family life play a prominent role in shaping her teaching self. She tells stories about her father’s influence on her development of attitudes and dispositions towards schooling. She explained that her father had high but reasonable academic expectations of his four children.

My father always said, “Work hard and you will be successful. You have to work for it.” This took me through high school and motivated me to do well. He would say, “If you walk out with eighty percent in grade nine you’re only walking to Grade 10 with eighty percent knowledge. If you do that, you have a twenty percent deficit.” As an adult I realize this isn’t true, but it worked with me when I was a kid. I used to think, “I’m going to be twenty percent behind everybody else in knowledge? Then the best I can do is sixty percent.” (laughs). Even though it’s not true, his expectation was enough motivation to get me to work as hard as I could to develop as much as knowledge or skill possible with which to move forward. He always taught me if you work hard, you can get to where you want to go.
In addition to motivating perseverance, Tanya explained how his influence taught her responsibility. She explained that if she came home from school with a complaint about something a teacher had done, her father’s response was always, “What did you do?” She explained that although this was hard in some ways, because it was tiring to be endlessly responsible, in other ways his attitude strengthened her because she always had to reflect on her behaviour. Her father taught her that if a teacher’s style was causing her difficulty, she was expected to find another way, perhaps through another teacher or resource, to solve her academic problems. She was expected to rectify problems at school, and so she learned at an early age how to seek out help.

Tanya’s father also taught her that fair is not same. She illustrated with a story about her sister returning home to report 98% on a math test. She said, “My father was the type of parent who said to my sister, ‘Where’s the other two percent?’” She explains how at the time she was shocked, and thought that her sister had done an excellent job. She, having much lower marks than her sister, thought her father harsh. But Tanya realized when her sister acknowledged, “Yes, I made a stupid mistake that cost me those marks,” that her sibling was able to cope with this parental criticism, and that in fact, her father was an astute judge of each child. Her sister’s best in the case of that test could have been a perfect score because she knew the answers to the questions she got wrong.

Tanya related coming home with a midterm report card with a physics mark of 50%. She explained that she was terrified that her dad would be very angry and confront her about it. To her surprise, he didn’t say anything about it, and she said that at the time, that seemed worse than a confrontation. She read his silence as anger. She said that she mustered up the courage about a
week later to talk to him about her performance. She was surprised when he simply asked her, “Are you happy with that mark?” and after returning a no, he pursued, “Are you going to do something about it?” She said she would, and he told her that he was happy that she was trying her best. Tanya noted that she was the fourth child and that by this time, her father clearly knew how to handle his kids and their schooling. He had high expectations, which he maintained without punitive measures, encouraging her to persevere. Tanya tries to imitate her father in her approaches to student learning and her own professional development. She emphasized how his strong belief, which he passed on to her, to try your best, live a good life and be happy, has become the focus of her teaching.

5.2.2 Learning to learn: stories from school. Tanya identifies with struggling learners. She says:

There was a time in my past where I struggled in school. I didn’t understand. I struggled a lot with English, particularly reading.

While she acknowledges that her struggles mostly ended before high school, her Self narrative of being a student who experienced difficulty learning in childhood helps her to empathize with and feel connected students with learning difficulties in her classroom. She shares her struggles with students to show them how she can relate to their own issues in school. She tells students that she is still the slowest reader amongst her friends, and in doing so, she is trying to demonstrate how it is possible to be successful despite difficulty with challenging material.
Through hard work and determination, Tanya describes moments of dawning understanding with great excitement. She tells a transformative story of how she “met the library” in the sixth grade:

I went to the library because I had a project on forest fires. The librarian asked me, “Have you looked in an encyclopedia?”

“What’s that?” I asked, and she taught me how to use it. That was when I really and truly met the library. I had known about it before, but this was the time I started to realize the power of the library. As it dawned on me how I could use it for my own education – wow. Wow. It was just great. Ever since throughout all my schooling, the library and the librarian are always there.

Tanya achieved an intellectual independence through this experience and others in this transitional and transformational school year. She no longer storied herself as a struggling learner, and developed instead into an “expert” learner with a keen metacognitive awareness of her own strengths and weaknesses and how to respectively build on or overcome them. While still acknowledging her process was slow, in meeting the library, Tanya understood her power to learn through literacy.

In university, Tanya found legitimacy in her love of popular culture, of which she is knowledgeable. She integrates her avid knowledge and critical awareness of popular forms such as music, television and film into English teaching. She talks about how these personal interests have influenced her English teaching practice:
In terms of my multimodal knowledge base, I would say I’m a pop culture freak. Drama is my other teachable, so I love theatre, films, television, and music. I eat it all up. One of my favourite courses at university was about the cultural history of North America, which we analyzed through literature, literary non-fiction and pop culture. The professor would often provide historical context when students discussed course topics. I regularly contributed pop culture references, like, “You will want to watch this TV show because it was really good, and it deals with that issue,” or, “that topic has connections with this movie here,” or “That was just on Dateline,” or “Consider this song.” Pop culture has always been a personal interest.

She shows how she applies her interest in and knowledge of popular culture to make critical sense of the world around her. She is “a pop culture freak” who encourages students to interpret and critically engage with their world of popular culture.

While her love of pop culture has been lifelong, Tanya’s love of literature is connected to a story of being a slow learner who through perseverance became a reader:

I learned to love books. I’ve always loved the idea of being a reader, and I could only really say I became a reader after university. It was bizarre that I actually chose English as a major. It was the right choice, a more practical choice than theatre.

After discussing her proclivity for pop culture and drama, she notes that she did not become “a reader” until after university, an accomplishment that she yearned after, but did not achieve in
her mind until adulthood because of her ongoing narrative about being a slow learner. Even with her chosen narrative of being a reader, she is careful to acknowledge her childhood struggles with literacy. She says:

I still say to the students I’m one of the slowest readers among my friend, and I’m okay with that. (laughs) It took many years to accept I was of the weaker people. In grade six my academics turned around, but you never forget that struggle. You never forget what it’s like to try to figure things out. You never forget that feeling of “I don’t get it and everyone else does.”

Her narrative shows her perseverance; her desire to become a reader did not fade because it was a struggle. She now uses her narrative in class to inspire students who struggle with literacy to persevere.

Tanya explains how early experiences sharpened the desire to share her love of learning with others, leading to her choice of becoming an English teacher:

I knew teaching was where it was at for me because I was good at it. Almost everything I did growing up in high school relates to teaching. Every part time job I’ve ever had involved teaching. I had tutored enough to know that teaching gives you a high. I knew the thrill of watching someone I was teaching have the light bulb of understanding turn on.
Her love of reading and her awareness of the power that comes with making meaning from text led her to choose teaching as a career so that she could help turn on the “light bulb” in others and share the rewards of her struggles with students. She is a lifelong learner who aspires to light the same passion in students that arose in her from having support that helped her develop perseverance and responsibility.

5.2.3 Teaching is learning: professional narratives. Tanya’s life narratives and chosen Self narratives revolve around her struggle to become an effective lifelong learner. Her love of learning also governs her chosen professional narratives. She considers pedagogy more important than subject knowledge and this value shapes her teaching and her leadership.

Because she believes the role of teachers is to open up new possibilities to students, she engages in ongoing professional learning to respond to needs that are continually changing. In order to respond to students, she explains how a teacher needs to focus on pedagogy over content:

I think any teacher should know how to teach. I think every secondary teacher, no matter the subject matter, should understand that they are a teacher first. So that’s a teacher of English, not an English teacher. I find many people don’t quite get the “teach” part of it and what that encompasses. When you are a teacher, you are here for someone; you are here to help other people learn.

She suggests secondary teachers often emphasize subject knowledge, overlooking the importance of pedagogical knowledge. She authors herself as someone who teaches students,
rather than someone who teaches a subject and makes her focus being available to students and responsible for students’ learning.

Tanya aims to foster and nurture a love of learning in students, offering her ongoing learning as an example:

If you turn off as a teacher to your own learning, I think you’re showing the kids that you’re done now, as if you were telling them, “I’m done learning.” Today as we were studying a short story, I said to my students, “There’s this misconception people have that English teachers ‘get it’. People believe that we read something and we instantly understand its layers. We don’t. I’ll tell you right now that I don’t understand this last third of the story. I have questions. So, I want you to go home and figure it out what you think it’s about. We’re going to come and talk about it tomorrow. I have a couple of options, but I’m not quite sure which option I like yet. I want you to do the same kind of thinking as I’m doing: you go figure out which options you like and we’ll talk about it next class. That’s what we do, we students of English.” For emphasis, I added, “I include myself in that; I’m still a student of English.” I said this to them because I think it’s important for them to see me as a learner too.

She wants students to see her engaged in inquiry, “a student of English” and chooses a professional identity that interacts symbiotically with her Self narratives about being a lifelong learner. In this story, she moderates her status in the classroom from knowledge authority to expert learner with meaning-making skills to share, demonstrating that she is not “done learning”.
Tanya describes teaching as an exciting learning experience where rewards come from helping others make meaningful changes:

What I really like about teaching as a profession is that it doesn’t get boring. You’re never bored, and if you are you’re doing something wrong, you’re not pushing yourself. There are thirty new faces in front of you in each class. There are probably eighty faces sitting in front of me each day, and those faces will bring eighty things that matter to the room. Those faces keep you on your feet. The texts change as does how you handle problems. You always try to find new things. If you’re interested in learning and you’re interested in challenging yourself, then this job is beautiful, because you can make it what you want. There are restrictions, but there is so much potential in every question. How many other jobs are there where you can say there is such potential for meaningful change?

Continually developing her practice makes her job “beautiful” and exciting. Guided by the potential of questions, Tanya considers teaching a form of inquiry in which she engages with students. She collaborates in inquiry with students and, in so doing, redesigns her own professional knowledge.

Redesigning meaning is an important feature of teaching and learning for Tanya, and she explains how she strives to help students make the connections that lead to transformed understanding:
English curriculum should not limit students; it should open them up. You should open them up their growth potential. That’s the power of literature. It can be a tool to open students to things as they’ve never seen or imagined. I saw that in my classes when we studied *The Kite Runner*. The students connected with it in a way that they never would have imagined and it became a part of something new for them. Somehow, through this novel they made meaningful connections. Whether it is being a child who understands what it is like to fight with a parent in *King Lear* or connecting with the immigrant experience of a character from Afghanistan when you’re a student from China, when students make connections they understand their own lives more deeply. Understanding parental control. Understanding respect. Understanding different cultures. When they can relate to that, that’s what can change their lives.

The transformative potential of literature is the focus of her teaching. In her professional narrative, Tanya continually seeks out literary works that speak to the experiences of students. She teaches classics, such as Shakespeare, but also tries to select contemporary and multicultural texts. As the teacher, she selects texts for their transformative potential and hopes by reading them, students will re-imagine the world.

Tanya’s interest in literacy education is connected to her Self narrative of struggling to read in childhood. She has been aware of the links between literacy and the study of literature since then and brings this awareness to teaching.

I don’t mind teaching literacy, because it involves practical life skills. I think I have a very important place in my heart for kids who struggle because I understand their
difficulties first hand. Because I’ve struggled, I think I have a better understanding than some other English teachers about the importance of literacy. For me it’s just not always been about the fiction; it’s also about basic skills.

Because she struggled with her identity as a competent learner, Tanya feels she understands the needs of students, who unlike most English teachers are not good at English. These needs include teaching skills as well as literature.

Tanya’s mandate as curriculum leader of English and literacy is to improve scores on the OSSLT. Her personal goal moves beyond test scores to changing colleagues’ attitudes about literacy and English education within the school. She imagines English education as the development of skills as well as the study of literature, and she talks about her process in leading colleagues to change their pedagogy:

Because of the department headship I have the literacy portfolio attached to my job, so I’ve had to enter this world of literacy tests et cetera. I’ve had to find answers to the question, *How do I get an entire staff to move that way?* I have learned to understand literacy education myself and then find ways to make it apply to colleagues’ classrooms in such a way that they see the advantages and use the strategies. I need to articulate for colleagues how I use these skills in order to improve the literacy of the students. With this headship, that is something new that I have that opportunity to explore. New opportunities like this are what I love about the job as a professional.
She sees literacy leadership as another way for her to share her love of learning. Just as in high school when she chose to share her learning skills tutoring others, she chooses a professional narrative that allows her to share what she has learned about her craft with colleagues. Tanya has undertaken a range of professional learning activities: attending literacy conferences, taking a media literacy course, encouraging professional development amongst colleagues, and co-planning units of study with colleagues in the role of supportive literacy leader, to change her practice so that she can lead others in the same direction.

5.3 Designing Personal Practical Knowledge: Making Multiliteracies Connections

Tanya has developed the ability to strategically direct her professional learning partly from interactions between chosen Self and chosen professional narratives. First I examine the role of early interactions in 1. Learning from important teachers. Next, in 2. Breaking things down: responding to students, I examine how early teaching experiences in other subject areas shaped the direction of Tanya’s English teaching. Finally in 3. Learning from colleagues, I examine how Tanya selects interactions with colleagues who challenge her to grow.

5.3.1 Learning from important teachers. Tanya credits childhood teachers with laying foundations for her professional knowledge, as well as some in high school and university. She discusses three teachers who changed her life in Grades 6 and 7: her grade six teacher, her school librarian and her grade seven teacher. She says:

In terms of changing my life or affecting my teaching practice there are a few teachers who stand out. In Grade 6 I had a teacher named Mr. Placid who was not very placid, but
he wasn’t cruel. School changed for me in when I was in his class. That’s when school clicked. That’s where I thought I had a chance to change, and I liked that because up to that point everybody knew who the smart kids were, you knew who the average kids were, you knew who the below average, trouble makers were. I was in the average group, the person whose report card read, “Tanya is a nice student to have in my class. She is very funny and sweet.” It was almost automatic – average: check. Every single year that’s what I’d get. Mr. Placid’s class was the first one in which I excelled. I started getting eighties: before, I hadn’t known they existed.

Tanya learned to be a teacher who allows students to be different and to grow in part because of experiences in Mr. Placid’s class. While previous teachers had her pegged as “average,” she believes that Mr. Placid allowed her to demonstrate her abilities afresh, which motivated her to excel. The same year she learned how to learn independently through library research, which in section 5.2 she calls, “meeting the library”. This meeting left her with a profound sense of awakening to literacy and knowledge that she looks for in her interactions with students.

Tanya also recalls a teacher she had in Grade 7 who helped her to develop her critical thinking and to develop arguments in defense of her opinions:

In Grade 7 I had a teacher who was very different than the kind of teacher I’ve become (laughs) because he was a pitbull. He looked like a pitbull. He would attack. I remember on one of the first days, it might even have been orientation, he asked if there were any feminists in the class. I didn’t know if that meant pro or anti-women at the time so I didn’t put my hand up. He said, “You know, any women’s libbers,” and I knew what that
meant, so of course I put my hand up. I looked around the class to see which other girls had put their hands up too, and I was the only one. He walked up to me and said, “Oh we’re going to have fun, the two of us.” He was this big guy and I was completely scared to death. But it turns out he was lovely because he didn’t mean it; he just wanted me to articulate my ideas. He’d bring up issues, and he’d make me them (laughs). What was I, twelve, thirteen at that point? I learned to defend feminism in Grade 7, and I learned to defend my views. I loved him, and we got along great because he taught me the power of persuasion. He taught me how to formulate my ideas so that I could actually fight back. He treated me as an adult. He’d put an idea out there, I’d respond and he’d listen. I totally respected that. Even though our classroom management styles and approaches to curriculum in teaching are very different, the fact he engaged me in genuine conversations made him influential. He wasn’t a sexist, but he played that role I think to get us to fight back. If you ever heard him talk about his wife or his daughter you’d admit he was not sexist. You knew that wasn’t who he really was, but the person he pretended to be to motivate your thinking.

With newfound critical thinking, research and persuasive skills she felt encouraged, developing confidence and improving her performance in school. She believes these teachers helped her form early experiential knowledge of what is important in the school curriculum: literacy and critical thinking.

In addition to elementary school teachers, Tanya discusses how her interactions with three dramatic arts teachers in high school have affected her professional knowledge and practice:
In terms of me becoming a teacher, my drama teachers in high school were a huge influence. I worked with two of them on extra-curricular plays, and one of them ended up being my teacher one year. The third teacher taught me twice. They just had it together. Once again there was respect. They treated us like we were people, and they helped us. We worked together in a collaborative art form. That’s the beauty of drama and why I love it so much. I think I fell in love with the extra-curricular aspect of drama and the creative space. Working with people creatively; I loved that. I also loved the respect we were given because we were members of a community and they treated us like that. You weren’t just a student, and they weren’t just teachers. You were together in this play. Equity was a big thing with one of those teachers so we tackle topics like bullying, racism, character, or body image issues. They were using drama to improve society, as a place to talk about questions. I now use that premise in my English class and in my drama class; it is the foundation.

She developed a lasting sense of the importance of student voice through the mentorship she received from her high school drama teachers. Her experience of being heard in the membership of a creative community laid the “foundation” of her teaching.

During her teacher education program, Tanya met a professor who became a pedagogical role model:

I aspire to be like a professor in university who was the one education professor that I adored. If I ever did a masters or Ph.D., I’d want to work with her. She taught *Foundations of Education*, a difficult class. There were students in there who for three
years who had gotten through their courses with not much thought. She created an amazing dialogue in that class. The conversations were so open and rich there, and I just remember sitting there watching her facilitate … She didn’t so much teach; she facilitated. It’s easier with adult students than in high school, but I aspire to have that control. She wasn’t in control of the conversation, because she didn’t direct, merely added things and moved them along. But if things got sensitive, and they did because we talked about race - a hot issue, she just managed it. She honoured a point and then she’d throw it back to somebody else. Whenever it looked like it was going to get contentious for too many colleagues she managed to keep it going; it seemed so easy for her. Watching her was an inspiring and rich learning opportunity. It’s something for me to aspire to.

Her interaction with this master facilitator cemented her professional narrative in which student voice, not teacher voice, is at the “heart” of her values. Her interest in this professor is different than her love of her earlier teachers. By this point in her development of personal practical knowledge about teaching and education she was confident in her chosen Self narrative of being an expert lifelong learner. This allowed for a different kind of interaction with this professor than she had had with previous teachers. A confident teacher candidate, she observed and reflected upon her professor’s pedagogical knowledge in the moment, and these observations influenced her practice and her future goals. At this stage in her education, Tanya began to design the course of her personal practical knowledge.
5.3.2 Breaking things down: responding to students. Tanya learned how to respond to students’ individual needs from teaching mathematics and dramatic arts. She explains how teaching math to secondary students operating at a “grade two or three level” helped her learn to scaffold student learning:

I had to focus on how to break things down in order to teach them. Scaffolding is one of my best strengths now because of that. It started before I was a teacher in my own learning as a student. But as a teacher, I had to refine that because if I went too big or too abstract, I lost them. If you lost them you had chaos.

Drawing on personal experience of developing strategies to overcome learning difficulties, these students pushed Tanya to refine what she knew about scaffolding learning. The classroom “chaos” that ensued when students felt unsuccessful provided immediate feedback to which she had to adapt.

Tanya explains how she learned a process for curriculum development through the challenge of teaching mathematics in difficult circumstances with few resources:

We had chucked out a bunch of old textbooks because we had all the new textbooks produced for the revised curriculum. The problem was, these new books didn’t teach what the old basic textbooks did. So, it was literally from the one copy I had kept that I pieced together a course that these kids could do. That was very fulfilling. There was something about saying, “Here’s the course I made,” and after three years realizing I had made something successful. The first year you try things out and you think, “Oh – I got
stuck on that. I won’t do that again.” In the second year, you’re honing your course. In the third year you get to really enjoy it. I find for me that things go in three-year cycles.

In learning teach students with weak numeracy, she developed the transferable skill of scaffolding and gained experience in the curriculum development cycle.

From teaching dramatic arts, Tanya learned to interact with students, reflexively and reflectively assessing and responding to them. The interpersonal skills required of students in this “collaborative” context made necessary explicit instruction about social interaction. She relates a story about teaching a boy in her drama class prone to outbursts about reading others’ social cues:

I think that was the first time anybody had said to him that he had difficulty reading social cues. I talked to one of his other teachers in my department; she has him for English. I said that to her, when I realized his difficulty, “He doesn’t pick up on social cues.” I started making sense of other things that had happened with this student in that class. Unfortunately, by this time it was the last four weeks of class. I think with his friends and his peer group he gets some of their cues, because it means more to him…But he wasn’t reading any cues from his teachers. That’s a literacy.

Having developed an awareness of the gestural, aural and visual modes of communication required for reading social cues and finding ways to explicitly teach these to students in the context of a drama class, she now uses similar methods for teaching social interaction in her English classroom. By using skills borrowed from collaborative creation in drama, Tanya builds
a more collaborative classroom in which she can enlist students’ strengths and develop a respectful working relationship with them. Experiences in mathematics and dramatic arts have helped her learn to provide bridges for students who lack skill enabling them to participate fully in classroom community.

Over the ten years she has been teaching, Tanya has learned to shape the arc of a year’s curriculum, to break down individual lessons into chunks manageable for the students in a particular class, and to teach students other literacies, such as social cues as a result of her experiences across different subject areas. This professional learning has happened through the interaction of Self narratives and the Other narratives of her students. She is inclined to observe and assess students’ skills. She knows how to respond to problems she encounters by innovating in her practice. When students’ narratives present a curricular or classroom management problem, she assesses the situation and reflects on her experiences. After considering what she knows about collaboration in classrooms, she applies her knowledge to new situations in order to respond to students’ needs. Drawing on previous experiences has allowed her to develop a literacy pedagogy that is rooted in student understanding and social interaction.

5.3.3 Learning from colleagues. After becoming a teacher, Tanya sought out professional development from colleagues in special education and literacy experts. She says:

I always respect the special education department. I go to them for help and we work together. Their students are my students, and some of my students who aren’t theirs should be (laughs). I need strategies to work with them. At Highfield Park, all of my students were identified with learning disabilities. At Henry and Lisa Parker I also had
many special education students. I worked really hard with the special education
department to respond to these students. They would give me all sorts of advice. I
inherited the grade 11 College English course from one of the special education teachers.
Often I would approach her instead of my department head because he wasn’t teaching
the college kids; he had the academic students. She understood the college students
better, so she would be the one that I would go to for advice. I would say, “They won’t
listen. What do I do? They’re just sitting there. They don’t want to learn.” Then she’d
give me some strategies and we’d start to break things down. She and her colleague
changed my philosophy on teaching. At that point my philosophy was to make the work
challenging. I was fair but in terms of marking it was challenging. I always maintained
that I was there to help. So, if a student bought into the fact that I was there to help I
thought they’d get through this challenging work. I made it clear that at the end of the day
I wanted them doing the work without watering anything down. I would lose kids right
off the bat because they would find me too hard; they wouldn’t even try. I spent a lot of
time convincing them to try. This changed when the special education department head
said to me, “You know if they buy in that they can do the work right off the bat you have
to fight because they can see they’ll be successful. Then they’ll buy in and they’ll come
more.” That advice changed how I start the class. I start class off with smaller,
manageable pieces that lead to something, so by the end of the course they’re still doing
the same challenging work I’d like them to do, but how I get them there is very different.
I no longer start them off with something challenging. If they follow the steps they’ll get
nine out of ten, and they’ll see that. If a student thinks, “I spent fifteen minutes and I got
almost perfect. Awesome,” then maybe they’ll come back for the next day’s activity, and
then the next. All of those pieces start to build. I’m learning how to develop a course that way, based on students acquiring small tangible skills.

Selecting the mentorship of experienced special education teachers, her philosophy about the way in which she presents challenges to students shifted as she learned new methods of curriculum design.

Tanya’s chosen Self narrative of being a lifelong learner draws from early formative interactions with her father in which he taught her to solve her educational problems by getting help from the right teacher. In addition to seeking advice from colleagues in her school, she solves pedagogical challenges by taking courses. She cites professional development workshops offered through her board of education and an organization at a local university offering a summer workshop in reading writing and media literacy. Tanya implements ideas from workshops one at a time. She uses her current interest in students’ background knowledge and literacy to explain:

(Background knowledge is) one thing that I want to hone in on and learn different strategies. I think many of those strategies will cross over from reluctant learner to those willing, but struggling learners, and ELLs. Understanding what we mean by background knowledge improves success. I keep hearing that from the board’s Instructional Leaders, but what do they really mean by background knowledge? How do I build that into my lessons? It’s been useful for me to understand that I might have to take half a period to engage background knowledge, but it will pay off in the end. I’ve started to do that, but I don’t know if I’m really on the right track.
Tanya reflects as she implements a new teaching strategy. She considers her professional learning to be a gradual and ongoing process that happens over a considerable span of time in response to needs of her students and present courses.

5.4 A Teacher First: What Tanya Knows

Tanya is committed to helping all students succeed. She talks to students about their day, asking questions about extra-curricular activities and events in other classes before beginning her lessons. She uses a causal tone with students, which is open and frank, and humour peppers her banter. She demonstrates her care in her classroom set up, maintaining clearly organized and well-labeled files of handouts that students are directed to inspect if they have been absent, which helps them find their bearings when they return. At the front of the class she has school supplies available for students who have not brought their own to use: paper, pens, and pencils. With this simple gesture, she signals to students that they are wanted and supported. She demonstrates her commitment to teaching diverse students in the simple ways in which she conducts her interactions with students and the signs she offers that welcome them all to her classroom.

When I first visited Tanya’s classroom for our initial interview in January 2009, I realized it was the room in which I had taught Gabriel eight years before. The windowless classroom, was lit by fluorescent tube lighting, some of which were burned out, and the air was abuzz with the loud hum of ventilation fans. While these environmental conditions were less than ideal, her room was clean and cheerfully decorated with posters and students’ work. When I returned again in April 2009 to observe her practice I noted more of the room’s many features. Many of the posters were for recently released films, such as The Watchmen and Harry Potter.
There were posters for Marvel comics and basketball. There was a poster of Martin Luther King Jr. and several other images with inspirational quotations printed on them. Finally, there were two posters on a Shakespearian theme. There was space reserved for “Grade 11 moments of Excellence” on a bulletin board where exemplary student work from her media class was posted, and elsewhere in the room were student-authored charts and student-crafted collages. Six rows of desks faced the teacher’s desk and a chalkboard. While I glanced around and casually absorbed these details before observing the first class, I stood speaking with Tanya and a former colleague. Then students began to file in while I retreated to a desk at the back with my notebook.

Below are three themes that emerged from my observations of Tanya’s Grade 12 University English course and her Grade 11 English Media course: 1. Multimodal instruction, 2. Mother tongues in the English classroom, and 3. Tacit adoption of multiliteracies pedagogy.

**5.4.1 Multimodal instruction.** The two classes I observed were very different. The Grade 12 university preparation course is a compulsory selection for students who intend to go to university after graduating and counts in students’ averages when applying for post-secondary spots. The Grade 11 English Media course is elective and open to students from all curriculum streams. Aware of this difference from the outset of observations I was interested to see Tanya’s interpretation of the curriculum.

Many students were absent from the Grade 12 class my first day. Those who arrived sat scattered around the room. Afterwards Tanya remarked that I had come on a day where attendance was particularly poor, but noted that many of the absentees were accounted for, either sick, traveling or doing extra-curricular activities.
Tanya regularly and explicitly includes multiple text forms, moving the study of English beyond the literary text, and indeed beyond the print text. Student voices are heard and respected in her classroom. In the remainder of this section, I discuss her approach of using media to foster students’ voices in the classroom.

The Grade 11 English Media course embraces multiple text forms, and unlike a traditional English course, does not revolve around literary study. This media literacy course teaches students to decode and to create various forms of media texts. On this first day that I observe, students learn about the Disney Corporation, and are at the finishing stages on a presentation they are preparing about the marketing of bottled water.

Interestingly, Tanya’s concern for media studies crosses over into the literary studies of the Grade 12 university preparation course. In this class, students use and produce various media forms to engage in the study of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. These students engage in an assignment where they produce their own graphic representation of a scene from the play, using either their own illustrations or a software product. Other activities include a Facebook style page of a character and a mock trial to determine which character is most responsible for the fall of Denmark. In addition to studying Hamlet, students are completing a comparative independent novel study and are preparing persuasive speeches using rhetorical devices on a topic of their choice. By introducing such a range of activities and assignments, Tanya blends traditional secondary English pursuits with multiliteracies instruction. She engages students in multiple text forms as both readers and writers, and in this way consciously and strategically engages them in multiple literacies.
5.4.2 Mother tongue in the English classroom. Tanya’s practice links to multiliteracies approaches in the way she engages student voice. I noted on my first day of observations how ELL’s were using their mother tongue in the English classroom. Asked about how she deals with the use of students’ mother tongues, she spoke at length about her practice of working with ESL students integrated into compulsory English courses. She discussed her process of learning, describing four types of learning supports that she offers ELL’s and providing insights into her conception of these students. The first support she describes is the way in which she seriously considers background knowledge when planning curriculum:

I think it depends on their level of fluency in English, their age, and their maturity level, but I’ll do a lot of decoding with those kids…Well I decode with any student really, in any class; I’ll model examples and discuss them. We’ll talk about words; I’m constantly re-defining words for ELL’s. I tend to let them use electronic dictionaries on tests because if I’ve structured it well, they shouldn’t be able to cheat with a translating device. I’ve been compiling professional materials dealing with students’ background knowledge, and how having it leads to success. I haven’t read a lot of it yet but I’ve got the books, and soon I’m going to be looking at how I can use background knowledge to promote student success. Now when I’m reading or viewing a text, I try to consciously put myself in the place of somebody who doesn’t have my experience. These students can get more time if they need to … I also let them talk in their first language. Sometimes I debate to what degree I should, but if there’s a concept they don’t understand that another person can translate, or if they’re searching for a word and they can explain it
efficiently in their first language, then I don’t want a language barrier to stop them from understanding … But at the same time they also need to practice their English more.

Tanya believes that students whose first language is not English need linguistic support and assistance with culturally specific knowledge in the classroom. She helps students fill in linguistic gaps by teaching them how to decode words and allows students the support of their first language through using translation devices. Permitting translation sets up a situation where students are able to function at a cognitive level that is developmentally appropriate, where language barriers might otherwise prevent them from exploring an issue deeply. Her concern about culturally specific background knowledge arises throughout our interviews. Her ongoing focus on the issue of providing support and designing activities that all students have some cultural investment in is, as she notes, an important equity issue that can contribute to the level of students’ success.

At the time of the interview, Tanya was involved in a gradual process of professional learning about this curriculum development concern. She learned about the place of background knowledge in a workshop for teachers, and had been thinking extensively about it. She had also been compiling resources for study, which as she mentions she had not yet had the chance to read. She reveals her concern for creating a curriculum that is accessible and fair by describing some of the steps she takes to accommodate ELL’s in the planning and implementation of her lessons.

Tanya actively encourages students to develop the grammar and pronunciation of Standard Canadian English. She tries to access students’ internal motivation by leveling her
status from teacher to fellow language learner. She described what she does to teach pronunciation to ELL’s in the following excerpt:

They often get a little bit more help because they accept more of my offers than other students. I’m pretty specific about what kinds of support they need. For example, if I deem some are weak orally, I’ll say to them, “I’m willing to come in at lunchtime or after school to work on your pronunciation.” A group of us sit down and we start saying specially selected tongue twisters, and I start identifying which sound systems that they have a hard time pronouncing and pointing it out to them. I might say, “So, you know you can say a P at the beginning of a word, but you need to work on the sound when it’s in the middle of a word,” or “With an L or an R you have a hard time, so you want to look out for those words.” We practice. I talk about where the sound is made in the mouth so that they can learn how to do it. The sessions are friendly, non-threatening; they don’t have to feel that the native speakers in the class are around them watching them. It’s just us. I put it this way, “Compare it to me learning Mandarin. I was listening to a word and it sounded to me exactly like another one. It’s a tonal difference in Mandarin,” I said, “but I have a hard time hearing the difference.” So I have them try to teach me to show them that if I were to learn their language in the same amount of time that they’ve had to learn English, I’d have just as many problems. I try taking away the intimidation factor so that hopefully they feel encouraged.

Students’ mother tongues get respect and space in her classroom. While she encourages students to use and develop their facility with Standard Canadian English, she makes efforts to create an
environment in which students are comfortable to exercise the skills they presently possess with the goal of developing other skills that will improve their academic performance. By working through the assignments in their first language, students worked at a level fitting their intellectual and academic capabilities.

5.4.3 Tacit adoption of multiliteracies pedagogy. In her Grade 12 class, we have seen examples of students who speak more than one language who are learning to communicate in a new tongue while simultaneously facing the critical cognitive challenges that the curriculum requires. When Tanya explained how she helped some of the Mandarin speakers in her class address difficulties pronouncing Standard Canadian English sounds, I imagine how such students who come during their lunch break to work on something not directly related to their mark in the course must be eager to learn about modes of communication that will help them integrate into post-secondary studies and to function with more ease in their everyday interactions. While these students may have been having difficulty expressing their meanings in English, they were fully engaged in the speech project she had assigned that required them to use rhetorical devices while defending a position to their parents because they could do so with the assistance of their first language.

Tanya’s media students engaged in class discussions about media issues. While many had expert knowledge of popular culture, they lacked analytical skills that allowed them to challenge their perceived norms.

Tanya demonstrated how she adjusts practice to create curriculum a balanced between the established norms of subject matter and the expectations of the hidden curriculum (which together are what the New London Group calls situated practice). She attempts to give students
tools she believes they will need to negotiate with the dominant culture in mainstream Canadian society and helps them to expand their lifeworlds. Simultaneously, by being open to student voice, whether showing her vulnerability to Mandarin students, or accepting that a boy’s social cueing system is not a deficit, but a result of his experience and lifeworld, Tanya transforms traditional power dynamics in her classroom, signaling to these students that their contributions are valued, even if their experiences are not always the focus of the curriculum. She draws students into the curriculum, welcoming their experiences and then building upon them in the hopes that students will grow and participate fully in school life and post-secondary education.
CHAPTER SIX: A PATCHWORK PANORAMA OF MY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Recently my family and I visited friends who have moved to an old farmhouse on four acres in central PEI. On the sparkling afternoon of the day of our departure, I escaped the pre-supper bustle and walked down to the fire pit on the property line beside a golden wheat field. I wanted to soak up the beauty of the place and squirrel it away to recall during the dreary winter months in the big city. When I looked up, I could see wispy cirrus clouds drifting gently through the azure sky, honeyed by the sun in the northwest. When I looked away from the house, I could see the rolling wheat field and round green hills behind it, prickled by a patch of pines, a rare sight in this pastoral province of grain and potatoes.

When I looked left, I knew the field of wheat stretched a kilometer to the road that would begin our homeward journey after the evening meal, but my view of the asphalt was blocked by a gentle hill. When I turned to my right I saw more fields, bordered with a road, beyond which was the delta of a river flowing gently towards the Atlantic. I looked down and saw the green lawn mowed short under my feet, the cold coals from last night’s fire in their bed of stones, and the vegetable garden, meekly presenting its small bounty of Swiss chard, herbs and rhubarb adjacent to the great farm fields. I breathed deeply to smell the earth and taste the maritime tang of salt on my tongue. My skin registered the warmth of the sun and the cooling offshore breeze. I heard the whispering of the wheat as it undulated in the wind and the sounds of voices from the house. I paused a moment longer, wishing greedily I could take in the landscape all at once, drink in its entirety, my mind attending to all the subtleties my senses could offer in a single perfect moment of perception.
A familiar sound, “Mommy! Where are you?” drew me back from my reverie. I folded up the moment like a beautiful patchwork quilt sewn with care and artistry and tucked it into the cedar box in my mind saved for storing such memories, pleased that while I could not have an omniscient remembrance of the vista, I could recall the parts of the place that had been important to me on that beautiful August day. My last glimpse of the mental fabric I was tucking away for storage offered an impressionistic pattern of colour, light, smell, taste, touch and sound, and I accepted my perceptive limitations, realizing that despite the imperfections of my patchwork landscape, it was for me a thing of beauty and meaning. I turned and saw the gray cedar shakes of the house and the platinum head of my sun-kissed son bobbing its way towards me as his pink feet pattered across the lawn.

* * *

This activity of consciously trying to piece together a memory as I was forming it reminded me when I thought of it later of the way in which I had sometimes tried to create a panorama using a camera, taking single shots, overlapping the angle and turning in a circle until I had the circumference of the horizon stored. These pictures are always fun to develop and piece together, and while they never hold the magnificence of the vista I beheld when I took them, and are limited to the visual sense, they allow me to examine a record of the details that may have been glossed or blurred in my memory and to re-construct some of the critical details of the moment captured. What I am presenting in this chapter is much like one of those snapshot panoramas of the metaphorical landscape of my professional learning.

Because I have been a teacher since 1998 and my personal practical knowledge has been influenced not only by professional experience but also my life narratives and chosen Self narratives, the picture I present here is patchy, but it offers a narrative unity that provides an
impression of some major features of the journey through my river landscape of professional learning. I will present a series of narrative “snapshots” and provide a transition between them that shows how they overlap each other to form a landscape view of my knowledge terrain and my journey through it. Each snapshot will, like the portraits I presented in the last two chapters, contain a discussion of what I knew at that moment, and an examination of the narratives that interacted to create the why and how of my learning, but the presentation of these details will vary from one to the next. Because of the limitations on length in this dissertation, I will only present four of these interwoven pictures or miniature narrative accounts. Their span covers the major periods of my career so far as well as delving back into my childhood days, and will give the reader an accurate picture of some of the dominant narratives that have shaped my professional growth as I have learned to use multiliteracies pedagogy effectively to innovate in my teaching practice.

Unlike a real panorama shot which presents a 360 degree view of its subject, this patchwork panorama of my professional learning landscape does not complete a circle, and it leaves the reader with a final narrative account that switches from the landscape view of past events to the present tense of the photojournalist perspective, which I outlined in Table 2 in chapter 3. These miniature narrative accounts are 6.1 Growing Up Responsible, where I present some narratives that highlight a theme from childhood which dominates my chosen Self and professional narratives; 6.2 From the Banks of the Edogawa River to Viceroy: Facing Imperfection and Meeting Failure, where I discuss my early career and the rise of the pedagogical problem that led to my professional learning; 6.3, Mapleforest and Multiliteracies: Finding a Way to be Good Again in which I present my period of professional transformation; and 6.4 Up for Breath and into the Cave: Finding Balance, which breaks from the landscape
perspective of the previous three narrative accounts and presents my current vantage point looking downstream at my future horizon. The chapter ends with a summary of the narratives in 6.5.

6.1 Growing Up Responsible

This first miniature narrative account of my journey of professional learning starts before I knew what I would grow up to do. In my childhood, when teaching school was just a game I played in my bedroom with a hand-me-down chalkboard and a semi-circle of teddy bears, prominent life narratives from which grew many of my chosen Self and professional narratives presented themselves. Like most people, many of my unchosen narratives were the result of my parents’ chosen ones. The stories about my childhood which I present here all share a common theme: my developing sense of responsibility. My father chose to leave our family when I was two, and because of his choice I was raised by a single mother, facts which have led to the development of this theme of responsibility in my life. In this section I zoom in on what I learned about being responsible, then zoom out to examine why these narratives have motivated my professional learning and how I have developed professionally from this motivating influence. With these stories I trace my journey along the metaphorical river landscape of professional knowledge back to some of its early sources and present the first snapshots for my patchwork panorama.

6.1.1 What childhood taught me about responsibility. My father’s choice to abandon his place in our family when I was two introduced the theme of responsibility early into my life. I watched my mom struggle to raise three children alone, and I felt responsible for her suffering. I watched
my brother and sister, seven and ten years older than me respectively, learning to be responsible for me, the baby, and felt like I was a burden to them. I experienced the effects of my family’s financial struggle and then an eventual relief from money worries, which led me to feel guilty about my privileges and responsible for the suffering of others who had fewer than me. My father died when I was a teen of complications from type I diabetes, and I felt responsible for the circumstances surrounding his last days. The stories below highlight some of the moments that storied this theme into my life.

6.1.2 Living east of the Don with a single mom. I grew up in the southeast end of Toronto, which has been branded in recent years by real estate agents and local businesses as the fashionable Leslieville. Today, my mother’s neighbourhood has a different face than in the 1970s and 1980s when I was a child. When I used to navigate its seedy streets and laneways with packs of local children, it was populated by the unemployed and working poor. The trendy lofts and condominiums full of singles and young couples were factories that made dish detergent, toothpaste and leather goods. We schoolchildren used to determine the direction of the wind by the smell of the air; if it was sulfurous, it was a north wind, and if the air was laced with the delicious scent of squishy white bread, it was a south wind. We loved those days with a southern breeze and would hungrily bite the air in the playground at recess. South winds did not just bring us tantalizing scents; they also wafted poison into our lungs, our yards. Heavy industry south of Queen Street pumped noxious chemicals into the air in the days before smokestack scrubbers.

Each year, public health nurses appeared and jabbed our thumbs with barbs, extracting a drop of blood so we could each be tested for lead poisoning from the metal processing plant around the corner and a few blocks east. Letters were sent home telling parents not to eat leafy
greens grown in backyard gardens unless the soil had been tested. We had a vegetable garden anyway, and my mother made sure once she knew about the lead that we grew no lettuce. Partly because it made food costs cheaper in summer, she continued to encourage the family to eat the cucumbers, tomatoes, zucchini and onions we grew. The soil has been reconditioned now, and the land the lead factory was on turned into film studios. My childhood playground, Hideaway Park, which for many years was dominated at night by the local teen gang who drank beer and smoked drugs, is now the site of a turf war between upper middle class dog owners and privileged parents of small children. The poor neighbourhood I grew up in has, like me with my salaried job, been gentrified.

When I was little and growing up in this environment, my single-parent family faced many economic struggles. Despite the monthly concern about money for food and utilities, my mother regularly reminded us that we had many privileges that gave us an edge on others also living below the poverty line. My parents both had a university education and during my early childhood my mother had clerical work with the public library, which meant we were surrounded by “good” books. The cultural capital these advantages gave us was noticeable to me in school, where I frequently had a breadth and depth of knowledge my peers did not possess.

In addition to cultural capital, we had property. Before he left us, my father had made sure the family was in a house with a mortgage my mother could pay. In its previous incarnation it was a rooming house, and before the family could move in, my dad, his friends and my maternal grandfather toiled to address the outstanding work orders to avoid the cost of hiring a contractor. They leveled some of the most crooked floors and mended the crumbled tile in front of the coal burning fireplace used by the families of Victorian rail workers who had lived there in the 1890s when it was new. It was by no means luxurious, but it was spacious and each of us three kids had
a bedroom to ourselves. The fact of home ownership gave us comfort and stability that many of the children at my school whose parents were renters did not have.

When I was eight years old my mother called a rare family meeting that would mark a significant change in my economic circumstances and provide me, the youngest child, with opportunities unavailable to my brother and sister. She announced to my teenaged siblings and me that she was going back to school to get a Masters degree in Library Science. “This means two years with less money than we’ve had in a long time. It means we will be eating different food and wearing more sweaters in wintertime. But in the end it will be better for us because when I graduate, I’ll have significantly more money.”

Two years later when she graduated, I remember being in awe of my mother’s strength of character. Like a hero she had toiled to make our world a better place, and I began to enjoy the comforts of her middle class salary as soon as she became a librarian. My enjoyment of these fruits through the years of my adolescence did not come without guilt. My brother and sister had both grown up and moved away by the time I was twelve. While I had many years to relish the comparative luxuries my mother could now afford, such as a CD player and trips to Cuba during March break (because there were no Americans there, and we were helping the small communist economy be self-sufficient with our tourist dollars), my siblings reaped none of these benefits. I knew that my comforts were the accidental luck of birth order and my mother’s choices, and that deep down I had done nothing to deserve what I had.

I was reminded often of these privileges, and naturally it was expected that I would be grateful for them. I felt guilty when I wasn’t, which was often. Even though I felt my life was not easy, I knew that I had it easier than my brother and sister. Not only did I enjoy more privileges than them, but because they were significantly older they had many more responsibilities than
me. One of these regular responsibilities was that they were frequently expected to look after me. I remember one evening when I was seven or eight, my brother had to look after me while mother was working. He made roast chicken with potatoes. I can still see him standing with his back to me in front of the stove with oven mitts on his hands. I knew that not many fourteen-year-old boys could or would do this for their little sisters and thought the world of him. My sister also had these kinds of responsibilities, even after she had moved away from home. When I was a young teen, my mom used to go on vacations without me, and my sister would come to stay at the house for the week or two that mom was gone. Despite being in her mid-twenties with a job and a relationship, my sister would stay and patiently deal with me and my fifteen-year-old attitude. While I didn’t want anyone looking after me, I was happy that it was my sister who had come. I watched and learned as my brother and sister patiently bore their responsibility and looked after me, but being the youngest, I had no sibling I could be responsible for.

By the time I was a teenager I knew what it was like to have been poor, and to have found financial security. I believed that I had unfairly, by the sheer luck of being the youngest, gained advantages that my brother and sister did not; I received more than they did and I had to do less to earn what I got. I reacted to the guilt that accompanied this knowledge with a need to prove myself, developing a responsibility to live up to my mother’s story of facing single motherhood with determination and perseverance, and have been trying to make up for my advantages ever since. I have never yet felt that I have.

6.1.3 No say in losing dad. Losing my father twice strengthened my already keen sense of having an unfulfillable responsibility. I remember nothing of my father’s first leave taking. I know that I had no say in the matter and that afterwards the reasons for his absence were never
discussed; with a child’s sensitivity, I felt it was taboo to ask. Like many children do, I blamed myself; there must be something wrong with me or else why would he leave? I was too young to stay up late enough to talk with him on the phone when he occasionally called late at night, when long distance charges were cheapest, to speak with my brother and sister. In the mornings after those calls, when I found out, I would rage that I had not been allowed to speak to my dad, throwing myself on the floor in a tantrum. Afterwards, I would know somewhere deep inside that I had not been permitted to speak to him because I didn’t deserve to. I knew I had a responsibility to keep my temper and be good because of all the things my mother and others did for me. Although I had tantrums regularly throughout my childhood and youth, displays of anger never resulted in me feeling heard. What did was me living up to the responsibility of being a good girl.

I learned that while tantrums didn’t get me the positive attention I craved, being precocious did. The adults around me praised me for the things I excelled at and I learned to get much of the love and attention I craved by being as perfect as I could be. I still had plenty of tantrums, partly from the strain of trying to be perfect all the time, and inevitably missing the mark sometimes. I became afraid of risk taking, preferring activities at which I had already proven myself, and quitting things that I was not good at on the first try.

When my father returned to Toronto after many years’ absence, I used my precocious side effectively to get his attention. I valued the afternoons spent at his apartment. I remember glowing with pride when he, a graphic artist by training, praised an abstract pastel drawing I had made. It was a series of blue and gold circles, and he was impressed that I had chosen colours his Buddhist dharma group preferred for meditation. My selection was coincidental, but this moment captured the type of praise I regularly sought and craved. As my father’s religion changed from
Buddhism to the Baha’i faith, I tried to follow his spiritual shift. To keep my father’s attention I began taking notes when he would lecture to me about the nature of the universe and spirituality. My mother, who remained on friendly terms with him for our sakes, found these lectures during our visits tedious. She would remark afterwards about how my father’s monologues left no room for anyone else to speak, but at the time I didn’t mind. I was happy to listen if it meant he paid me attention.

Perhaps because I showed more interest in his stories than the rest of my family, and perhaps because of my young age, I began spending more time with my father as I moved into adolescence. He would occasionally invite me to his apartment near the St. Lawrence Market solo and we would spend an afternoon together, cooking up a savoury Persian dish of rice and beans with plump raisins that he had learned about from his Baha’i friends. He had type I diabetes, and food was always a concern for him, but he would sometimes treat me to some decadent sweet like a fresh apple fritter from the market. During these years, I began to feel a closeness with my father I had missed as a young child. He gave me advice about school and social situations. He told me, “Never give up math. When you do, you close so many doors.” And, “Those kids who are popular now aren’t going to be popular in ten years time. It’s the smart kids you want to hang around.” I took his advice to heart, even though and maybe partly because by adult standards, he had made a mess of many of his own choices.

My father’s death was a time in my life where I felt choked with voicelessness and failed responsibility. When I was fifteen, while walking to some family event at a restaurant, my 46-year-old father sidled up beside me with a disturbing confidence. He did not look well on this occasion, his skin dewy and tinged with green, and his breath was short and laboured with the effort of the walk. He leaned in my direction as the others walked on ahead and said, “You
know, I don’t think I’m going to live much longer. I think I only have a year or so left.” I was speechless, uncomfortable and afraid. What was I supposed to do with this information? Later I told my mom, and she brushed it off, saying, “He doesn’t look well, but no one can know that sort of thing.”

I soon found out that he was right about his ill health. Just before Christmas in 1988, he was admitted to St. Michael’s Hospital with a foot infection. We were told it was gangrene, and that they may have to amputate his leg at the knee if antibiotics didn’t work. I visited him often; although he wasn’t Christian, it felt so lonely to me for him to be there in hospital at that time of year. I felt responsible for going: my brother was away working in Japan, my sister had a job, and my mother wasn’t related to him anymore. I was a high school student on my winter break and had time to go daily. By the first week of January 1989, things had gone wrong. He was upset because his kidneys were failing to purge the saline that dripped into his body from the IV, and he was uncomfortably swollen from head to toe. He said, “The nurses aren’t giving me my insulin when I want it. I know when I need to take it, and they’ve got me on some schedule that’s messing up my system. To make it worse, they’re short staffed because of the holidays. The doctors are hardly here, but I need to talk to one today. If I don’t I think I’m going to die in here. Can you please go to the nurses’ station and tell them I need a doctor now?”

I was at this time an awkward, shy teen, who was too afraid to call the dentist and make an appointment for myself, let alone tell a nurse my father was dying. Terrified of what was happening and afraid to ask for the help needed, I knew it was my responsibility to speak up for my dad. I crept up to the desk and waited as the nurses chatted. One looked up at me after what had seemed like ages and asked, “Can I help you?”
“Uh…my dad, Dan Hegge, he needs a doctor,” I mumbled.”

“What’s wrong with him?” she asked with what seemed to me at the time a disinterested sneer.

I took a big breath and with all my nerve said, “He’s all swollen. He says he’s going to die.”

The nurse looked at me with pursed lips and assured me, “He’ll be fine. The doctor will see your father when he makes his rounds.”

When I went back to my dad’s room to tell him, he looked like a cornered animal. I knew I had failed him by not speaking up more, by not insisting, demanding a doctor and bringing one back immediately. “I’m not ready to die today,” he told me with pleading eyes. Can you please go and get your mom, and see if she can talk to them?”

I took the streetcar home, my head quietly screaming for it to go faster. My mother’s boyfriend, a legal-aid lawyer, was visiting from Saskatchewan at the time. He came with us back to the hospital, and it was he, not me, not my mother, who negotiated with the nurses. I was grateful to him. My father got to see a doctor, but later that night had a massive heart attack, which put him in a coma. He died two weeks later.

Both times I lost my father I was haunted by a feeling of crippling voicelessness, as if the act of me not speaking was part of the reason why I lost him. As if it was my fault that it had happened. Regret of failing at this self-imposed responsibility is a somatic experience, a physical sensation, like a maelstrom sucking me down underwater, a feeling of complete helplessness as organized chaos breaks around me. I experience echoes of this feeling, whirlpools of doubt and turmoil whenever I face a situation for which I feel responsible, and over which I have no control.
Feeling impotently responsible has been a feature of my life since childhood. Being the baby in a single-parent family, watching everyone around me shoulder the responsibility of my care caused me to have a penchant for proving myself worthy by showing my family I could be that way too. Feeling responsible for my father’s leaving and his death has given my bursts of activity born from this conscientiousness a frenzied productivity that has resulted in many of the accomplishments I list on my curriculum vitae. The setting in which I was raised compounded with the narratives of social responsibility passed on to me by my mother and the examples of self sacrifice shown to me over and over again by my family have ensured that this productivity has been pointed in the direction of helping others, the teaching profession. Responsibility has been like a hairshirt I have worn to purge myself of childhood guilt of my perceived failings.

After my father’s death, I responded to my grief with overwrought responsibility. I prided myself that I took only three days off of school, not wanting to use my loss as an excuse for shirking my studies. Before my seventeenth birthday that April of 1989, I had decided that I would turn my good marks into excellent ones and earn a scholarship to university, a kind of tribute to the man who told me to surround myself with smart kids. I cultivated friendships with the brightest kids, whether they were popular or not. I studied harder. I took math, even though I hated it and earned bad marks, suffering what was for me the humiliation of a tutor to get through. I began saving more of the money I earned from lifeguarding with the plan to pay my own tuition. Six months after my father died, in the autumn of grade twelve, I could not stop crying. The manic responsibility I felt and had manifested in my studies spilled out in tears. After the delayed grieving, I was able to gather myself together and keep going, finishing another year and a half of high school in fine form, and earning a scholarship to the University of Toronto.
6.1.4 Forming a narrative core of responsibility. The interaction of two prominent life narratives, the story of growing up in my mom’s single-parent house, and the story of my dad’s two leave takings have produced a solid core at the heart of all my Self narratives which is driven by the energy of responsibility. As if through mitosis, the narrative zygote of my parents’ stories in my life have created two other prominent narrative cells, my chosen Self narrative of being excellent and its twin professional narrative of being a good teacher.

6.1.5 Interacting narratives as primary loco-motivators. I use the mitosis analogy not only because it works nicely with my concept of the multi-celled narrative organism, but because my most prominent chosen Self narrative emerged so early in my life that it is a tacit part of everything I elect to do; while feeling the need to be excellent at all I do is a chosen response to life circumstances, it has become so habitual for me that it feels like a part of my nature. Out of this chosen Self narrative emerged its genetic twin with a different function, my chosen professional narrative about being a good teacher which is the loco-motivator, the why, behind all my professional learning movement. And growing out of this four-celled narrative core of my being are the many choices and narratives that make up the plot of my personal and professional life that I include here to illustrate how and why I learned to innovate in my teaching practice.

6.1.6 How the Self narratives push me along. The way that my Self narratives usually interact with Other narratives is predictable. My education and professional life has followed a pattern of periods of productivity, born out of a sense of duty or responsibility in which I make a choice to excel. Inevitably, I meet with conflict. Sometimes the conflict seems insurmountable and in these cases the productivity is often followed by a little collapse, from which I rise part phoenix part
bookworm to do it again, like I did in my teens while finishing high school. At other times, the conflict offers less resistance, and in those cases the energy I gain in gratification of my success is what drives me forward. In the next section of this paper I present a miniature narrative account that highlights how my tendency towards perfectionism, which is driven by an overdeveloped sense of accountability, created conditions in my early career for a fork in my course along the professional learning river landscape. It is a two-part story in which I first meet a little conflict, an obstruction in my course, which I find a way to move around, followed by a new circumstance that leads to a fall from a knowledge cliff from which substantial professional learning arises.

6.2 From the Banks of the Edogawa River to Viceroy:

6.2.1 Facing imperfection and meeting failure. Becoming a teacher was not my first choice; I had wanted to become an actor. During theatre school I began to understand the lack of emotional and financial security such a career would provide, and I decided it was not a good choice for someone who had issues about rejection and about financial security. In the final year of completing my drama and English undergraduate degree I considered my options. How could I use my skills professionally? My academics in combination with my love of teaching swimming made a Bachelor of Education program an appealing choice and I applied to the secondary panel at OISE/UT, Queen’s University and the University of Western Ontario after going to an information session about the process. I was accepted and chose the program at Queen’s because of its long practicum component.
The practicum for which I had selected the Queen’s program initially made me decide not to become a high school teacher. I will gloss over this period somewhat, but suffice it to say that while I earned fine grades and good reports from the teachers hosting me, I thought I was doing a terrible job with the students. I hated how difficult their behaviour was; I was only six years older than some of them, but many treated me like an opponent and best and enemy at worst. Frequently I felt that whirlpool sensation of losing control while I taught, which I hated. In my non-traditional practicum assignment, I worked with adult ESL students and loved it. I decided after I was done my B.Ed., I would go to Japan and teach English there.

6.2.2 At the outset of my knowledge journey. The narratives that follow are examples of how my Self narratives have interacted with two conflicts I encountered in my first years of teaching. I examine the motivational outcomes of each event and then look at how my pattern of professional learning began to unfold.

6.2.3 Mount I-don’t-know. I began teaching adults in Japan, but soon tired of the company I worked for and the lack of creativity I was afforded in my position. I looked for something else and landed my first secondary teaching position. It was at a small international school in a bedroom community outside Tokyo offering Ontario curriculum and Ontario secondary school diplomas to graduates. My assignment was to teach English, drama and ESL. At 25, I was a young teacher by North American standards, but despite my green age, I was treated with utmost respect by my students and their parents. What I inferred from this respect was that I was doing a good job, which felt rewarding.
It was a small school and none of the teachers had more than five years of experience. We developed our courses autonomously because each class had only one section. It was 1999, a period of curricular upheaval in Ontario, and as an inspected overseas private school, teachers were required to produce detailed courses of study for the Ministry of Education inspector who would come to see that our school was compliant with Ontario government policy. Although it was arduous, I loved this work because, without an experienced mentor to compare myself to, I thought I was good at it. Writing these courses sparked enough of an interest in curriculum for me to apply to a Masters program at OISE/UT in curriculum studies in the second year of my career.

My first hint since teachers’ college that I might have to face failure and inadequacy in teaching came in my last semester at the school, in the fall of 2000. I was beginning my Masters degree with an online course. I had decided to use *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1954) in a grade 11 English course, and the ensuing unit of study was the first time a text that I had selected caused so many problems. At the time I blamed these problems on the students and the book, and not on my lack of judgment of skill. A colleague, Adam, had recommended it over lunch in the staff room, as I contemplated aloud what novel I should teach. “I taught it last term,” he said. “We have enough copies in the storage room, so you wouldn’t have to order any. It’s short, it’s a classic, and it’s easy to read. As far as I’m concerned it’s a no brainer. You should try it,” he advised.

I accepted his suggestion and we began reading the text the next week. My approach was a variation on what I had learned in high school and in teachers’ college: to hand a set of chapter questions to the students at the beginning of class, to read aloud while they listened and wrote down answers, and then to take up the questions after reading. This method was accepted
practice, but I immediately found that even the most capable and most confident students were unable to answer what seemed to me to be basic comprehension questions. Even Kiori, usually pink-cheeked and boisterous, the first to raise her hand, bowed her head as I sought students’ answers to the Internet’s list. When I asked why they were stumped, Saki bravely responded, “We don’t know what’s going on. This story is about pigs and other animals, but these questions are asking us about Russia.”

Oh! I thought, they don’t get the allegory. They don’t have the historical background knowledge to see it. The next morning before school, I stood in the south-west hallway of the school looking out the window, wondering what to do. I could not have an entire class in this very expensive private school fail a unit of study because they did not know enough history to respond. How could I help my students improve their comprehension of Animal Farm? On this clear, crisp morning, I could see Mt. Fuji in the distance, rising above the smoke billowing from industrial chimneys in this mixed-use suburban neighbourhood of micro-farms, light industry, shops, residences and our school. Fuji San stood as oblivious to me and my teaching problem as I was of the flaws in my approach that would keep me from ever really teaching these students how to read an English novel. I was suffering from what Eisner (1998) dubbed secondary ignorance (Eisner E., 1998, p. 115): I did not know what I did not know. Even though my problem of inexperience and limited skill was beginning to loom like Mt. Fuji on my professional knowledge landscape, I was facing the other direction and did not see it coming. I could not see the pedagogical imperfections leading me towards a fall of my good teacher narrative.

That day during my window reverie, I decided the students would need to do some research about the U.S.S.R. and connect what they learned to the novel in group presentations.
For me, this was an innovation away from the known and familiar, chapter questions in the
direction of the pedagogical knowledge I had theoretically understood but not yet applied

techniques of cooperative learning. I knew that using co-operative learning techniques (Slavin,
1990) students could quickly teach each other about the novel and fill in those gaps in
background knowledge that were preventing them from seeing it as a satirical allegory. This

seemed a good solution because of all the skills such an assignment would require students to
practice: reading and writing for the research, media for creating a visual aid for the presentation,
and oral communication for the presentation. And while the assignment did help most of the
students to make superficial connections between what they learned about the history of the
Soviet Union and characters and the plot of the novel, I do not believe that any of them

experienced the power, pleasure, excitement or amusement that comes with making meaning of a
text. Since I orchestrated all the connections for them by selecting the text, creating the
assignment, selecting the topics, and allocating each subject to a group of students, they learned
to make my meanings, ones I had already developed for myself. I did not realize this until much
later and only felt a vague sense of disappointment that I had ended my tenure at this school with
such a lackluster unit of study.

6.2.4 Facing failure at Viceroy. Soon after this experience, I returned to Canada in January
2001, and was lucky to get a job in secondary school in Toronto. Within weeks of beginning at
the diverse urban school, I wished that I was still Hegge Sensei in Japan; I was completely
unprepared for the situation in which I found myself. I was hired to teach at Viceroy Collegiate
where I met Gabriel, B.J. and others about whom I tell a story in chapter one. These boys and
their classmates made sure to let me know that I was a bad teacher. What I experienced was so
far from what I had expected that I became a classic case of Veenman’s (1984) reality shock, an inexperienced teacher who finds herself incapable of doing her job with the training and experience in which she believed, and suffering from stress and anxiety as a result in her sudden plummeting self-efficacy. The swearing and threats of violence caused me to fear for my safety, but what made the situation intolerable for me was the implication that I was a failure. I was no Louanne Johnson taming Dangerous Minds (Smith J. N., 1995), and there was a big part of me that wanted to be. To be a good teacher like those ones in the movies was a goal I held close and secret, which now seemed unattainable.

The thought that I was not cut out for teaching caused me to wonder if it was worth persevering in this career. Having been hired in February 2001, I was seriously contemplating leaving the profession by the March break when I had to get off a bus while on vacation in Waikiki because I had an anxiety attack when two noisy teenagers boarded. I had reached a point of crisis and burnout, and it took all my effort and much support from colleagues and mentors to transform my practice over time and learn a new way of teaching secondary English.

6.2.5 Two interactions with my responsible narrative core: why they affected my professional learning. Here I will discuss narrative interactions that occurred between Self and Other in the two stories above and explain why these types of interactions drive my professional learning. I first examine how the Other narratives in the minor conflict I experienced in Japan interacted with my Self narratives and then how Other narratives in the major conflict at Viceroy interacted differently.

6.2.6 Minor conflict: reaching for what is known. As I discussed in 6.1, the life narratives that arose from my childhood act as a nucleus to my chosen Self narrative, The Drive to Excel, and
my chosen professional narrative, *Being a Good Teacher*. In the story of Mount I-Don’t-Know, about my teaching in Japan, the good teacher narrative interacted with Other narratives in my professional environment forming a minor conflict between me and the students which was created by my choice of text and teaching method. This conflict nudge my good teacher enough that it prodded my narrative core, interacting with those tacit narratives of being responsible to help, which is connected to the life narrative of my mother’s influence on me, and the narrative of being responsible to succeed, which is connected to the life narrative which is my father’s legacy. In the gentle bounce back from my Self narrative nucleus, my good teacher chosen professional narrative responded with confidence, as if to say “I can handle this with my previous experience.”

Instead of turning to see the mountain of inexperience and not knowing that I would have to travel a long, hard way to become a teacher who could flexibly respond to the learning needs of the students in my classroom, I turned instead to the known experience of teachers’ college. I had learned about co-operative learning structures while on practicum from a math teacher whose classroom I had observed one afternoon. I hadn’t tried these structures in my teaching yet, but to me they seemed at the time to hold an innovative solution to my problem. Now that I have the perspective of time and can zoom out from this moment in my professional development journey, I can see that I was merely imposing a superficial change to alter classroom dynamics and to support students in finding teacher-centred meanings. My solution felt innovative since it was my first application of a theory in practice. I was satisfied enough with the illusion of success created with the conflict with my compliant students dissipated. I was able to brush off my lingering feeling of dissatisfaction from my good teacher narrative, dismissing the process as something arising from the students and not from my own professional knowledge. The students’
choice not to push the conflict by demanding I learn about their personal needs and interests and the minor conflict resulted in me drawing on my existing knowledge and applying it in a new way, building my confidence and reinforcing my good teacher narrative.

6.2.7 Major conflict: reaching for something new. In the major conflict that arose when I began teaching at Viceroy and encountered Gabriel, B.J. and their classmates, the outcome of narrative interaction was different. Instead of complying with any adjustments I offered, the students pushed back, rejecting or refusing my solutions. This created a situation of escalating conflict, which was exacerbated by the nucleus of my Self narratives. The major, ongoing conflict pierced my good teacher chosen professional narrative, which then packed punches for my narrative nucleus, sending me into a spiral in which I experienced an extreme loss of efficacy. I felt I was being pulled under, emerging now and then for breath, desperate, and looking in every direction for a radical solution.

If a living organism survives being injured, new growth occurs to heal the wound. So in my narrative experience of overcoming the injuries to self-conceptions held in my chosen narrative teaching from the major conflict at Viceroy, new growth developed, depositing a new narrative cell on the old and forming a new structure that future conflicts or narrative interactions encounter. The impact of this narrative growth will be seen in 6.3 when I examine the middle phase of my career through which I engaged in significant self-directed professional learning which led to real innovation in my teaching practice. So far in this chapter, I have zoomed in on particulars of each scene as I patch together my panorama of my professional knowledge landscape as I have traveled along it. In the section below I take a moment to zoom out and trace back over my metaphorical journey.
6.2.8 How did these interactions form a pattern in my professional learning landscape? The result of my minor conflict over *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1954) in Japan on my professional learning was to continue propelling me down the main stream. I had gained experience in applying a teaching method that was theoretically familiar, but experientially new. This experience paired with the resulting superficial success gave me confidence to keep moving downstream. As I journeyed with prevailing currents on the metaphorical river of professional knowledge, compliant students nudged me to look only at the right bank of the river. I remained oblivious to the giant Mount I-Don’t-Know on my left, representing my secondary ignorance (Eisner E., 1998). I did turn to the theoretical knowledge on the right bank of my professional river landscape to view the Queen’s Education Faculty forest, from which I plucked one leaf, co-operative learning structures, which I used as a paddle to move myself away from conflict. Because the ripples created by the students were small, my first solution worked and I held onto that leaf, paddling it bravely, obliviously ahead to an unknown cliff.

With my appointment at Viceroy C.I., I went over the metaphorical cliff into the pool at the base of the falls, I saw the immense Mount I-Don’t-Know towering over me as I plummeted down. Each time I came up for breath from the conflict I tried to grab on to something. My old leaf was no use, but I held it tightly because it was the only thing in my grasp. Looking to the bank of theory on my right I saw the beautiful OISE/UT forest and each time I rose from the water I reached out, grasping at the branches of its trees. Theory failed at this time to provide a strong enough hold for me to escape the broiling water, but as I slipped off its branches leaves came away in my hands. Eventually I had enough of these to help me stay afloat, and I
immediately paddled away from the whirlpool to the seemingly safe shores of Mapleforest C.I.,
a new school and a new beginning in calmer waters after my big fall.

The major conflict I had faced, the students at Viceroy who demanded of me skills I did not have, had a profound effect on the direction of my professional learning. I almost succumbed and left the profession, but OISE/UT, and graduate study offered me a promise of a chance to redefine myself. OISE/UT and the good response I was having from my professors was gave me a lifeline; if I wasn’t good at teaching, at least I was good at learning, and if I could learn well, then I could find a way to apply learning to teaching and find a solution to my problem. Taking the promise of a solution to heart, but not yet having any answers, I found a new work environment, Mapleforest C.I. It felt like a fresh start after a failure and I used the new environment to begin experimenting with finding a solution to my lack of pedagogical skill. In the next section of the paper, I will describe the solutions I tried, why I tried them and how effectively my professional knowledge was transformed.

6.3 Mapleforest and Multiliteracies: Storying Myself Good Again

In my story of professional learning, I had come out of the interaction at Viceroy C.I. wondering if I should remain in teaching. I continued in my study at OISE/UT based on the hope that I would find an answer there that would alleviate the intolerable battering of my Self narratives, especially those dominant personal and professional narratives about being excellent and being a good teacher. The good marks I received at OISE/UT were a balm for my bruises and helped me to feel that I would find a solution. This mini narrative account offers several vignettes that show how by choosing to follow a direction that reinforced my narratives of being excellent, I was able to story myself into a place where I could characterize myself once again as
a good teacher and resolve many of the teaching conflicts I had experienced as I did it. These vignettes cover a span of five years and zoom in on my journey at key points along the way.

### 6.3.1 Paddling in a circle

These vignettes show learning that occurred because of choices I made in my professional learning journey that took me out of the main stream of accepted knowledge and back again. The first choice that led me in a new direction was teaching kindergarten in Japan. This fresh setting afforded me an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting without the baggage of past experience. I found upon returning to the secondary classroom that I was back using the same old methods, but the diversion of teaching kindergarten in Japan provided me with a kind of experiential propulsion that carried me forward in the direction of innovation.

### 6.3.2 Paddling up kinder creek: applying new knowledge in a new environment

When I first moved to Mapleforest I was disappointed that the change of schools did not result in a radical change in the problems I was experiencing with students and my perceived failure in classroom teaching. While the severity and personal impact of the conflict with students had decreased, I felt ineffective and wondered if I was suited to teaching. I saw an opportunity and took it: I had recently gotten my qualification to teach primary school, during a period of grasping for ways out, and had a friend in Japan who was working as an administrator in an arts-based preschool/kindergarten for children aged 2 to 6. I had been learning about arts-based education in my Masters coursework and, while I couldn’t at the time conceive of how to apply Paulo Friere’s theories in a secondary classroom, I felt that this new setting would afford me the opportunity to experiment. I took the trip away from the mainstream up kinder creek one year
after moving to Maplewood. Before I left, a respected colleague said to me, “Laura, when are you going to settle down?” He didn’t realize that to me at that moment, settling down meant drowning.

In September of 2002 I began a year’s leave of absence and returned to Japan. The international arts-based preschool and kindergarten served a community of ultra-rich Japanese families and ex-patriots with company sponsored private education in downtown Tokyo. With fourteen children aged three and four in the care of a Japanese colleague and me, I began in this creative, bilingual environment transforming my teaching practice, applying concepts of holistic and aesthetic education that I had learned about during my Masters of Education coursework and continued to gain exposure to in professional development activities there. These children were willing participants in storytelling, drama, dance, music, visual art and imaginative play and contributed their ideas and imaginings without reserve. Our narrative interactions churned up bubbling currents of energy that pushed us all cheerily along. These children allowed me to practice teaching through the arts, and more importantly, they taught me how to balance my curricular agenda with their interest. Through them I learned to teach skills through student selected topics and activities. Perhaps the best example of this is a field trip they planned with my assistance a few weeks before it was time for me to leave them and return to Canada. I introduced the idea of a celebration to end our time together during our morning circle time, and I asked them what we should do. “We should go on a trip,” said Kana.

“Yes, to the zoo!” Yasaho enthused. The children nodded and clapped their agreement.

“Okay,” I said. “What do we need to do so that we can go to the zoo as a class?” I asked.

“We could go on the train.” Maya suggested.
“So we’ll need some money,” I concluded. “And who knows how to get there?” And so it continued until the class of children had with my help as scribe composed a proposal to the school’s director with a planned date, permission letters for parents with the cost of the trip, a request for volunteers and a list of items to bring. While my colleague and I orchestrated the financial transactions and parents paid and provided lunch, the children owned that magical day in Ueno Park. The image of their proud faces, marching in a line side-by-side under a canopy of cherry blossoms is a picture of empowered learners that will glow forever in my memory. My second time teaching in Japan taught me that putting children in charge of the direction of their learning can have profound effects.

6.3.3 Overcoming old patterns. Back in Toronto from my leave of absence along kinder creek the following September, I had difficulty transferring the professional knowledge I had developed in the preschool to a secondary setting. I fell into ranks with my colleagues and returned to the old habits of the main stream, assigning pre-determined questions, becoming frustrated with students who did not keep up with tasks. I remember stumbling on a new method while chastising a classroom full of grade 11 students, some ashamed, some resentful, after I had discovered that only two students had completed the assigned reading and chapter questions on Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (Fitzgerald) for homework. I began with tricks I already knew how to do, the same co-operative strategies I had used in Japan teaching Animal Farm (Orwell, 1954). I felt the same irritation, that the conflict was their fault, as I had earlier. I exclaimed, “Well I’m not going to do the work for you! I already know the answers.” Given my experience teaching kindergarten this admonishment should have sounded as a warning to me that I was heading in an unfruitful, teacher-centred direction away from methods that had made my second time in
Japan so meaningful. Nonetheless, I continued, “You’re going to do these questions now in pairs, and we’ll put your answers on the board. It’ll take the whole class. It’ll be boring, but I’m going to make sure you do it!”

A happy accident was born out of frustration, which I noticed because of my journey along kinder creek the previous year. I first noticed the same thing I had when using cooperative learning structures previously: that by having students work together on the assigned questions in class under my supervision we got better answers, everyone in attendance participated, and no one found the task overwhelming. Then something new: they were not bored or merely compliant; in fact they seemed more engaged than they had all term. I noticed that as we took up answers, students began discussing points of interest in the novel and asking their own questions, which we discussed as a group. Instead of assigning questions that already had answers for homework that night, I decided to flow with an extension of the lesson: students would bring their own questions to class and we would use those for discussion. I had still not developed a multimodal, multicultural approach to English, but I had taken an important step toward letting students take the lead in classroom learning by accidentally setting up a collaborative exercise. My ability to notice the changed response and act on it was slow, but emerging as a skill that was born out of my application in practice of some principles of arts based education in a classroom half a world away with students a quarter of their age.

6.3.4 Finding two solutions: chosen professional learning that put a fork in the river.

Meanwhile, I had experienced enough positive feedback from professional learning in my Masters program in the form of good marks and minor shifts in my practice that I felt motivated to continue graduate study. I had applied to a doctorate program at OISE/UT in curriculum
studies and teacher development. When I learned of my acceptance, I requested a half time assignment at my school, ensuring that I would keep my feet wet in secondary teaching. When I began my degree, I had vague notions about studying teacher burnout and resilience. Through my doctoral coursework I learned two things that not only focused my inquiry but helped improve my teaching: how to apply narrative thinking to my own professional development and how to use book clubs to address the multiple literacies of my students. I had gained enough experience that I was beginning to develop a practice of the theories I had learned about, which were so different with the mainstream pedagogies I had been exposed to earlier in my career.

My pilot study in a course on narrative inquiry resulted in a storying technique I now regularly use when I face problems in teaching. It also helped me narrow my doctoral inquiry to the fundamental question underlying my professional learning narrative: what makes a good English teacher, and how does a person become one? As I learned to use narrative as a rehearsal for transforming my teaching, I have changed how I cope with conflicts in my teaching. I now reflect on events in my classroom by examining how I story myself in the situation. If there is something I want to alter, I write about it retelling the story, in a technique with intentions borrowed from Boal’s (1985) forum theatre, imagining different ways for me to be in the classroom and rehearsing change. I also use my imagination to change the narrative perspective of the story of my teaching and often experiment by changing the choices I make as a character in the conflict or switching out of my own narrative voice in order to gain insights into the possible experiences of students based on visible reactions I observed in class.

Another major solution that arose from doctoral study was the application of book clubs to my practice as a model of the classroom as a learning community. Because of my interest in burnout born out of the battering my ego had taken in these early years of my career, I took
courses in teacher development in which I learned about teachers’ induction experiences and the impact of these experiences on their practice and their careers. I took two courses in which graduate students read novels and met in class in the manner of book clubs to discuss them. In both courses, one on multicultural texts taught by Grace Feuerverger and the other on teachers in fiction by Mary Kooy, the novels often, but not always had teachers in them. The discussions that we had about the novels studied helped me to make strong personal and professional connections to the literature. The structure of these classes gave me personal experience in a mode of collaborative study that provided a model which allowed me to continue transforming my practice of teacher directed activities towards the establishment of learning communities as a primary mode of classroom instruction. I decided to take a risk and move away from the format my colleagues at Mapleforest employed where students study one novel under the teacher’s guidance to implementing student book clubs. Kooy and some colleagues in her course who already used book clubs gave me practical suggestions and support that helped me to begin.

6.3.5 How two Lessons from grad school transformed my teaching practice. To give the reader a sense of how these two lessons helped to transform my teaching I present the story of introducing book clubs into the grade 11 University English course I teach.

I began slowly and had all my grade 11 students in the 2007 to 2008 school year read the same novel, *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003). Having everyone read the same text was a familiar practice for both the students and me, and having this familiarity reduced the change variables, which in turn gave me the confidence to break away from the usual structure of teacher led questions and discussion. I instructed them to keep a log of their reading, using the same structure we had employed in Kooy’s course on teacher book clubs. They were expected to
respond at least once per chapter, but when I first checked the students’ reading logs, I was surprised and alarmed to discover that many were at a loss as to what they should write. I had expected students to eagerly absorb and apply the techniques I had modeled for keeping a log that I had shown them, and told them as much. As I began to inquire into the students’ difficulties, two main themes began to arise in their answers to my questioning: one group of students felt the task simply to be an onerous imposition that “ruined” their reading experience. Another group thought the activity was “like kindergarten,” and I heard from several of them that they had done such logs “in grade four.” When I looked at the logs from the second group, I noticed that the majority of connections they were making were to personal experience. They had misunderstood the activity, and I was disappointed and frustrated.

One day, in my afternoon class a group of girls who had been implying for some time that I didn’t know what I was doing started what I perceived as a mutiny. Their leader, Shanice, erupted after I had given the lesson’s instructions, “Why the hell can’t you just teach us?” Her friends closed ranks around her, “Yeah,” Alana piped in, “This is just stupid. Do you think we’re dumb?”

“Oh my God, this is so stupid,” grumbled the usually quiet Brigit, emboldened to add her distain to the erupting chorus. As these girls erupted in yet another conflict that threatened my good teacher narrative, I began feeling the familiar maelstrom pulling at my feet, as anger bubbled up around me, swallowing up any rational response I may have had.

I cut any further dissent short. “Get to work, everyone,” I barked. “You three, I want to talk to you in the hall.” I gestured violently in the direction of the usurpers.

When the door was closed behind us I turned on them, “What is the matter with you?”
Shanice smirked, “We just think this class is dumb. It’s insulting. I don’t even know if you know anything about the book we’re reading.”

“I’ve read it six times, of course I know something about the novel. But you won’t learn very much if I tell you what to think.”

“Are you saying that what we did last year and the year before in English was wrong?” quipped Alana.

“Of course not; don’t be ridiculous. This is a way that is closer to how you’ll study in university seminars. You’ll be grateful in the future that you learned how to do this.” I retorted, angrily defensive of the approach and my implementation of it.

The girls pursed their lips, unconvinced. “Well,” I continued, “I’m not going to change what we’re doing because you don’t like it. Now I don’t want to have to call you out here again. Can you understand how your behaviour is going to have to change?” They nodded sullenly, walked unrepentant back into class, and sat defiantly refusing to participate in their desks for the rest of the period.

That night when I got home from work I was distraught. It felt like I was precariously perched on the edge of another professional waterfall, about to be plunged into the depths yet again. Then it occurred to me: I had to use what I knew and re-story my interaction with the girls. That night I wrote in my professional journal, rehearsing some alternate scenarios for addressing the girls’ concerns, re-storying my reaction to them, in an attempt to contain the problem.

The next day I spoke to them again. “I’m sorry if I seemed tense yesterday. My reaction to your behaviour was disproportionate. I want to address some of your concerns.” I proceeded to explain more clearly the philosophy behind what we were doing and to address some of their
issues with the reading logs. Their behaviour improved, but their favour of the book club format did not.

I was about to ditch the idea of book clubs altogether, but was encouraged by a fellow graduate student, who was an English teacher using this method, and my professor, Mary Kooy, whose class I was in at the time to persevere. Before the next novel study unit, I gave each class a book talk on five different and varied texts that were readily available in the bookroom at my school and then put it to a vote. The first vote, by secret ballot, was whether or not we should do book clubs. I explained that if we did, they would keep another reading log, and that they would be required to participate in groups within their class and in online discussion forums which would include students from the other class who had read the same novel. The other option was to vote to select a single novel that we would study as a class in a more traditional way.

To my great surprise, the overwhelming majority of students in each class voted to continue the book club experiment. As we formed our first real book clubs with student-selected texts, the girls who had spoken out against the format, participated more actively in the process than they had before. These clubs met in person three times through the reading process, after reading the first third, second third, and then after completing the novel. They also participated in the online discussion forum, and it was here that I felt I could best eavesdrop on their dialogues. I could also in this forum add more meaningfully to their discussion, and my presence was less that of the teacher looming over a circle of students, but one of a facilitator adding to and spurring on the conversation.

After six years of graduate study it seemed, I arrived at a point where I was able to apply theory to practice. This transformation took so long because I had been searching for change in theory. Change only came about because I had chances to practice applying theories elsewhere,
where I had no previous experience that would override my theoretical knowledge before I could incorporate it into my secondary English teaching. It was easier to apply new theory in a setting that was unfamiliar to me: the bilingual kindergarten. To transform my practice in secondary school, about which I had even in my early career substantial personal practical knowledge, I had to unlearn traditional ways of teaching that had been ingrained, and make a shift against the current of that knowledge to an innovative side stream. I had substantial support from professors and colleagues I met at OISE/UT, and I will discuss in the next section, 6.4, how I continue to flow in the direction of innovation by seeking to refine what I now know how to do.

This example of how I began developing multiliteracies activities in my secondary English practice contains a narrative pattern that is evident in other examples of my professional learning: an Other narrative in the landscape enters into conflict with my professional narrative of the “good teacher.” This interaction provokes a reaction from the nucleus of my Self narrative that prompts me to react. First, I experience feelings of decreased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) and a loss of control when faced with a situation that contradicts my identity of being “good” at English. I then turn to what I know and build new action from experience: for example, my work using arts based pedagogy led to a deepening of my ability to use narrative inquiry as a tool for professional learning, which led to my interest in fictional narrative as a tool for professional development, which in turn led to my initial application of book clubs. This process resulted in the innovation of multiliteracies pedagogy in my practice. Some Other narratives create conflict spurring growth, and some Other narratives, those from critical friends, provide me with professional support and guidance, buoying me up as I persevere in change. Over time, I establish a new learning course and develop a sense again of being a “good teacher”.
6.4 Broadening the Stream of Innovation

In this section I transition from a landscape perspective to a brief excerpt in the photojournalist perspective. This shift arises because I am moving from examining events in the past on which I have spent substantial time reflecting to looking at events in recent history, the present and the future. This last section covers the period of time in which I have been actively engaged in my doctoral research. From phase one, which lasted from January 2009 to December 2010 and through my year off, to the present, summer of 2012 when I am working on phase two of my project while completing major revisions of my dissertation (phases of the research have been discussed at length in chapter 3). In this mini narrative account I present two excerpts that provide a picture of the scenes most prominent in my recent and current viewpoint of the professional learning river landscape along which I am traveling. I will discuss the interactions within each narrative excerpt as I present them, instead of providing analysis afterwards as I have been doing, to provide a sense of immediacy and also because since I am in the midst of these narratives as I write, there are inevitably larger blind spots on my horizon than when I provide the historical perspective of the landscape view. The two excerpts are: 1. Interacting with Tanya and Anandi: developing a leader’s confidence, an account that zooms in on some recent understandings emerging from the research; and 2. The view from here: emergence amid fog, in which I provide a description of my current viewpoint as a beginning narrative inquirer and teacher educator.

6.4.1 Interacting with Tanya and Anandi: developing a leader’s confidence. If my doctoral coursework gave me the experience and confidence to drift away from mainstream professional knowledge and begin to follow a course of innovation, conducting my research has helped me
find ways to bring other colleagues along. Engaging in this study, which at first I thought was about learning how to apply multiliteracies pedagogy, has taught me more about the nature of teachers’ learning and about innovative practice and how to effect pedagogical transformation. Learning about transforming pedagogy and observing colleagues’ interest in what I know has had the effect of developing my leadership skills. In this section of the paper I will discuss three lessons that emerged from my interactions with Anandi and Tanya’s narratives followed by an explanation of how these lessons led to my emergence as a teacher leader.

6.4.2 First lesson: multiliteracies pedagogy in practice. I remember several instructors in undergraduate theatre school assuring us aspiring actors in scene study class, “Watching other people and debriefing what they have done on stage is at least as valuable as going up yourself.” Observing others engaged in practice is a founding principle of apprenticeship, which is incorporated into early teacher training through the practicum. The opportunity to observe other teachers diminishes after the preservice period, and for many, such as me, it is a rarity. This project allowed me to observe skilled and experienced teachers, to interact with their narratives of teaching, and to debrief their practice through dialogue on paper and in interviews. By observing their practice after ingesting multiliteracies theory (New London Group, 1996), I was able to form a practical sense of how to apply the pedagogical concepts in classroom curriculum. Anandi and Tanya’s influence was seen in my classroom in two ways, which are explored in the examples below: immediate adjustments to lessons and the overhaul of my approach to curriculum design.

Being in Tanya’s classroom in the role of researcher had an immediate impact on my teaching practice. After seeing an activity she showed me where the students were asked to make
a character profile in the format of a Facebook page and hearing a story Tanya told me about
connecting literature, especially Shakespeare, to students’ personal lifeworlds, I developed a
writing assignment for my grade 10 applied students when they studied *Romeo and Juliet*. I had
students write in role as if they were a young man trying to gain the affection of a much younger
lady, the love letter to Rosaline using a voice that came naturally to them. Some of my Jamaican-
Canadian students erupted jokingly in patois as I explained the activity. “Exactly!” I enthused.
“You might need to provide a translation for some of us who don’t share that way of
communicating, but please, use any language register you think appropriate for the situation as
you imagine it.” Every student in a class of reluctant learners handed in an assignment on the
fancy paper I had provided by the end of that class, a situation that had not occurred previously
that year. I found that observing Tanya’s activities and approaches to teaching English helped me
to try out some new activities with much success.

Working with Anandi’s narrative had a profound long-term impact on my approach to
curriculum design. When I began observing her teaching I felt that I was in the presence of an
expert who made something complex look easy. I observed keenly and during interviews learned
about how she approaches designing curriculum. While engaged in the analysis of Anandi’s data,
I simultaneously was working on overhauling a grade 9 English course of study, while acting as
the lead teacher for that grade level at Mapleforest. I decided to implement the storybook
assignment as a culminating activity to the study of world mythology for three reasons: first, I
had observed how she had done it; second, it was multimodal and covered all areas of the
secondary English curriculum expectations; third it allowed for the individual voices of students
to emerge in a way that an essay or test would not.
My first and second attempts at working through this unit of study have resulted in significant professional learning for me, despite meeting with some glitches. From watching Anandi and attempting to orchestrate curriculum similar to what I observed in her practice, I have learned to organize instruction in the direction of goals that involve multiple literacies, which emerge out of student choices, and which connect more directly with students’ lifeworlds.

6.4.3 Second lesson: self awareness. In a similar fashion as my pilot study, working with experienced teachers’ narratives created an interaction with my professional narratives that allowed me to step back from my story and view it as the narrative of a character in the story of education. This narrative stepping back was different than it had been in my pilot study, where I discovered how powerfully observing the points at which stories have resonance (Conle, 1996) with each other can alter perception of the inquirer’s own narrative. Tanya’s narrative in particular held many resonances where I saw myself reflected in her practice. I learned from observing and interviewing Tanya and seeing myself reflected in her teaching some ways in which I have shifted since my days teaching at the same school. Working with her, I was coincidentally back in the same room in which I had my confrontation with Gabriel, which became a frozen narrative in my story of teaching, as seen in chapter 1 and 6.2. Sitting calmly at the back of the windowless room I felt removed from the teacher I had been in that narrative, as if a lens had zoomed out and presented the environment that produced the story as it was. I resonated with what Tanya was doing, and instead of viewing her as an expert whose skill was far beyond mine as I did with my experienced colleagues when I worked at Viceroy in 2001, I recognized the skill in her work and also realized that I was as capable a teacher. Working with Tanya reinforced for me how much I have developed my practice over the past ten years.
Not only did working with Tanya help me to see how I had changed, but it also helped me to re-story the narrative I had developed about Viceroy Park and its students. While I recognized that the demographics of the school were similar to those when I worked there, I also recognized that my continued impression of the school being tough, unpleasant, even dangerous, was poorly founded. Instead I witnessed an urban school with a range of strengths and challenges and observed both students and staff striving to grow within a positive engaging community.

6.4.4 Third lesson: innovation requires practice first. Finally, while writing interacting in both phases of the research with Anandi and Tanya’s narratives, I have had to re-consider the focus of this dissertation, which began with me, the novice educational researcher, finding a theory which passably fit a phenomenon I was trying to describe in secondary English: that a small number of experienced teachers were beginning to innovate in response to changes in the urban student population and changes in modes of communication. When I had found one that matched, multiliteracies pedagogy, I believed that my job would be trying to fit the narratives of participants into that theory. What Tanya and Anandi’s stories helped me to see was how my participants and I work with our personal practical knowledge and our personal and professional identities to respond to the phenomenon of cultural change on a practical level that the New London Group began to theorize. Practice had come first; before I contacted them, neither participant had heard of multiliteracies pedagogy, though once I had explained its key features, they both recognized the theory in their practice. I had already understood the concept of personal practical knowledge and seen how experience manifested itself in practice, but my viewpoint was limited. Having observed few teachers with innovative practice, I had formed a tacit conception that personal practical knowledge resulted in replication of an individual’s status
quotient. I had assumed that innovation could only come out of theory. The experience of recognizing that not only mainstream practice, but innovative practice emerges out of experience in response to a practitioner’s interactions with Self and Other narratives has resulted in the three major findings of this project, which I will discuss at length in the following chapter.

6.4.5 The View from here: emergence amid fog. My interest in teacher development arose out of my own burnout from reality shock (Veenman, 1984) when I returned from Japan and began teaching at Viceroy. This interest in burnout in general has evolved into an interest in what keeps teachers going, the innovations that help teachers feel that their work is relevant and that gives them a sense of purpose in their practice. My own teaching innovations have been the biggest source of career satisfaction, despite my perfectionist Self narrative that creates conflicts within my story of professional development, it is important enough to me that I have developed another passion: teacher development. Understanding how and why experienced teachers learn to innovate through my interactions with Anandi and Tanya has led to some tentative applications of these findings. Currently I am facing a new challenge which I have chosen as a means of developing leadership experience in secondary English: I have been hired at a new school as Curriculum Leader with the purpose of developing innovative practices within the English department. The following narrative excerpt captures my view as I move into a new school year with challenges beyond my own classroom.

6.4.6 Leading experienced teachers in change. In April 2012 as I competed for the job as curriculum leader of English, drama and ESL at Valley Stream Collegiate, I had to explain to the principal and vice-principal who were interviewing me what leadership skills I possessed. I sat
across from them in the principal’s book-lined office in a leather chair and remembered to sit straight and lean forward slightly as I launched into my prepared answer about my research in teacher development and how that has led to skills I have demonstrated in my work at Mapleforest. While providing two examples, my mind flashed through a whole series of memories I had considered the night before that are highlights in the gradual shift I made into becoming a leader of experienced teachers.

It’s 2005, and I am the youngest teacher at a lunchtime English meeting at Mapleforest. We’ve all responded to the paper memo in our staff mailboxes with the familiar visage of the Droeshout (1622) portrait of Shakespeare in the upper right hand corner. One of the agenda items listed on the chalkboard is new texts. Tompson Highway’s *Res Sisters* (1986) comes up as a possibility for the grade 11 course, which I teach. I’m excited about the suggestion. I’ve studied the play and been involved in a student production of it directed by Ken Gass at the University of Toronto. There is a First Nations student in my class this year, who I think would love to see something by this famous Native author. Ronald, a teacher with more than twenty years of experience starts to speak. *Not again,* I think to myself, another rant. He sputters, “Do you mean that this would replace *Macbeth* in the course?”

“Well, it could,” deposits Lawrence, the department head.

“I think that’s preposterous! How do we know these modern texts are any good? They haven’t stood the test of time.”

Being the newest teacher on staff, I usually keep my opinions to myself, but I feel a rush of indignance, and my face blushing read as I retort, “of course the text has merit!”

“Have you read it?” Ronald spits my way.

“Yes, I’ve studied it several times.”
“But still, I don’t know that it’s good enough for the academic course,” he continues, unwavering in his stance.

Heart pumping, I persist, “If it’s good enough for two professors at the University of Toronto, it’s good enough for me. He was the writer in residence there in 1993, you know.”

“Well, I don’t know anything about that. I guess it must be okay,” Ronald concedes grudgingly. But, he ultimately wins the argument, because the text does not appear on the syllabus for any of the following year’s courses.

My mind jumps forward to an English department meeting in the 2007/2008 school year. Lawrence has moved on to another school and Catherine has stepped into his role. Catherine is my unofficial mentor for teaching English. I respect her pedagogical and content knowledge and when I have questions about assessment or curriculum I enjoy mulling them over with her. Since she joined the department at Mapleforest the year after I arrived, I have learned immeasurable things from her about my craft.

The discussion in today’s meeting is about the writing folders that are serving as a culminating activity for all students in all classes. Staff are trying to find some sort of consistent approach that we can all use to address some of the problems we are having managing this assignment. “Well,” says Marlene, “I’m finding that so many of them are missing multiple assignments. They are going to fail.”

“It’s the same for me,” Ronald agrees. “We have a real problem here.”

“Yes,” said Catherine, “I’m wondering how valid the assignment is as a culminating activity, given that these things are supposed to represent the students’ skill at the end of the year, rather than draw from the entire year.”
“Yes,” I pipe in, wanting to add a point about teaching design skills, and “if it’s simply a record of things they’ve done, it doesn’t demonstrate any learning. What I’m doing is asking them to select three pieces from throughout the year and produce a new draft in which they focus on one particular skill. One new draft will demonstrate their skill in revision of ideas, another editing structure, and third proofreading to polish language usage and formatting. They then have to write a reflection in which they discuss the rationale behind the changes they made in each paper, and discuss what skill they believe they developed significantly that year.”

“So you’re only collecting three pieces of writing in the folder?” Catherine asks thoughtfully, eyes narrowed in a look I was learning to understand meant she was rolling things over in her mind.

“That’s all I’m evaluating.” I explain, “There’s no need to mark any more if those are the three things I’m assessing. They can include more than three pieces if they like, but I’m only looking at new drafts for marks. That way it truly is a culminating activity in which they demonstrate the writing skills they have learned over the year.”

“Hmmm.”

I decide to make another point that had been bothering me about the assignment, “The other problem with using the folder as a culminating activity worth ten percent of the year is that it only assesses the writing strand of the curriculum. Then we have an exam that is a reading and writing assignment worth twenty percent. And media studies and the new oral communication strand are left unrepresented in that huge percentage of the marks. And the curriculum documents emphasize that we should be weighing each of those curriculum strands equally. With these assignments at the end of the year it’s just not happening.”

“So what do you think should be at the end of the year?” inquires Ronald.
“I think it should be a media assignment that involves oral communication that is weighed at fifteen percent, paired with the exam valued at fifteen percent.”

“Even for the academic classes?” Marlene asks, somewhat incredulously.

“I think so…”

Over the next year and a half our department had several more discussions like this. Catherine made the decision in 2009/2010 when I was on maternity leave to do away with the folders as a culminating activity and replace them with presentations. When I arrived back in September of 2010 after assuming the department head position after Catherine had stepped down, I had another happy curriculum surprise. Ronald had created an innovative unit of study based on some text suggestions he had been exposed to at a professional development workshop. Using a high interest low vocabulary text about Hurricane Carter, he had devised a critical literacy unit, which involved a comparison of four different media texts on the story of Lesra Martin’s involvement in overturning Carter’s murder conviction. When I perused the materials I had been handed to use in my grade nine classes that year, I smiled. “This is great!” I exclaimed thinking of my Afro-Canadian students, and of reluctant boy readers who might find this story more exciting than *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Shakespeare, 1974). Privately, I also remembered the argument I had had with Ronald a few years earlier and thought how happy I was to see this shift in his use of texts beyond a slim margin of literary criteria.

I remember how as a new assistant curriculum leader, I began to defend my more experienced colleagues in department head meetings with the school administration who accused them of being “dinosaurs”.

With heart pumping hard at one meeting in which the vice-principal accused my colleagues of being out of touch I said, “Actually, I think you’re mistaken. If you went upstairs
and looked in at Ronald’s classroom, you’d find him doing a really innovative unit of study that he devised, which the whole department is now using. You’d find that the English department is shifting towards a multiliteracies curriculum. What I think the administration is not recognizing is that teachers are learners too. It takes time to learn how to do something differently. It took me five years of trial and revision to learn how to use book clubs effectively, for example.” When I finish I see him looking back at me blankly, and I assume he is unconvinced.

That same year, before I left for medical treatment, I made changes to Ronald’s unit of study to tie it in with the spoken word workshop that the guest artist brought in. One day in the English office, Catherine said to me conversationally, “Yes, it’s great having her in, but I don’t know how to connect it to what we’re doing. I guess it’ll just be enrichment.”

“Oh, yes it is enrichment, but it ties in very nicely…” I began and then launched into an explanation of what I planned to do. When I told her how I was using protest songs as a bridge, which would link to themed research on a topic students were concerned about that they would base their spoken word poem on, I noticed Catherine giving me that look again, head to the side, eyes thoughtfully narrowed, weighing with her many years of experience the quality of my concept.

“Did you just think of that?” she asked when I was done.

“It occurred to me yesterday after school that it was a great way to link the workshop into what we’re doing, and I worked it out from there.”

“Hmmm.” She nodded thoughtfully and turned back to her work.

In the 2010/2011 year after returning from my medical absence I was working with my colleagues under a new department head. He came from another school, the first outside head in ten years and brought seven years of teaching experience with him, one of the newest teachers in
the department. Catherine was assigned as his official mentor, but I noticed he came to me with questions about curriculum. I found this somewhat uncomfortable, because I knew Catherine wanted to help him, but I enjoyed explaining my vision of change to this newcomer, who clearly shared my philosophy.

Because of my half-time status, administrators apologetically told me on several occasions why I was not invited to join some of the curricular committees that met in our school. I respond with “yes, yes, of course I understand,” but deep down I felt sad that cancer was keeping me from using my growing knowledge to provide leadership at my school.

One day, one of the instructional leaders, who I have been getting to know in recent years, from the board offices pops into see me in my classroom during my preparation time. She has spent the morning at Mapleforest working with Catherine, Ronald and the new department head that are on a committee to revise English literacy curriculum and teaching practices. She had come to invite me to present a workshop at a professional development day she is hosting for all the English curriculum leaders. Ash she sits down, she about my health and then says, “Even though you’re not officially a leader at this school, I think your colleagues recognize you as one. We just had a lively discussion in which several of them told me the things that are happening in the curriculum thanks to you.”

When I returned to the English office at lunch after accepting the invitation, Catherine breezed in and said to me, “We were talking about you at our meeting! They were trying to tell us how to make our curriculum better and I told them, ‘Well, we already do this, and this, and this because of Laura’s work.’” I smiled because I had heard the same story from both sides, and it felt good to hear how Catherine, my mentor of so many years, had been championing me
as innovator in school, setting us against a perceived outsider who came in with the assumption that our work was behind the times.

Sometimes in job interviews I feel like an imposter, but as these memories flashed in quick succession in my memory, I didn’t. I was assured that I know something about leading experienced colleagues in change. I said, “Well, what I do is first recognize and try to respect the knowledge of my experienced colleagues. I like to encourage change by example, taking a unit of study that someone else has made, and then making adjustments in the direction of multiliteracies, then bringing back samples of student work and saying, ‘thanks for that great material; look what my students did with it.’ I try to show colleagues by example how it works, while recognizing their knowledge and their contributions to the department.” While I spoke both administrators wrote ample notes and paused occasionally to make eye contact with me and nod.

I got the job. When I went to visit the school at the end of June, I understood the connection between what I had said in the interview and why I had been hired. The department is well supplied and incredibly organized. The courses of study were all sent to me electronically completed on the school’s official template. When I read the content of the courses, they reflect a traditional approach to English as a genre based study of literature. In this new position, I am beginning again. There is an experienced staff with an established program, and my job is to encourage a shift, and to lead my colleagues towards innovation.

I know that as I begin at this new school I have to keep a number of things I know about teacher development in mind if I want to have success in encouraging change. I know that teachers share many similarities with their students when they are learning, and that it takes time for people to learn to do something different, especially if they have a long-established practice
of doing things in one particular way. Like students, some teachers resist change. I know this resistance often comes because a change conflicts with a professional’s existing personal practical knowledge and professional narratives. These types of resistances are both connected to an individual’s interacting narratives, creating a point of friction on the professional landscape.
My job as a curriculum leader is in part to learn about my colleagues and to help find narrative bridges to connect them to any changes I encourage them to make in their practice. I also know that teachers need autonomy – they are used to it and it is being popularly touted as an essential ingredient for innovation (Pink, 2006). As a leader, I need to find ways to help colleagues see the fog of change not as an unwelcome damper, but as an adventure into the unknown.

6.5 Summary of What, Why and How I Learned about Multiliteracies Pedagogy

Conducting an analysis of the interactions of prominent narratives on my metaphorical professional learning river landscape with my prominent Self narratives using the method of drawing the journey, has resulted in a rich understanding of significant moments of professional learning. I have discussed how the life narratives of growing up have influenced the development of certain learning and performance tendencies I possess, or my chosen Self and professional narratives. With this understanding I am better able to evaluate the interactions that occur between Other narratives and my Self narratives as they occur in the professional landscape. Interactions are easier to examine from the distance of time, which allows the inquirer to evaluate her role as a character in a narrative conflict from an emotional distance that may exist for a present issue. However, I have also shown in this chapter how narrative inquiry and an understanding of narrative interaction can help practitioners work through narrative conflicts as they happen, because re-storying different possibilities for action provides a rehearsal for new
ways of being that if enacted, lead to new possibilities and can aid in the transformation of practice.

After zooming in on the narrative excerpts which I have identified as important points along my metaphorical professional learning river landscape and zooming back out to provide a patchwork panorama of the pedagogical transformation I have undergone, I have pieced together an understanding about what I know, and why and how I developed that knowledge through the interaction of chosen and unchosen, Self and Other narratives. As I transition from here to the final chapter of this dissertation, which provides a summary of my findings I have presented my vantage point as of summer 2012. This view of the drawn out journey that has come before and the foggy going ahead leaves me with three main findings and a further research question, which I present next in chapter 7.
CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS

In this final chapter I address three areas: contributions of the research, recommendations for practice, and areas for further study before concluding with a final narrative. In 7.1 Contributions to Narrative Inquiry, Multiliteracies Theory and Teacher Development, I summarize how the study synthesizes and extends knowledge from these areas of study. 7.2, Fostering Innovation in Secondary English: Recommendations for Practice, connects examples from the study to applications in educational practice. In 7.3 I explore questions for further study. Finally, in 7.4 Flowing Downriver I end with a narrative that re-connects the study to my practice.

7.1 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions to Narrative Inquiry, Multiliteracies Theory and Teacher Development

In this section I discuss two major findings that contribute to narrative inquiry, multiliteracies theory and teacher development. The first finding is theoretical, combining the concepts of interacting narratives from narrative inquiry and design from multiliteracies theory to describe a process of teacher development. The second finding is methodological, providing a new system of analyzing interacting narratives.

The most significant contribution of this study is its theoretical melding of concepts from narrative inquiry and multiliteracies theory, furthering our understanding of teacher development. By combining the concepts of interacting narratives and design, the study describes two modes of teachers’ development of personal practical knowledge: inadvertent evolution and intentional design. This finding arises from aligning theories about the development of personal practical knowledge through interaction with multiliteracies pedagogy
and its concept of the semiotic process of transforming Available Designs into the Redesigned, which:

(i)s never a reinstatement of one Available Design or even a simple recombination of Available Designs; the Redesigned may be variously creative or reproductive in relation to the resources for meaning-making available in Available Designs. But it is neither a simple reproduction (as the myth of standards and transmission pedagogy would have us believe), nor is it simply creative (as the myths of individual originality and personal voice would have us believe). As the play of cultural resources and uniquely positioned subjectivity, the Redesigned is founded on historically and culturally received patterns of meaning. At the same time it is the unique product of human agency: a transformed meaning. (New London Group,1996/2000 IN B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (EDS), p. 23)

Upon reading this definition in the early stages of my research, I began to draw parallels between narrative inquiry and multimodal design. In particular, I repeatedly sensed a resonance between the processes of multiliteracies pedagogy (situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice (ibid, p. 35)) and the intentional design of my emerging narrative inquiry.

The acquisition of personal practical knowledge involves at least two processes, which I define here. Inadvertent evolution of personal practical knowledge is ongoing and generally tacit. It arises from interactions among and between Self and Other narratives when available knowledge designs are internalized and/or replicated. In other words, when a teacher learns to apply established practices through observation and imitation, his/her personal practical knowledge evolves inadvertently. Over time, a teacher acquires a significant body of knowledge
through this process. This process is not a simple replication of knowledge; each interaction contributes to ongoing gradual shifts in the development of personal practical knowledge, but it is not a significantly creative process in which innovative change to practice is made. The intentional design of personal practical knowledge is innovative and involves the stages of design described in multiliteracies pedagogy. First, a question arises about the available pedagogical designs. Next, the teacher seeks overt instruction regarding the question. Following the overt instruction is a period of critical framing during which the teacher evaluates current personal practical knowledge. After this reflection and evaluation, the teacher begins to transform practice by intentionally redesigning curriculum and thereby personal practical knowledge. This cycle is ongoing and through teacher directed professional interactions, leads to creative innovation beyond established practices.

In this study the process of intentional design of personal practical knowledge is most evident in my interactions with co-participants and the impact of our interacting narratives on my pedagogical knowledge. I began my intentional design process with my research question; I was dissatisfied with the available designs of my personal practical knowledge and wanted to know how established English teachers had learned innovative approaches to teaching. My interactions with co-participants during data collection and the composition of narrative accounts constituted overt instruction in the curricular approaches that constituted their available designs, but which were different than mine. The narrative reflection that occurred as I analyzed data, a process in which my narratives interacted with theirs, resulted in critical framing of my teaching practices and pedagogical knowledge. This critical framing allowed me to transform practice, resulting eventually in intentionally redesigned personal practical knowledge about teaching and teacher development.
The second major finding arises from the theoretical development regarding intentional design. It synthesizes the work of Clandinin & Connelly (2000), Craig (2007) and Beattie (Beattie, Thornton, Dobson, & Hegge, 2005; Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge, 2007; Beattie, 2009), proposing a new metaphor for conceptualizing interacting narratives and a new method of analyzing their effects on professional practice that considers the complexity of both internal and external interactions. The new metaphor involves a professional ecosystem and accounts for increased levels of complexity when considering how narratives interact to drive professional learning than previous models.

The metaphor conceptualizes narrative interaction between the individual and professional ecosystem as a series of processes that result in sedimentation (inadvertent accumulation of personal practical knowledge) or growth (intentional design). Drawing from Beattie’s work on interacting narratives, the individual is represented as an organism composed of three types of Self narratives: (a) life narratives, which are those aspects of a person’s biography they cannot choose, such as ancestry, genetics, place of birth, parentage, and childhood stories determined by adults responsible for care; (b) chosen personal narratives, which are narratives selected by the individual for some function in their personal life, such as gender, relationships, affiliations, activities; and (c) chosen professional narratives, stories selected for their function in professional practice, such as professional identities and affiliations. This individual is positioned in the professional knowledge ecosystem and simultaneously has impact on and is impacted by the environment.

The nature of the impact of the professional environment on the individual is influenced by how he/she has been shaped by the ongoing evolution and design of her/his interacting Self narratives. Some interactions result in sedimentation or ossification (Conle, 2000; Hegge, 2007),
which involves the development of inadvertent personal practical knowledge and hegemonic group practices. Such interactions occur when an individual or group reinforces situated curricular practices, building up practices on a foundation of tradition instead of inquiry or critique. Other interactions spur transformation. Transformative interactions become dynamic and ongoing when they are “selected for their conditioning effects” (Beattie, Dobson, Thornton, & Hegge, 2007) and the landscape and individual provide each other with stimulus for growth.

Interactions leading to intentional design focus on critical framing and transformation of situated practices. Both types of interactions exist and are necessary within the framework of an individual or group’s journey through the ecosystem.

This metaphor is employed in the new method of analysis to conceptualize ways of framing narrative interactions to examine their different natures and qualities as they occur over the course of an individual’s career in different contexts. Considering the movement of a single organism through its professional environment lays ground for a method of analyzing the complex interactions that occur as the individual travels through time and space. Since it is impossible to capture all the complexities of interaction in a professional environment, one of the concerns with conducting narrative inquiries into interacting narratives is with framing. There are different kinds of interaction and different ways of looking at those interactions. Using photographic language to describe how a narrative inquirer can capture and describe the professional in her or his environment, the method first involves finding a frame for the data.

As a narrative researcher examines data, he or she can look closely or step back, with perspective varying from a portrait, with an individual as primary focus, a landscape, with the professional terrain as primary focus, or a photojournalist’s essay, with the first person perspective of the hand holding the camera (see Table 2 on page 76-77), depending on the aims.
of the research. This method offers greater clarity and precision in data analysis than previously available in the way in which it addresses ways of looking and takes the researcher into the environment as a co-constructor of meaning.

7.2 Fostering Innovation in Secondary English: Recommendations for Practice

This section first describes how I drew findings from the pattern of interactions resulting in curricular innovation that emerged from the participants’ cases. Next I examine my interactions with co-participants and the accompanying transformation of my personal practical knowledge. Finally, I offer recommendations for teaching and implications for educational leadership.

The theoretical development of the concept of intentional design emerged from the interacting narratives in this study. In each of the three narrative cases, life narratives shaped the direction of participants’ professional learning as we responded to stimulus in our professional learning environments. These cases demonstrate how professional learning often begins in experience, when it is integrated into personal practical knowledge. Personal practical knowledge underlies individuals’ philosophical beliefs, professional narratives and orientations towards future practice. When no experiences or interactions in the professional ecosystem challenge personal practical knowledge and its accompanying professional narratives, they are reinforced. In order to innovate, the participants in this study had exposure to experience(s) that were challenging, providing impetus for change. They way in which these challenges collided with Self narratives in the professional ecosystem caused participants’ desire for professional growth and initiated processes of intentional design of new personal practical knowledge. These cases show how dominant narratives in the professional ecosystem can interact with individuals’
personal practical knowledge with divergent results. Such interactions can on one extreme replicate the status quotient, promoting the ossification of narratives of practice, or on the other end of the spectrum, interactions between Self and Other narratives in the professional ecosystem can promote innovation. Many interactions fall between the two extremes, but the ones I focus on here sit on these polarities.

Anandi’s case provides many examples of narrative interactions spurring innovation, revealed in the way prominent life narratives colour all aspects of her professional narratives and influence how she interacts with her professional ecosystem. Growing up as a biracial child in a homogeneous community motivated Anandi to focus her professional activity on social justice and inclusion. She interpreted the student diversity at her school as an opportunity to create an inclusive community and spread awareness about the benefits of acceptance. Her mother’s flair for community building influenced her professional focus on developing learning communities that extend beyond the classroom and she engaged in professional learning through both extracurricular involvement and experimentation with curriculum that forged connections outside the school walls, extending students’ sense of belonging into the broader community. In response to the challenge presented by significant numbers of reluctant learners struggling with literacy at her school, Anandi made a number of narrative interactions that led her to stretch professionally and develop the children’s literature course. Throughout her professional narrative of learning is the constant echo of her life stories: the biracial student who felt that she did not fit in at school, the girl who struggled with the demands of her father and found solace in reading, the child who absorbed her mother’s model of celebrating struggling students’ successes. Tanya’s case holds a similar pattern.
In chapter 5, we see the roots of innovative practice in the way Tanya’s life narratives interact with her professional ecosystem. The story of the child who struggled in school and was raised by a family that provided firm encouragement spurs much of her professional learning. In Tanya’s case this prominent life narrative is the foundation for her chosen Self narrative about transforming into a reader, which in turn informs her professional narrative and her interactions with students. Tanya has “been a teacher first” since she “met the library” and transformed with the help of special teachers from a student who struggled into a strong and confident learner. This narrative of transformation informs her professional narrative in two ways: by influencing her approach to students, and by influencing her keenness to continually transform and innovate in her practice.

In chapter six my story is an example of both extremes: how professional narratives can become frozen and how the right conditions can lead to renewal and transformation. I showed how my personal practical knowledge at the beginning of my career clashed with an environment at Viceroy Collegiate for which I was ill prepared. My practice ossified into an untenable situation where I was experiencing my work as a failure and my role as a victim of circumstance. My life narrative emerging from childhood interactions with parents resulted in a theme of responsibility that influenced my interaction with this professional ecosystem, fueling my drive to be a good teacher and initiating my search for innovation in classroom practice. While my route to innovation was more circuitous than my co-participants’, I also drew on childhood experience to develop my innovative practice. Knowing school was my strength, I believed graduate studies would eventually reveal an alternative to my untenable teaching practice. I also knew about theatre and rehearsal, through my background in drama, and this knowledge allowed
me to overcome the overwhelming hegemony of traditional classroom approaches that were meeting with such failure.

Realizing that there was a pattern of interaction in the three narrative accounts led to the theoretical extrapolation that different types of narrative interactions result in different types of personal practical knowledge. The theory of intentional design emerged fully when I examined the effects that my research interactions with co-participants had on my teaching. As I composed my own narrative account, I began to see this study as a process of intentional design of personal practical knowledge. I had hit a critical point in my early teaching career where my existing knowledge was insufficient to cope with the challenges I faced in my environment. My Self narratives led me to graduate studies in search of a solution to my professional challenges, and I intentionally sought courses and eventually this study to help me modify my own teaching practice. Once I had identified and named this phenomenon, differentiating the process from the inadvertent evolution of personal practical knowledge, I understood that the same process was at work in the narrative accounts of my co-participants. The significant challenges that they discussed caused them to examine situated curricular practices, seek overt instruction from mentors, courses, or collaborations with colleagues, critically frame their own practice and transform curricular approaches, re-designing their personal practical knowledge in the process. This finding has practical implications for both teaching and educational leadership.

Fostering innovation in English education is an important goal, particularly at this historical juncture. Implications that emerge from the finding of the role intentional design of personal practical knowledge plays in developing innovative practices cover two areas: teacher development and educational leadership.
Teachers can use the intentional design process to develop autonomy over their learning and broaden their range of responses to interactions in the professional ecosystem. Beyond applying the design cycle to intentionally transform personal practical knowledge, my narrative account explores two important ways in which the process can be extended through intense self reflection and fictionalizing practice during the design cycle to rehearse change. In this section of the discussion, I will focus on the benefits and implications of these processes.

The most dramatic benefit I received from using narrative inquiry as a form of professional reflection was relief from the burnout I had been experiencing while stuck in a frozen practice. More than any other form of professional development in which I have participated, a chosen practice of narrative inquiry and application of the design cycle to my teaching practice has allowed me to experience the greatest sense of positive change and transformation. The cause of this benefit lies in the way in which narrative inquiry involves multiple dimensions of personal practical knowledge, engaging the researcher on a number of levels, which in my case included moral, affective, aesthetic and intellectual facets of my knowledge. Because of its potential to engage and exercise a researcher’s personal practical knowledge in complex interactions among its various dimensions and to create new understandings from these internal exchanges, narrative inquiry offers participants the benefits of an intensely reflective practice. Intense self reflection allows a teacher to clearly see patterns of practice that were previously tacit or hidden. By making such patterns of practice explicit, the person engaging in reflection gains control over them and develops narrative agency, paving the way for overt instruction and critical framing using new forms of curriculum design in the present and future.
Another important benefit that narrative inquiry offers as a method of reflective teacher development is through its conscious application of story. In chapter 6, I demonstrated how I used story as a means of rehearsing changes in my practice when introducing book clubs to a resistant class of students. By fictionalizing my story of teaching, changing my memory of what happened to a fiction of what I hoped might happen in a similar situation in the future, I was able to narrow the gap between theory and practice, rehearsing for real life change. Although the use of fiction in qualitative research is still a highly contested issue, I believe that there is great ethical value in using fiction as a method of reflection and professional development. By rehearsing desired scenarios of practice in writing, practitioners can try out new ways of being without any negative impact on students. Unlike drama, which has been used as an arts-based method of rehearsal of new ways of being (Boal, 1985; Gallagher, 2000), writing a fictionalized narrative provides a permanent record of a teacher’s reflection, which can be used for further reflection and change in the future. It is in part because I had a trail of narrative reflections that I could return to and compare against the narratives of other teachers that I was able to transform my practice. A written rehearsal of new modes of practice using the artifice of fiction provides teachers with instant and permanent feedback on their reflection and helps to provide an aesthetic experience that bridges the gap between theoretical professional learning and enacting something new in classroom practice. This finding has important implications for experienced teachers, who, unlike preservice teachers and beginning teachers enrolled in mentorship programs, do not have a forum to practice new theoretical knowledge other than their practicing classroom. Story can provide imagined experience that substitutes for personal practical knowledge and allows for change in practice. Making these tools available to teachers through courses in teacher education
and graduate study could have many benefits to successfully encouraging innovative changes to practice.

Fostering innovation in schools is not an undertaking that should be left solely to teachers. Administrators have a responsibility to ensure that curriculum changes to meet the shifting needs of a school community. So often, however, top-down measures do not result in the kind of practical transformation that leads to innovation in classroom teaching. This study shows how the professional ecosystem plays a pivotal role in the development of innovative teacher knowledge. Tanya, Anandi and I connected with different niches within our professional ecosystems that supported our innovations. This common experience implies that administrators would benefit from paying careful attention to the kind of environment that they cultivate in schools for the teacher/learners they have in their faculties. In particular, they need to cultivate environments that support innovation by promoting the autonomy and efficacy of teachers, and by paying attention to the narratives of experience of the staff in the school.

Promoting the autonomy and efficacy of teachers involves establishing a narrative of trust in the professional ecosystem. This trust is placed in the personal practical knowledge of teachers and in their imaginations. Trusting teachers’ experienced knowledge, even if it has resulted in a current practice that is not desired by administrators or policy makers, is an acknowledgement of teachers as learners with existing knowledge that was acquired for a reason, and with the potential to change. All three teachers in this study had an outlet at some point in their professional narratives where their personal practical knowledge was affirmed and extended. Tanya learned from colleagues in her first placement that she was a teacher first, and could teach anything, including math. Anandi learned from her mentor to teach to her strengths. I found
affirmation in what I was good at: study; and I drew on my theatre background to develop the ability to rehearse change in my practice.

When teachers have a safe space where personal practical knowledge is validated, they can then face challenges to practice with imagination, which allows for critical framing of current practice, a key step in the process of innovation. Tanya can imagine the experience of struggling students, which helps her to envision what she needs to do to alter practice to meet their needs. Anandi imagined a new approach to teaching reluctant learners, and in her daily practice imagines their lifeworlds so that she can respond and adapt her planning. I imagined different relationships with students that led to an adoption of student-centred practices. These innovations required imagination, and administrators could encourage innovations in their schools by validating teachers’ personal practical knowledge, and then using this validation to support the use of imagination and lateral thinking in curricular problem solving.

Establishing trust in the professional ecosystem can be accomplished when administrators pay attention to teachers’ experiences in the workplace. Regardless of the efforts of principals, new initiatives that are ill received by teachers do not result in meaningful change. Administrators need to study narrative interaction in order to understand how and where teachers position themselves in the professional ecosystem. As players who hold responsibility for establishing the tone of the environment, administrators can make greater impact by being responsive to the prevailing currents among teaching staff and helping to nudge them into intentional evolution by motivating interactions that respect their current expertise. Understanding how teachers’ narratives interact over time in the workplace can aid administrators in consciously landscaping the ecosystem with their own well-placed interactions
and interventions that, with the foresight of the chess player, are designed to result in a winning outcome.

### 7.3 Questions for Further Study

There are many questions that arise out of this study, but there are four that I believe are most pressing and worthy of attention here.

The focus of this inquiry was on understanding how complex narrative interactions influence innovation in teaching practice, and because of its small number of participants, I was able to delve into these interactions in significant detail. A larger study conducted over several school years in a single school with a learning community of innovative teachers would compliment and augment the findings that have emerged from this study. In a longitudinal study, the researcher could examine how the Self narratives of individual teachers interact with Others in the same professional ecosystem to promote innovation. As well, a longitudinal study would allow the researcher to develop a landscape view of each participant, which would then provide a basis for the comparison of learning experiences. This would be a valuable extension of this study because it would tell a different story about how teachers form innovative learning partnerships with each other.

I recommend further study into the use of narrative as a tool for rehearsing practitioners’ learning and innovation. This study could either involve preservice teachers or experienced teachers who are trying to change their practice. Boal (1985) and Gallagher (2000) have demonstrated that drama is an effective tool for growth and political change. Many, including Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) and Beattie et al (2007) show that aesthetic practice can be used to deepen teachers’ practice. This study shows some promise for the use of written fictionalized narrative
as a form of teacher rehearsal, and further study using multiple participants would extend our understanding of these results.

A final recommended study emerging from this research involves educational leadership. If interacting narratives are a prominent factor determining the path of experienced teachers’ learning, and if the desired outcome of educational leaders is transformation of current standard teaching practices into innovative models of curriculum emerging out of the rapid social and technological changes of our times, then the question arises: How can educational leaders create a professional ecosystem that encourages interactions in the direction of innovation?

Finally, the theory of intentional design of personal practical knowledge has applications outside the field of education. Caring and relational professions, such as nursing, medicine, psychotherapy and social work would all benefit from this knowledge, and it would be useful to conduct research examining the role of interacting narratives in professional development in these and other fields. Areas of interest include:

• the role of intentional design and restorying narratives in patient care and wellness, and
• the healthcare professional’s interacting narratives and patient-centered care.

Studies in these areas would provide valuable insights that could enrich patients’ experiences of illness and may help health practitioners become more responsive to interactions with patients in their care.

7.4 Flowing Downstream

I stand at the end of this research journey with my feet in the river looking downstream, feeling excited about how this research has transformed my approach to classroom teaching and guided me into teacher development as a leader and mentor. I think back to Gabriel and
recognize the beginning of this transformation when I “melted” my frozen narrative by restorying my confrontation with him, thereby pushing myself out into shifting currents in the professional ecosystem. Now I use my knowledge of interacting narratives and the intentional design of personal practical knowledge in my day-to-day exchanges with colleagues and students. I end this research story with the view from here, looking downstream towards the goal of supporting others in their own professional learning.

*I*  

I see Sonia’s look of concern as I walk into the room. I infer that it is a result of the outside pressure imposed from the Ministry mandated professional development session from which we have just emerged. Watching the impact of this meeting register in her as a shift from excitement about professional development to dismay concerns me. “How are you feeling about that meeting?” I ask.

“Well, not so good. I think the whole thing is a waste of time and taking us away from the work we’ve already been doing."

I nod, thinking about the day of release time we had last spring to revise the grade nine course outline. I remember her exclaiming excitedly, “This is refreshing. I think I’m really getting a sense of the direction we’re going in and I’m really happy about the time and space we’re taking to actually learn how to do this. I feel like I have the chance to try things out.” Smiles, laughter and the feeling of satisfaction from a job well done flash through my mind as I say, “I don’t think that woman had any awareness of the situation she was coming into. She seems to have it all figured out and thinks that we don’t know what we’re doing here. She missed us.”
“Oh, I’m so glad you said that,” she says as she bounds across the office to give me a bear hug. “I really felt that, and I’m so glad you noticed. She was talking and I was getting red-faced, and I noticed you were too.”

“Yes. And we’ll find a way to make this work for us. We’ll use their time and money to do the things that we are already working on. She is not going to change my plans or what I am doing. We’ve got something here already that is working really well.”

“Okay. Good. I feel a bit better about it now.”

After Sonia leaves the office for the day I say to another colleague, “It’s too bad how poorly these people understand teacher’s learning. I’ve been working for the past year to understand where people are coming from here and to meet them where they are as highly trained professionals. This person obviously knows a lot about teaching literacy strategies to students, but she is not at all aware of the best ways to reach teachers.” As I look ahead, I know that my team of colleagues and I will weather the onerous schedule of externally imposed professional development meetings, and I realize that this new unchosen narrative is simply another story that I will have to blend with the waters I am traveling along in the ongoing journey of professional learning.


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