“Sometimes Children Can be Smarter Than Grown-ups”: Re/constructing Identities with Plurilingual Students in English-Medium Elementary Classrooms

by

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Abstract

Monolingual, monocultural approaches to education in Canada overlook the tremendous cultural and linguistic resources present in our classrooms and communities. Connecting language teaching and learning with a politics of global location and broader social issues relating to migration and diversity, this dissertation explores how dichotomous understandings of ‘native’/’nonnative’ students neglect these interlocking and intersecting dimensions of experience.

The dissertation employed Lather’s (2007) critical praxis methodology to generate data from a collaborative research project involving teachers, students, and university-based researchers. The purpose of this project was to explore the educational significance of engaging students in authentic forms of cultural production that drew upon their cultural and linguistic resources, diverse histories, and multiple modes of representation in classroom-based learning. While endeavouring to contribute to positive change in education practice, the dissertation directs a critical gaze toward the dominant and marginalizing practices and discourses that materialized during this work. Drawing upon ethnographic data gathered over the course of the project, including classroom observations, interviews with students and teachers, multimodal...
artifacts of student work, and researcher field notes, the dissertation maps moments of ‘otherness’ that marked nonnative ‘others’. Located where sameness and difference meet, these pedagogical pivot points became sites for negotiating understandings of cultural difference.

The discoveries arising from the study are presented as two stories, offering what Lather (2007) calls a “double(d) reading” of the empirical work of the project. The first story articulates a critical analysis of the research, based on efforts to incorporate plurilingualism in education and meet the needs of students as plurilingual social actors. The second story deconstructs these aims, examining the desires of liberatory educators to create contexts of empowerment for immigrant students. The significance of the study is its contribution to expanding conversations about how educators and researchers interested in language learning might talk about difference and the social subject in education, adding greater complexity to address the multiple dimensions of students’ experiences in globalized educational contexts.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

International mobility and interaction among people with different backgrounds is increasingly part of social and cultural life. Within this context, contemporary Canadian classrooms are multilingual and multicultural, constituted by learners with a wide variety of affiliations, trajectories, knowledge, and experience accumulated within and across local, indigenous, national, and transnational communities from around the world. Students are connected with people and places where they or their families are from, and the circumstances in these locations at the current time. Intensifying these intersections, rapid technological change has opened more diverse networks and public spaces, such as the Internet and social media, through which people communicate, interact, and develop and sustain communities. These resources are ever present in the classroom, pointing to the need for curriculum policies and classroom pedagogies that better reflect the present social condition. New forms and spaces of participation that have emerged that require a model for education that accommodates the mobility, flexibility, and complexity of learning and the learning context. Engaging with these considerations, the purpose of this dissertation is to elaborate the possibilities for learning when curriculum and instruction draws upon the full range of students’ cultural, linguistic, and representational resources. Focusing in particular on students who are learning English at the same time as they are learning curriculum content in school, this dissertation is grounded in and relevant to research in the fields of education, applied linguistics, and literacy. These interdisciplinary domains are all engaged in understanding the complex, dynamic, and shifting conditions of language and curriculum learning in globalized educational contexts.
Language learning, as discussed throughout this thesis, is connected to a politics of global location and broader social issues of race, migration, religion, gender, sexuality, and social class. Dichotomous understandings of students as either native or nonnative speakers ignore these interlocking and intersecting dimensions of experience. Moreover, the political and ideological positions evidenced by monolingual, monocultural approaches to education in Canada suggest that the construction of language learner identities can map onto xenophobia and racism. The tendency toward “English-only” in schools, and the disregard for students’ plurilingual language practices, global experiences, and funds of knowledge maintains a conversation about language that is framed as an us/them divide. Nowhere is this more evident that in the language used by educators and policy makers to categorize students as “English language learners”, defining them from a deficit orientation by what they do not know or skills they do not have. To broaden this understanding, my dissertation examines how research in second language acquisition (SLA) can be understood within structures of power and global issues of migration and diversity that are underemphasized in the simple story of native/nonnative speakers. These issues mark a starting point for my research, which aims to broaden conceptual understandings of difference and the social subject of language learning.

Turning toward a situated, embodied epistemology to chart the moments of ‘otherness’ that mark nonnative ‘others’, I attempt to locate where sameness and difference meet in language and education. As Rosi Braidotti (2005) writes, this work “traces the routes of new mobile forms of subjectivity in the midst of the politics of global mobility. It produces an alternative relational geography, which assumes as the starting position the diasporic identity of multi-located subjects, and not a unitary subject position” (p. 176). The work complicates essentializing approaches to the research and practice of language teaching and learning, and addresses how to account for linguistic and cultural difference in education. Drawing on evidence gathered from
classroom practice, I explore possibilities to resist and counter monolingual, monocultural approaches to education, and find opportunities for teachers, students, and researchers to enact agency in reshaping these processes.

Within education, the significance of social context to curriculum, teaching and learning is widely accepted. Educational reform is directed at reducing opportunity and achievement gaps among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and curriculum policy is designed to promote school success for all students (see for instance Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, b). Despite these efforts, large-scale international studies show that socioeconomic status remains a key predictor of students’ literacy achievement and academic performance (OECD, 2004). Reflecting the influence of sociology and anthropology, education research has given greater attention to how schooling is implicated in inequitable processes of social reproduction. This research has highlighted how education is connected with broader socio-political power relations, and inclusions and exclusions present in student experiences of learning. Many education researchers have documented the explicit and implicit devaluation of students from marginalized social backgrounds (Anyon, 1997; Cummins, 2001; Kozol, 2012), including an emphasis on high-stakes testing and accountability that has had the unintended consequence of undermining rather than enhancing learning opportunities for low-achieving students (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Taken together, these circumstances have created an “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) to students from underserved or marginalized communities, particularly low-income students of colour. For this reason, “identity has become an important analytic tool for researchers in various disciplines” (Gee, 2001, as cited in Carabello, 2011, p. 157). At a time when curriculum policy and pedagogic discourses (Gallagher, 2008) are dominated by concerns about at-risk students, immigrant families, refugee populations, English language assessment, and literacy standards, my work is concerned with the boxes that educators (and researchers) put
children into. I hope for my work to inform understandings about how students might be rendered differently; not within fixed categories of understanding, but as becoming other. The research and practice of language teaching and learning needs to reflect the complexity of lived lives and communities, the identities that are “the not yet and, at times, the not anymore” (Tuck, 2009, p. 417, italics original).

1 Globalized educational contexts

Putting social and technological change at the centre of understanding contemporary classroom contexts opens a broadened perspective on the resources available for teaching and learning. My research is located in the province of Ontario, Canada, which has welcomed more than 145,000 newcomers annually since 2000, including 17,000 school-age children each year (Auditor General of Ontario, 2005). This expansion and enrichment of our broader community comprises a diversity of knowledge and experience, and range of social, cultural, and linguistic resources. I understand these circumstances as creating a globalized educational context; however, these community resources are not always drawn upon to support teaching and learning. Monolingual, monocultural assumptions underlie approaches to curriculum policy, teacher education, and classroom pedagogy. For instance, many educators in Ontario have had little preparation in either teacher education or professional development to assist them to teach effectively in multilingual, multicultural classrooms (Coelho, 2004; Faez, 2011; Gagné, 2009; Webster & Valeo, 2011). Furthermore, although students may be learning English at the same time as they are learning curriculum content in school, few teachers have the professional knowledge to support learners’ developing English language proficiency in the context of curriculum teaching and learning (Filmore & Snow, 2000). The symbolic dimensions of these conditions define who, and whose knowledge and experience, is recognizable in school. English language
and literacy practices are privileged, and students who are in the process of learning English are constructed as other, as different, as deficient and struggling to catch up to an idealized English-speaking norm (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010).

Recent student data from both the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Vancouver School District shows that while some newcomer students perform as well or better than Canadian-born English-speaking students, newcomer and second generation students from some countries perform below their same-age peers and are more at risk of disappearing from academic subject courses and leaving school early (Brown, 2006; Coelho, 2004; see also Gunderson & D’Silva, 2012; McAndrew, 2009; Toohey & Derwing, 2006; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). These circumstances raise significant concerns about equity, inclusion, and social justice for these learners, their families, and our communities. Responding to these needs through policy, Ministries of Education and school districts across Canada have made changes in the services and programs provided for newcomer students, including policies for newcomer student orientation, language assessment, differentiated instruction, assessment and reporting processes, and curriculum for a wide variety of English as a Second (ESL) and English for Literacy Development (ELD) classes (See for instance Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, b). These policy changes and their implementation go a long way toward building capacity to meet the needs of students who are learning English at school. However, embedded within a monolingual, monocultural paradigm, these policies and related practices remain focused on socializing students to an English-speaking norm, potentially excluding the cultural and linguistic competencies possessed by the actual population of learners in our communities.

In the Ontario education context, curriculum policy documents and educators use the term “English language learners” (ELLs) to refer to newcomer or Canadian-born students who
are in the process of learning English as a second or additional language (ESL/EAL) in school and who are receiving support for their English language proficiency development. The differentiation of the particular needs of English language learners from the needs of so-called native English speaking students sets students apart as a group. This labeling of students implies an assumed uniformity of who students are, and an implied consensus about how their needs ought to be addressed in classrooms. However the category of English language learner is neither straightforward nor unproblematic (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). Identification and naming is, as bell hooks (1994) writes, a privileged act that “affords those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place” (p. 62).

Educators often use the phrase “culturally and linguistically diverse” as a positive construct to mark an asset-based orientation to the resources that students have. However, the use of the word ‘diverse’ normalizes another community as dominant, positioning students in relation to a dominant norm (Gérim-Lajoie, 2008; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Knight, 2008). These terms are present in the scholarly writing of researchers in education and in applied linguistics, designating a particular notion of culture at work in their epistemologies. The frame of diversity categorizes communities as either normative or non-normative, a selective exemplification that flattens understandings and perspectives. Attending to the dynamic and fluid characteristics of communities in the context of globalization, on- and off-line environments, and “superdiversity” requires an alternative sensibility and epistemology, a perspective that reflects the complexity and dynamics of peoples’ lives (Blommaert & van de Vijver, 2013). Such an approach can make space for the complications and tensions present in lived lives and experiences, rather than putting experiences that stand outside of normative,
coherent narratives under erasure. For research, these concerns move me to reflect on the non-innocence of the constructs I employ in my research; to name what is assumed or what is made normative in my representations. These moves comprise part of my responsibilities in doing research that is accountable for the ways in which I talk about and represent others.

Children who do not speak the classroom language in the home are a significant presence in Canadian schools (Brown, 2006; Coelho, 2007; Gunderson, 2003; Toohey & Derwing, 2006; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). Many of these children, including both Canadian-born and newcomer children, face the dual challenge of mastering a new language and acquiring the literacy skills necessary to set them on a positive trajectory for curriculum learning. Furthermore, schools face the challenge of developing programs to support these children’s language and literacy learning needs. For instance, although students learning English in school develop oral communication abilities similar to their same-age peers after approximately two years, academic language knowledge and school literacy activities present a significant challenge for these learners, especially after third grade when English lexical knowledge and literacy skills are needed to support curriculum learning in English-medium classrooms (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998; Carrasquillo, 2004; Lesaux & Geva, 2006; Roessingh & Elgie, 2009; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004). What is effective pedagogy for these children’s language and literacy development in school remains an unanswered empirical question (August & Shanahan, 2006; Ball, 2010; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Gutiérrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010). Many researchers have identified a need to examine emergent bilingual learners’ language and literacy development in school. Similarly, there is a need to identify the language and literacy practices in multilingual, multicultural school classrooms to understand the language and literacy practices of emergent bilingual children, and what successful scaffolding and supportive learning environments might look like (Hawkins, 2004, p. 14).
2 Research inquiry: Language, identity, and education

To engage with these issues, my dissertation research focused on a multilingual, multicultural school in a large Canadian city. Specifically, my research explored the experiences of elementary level students who were newcomers to Canada or children of first-generation Canadians. The dissertation employed Lather’s (2007) critical praxis methodology to generate data from a collaborative research project involving teachers, students, and university-based researchers. The purpose of the project was to explore the educational significance of engaging students in authentic forms of cultural production that drew upon their cultural and linguistic resources, diverse histories, and multiple modes of representation in classroom-based learning. While endeavouring to contribute to positive change in education practice, the dissertation directs a critical gaze toward the dominant and marginalizing practices and discourses that materialized during this work. Drawing upon ethnographic data gathered over the course of the project, including classroom observations, interviews with students and teachers, multimodal artifacts of student work, and researcher field notes, the dissertation maps moments of ‘otherness’ that marked nonnative ‘others’. Located where sameness and difference meet, these pedagogical pivot points became sites for negotiating understandings of cultural difference. The discoveries arising from the study are presented as two stories, offering what Lather (2007) calls a “double(d) reading” of the empirical work of the project. The first story articulates a critical analysis of the research, based on efforts to incorporate plurilingualism in education and meet the needs of students as plurilingual social actors. The second story deconstructs these aims, examining the desires of liberatory educators to create contexts of empowerment for immigrant students.
Destabilizing master discourses, a double(d) reading entails both critique and complicity—the double necessity of working from within the constraints of a tradition and exposing what that tradition has ignored or forgotten. Lather writes that a double(d) reading is one that disables itself, under erasure, intervening in what it critiques by both overturning the opposition and by displacing the system, working within/against dominant, contesting borders and tracing complicity (p. 14). She describes this as knowledge that undermines itself, losing the unmediated referent that has authorized representation, certitude, and transparency. In a deconstructive move, a double(d) reading identifies binaries, reverses them, gets to a place that is both-and and neither-nor, working within and against received understandings to locate their limits and possibilities. Finally, this work entails a double(d) epistemology wherein the text comprises a site for the failures of representation.

Over the course of the study, it quickly became apparent that the theoretical concepts that informed my research needed be revised. As Blommaert and van de Vijver (2013) wrote, “Complexity, mobility, and dynamics are key defining features of the present world; they need to be converted into useful research instruments, and this job is far from being done at present” (p. 1). This need guided a further aim of my work, to explore a theoretical approach that locates and situates the ground for a new understanding of the subject of language learning. Arising from the tension between individual, embodied aspects of identity, and issues related to political subjectivity and epistemological legitimation (Braidotti, 1993; Haraway, 1994), I explore the notion of identity as a site of difference. Accompanying this articulation, I argue that what is at stake is not just a reorientation to the notion of subjectivity in the field of SLA, but a redefinition of research practice in the field. Inspired by feminist theory, I suggest that the field of SLA requires a new vision of subjectivity. These shifts provide support for the “multilingual turn” in
SLA research and practice (May, 2013), and potentially redefine understandings of the social dimension of language teaching and learning.

Against the backdrop of critical scholarship in applied linguistics, I examine how powerful discursive conceptualizations of language, diversity, and social difference have shaped approaches to addressing the language learning needs of immigrant students. As Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook (2005; 2007) have argued, the concept of multilingualism only superficially overcomes monolingual perspectives: “discourses of multilingualism reinforce the ways of thinking about language that we need to get beyond” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 12).

Approaches in language teaching and learning, and education in particular, are imbued with normative, essentializing beliefs and practices that focus on ‘fixing’ students’ language and literacy problems and ‘helping’ them to be equal to native English speaking peers. Troubling the import of these deficit discourses and remedial approaches, I describe a plurilingual approach to pedagogy that offers a more expansive view of students’ linguistic capabilities. Finally, I demonstrate how difference and otherness are materialized in education practice, illustrating how understandings of identity in SLA research are implicated in the very circumstances they circumscribe. Taken together, these purposes contribute to mapping the processes by which monolingual, monocultural pedagogical practices are reproduced, normalized and, potentially disrupted in educational contexts.

Underlying my approach to this work is the idea that insight into effective forms of pedagogy will be gained only by means of equitable collaboration with teachers and students. Involving research as critical praxis (Lather, 2007), this approach to inquiry begins with interest in and collaborative action toward addressing challenges or problems faced by a group or community. Critical praxis is based on the idea that experience is open to change, and that individuals and communities possess the capacity to produce change. A fundamental aspect of
praxis-oriented scholarly research is that it is constituted within a relationship of mutual trust with people and communities, developing understandings through involvement with, not for, people in the struggle for humanity (Freire, 1970, p. 48). These relations involve solidarity, working together to understand and transform conditions of experience. At this intersection of thinking and doing, conditions for material transformation are created, and so create possibilities to know differently. As Lather (1986) has written, this is the work of theory’s practice and practice’s theory.

2.1 Engaging Literacies Project

My dissertation study was embedded within a school-university partnership designed to support English as a Second Language teachers in implementing pedagogical strategies for engaging emergent bilingual students in literacy activities. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Jim Cummins, led this project. To meet the objectives of the partnership, I, as part of a team of university-based researchers, worked collaboratively with teachers and students to assist them in using digital technology for teaching and learning activities, and to encourage students to recognize and draw upon their home languages and cultural knowledge as resources for learning. The research component of this study documented students’ perceptions and feelings about the process of getting engaged with literacy in this way, and teachers’ observations about the effects of the project on students’ self-efficacy and literacy accomplishments. We anticipated that this project would enhance the students’ engagement with literacy, and generate positive feelings towards using students’ home language(s) and technology for literacy activities in the classroom. A key outcome for the project was to support students’ identity investment in language and literacy learning, and therefore to promote their literacy engagement.
3 Toward a plurilingual and culturally sustaining pedagogy

Vanessa Andreotti (2012) asked, “How can one ethically and professionally address the hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, paternalism, and deficit theorization of difference that abound in educational approaches benevolently concerned with helping, fixing, defending, educating, assimilating, or giving voice to the Other?” (p. 3). The purpose of my research is to address exactly the kind of question that Andreotti posed. I hope for my work to illustrate how schools might become spaces where difference can be drawn upon to enrich learning, and where the negotiation of difference rests at the core of community building. As Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, and Linda Powell (1997) wrote, “the process of sustaining a community must include a critical interrogation of difference as the rich substance of community life and an invitation for engagement that is relentlessly democratic, diverse, participatory, and always attentive to equity and parity” (p. 252-3).

Inclusive education is defined by UNESCO as “based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives...The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is to end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion” (www.unesco.org/en/inclusive-education). To me, inclusive education needs to go further than these aims to address the power relations that pattern across and within global locations and ensure the value and maintenance of difference in multilingual, multicultural societies. The notions of plurilingual and “culturally sustaining pedagogies” (Paris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995) can potentially support and develop the plurality of languages, literacies, and cultural practices that students bring with them to school, particularly for students from minoritized or non-dominant social backgrounds (i.e.: Graz Declaration on Language Education, 2010). Moreover, these approaches to pedagogy can assist teachers to make use of and build on...
students’ linguistic repertoires to support their language development, literacy, and learning in English-medium schools. These purposes of plurilingual and culturally sustaining pedagogies are critical to support all students in developing plurilingual and intercultural competence.

The treatment of cultural and linguistic diversity as a singular issue is a limited and limiting perspective for several reasons. First, this perspective obscures the interlocking and intersectional relation of other forms of marginalization that students may encounter, such as racism, homophobia, sexism, and discrimination relating to socioeconomic status. Second, this perspective reinforces the idea that supporting students who are learning English at school is only the job of ESL teachers, and that classroom teachers at the elementary level, and curriculum subject-area teachers at the intermediate and secondary levels, do not need to infuse language teaching and accommodations for students’ language and literacy development into their instruction and assessment practice. Third, this perspective disregards the extent to which academic literacy skills, which are required for students’ success in school, overlap with processes in language acquisition. Finally, this perspective suggests that the development of language awareness and intercultural competence is solely the domain of students who are learning English in school.

Supplanting this orientation requires a shift in understandings of difference to align with the realities of the present social condition. Taking seriously the need to trouble these assumptions and de-centre the native/nonnative dichotomy, I suggest that the dominant framing of equity and equality needs to be positioned within a theoretical context of difference. All students need to live, learn, and work in communities increasingly marked by international mobility, and by contact between languages and cultures. This circumstance is already present in many Ontario classrooms today, and can be drawn upon as a resource for developing every
student’s language awareness, intercultural abilities, and curriculum knowledge. Schools need to consider a revaluation of the linguistic and cultural resources already present in our classrooms, environments in which difference, plurilingualism, and cultural plurality should be supported and promoted as both an ordinary and desirable phenomena as well as a collective responsibility (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009, p. 28).

4 Accounting for myself

This research is framed by my personal experiences. Through my professional work in language education, I have learned many things from the students and teachers that I have been fortunate enough to work with. I have been a language teacher in multiple contexts over the past sixteen years. These experiences have included teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for graduate and undergraduate students both in Canada and abroad, and teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) for adult learners. Before beginning my academic work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)/University of Toronto, I was co-founder, along with my partner, Anthony Stille, of the English School of Canada, an ESL school for international students located in Toronto, Canada. The school is in its thirteenth year of operation and has welcomed more than 15,000 students from 50 countries to study ESL and EAP programs.

Currently, I am an instructor for the Office of English Language and Writing Support in the School of Graduate Studies at University of Toronto, and a teaching assistant for the Multilingual and Multicultural Education cohort in the Initial Teacher Education program at OISE/UT where I work with students from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Each of these experiences has and continues to open my eyes to the realities of our changing global and local context. Like many language teachers of adult learners, my work has often extended beyond teaching grammar, conversation skills, or metacognitive strategies;
indeed this work has, at times, extended beyond the classroom. Reflecting upon this circumstance, it’s as though the language lessons that I plan mark only the beginnings of my encounters with students. As I write this I reflect upon the many experiences that students, their families, and I have shared. Dining together, being welcomed into students’ homes, going to movies, markets, festivals, and once even to a fortuneteller, we have laughed and shared as much as we have learned. Along with these happy and joyous occasions, there have been many times when our shared experience was characterized more by comfort and support: waiting for students at the airport or dropping them off and saying goodbye, accompanying students to the doctor, filling out paperwork for rental agreements, social insurance numbers, college, university, and job applications, or assisting students in dealing with officials from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, United States Customs and Immigration, Human Resources and Development Canada, and the Refugee Board of Canada. Sadly, and fortunately incredibly rarely, we have also dealt together with far more difficult circumstances that include deportation, emergency surgery, filing police reports for stolen property, assault, harassment, and returning home quickly to a loved one who is dying. Students in my classes have formed friendships, have gotten married, and have even had children together. And it is with deep sorrow that I think of one student who was tragically killed, hit by a car while crossing the street not a week after starting school in a country far away from her loved ones.

Considering these needs and circumstances, at once quotidian and remarkable, I cannot think that all that I teach, all that students learn, the entirety of our relation to one another can be described in the learning outcomes specified by my lesson plans. From our experiences I have come to understand that language teaching and learning is about more than balancing form-focused instruction and corrective feedback with meaningful communicative activities (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006); it is equally about participation, solidarity, and our lived lives:
celebrations and frustrations, sadness, struggles, desires and dreams. Nevertheless, it is to the classroom that we return together, day after day, week after week, a touch point in our collective experience.

For me, working with adult learners alerted me to these understandings. Perhaps because of our shared affiliations as community members, workers, parents, sons and daughters, we talked often about a broad range of topics, interests, and concerns. I listened as my adult students talked about the challenges that they were managing, and what struck me most was their apparent frustration and sadness when they talked about their children: lack of recognition for their children’s linguistic knowledge and experience; struggles to enroll their children in the schools and programs that they wanted; and difficulties in supporting their children to make new friends and adjust to life in Canada. As they expressed their dissatisfaction with what they perceived they could do to help their children, I felt helpless to do much more than hear their stories. I decided to pursue further studies that could move me in the direction of supporting newcomer students in the K-12 educational context. I wanted to draw upon my professional experience to work towards a broader vision for education that is at once inclusive, plurilingual, and intercultural. I believe that changes are required in education relating to curriculum policy, teacher education, and classroom pedagogy. These changes need to be based on plurilingual and culturally sustaining approaches, constituting a pedagogy that integrates the needs of all learners and represents a broad vision of education for the contemporary social context.

5 Overview of the dissertation

The introduction to the dissertation outlined the circumstances and issues that my research was concerned with. I explained my research purposes and shared my personal interest and motivation for conducting this study. The second chapter of the dissertation elaborates the
scholarly literature and theoretical perspectives that informed my research. In particular, I describe what has been called the “multilingual turn” in SLA research and practice, and I introduce perspectives from feminist theory that have helped me to theorize the subject of language learning within this context. The third chapter explains the methodology for this study. I discuss how critical praxis guided my research, and describe the double(d) reading through which the findings of the dissertation are presented. The fourth chapter presents the research context, providing information about the research setting, participants, and data collection activities. The fifth and sixth chapters articulate the findings that arose from this research, intertwining evidence from classroom practice and theory. Finally, the seventh chapter concludes the dissertation, sharing the significance and implications of the research, as well as its limitations.
Chapter 2
Mapping Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Issues

As a language teacher, I came to see language as embedded within the social world. As a doctoral student researcher, I was happy to discover research that spoke to the sociocultural and political dimensions of language teaching and learning. However, I was surprised to learn that such research was relatively new in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), particularly when I read Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner’s (1997) article in the Modern Language Journal that called for broadening the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual parameters of the field. Pointing to the field’s “general preoccupation with the learner, at the expense of other potentially relevant social identities” (p. 760, italics original) that inscribed a divide between native and non-native speakers, Firth and Wagner argued that this epistemological orientation created an SLA “mindset” that focused on linguistic deficiencies and communicative problems (p. 760). Critiquing this orientation, Firth and Wagner’s article articulated a broader sociocultural turn happening in SLA research, which has underwritten greater attention to language learning and language use rather than language acquisition. Revisiting the impact of their article, Firth and Wagner (2007) noted the debates that this attention to learning sparked, and they maintained that traditional or mainstream approaches focusing on language acquisition cut SLA research off from learning theories that reside outside of its disciplinary boundaries (p. 806).

1 My use of the terms native and non-native speakers of English in this chapter is not to support this dichotomy, but to draw attention to the binary logic of these concepts in SLA research. I use this dichotomy against itself, working

2 Firth and Wagner (2007) pointed out that their description of the difference between these approaches set up a dichotomous relationship and reified the positioning of cognitive approaches to SLA research as “mainstream”.
In this chapter, I engage with the theoretical perspectives and conceptual issues relating to the social turn, and the more recent “multilingual turn” (May, 2011; 2013) in SLA. These understandings informed the study throughout my review of relevant scholarly literature, my work with participating teachers and students, and my process of data analysis. This chapter serves as an introduction to these key ideas, which are further developed in the chapters that follow. Aiming to “knead theory and practice” (Anyon, 2008), I sought to create a dialectic between theory and the practice of education (Freire, 1970, hooks, 1994). Moreover, this approach to inquiry constituted an epistemological choice to ground knowledge about the social world in the everyday experiences of people and communities. My engagement with theory was not limited to one perspective; I took a transdisciplinary approach to inform my understanding of language, social difference, and education. Considering the complex, dynamic, and mobile social context, I wanted to explore new ways of thinking about language teaching and learning. Reading across the fields of second language acquisition, bilingual education, curriculum studies, and feminist philosophy, I looked for perspectives to assist me in complicating settled understandings and resist what I saw as monolingual, monocultural practices of education in Ontario schools.

My interest in both empirical and hermeneutic questions is connected to my belief that epistemology constitutes an ethical decision in social research. Related to research in SLA, David Corson (1997) wrote that neutrality is a problematic stance to adopt in applied fields. He further noted that many theories and concepts in applied linguistics have developed without philosophical underpinnings, or awareness of the field’s emancipatory potential. Following from this need, I aim to develop the explicit philosophical and epistemological orientations of my research, especially key concepts of identity, language, and the social dimension of language learning. When such concepts are not explicated or interrogated, they imply a neutral and
universal truth that upholds the power of dominant and potentially marginalizing social discourses (Corson, 1997; Pennycook, 1990). In what follows in this chapter, I map the terrain of ‘the social’ in SLA research, focusing attention on the discursive constructions of identity and language learning that uphold monolingual, monocultural approaches to education, and marginalize newcomer students and students from non dominant cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Contributing to theorization of these key concepts, I deconstruct dichotomous understanding of students as either native or nonnative speakers, and challenge unitary, static notions of language, bringing together perspectives from sociolinguistics and bilingual education to highlight the debates surrounding these terms. Finally, in an attempt to think otherwise about ‘the subject’ of language learning, I engage with perspectives in feminist theory to articulate a different difference where language and education meet.

1 Language as a social practice

Thinking differently about identity is consistent with understandings of language that are similarly fluid and dynamic. Language learning can be thought of as “a process of growth, of sequential learning of certain registers, styles, genres and linguistic varieties while shedding or altering previously existing ones. Consequently, there is no point in life in which anyone can claim to know all the resources of a language” (Blommaert, 2012, p. 9, italics original). Within this framing of language, individuals can be thought of as “mobile subjects” (2012) whose affiliations shift and change according to context and circumstance, and whose language resources are learned and accumulated through a variety of personal and social encounters and experiences with language. This changing vocabulary and perspective on language use marks a shift away from idealized notions of grammatical competence and coherent discourse that terms such as “native speaker” and “speech community” and related models of language learning
designate (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997). Foregrounding cultural and linguistic plurality, translanguaging, and plurilingual language practices, greater attention is being given to the mobile and flexible social contexts which groups and individuals move in and through. In what follows, I explore how understandings of language engender the subject of language learning.

Underlying the field of SLA, structuralist approaches abstract language and language learners in their emphasis of language system-building. These assumptions about the nature of language led to the articulation of rules and universals for SLA that obscured the learner and the actual language practices of people and communities. As Brian Morgan (2007) wrote, such understandings were based in “measurable reality or ontology independent of the rational, scientific frames and tools used to discover them; and assumption that such research methods, if not culturally and ideologically neutral, are at least controllable through experimental design” (p. 950). The field of SLA owes much to Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1916/1983) structuralist semiotic understanding of language. Saussure’s perspective on language favoured a decontextualized, ahistorical system, la langue, over actual language use, or parole. Within de Saussure’s approach, language produces meaning only as a system of difference; the meanings of signs produced by differences from other signs in a “self-regulating” linguistic system (Morgan, 2007, p. 952). Within this frame, “nothing inside the mind or outside language accounts for the ‘arbitrary’ binding of a signifier and signified” (p. 952). Saussurean semiotic theories have been criticized for their focus on the underlying structures and rules of a semiotic system rather than on the performances or practices that comprise occurrences of the system’s use. These critiques emphasize the social context of language use and meaning. For instance, Teresa de Lauretis (1984) noted the shift in semiotics toward the exploration of modes of production of signs and meanings, and the ways that language is used, transformed, or transgressed in and through social practice. She noted that prior emphasis on sign systems of meaning, whether language, literature,
film, music or other modes, shifted to a focus on the work or activity that these modes perform. Understanding such work or activity as constituting meaning, this perspective emphasizes individuals, not the system, as the subject of *semiosis*, or the production of signs and meaning. de Lauretis noted that semiosis is significant because of its attention to the subjective and social dimensions of meaning and signification: the practical, aesthetic, or ideological aspects of use that are shaped by culturally shared codes of communication (p. 167). This *semiotics of experience* is relevant to the argument developed here, particularly because de Lauretis’ perspective emphasizes that language does not have an objective existence independent from human interpretation. Moreover, de Lauretis’ approach underscores the socially constructed dimensions of experience, and the idea that meanings are not immanent or contained by language, texts, or actions, but actively created according to conventions that people may or may not be aware of. de Lauretis’ semiotics of experience can assist in mapping the meanings of otherwise transparent signs and codes, allowing a reading that lays bare the social and ideological constructions and realities that privilege and suppress particular perspectives.

Theorists of bilingualism and bilingual education point out that SLA’s structuralist orientation resulted in a “subtractive model” of bilingualism which conceives of the language learner as deficient and struggling to overcome underdeveloped L2 competence, striving to reach the ‘target’ competence of an idealized native speaker (García & Kleifgen, 2010; García, 2011). By contrast, an “additive model” opens space to consider individuals’ heterogenous uses and knowledge of language, which can change over time and based on social circumstances. Research in bilingualism has documented the diverse linguistic repertoires of multilingual speakers. However, as Baker (2001) noted, bilingualism should not be regarded as a modern phenomenon. In many parts of the world where multilingualism has long been the norm (including Africa, Asia, and South America), and more recently in countries of migration, these
repertoires highlight the complexity of linguistic contexts (Canagarajah, 1999; García, Bartlett, Kleifgen, 2007; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). For instance, many of the world’s English learners are multicompetent English users who employ English as a *lingua franca* in varying ways in their daily lives, for a range of purposes, and in a variety of settings (Firth & Wagner, 2007; Pennycook, 2007). The language practices of individuals and communities across these contexts challenge the autonomous, homogeneous view of language underpinning structuralist approaches in SLA and related language education theory and practice. As Stephen May (2011) noted, this evidence of practice “blurs the line between language A and language B, but also between ‘langue’ and ‘parole’, between linguistic systems and their uses, between knowledge and practice. It questions the starting point of linguistics as a whole” (p. 320). The implications of these circumstance for theories of SLA suggest the need to replace the goal of acquiring competence in two languages with a model that recognizes that individuals acquire as much competence in two or more languages as is needed, and all of these languages together serve the full range of an individual’s communicative needs (May, 2011).

Examining the actual language practices of multilingual communities, researchers have documented how speakers use the L2 along with, not in place of the L1 (García, 2011). These language practices challenge the assumption of unitary, bound linguistic systems (Auer 2007; Blommaert, 2010; May, 2011). Researchers have documented what bilingual individuals do with their linguistic resources, including fluid and overlapping language uses and related linguistic and sociocultural competencies. Several scholars in the field of bilingualism and bilingual education have recently used the term *translanguaging* to describe the language practices of multilingual speakers (Baker, 2011; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; García, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Translanguaging refers the hybrid uses of language as individuals make meaning, communicate, and engage in bilingual worlds (García
Encompassing far more than code-switching, a cognitive-oriented term which refers to speakers’ shifts between two or more languages within activities or between words in a single sentence, translanguaging emphasizes the dynamic and functional integration of bilingual language practices. Translanguaging encompasses the greater choices and wider range of expression available through the use and integration of diverse linguistic and cultural knowledge.

To describe contemporary linguistic practices, the term “plurilingual” has emerged out of the European context, promoted by the Council of Europe and the use of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. Plurilingualism and plurilingual competence refer to:

…the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the social actor may draw. (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009, p. 11)

Plurilingualism involves practices and values that are not equivalent or even homologous in different languages, but that are integrated, variable, flexible, and changing (Coste, 2001, p. 15). Each of these languages may have different functions; and drawing upon these collective proficiencies, individuals assemble and use their language knowledge to produce the communication they need (Beacco & Byram, 2003). Ofelia Garcia, Leslie Bartlett, and JoAnne Kleifgen (2009) described that plurilingualism “involves the integration of unevenly developed competences in a variety of languages, dialects, and registers, as well as the valuing of linguistic tolerance” (p. 2).

Underlying the perspective of plurilingualism is the notion of difference. Describing approaches plurilingualism in *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to*
Languages and Cultures for the Council of Europe, Candelier and colleagues (2011) wrote: “It is clear that communication in a context of plurality and otherness – the very purpose of plurilingual and intercultural competence – requires that participants possess, to a marked degree, a competence of adaptation which implies a movement towards that which is *other, different*” (p. 12, italics original). From this perspective, recognition of and respect for linguistic and cultural pluralism entails not just acknowledgement of the multiplicity of languages and cultures, but also understanding that:

…multilingualism and multiculturalism cannot consist in simply placing different communities side by side. The two phenomena are a product of exchange and mediation processes carried out in multiple forms and combinations, through the medium of actors who themselves have a foot in several languages and cultures. Talking about plurilingual and pluricultural competence therefore means taking an interest in the communicative competence of social actors capable of functioning in different languages and cultures, of acting as linguistic and cultural intermediaries and mediators, and of managing and reshaping this multiple competence as they proceed along their personal paths. (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009, p. 9)

Sociolinguists use the term “linguistic repertoire” to describe all of the language resources upon which individuals can draw, attempting to dispense with *a priori* assumptions about the links between language and community of origin or upbringing. As Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton (2012) write, linguistic repertoires refer to:

…individuals’ very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres, which are picked up (and maybe then partially forgotten) within biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies. (p. 12)

Blommaert (2012) points out that not all the resources in an individuals’ linguistic repertoire have the same value or range of operation: in only a handful of these resources can individuals accomplish all that they wish. However, all of a person’s linguistic resources are likely to be useful to them in some way. From this perspective, the traditional notion of language competence seems narrow and absolute in its assumptions about ability and alignment with a
given way of speaking (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011, p. 5). Linguistic repertoires are not fixed or static, but dynamic and evolving along with the ever broadening of learners’ personal, academic, and language learning experiences; a collection of life-long skills and abilities which develop according to ongoing interaction with and experience of different cultures as a result of occupational, geographic, and family movements and changing personal interests (Coste, Moore, & Zarata, 2009, p. 13). As such, these repertoires are temporal and unfinished, ever expanding and incomplete.

The mobility of the present social condition affords an escalation of language practices and resources, and an accompanying escalation of social norms (Blommaert, 2012). For instance, different norms accompany the tasks of ordering a meal in a foreign country, giving an academic presentation, and/or sending a text message to a friend. Blommaert notes that with the escalation of normative systems that accompanies growing diversity and rapid technological change, individuals and communities adapt to and work with an expanding number of normative systems. The dynamics of these norms mean that linguistic repertoires continue to expand as people learn, negotiate, and move with and through systems and mobilities of power. For my research, understanding linguistic repertoires as dynamic, developed through a variety of trajectories, and involving diverse linguistic abilities that can change over time and based on social circumstances suggests that these repertoires are developed with and in dynamic, negotiated subjectivities and the symbolic and material dimensions of social life.

2 Theorizing ‘the subject’ of language learning

Subjectivity, de Lauretis (1984) wrote, is produced “by one’s personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world” (p. 159). de Lauretis’ conceptualization of subjectivity stands in
contrast to fixed notions of the social subject as a unitary, coherent being. In the field of SLA, the dichotomous construction of native/nonnative speakers rests on this kind of coherence of the subject. However, the dichotomy that underwrites the difference between native/nonnative speakers creates a false hierarchy out of binary logic that privileges native speakers over nonnative speakers. For instance, I saw that this native/nonnative speaker dichotomy appeared to be taken as a ‘natural’ difference in the school where I conducted my research. However, working alongside teachers and students, it became evident to me that the hierarchy was constructed out of particular discourses and social locations. I became interested in a more indeterminate understanding of students’ subjectivities, and I did not want to my research to reinforce binary thinking about students as merely ‘nonnative speakers’.

My first realization that I needed to think differently about subjectivity was at the beginning of the project, when I was trying to find out “who” the students were. A typical question that language teachers ask when getting to know students is “what languages do you speak?” I very quickly realized that students’ identities exceeded my capacities for definition. My ability to define students’ language profiles was limited by my understanding of students as English language learners. For instance, asking students what home language they spoke yielded complex responses—students spoke different languages at home depending on who they were with and where ‘home’ was determined to be. Moreover, students were sometimes unable to list all the languages that they knew or could communicate in. Rather than seeing language as something that students ‘had’ or ‘possessed’, I decided to focus on language use and students’ active, agentive engagement with their linguistic resources.

In applied linguistics, the term “native speaker” shifted focus from the language system to the use of language by monolingual, homogenous speakers of the language. However, as Firth
and Wagner (1997) pointed out, the notion of the native speaker did not account for the variability among language users and their language use. Moreover, increasingly globalized social contexts have challenged the idea of homogenous speech communities. The term marks many fluent language users as ‘nonnative’, such as speakers who do not use a ‘standard’ language form, which tends to include ex-colonial languages or the mix of minority and dominant languages (e.g. ‘Konglish’, ‘Spanglish’) (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007, p. 911). This conceptual silence is marginalizing, and reflects the politics of social power relations and deficit views of second language competence and language use. Fahrnaz Faez (2011) recently argued for reconceptualizing the native/nonnative dichotomy, suggesting that this distinction falls short in reflecting the multifaceted nature of individuals’ diverse linguistic identities. Faez writes that a sociocultural lens emphasizes the dynamic, dialogic, multiple, and situated nature of identity, and foregrounds language users’ negotiation among linguistic identities across social contexts and purposes.

Accounting for the dynamic relations among symbolic power, subject positions, and language learning is relatively recent but ongoing challenge for SLA researchers, particularly because the concepts of identity and ‘the social’ have been understood in different ways. As David Block (2007) wrote, “before the 1990s, there was little or no research examining identity as a site of struggle, the negotiation of difference, ambivalence, structure and agency, communities of practice, symbolic capital, or any other constructs associated with poststructuralist identity” (p. 866-867). In a significant contribution to this work, Bonny Norton (1995, 2000) suggested that SLA research drew artificial distinctions between the individual language learner and larger, frequently inequitable social structures. To address this relationship, Norton, elaborating on Bourdieu’s economic metaphor, identified “investment” as a central
construct in explaining processes of language learning and use. Describing identity investment, she wrote:

Learners ‘invest’ in the target language at particular times and in particular settings, because they believe they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will, in turn, increase the value of their cultural capital. As the value of learners’ cultural capital increases, so learners reassess their sense of themselves and their desires for the future. (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420)

Rather than draw distinctions between the learner and the social world, which designates particular factors in language learning as either individual or social, investment integrates the language learner and the learning context, and considers the role that this context plays in the interactions between language learners and target language speakers. The notion of investment is not equivalent to motivation, which is embedded within a cognitive orientation to SLA. According to Norton, the conception of motivation is a property of the language learner, and generally presupposes a coherent, fixed, and ahistorical perspective on interest and desire to learn and use a target language. By contrast, the notion of investment reflects the relationship of the language learner to the social world, wherein learning or using a language is an investment in a learner's own social identity.

Several competing assumptions relate to different understandings of identity in SLA research. The first assumption relates to equity for non-native speakers of English, and the idea that equality with native English speakers is a desired and appropriate goal for language teaching and learning. This assumption unites all non-native language speakers under a common category. A second assumption relates to the need to reflect the multiple differences and affinities among nonnative speakers, including differences in language background, gender, culture, social class, sexuality, race, and global location. This assumption emphasizes differences among nonnative speakers of English. A third assumption demands skepticism of fixed or predetermined constructions of identity, particularly in light of changing global flows of
people and information, and the growth of new social networks within and across transnational and digital spaces. This assumption rests on the idea that the construction of identity based on a Cartesian binary is inherently flawed and exclusionary. The purpose in distinguishing these three assumptions is not to suggest linearity or progression, with each assumption building upon the other(s). Rather, I am interested in holding each of these assumptions in productive tension, to locate the theoretical and empirical silences that they create. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that each of these assumptions might be operating at once, prompting consideration of both the issues each assumption emphasizes, and the dilemmas that the different assumptions create when they intersect.

Within SLA research, a certain amount of strategic essentialism of identity has been useful, for instance, in supporting efforts to improve educational opportunities for students in the process of learning English while learning curriculum content in school. However, this work towards equality inadvertently affirms the divide between native/nonnative speakers, evoking a rational, modern subject by minimizing differences. While this work supports solidarity and empowerment, and emphasizes gains in opportunities, the assumption of commonality of experience fails to take into account different experiences of society and social power relations. This kind of binary logic entails a discursive binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, requiring what is left outside—its constitutive outside—to consolidate the process of identification. This way of thinking tends to produce the desire for an autonomous subject. For instance, Judith Butler (1990; 1993) writes that the subject is discursively constructed; it does not exist before or outside of power. From Butler’s perspective, the materialization of subjectivity is not constituted as “the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, 1993, p. 2). In Butler’s perspective, identification comes together through discursive
means that foreclose and disavow other possible identifications; a suturing of the psychic and the
discursive that acknowledges both the necessity and impossibility of identity.

Feminist theorists have pointed out that the desire for an autonomous social subject leads
to constructed forms of closure, which I think is useful for theorizing the subject of language
learning. For instance, Braidotti (1993) explained that in structuralist approaches to feminist
theory, the category ‘Woman’ has been used to support a feminist politics and the ontological
desire to be. Used in this way, Woman carried an historic, political imperative. Such strategic
politics was important for correcting political injustices concerning women’s equality, but it
raised the issue of how to mobilize without excluding or devaluing more particular issues.
Woman, as a representative category, was embedded within transcendent claims and
generalizations—imposing a unity that erased differences between women. Nancy Fraser (1996)
wrote that this kind of identity politics was firmly established in an epistemology which assumed
“that all women were subordinated to men in the same way and to the same degree, it had falsely
universalized the specific situation of white, middle class heterosexual women and concealed
their implication in hierarchies of class, ‘race’, ethnicity, and sexuality” (p. 65). Similarly, Jane
Flax wrote that the maintenance of an identity politics viewpoint “requires the suppression of
discourses that threaten to differ with or undermine the authority of the dominant one” (Flax,
1987, p. 633). This kind of group identity is exclusionary by its very nature, fosters divisions,
and limits other equally important identifications such as those relating to race, global location,
religion, sexuality, social class, and so on. Equality-based feminism did not nor could not
represent all women.

Arising from this gap in feminist theory, de Lauretis (1987) noted that texts like This
Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua contributed to a “shift in feminist consciousness” (de Lauretis 1987, p. 10) that demonstrated the disadvantages of a feminism only interested in the pursuit of egalitarian goals. The assumption of commonality of experience united women as a group, but excluded or devalued experiences of difference. Many scholars, writers, and activists reinvigorated the politics of feminist theory by articulating a decolonizing critique of the hegemonic and appropriating tendencies of dominant feminist theory. For instance, bell hooks wrote:

No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or a present part of the larger group ‘women’ in this culture…When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women. (hooks, 1982, p. 7)

Feminist positions have different priorities, but are united in recognition of the need for theorizing a subject that reflects and incorporates both difference among women and between women and men—equal but different rather than equal and the same. However, examination of relations of power between women has also shown that feminist identity categories are no more unitary than the prior category of Woman. For instance, feminist standpoint theory reconstructed alternative subjects, reflecting embodied differences of race and sexuality. Critical to this constitution of the subject were notions of agency and emancipation—but this construction of subjectivity still operated from the same paradigm of equality feminism and its related epistemological dilemmas. As Elizabeth Grosz (1990) wrote,

In claiming that women’s current social roles and positions are the effects of their essence, nature, biology, or universal social position, these theories are guilty of rendering such roles and positions unalterable, necessary, and thus of providing them with a powerful political justification…they are necessarily ahistorical; they confuse social relations with fixed attributes; they see these fixed attributes as inherent limitations to social change; and they refuse to take seriously the historical and geographical differences between women across cultures as well as within a single culture. (p. 335)
This approach to difference remains rooted in notions of identity as inherent rather than constructed categories. Moreover, such categories imply that differences must compete for legitimacy.

These competing understandings in feminist theory highlight the forms of closure inherent in thinking about identity. Several scholars in the field of SLA have acknowledged the incoherence of the concept of identity, and their recent contributions have complicated formerly settled understandings. Ryoko Kubota and Angel Lin (2006; 2009) explored the absent discourse of race in SLA. They wrote that reluctance to engage with discourses of colonialism and notions of difference has prevented field from confronting racialization in language teaching and learning, resulting in “epistemological racism” and a hegemony of whiteness and Western imperialism in the field. Kubota and Lin explained that the lack of attention to the racialized aspect of native and nonnative speakers has created an “essentialized dichotomy (i.e., native speaker = Standard English speaker = white versus nonnative speaker = non-Standard English speaker = nonwhite)” (p. 8) that limits access to more powerful identities. Similarly, Ena Lee (2008) noted that critical discourses in language classrooms essentialized students’ culture and subordinated students’ cultural identities. These studies underscore that research in SLA has tended to focus on the sociolinguistic differences of native and nonnative speakers, ignoring the conceptual basis for understanding identities as socially constructed, discursive categories. Several SLA researchers have contributed to interrogating additional dimensions of identity, focusing on global location (Adawu & Martin-Beltrán, 2012; Canagarajah, 1999; 2005; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Lee & Norton, 2009), gender (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko, 2008), sexual identities (Nelson, 2008; 2010), and social class (Vandrick, 2009). Taken together, this research emphasizes the slippage occurring in the use of the concept of identity in SLA research, illuminating how the category of English language
learners has been constructed as universalizing, inferior, and as other. However, this new understanding of identities remakes difference and social subjects as “emergent subjectivities which are ‘other’ only in relation to an assumed and implicit ‘same’” (Braidotti, 2005, p. 170). Despite this limitation, Braidotti writes that the changing roles of the former ‘others’ of modernity (including women, indigenous peoples, minoritized others) has turned them “into powerful sites of social and discursive transformation”, agents for becoming other (p. 171).

Like Norton, many SLA researchers have turned to poststructuralism to illuminate different conceptualizations of identity in SLA. For instance, Claire Kramsch and Anne Whiteside (2007) noted that the role of the social in SLA varies depending on whether identity categories are considered stable, from a structuralist point of view, or discursive constructions, from a poststructuralist view (p. 913). They suggested:

The symbolic, historical, and social aspects of SLA have to be interpreted from a poststructuralist, ecological perspective on language learning, one in which categories of people, actions, and events are not fixed but are discursively constructed, reproduced, and contested; where subject positions (not identities) are negotiated relative to perceptions of symbolic power and a practical sense of the possible and the feasible. (p. 918)

Most uses of poststructuralism in SLA seem to cohere around problematizing notions of fixed, static representations of language learners’ identities. Recent reviews (Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2011) have summarized the claims that researchers in language teaching and learning have made regarding the role of identity in language learning. These reviews have elaborated shifts in theories of identity that have informed research in the field, particularly the use of poststructural perspectives on identity. For example, Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey (2011) noted that a poststructural perspective on identity emphasizes subjectivity and social

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3 SLA scholars have also turned to the natural sciences to explore alternative approaches to understanding language, using chaos and complexity theories to account for the dynamic and unstable nature of language and language use (see for instance Larsen-Freeman, 2008; 2009).
positioning, which are affected by contexts and relationships that can change over time and based on social circumstances. Within this framing, identities are not fixed or static, but fluid and context-dependent. This understanding suggests that identity, practices, and resources are “inextricably linked and mutually constituted” (p. 414). Further, learners can be seen as having multiple identities and social positions that enable or constrain their participation in target language communities. Similarly, Kubota and Lin engaged with a poststructural approach to inform a discursive and socially-constructed interpretation of race in SLA research. They wrote:

As a social construct, racial representations are always in flux and situated in social and historical processes. Race is socially and historically constructed and shaped by discourses that give specific meanings to the ways we see the world, rather than reflecting the illusive notion of objective, stable, and transcendent truths. (2009, p. 3)

Kubota and Lin’s theorization of race and identity stands in stark contrast to structuralist concepts in the field of SLA which seem to regard learners as having “generic identities… imposed by researchers on the participants for the sake of scientific inquiry” (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007, p. 918). This conceptual inadequacy suggests that traditional SLA understandings of identity need to be reworked or rethought to interrogate “the claim of universality”, the construction of perceptions, displays of symbolic affiliation, and the exercise of power (p. 918) evident in the actual experiences of language learning by groups and individuals situated in dynamic, globalized contexts.

Feminist scholars have engaged with deconstruction in theory and in practice to reconceptualize subjectivity outside of fixed categories of difference. Drawing on Derrida’s (1978) notion of différance, a play on the French word différence, deconstruction undermines binary logic in conceptual understandings. Deconstruction has been useful to uncover and disrupt abstract, universalizing, generalizing definitions that challenge complex and dynamic representations of subjectivity. Rather than replace one meaning with another, deconstruction
introduces a multiplicity of meanings, reversing binary logic and creating ways of understanding that go beyond the discursive construction of man/woman inscribed by a patriarchal system. This approach has been useful because “to become a subject on this sameness/difference model is surely not a feminist goal” (Butler, 1992, as cited in Papadelos, 2010). Within the notion of *différance*, identities might be understood as subjectivities: contingent, produced with and in social and historical effects of power and discourse. Pam Papadelos usefully traces the use of deconstruction in feminist theory. She cites Butler, who described:

> To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject. To deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that to which the term, ‘the subject,’ refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or to dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term, like ‘the subject,’ to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized. (p. 159, as cited in Papadelos, 2010, p. 71)

However, deconstruction entails risks for those positioned at the margins. As hooks (1990) wrote, “we should be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the ‘subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time” (p. 28, as cited in Papadelos, 2010, p. 69).

> In SLA research, the interest in finding a new way of understanding identities, one that does not rest on the native/nonnative dichotomy, has emphasized fluid, dynamic identifications of language learners. Suggesting that these identities are socially constructed rather than fixed or inherent seems like a step forward, but poststructuralist notions of subjectivity are problematic in the risks they involve for non-dominant or marginalized communities; particularly the risk of erasing shared dimensions of experience. This tension articulates a crisis of the subject, and understanding this tension is critical to rethinking subjectivity and identity in SLA research. Turning again to feminist theory to find a way through this challenge, Braidotti (1993) writes
that notion of Woman offers sufficient condition for the feminist subject position, but the feminist subject requires recognition of the differences between women, among women, and within women that split the nature of the subject. From this perspective, identity can be rethought as a site of difference, suggesting the possibility to occupy different subject positions at different times.

In what Braidotti (2011) calls “nomadic theory”, she does away with the dominant model of subjectivity for an ontology “that privileges change and motion over stability” (p. 29). Offering the idea of becoming rather than being, this notion of subjectivity comprises a temporal yet nonlinear process that occurs alongside the discourses and practices of others in a non-dialectical manner (p. 34). The notion of becoming is not concerned with deconstruction, but with a desire for transformation that goes beyond the logic of reversibility. Braidotti’s notion of becoming can be used to inform a reconceptualization of the subject of language learning that removes linguistic identities from the “dualistic grip” (Braidotti, 2011) of the native/nonnative binary. Rather than erase difference between native and nonnative speakers, among nonnative speakers, and within nonnative speakers, this notion of subjectivity can be used to think a different difference about language and the social subject.

A starting point for this work is an acknowledgement of complexity and instability as central concepts in the constitution of social subjects. As Braidotti (2005) writes, this understanding emphasizes “the productive aspects of the dislocation and recasting of identities” (p. 178) in the context of transnationalism, technological change, and advanced capitalism. Acknowledging the impossibility of fixed identities within these circumstances, feminist philosophers have turned to a post-humanist perspective that challenges limitations of the essentialist-constructivist binary informing equality politics and strategic essentialism. Inspired
by the philosophical creativity indexed by Braidotti’s nomadic theory, I draw on her work to articulate “a shift of paradigm toward a positive appraisal of differences, multiplicity, and complexity not as an end in themselves but as step in a process of recomposition of the coordinates of subjectivity” (p. 232). In my continued interest in reorienting the conceptual tools of SLA theory and practice, my interest in seeking new approaches to political and ethical agency concerning language and education is “not dependent on the current state of the terrain. They are not oppositional and thus not tied to the present by negation; instead they are affirmative and geared to creating possible futures” (p. 286, italics added). This work entails inquiry into the cognitive, affective, and ethical forces present in the actual material relations of language teachers and students, and the exploration of new conceptual tools to actively interact with empowering others, an “ethical gesture” towards the need for “increased ability to act and interact in the world” (p. 287). Despite my affirmative interest in charting new possible futures, my engagement with Braidotti’s work is itself a becoming, an ongoing process of understanding that is far from coherent or complete. Moreover, I am still thinking through what engagement with nomadic theory might entail for work with empirical data in research like mine. I am drawn to engage with this philosophy despite my inadequacies, because troubling the idea of subjectivity in SLA research highlights what is at stake in the uneasy use of the concept of identity and the subject of language learning.

3 Social dimensions of language learning

The field of language education has largely been informed by theories in second language acquisition (SLA) and, most recently, the “social turn” in SLA. The social turn was articulated by Firth & Wagner (1997) who called for enlarging the ontological and empirical parameters of the field of SLA, pointing out that the field’s traditional cognitive orientations tended to view
language proficiency and bilingualism according to monolingual norms. Early, structuralist research in SLA understood the process of language acquisition to involve acquiring a language and being able to use it in the same way as monolingual speakers of that language. These perspectives assumed that the only legitimate linguistic practices were those enacted by monolinguals (García, 2011, p. 115). Further, cognitive orientations to SLA focus on acquisition stages, presupposing the sequential addition of a second language rather than the heterogenous, simultaneous, multiple language and language learning evident in multilingual environments (García, 2011). By contrast, the social turn has been concerned with grounding theories of language acquisition in practical activity and social psychology (Block, 1996; van Lier, 1994). Arising from this approach, the sociocultural view of SLA has expanded critique of the cognitive and psycholinguistic preoccupations of the field (Block, 2007).

These shifts in understanding language, identity, and language use have implications for language learning and education. Conceiving of language as a social practice considers more than the role of language in context, it opens to the contingency and interactivity of context and relations in the production of language. Grounded in and emergent from social acts done in a particular time and space, language is a product of the embodied, contextualized, and political social practices that bring it about (Pennycook, 2010, p. 124). From this perspective, linguistic repertoires and identifications can be seen as products of social practices. Drawing on Bourdieu (1977), practices encompass actions, thoughts, and perceptions that are conditioned by habitus, a sensibility for social life that is developed in and shaped by historically and socially situated conditions. Bourdieu writes, “the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices” (1977, p. 82). These practices are in dialectic relation to other practices; themselves structured and restructured in interaction. Practices are not fixed or static performances because they are always under change, continually rewritten as new circumstances
arise (p. 124). As productive activity, practices are constructed out of all manner of existing resources, which are relocalized in production. Bourdieu’s perspective moves me to consider the conditions of possibility within which students’ language is produced; the repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) that can be drawn upon as a resource for supporting plurilingual language practices in the classroom. This dialectic notion of practice suggests to me that language is not a neutral structure with universal applications, but a structure that is porous, open to change and transformation. In education, how teachers and students use language and what they do with it constitutes a practice; contributing to habitus or a repertoire of practice that constitutes the preconditions for further coordination of practices.

Enmeshed within and influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic contexts, the use and value of languages vary. The intersection among these contexts is evident in circumstances that include: the marginalization and/or loss of minority languages (Skutnabb Kangass, 2000); the colonization of indigenous languages (Menezes de Souza, 2002; Lopez Gopar, 2007; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007); the global spread of English as a lingua franca (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2007); and issues relating to language policies and linguistic human rights (Phillipson, 2000; Shohamy, 2012). These circumstances pattern onto language use and the choices that individuals make in the mobilization of their linguistic resources. For instance, García, Bartlett, and Kleifgen (2007) point out that individuals are increasingly obliged to incorporate English into their communicative and literacy practices. While potentially overshadowing the use of some languages, they suggest that this use of English has contributed to the diversification of language practices and increasing familiarity with multilingualism, bending rigid norms and opening space for more diverse forms of linguistic knowledge and language use in society. These circumstances can be seen as individuals use their many languages not only within particular, local ethnolinguistic communities, but also across more
diverse public spaces including the Internet. García, Bartlett, and Kleifgen write that the increased presence in public domains, including the Internet, of languages that had been previously relegated to private domains has supported the variability and hybridity of language practices today.

To highlight how language learners and language learning is embedded within social contexts, many scholars in SLA (i.e., Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Poehner 2008; Swain, Kinnear, Steinman, 2010; Thorne, 2005) have conducted research informed by a sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning. Sociocultural perspectives focus on learners as members of social groups who use language as a social tool, rather than emphasizing internalization of a stable linguistic system. Sociocultural theory originates in Vygotsky’s (1986) theory of psychological development, emphasizing the idea that learning results from participation in, and appropriation of, forms of cultural mediation that are integrated into social activities (Wertsch, 1985). From a sociocultural perspective, all forms of development begin as external social activity, which is then appropriated and internalized by the individual. Several assumptions underlie this perspective on development in sociocultural theory, which Roos & Hamilton (2005) summarize: first, individuals are inducted into ways of thinking, working, and seeing. Second, as these ways of thinking are learned and internalized, they lead to incremental processes of change or development. Third, these abilities are fostered through mediated learning opportunities. These learning activities occur within a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is generally defined as the difference between what an individual can do alone and what he or she can do with assistance. Drawing on the SCT perspective, SLA research has documented the contribution of various pedagogic activities and processes that occur in the ZPD to promote L2 development. Key concepts that scholars have explored include collaborative dialogue (Swain & Lapkin, 2002), dynamic assessment (Poehner & Lantolf, 2004; Poehner,
2007; 2008), the role of mediating artifacts (Thorne, 2003), and languaging (Swain, Lapkin, Knouzzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009). Broadly, these activities emphasize the role of mediation and dialogic interaction in language learning and education. For language education, a sociocultural approach suggests a model of language learning “in which the relationship among participants matters as does the context” (Swain, Lapkin, & Kinnear, 2011, p. 21). However, Kramsch and Whiteside point out that SLA researchers working with sociocultural theories (SCT) of learning have maintained structuralist understandings of concepts such as native speaker. Similarly, they pointed out that although Norton’s theory of investment draws on poststructural feminist theory, it takes a structuralist view of learners and their multiple identities (p. 913).

Taking a critical approach, Jim Cummins (2001) has highlighted the influence of societal power relations in classroom interactions, particularly in the education of bilingual students. Cummins suggested that within a social context of unequal power relations, classroom interactions are never neutral, but located on a continuum ranging between the reinforcement of coercive relations of power and the promotion of collaborative relations of power. He explained that when students see their language, culture, and community reflected in and respected by school, this positively affects their engagement with learning. By contrast, when students perceive their language, culture or identity to be devalued or ignored at school, they are less likely to engage. Articulating this reciprocal relationship, Cummins wrote:

The more students learn, the more their academic self-concept grows, and the more academically engaged they become. However, students will be reluctant to invest their identities in the learning process if they feel their teachers do not like them, respect them, and appreciate their experiences and talents. In the past, students from marginalized social groups have seldom felt this sense of affirmation and respect for language and culture from their teachers. Consequently their intellectual and personal talents rarely found expression in the classroom. (p. 126)
Cummins has presented several pedagogical frameworks and strategies to guide teachers in actively challenging conditions of inequity for bilingual students (i.e. Cummins, 2001; 2009; Cummins & Early, 2011). These approaches are based on the idea that identity plays a central role in the language learning processes. For instance, Norton and Toohey (2002) write, “Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks” (p. 115). When students see their language, culture, and community reflected in and respected by school, this positively affects their engagement with learning, determining “who they are in their teacher’s eyes and who they are capable of becoming” (Cummins, 2001). Classrooms interactions can therefore either constrain or enable students’ identity constructions and learning.

Current understandings in language education highlight the multiple ways in which students’ home languages can serve as resources for learning (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Dagenais, Walsh, Armand & Maraillet, 2008; García, Barlett, & Kleifgen, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Stille & Cummins, forthcoming). This body of research demonstrates that instruction that draws on students’ cultural and linguistic skills and abilities, which comprise students’ “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992), supports academic achievement, affirms students’ identities, and promotes connections between home and school communities. Related to this perspective, literacy researchers have articulated the value in understanding students’ out of school literacies so that teachers can build upon these literacy practices in school (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Marsh, 2006; Pahl & Rowsell, 2006). For instance, Jiménez, Smith, and Teague (2009) suggested that “minority students are more likely to make progress in school when
teachers understand and incorporate their home and community literacy practices as opposed to attempting to simply impose school-like practice (e.g., book reading)” (p. 18).

Literacy engagement has recently emerged as possible explanatory factor in plurilingual students’ academic achievement (Cummins, 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Gambrell, 2011; Protacio, 2012). Theoretically, engagement has been described as a “meta-construct” (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) that characterizes multiple, interrelated behavioural, emotional, and cognitive processes. For example, literacy engagement encompasses motivation to read and write, habits of extensive reading and writing, and positive feelings and attitudes towards literacy. These distinctions have been applied to conceptualizations of literacy engagement in scholarly literature, although the aspects of each dimension and their operationalization differ across studies. Generally, behavioural aspects of literacy engagement refer to habits of extensive reading, including reading and using a variety of text types and genres, and reading for an extended amount of time. Affective aspects of engagement refer to positive feelings about literacy, including interest in literacy activities, enjoyment of favourite subjects or authors, and feelings of self-efficacy as a reader. The cognitive dimensions describe effort and involvement in literacy tasks, a preference for long or challenging texts, and the use of meta-cognitive learning strategies during reading. Studies in cognitive psychology often draw from literature on motivation or goal orientation theory (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Hidi & Harackiewicz et al., 2000; Pintrich, 2000; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994) to describe intrinsic motivation as a part of literacy engagement, meaning valuing reading for its own sake and seeking to master literacy tasks for the purposes of understanding. Literacy engagement also has a social dimension, in that readers collaboratively interact with others around literacy activities, for instance talking about and discussing books or other texts. Collectively, this literature on literacy engagement usefully draws attention to what engagement might look like in students; and though significant,
these studies focus on English-speaking students, and monolingual, monocultural approaches to teaching and learning. Many of these studies also exclude data from English language learners in their results.

Empirical evidence connecting literacy engagement to academic achievement comes from numerous studies linking access to books and extensive reading habits to comprehension and school achievement (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Guthrie et al., 2007; Lindsay, 2010; Wigfield et al., 2008). For instance, data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) clearly showed that, “The level of a student’s reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student’s interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages” (OECD, 2004, p. 8). My perspective on this relationship draws from Cummins’ Literacy Engagement Framework (Cummins & Early, 2011), which conceives of literacy engagement as not just a factor in learning, but also an outcome. This framework suggests that to teach plurilingual students effectively, teachers need to build on the full range of students’ cultural and linguistic repertoires, and maximize students’ opportunities to become actively involved with and invested in reading and writing activities. Most importantly, the framework suggests that identity investment is a component of literacy engagement.

Cummins’ research about literacy engagement differs from other studies in several ways. First, the Literacy Engagement framework is designed to support the teaching and learning of emergent bilingual students in particular. Another important distinction is that Cummins’ research conceives of literacy engagement as not just a factor in learning, but an outcome. As such, the Literacy Engagement framework is pedagogical; it articulates both what engagement-
supporting instructional practice might look like, and how engagement-supporting instructional practice creates a context for producing engagement as an outcome of learning. Finally, Cummins’ research takes a broad and inclusive perspective on what literacy is, emphasizing the value of biliteracy and digital literacy practices in contributing to literacy engagement. Collectively, these distinctions have significance for educational policy and teaching and learning; including what literacies should be developed in and supported through curriculum and classroom practice, how students’ literacy engagement can be amplified, and why identity affirmation is important to literacy engagement.

Cummins’ Literacy Engagement framework provokes a critical analysis of conventional ideas for language and literacy pedagogy, similar to the differences among “autonomous” and “ideological” models for conceptualizing literacy (Street, 1984; 2003). Theorists and researchers subscribing to the autonomous model frame literacy as a set of universal reading skills that are acquired developmentally: “a process in which the cognitive changes within individuals affect the nature of their participation in the social events that constitute literacy” (Snow, 2000, p. 117). Countering this perspective, scholars who draw upon an ideological model of literacy focus on the significance of literacy within particular socio-cultural contexts, wherein “changes in the nature of participation affect cognition” (Gee, 2000, p. 126). The differences between these two perspectives have implications for the ways in which literacy is conceptualized, and the way in which literacy engagement should be researched. Seeing literacy engagement from an ideological perspective, occurring in interaction with others in socially and culturally organized contexts, I consider how students’ engagements with literacy are formed and mediated by experience—not only through classroom instructional activities, but through the totality of embodied, gendered, social and cultural aspects of school and community life. Casting school-based literacy practices as socially mediated and embedded in social practice assists me in
exploring how learners’ literate identities are cultivated in and through frames of activity that support their engagement with literacy and education. I draw on this background literature to enable me to see school-based language practices and literacy engagement in connection with plurilingualism, identity investment, and social context, providing a lens through which I can interpret the forms of instructional practice that create conditions for supporting and strengthening learners’ engagement with literacy activities in school.

4 Conclusion

In this review of the literature in SLA research, I have argued that the theorization of students as either native/nonnative speakers limits or excludes different ways of being, denies or excludes differences, and is constructed based on categories of sameness and difference. This theorization imagines a subject with universal attributes, and in imagining equitable futures risks being confined by rigid, dichotomous thinking. This critique can be extended to the notion of multiple identities that has also been used in SLA research, an understanding that operates within the boundaries and limitations of the Cartesian subject. The limitation of this perspective is that it upholds a possibility of diversity and difference while relying on the myth of unity and sameness. For instance, as Nancy Fraser (1996) wrote, “like difference feminism, pluralist multiculturalism tends to substantialize identities, treating them as positives instead of as constructed relations…losing sight of the fact that differences intersect, it regresses to a simple additive model of difference” (p. 70). An alternative to these understandings entails unraveling assumptions inherent in SLA research and practice, taking subjectivity into account. Articulating what is at stake in the theorization of identity and subjectivity, my purpose has been to support the emancipatory aim of critical approaches in the field of SLA, attempting to get beyond the
understandings that continue to reify monolingual, monocultural approaches to language and education.

Drawing on perspectives in feminist theory, this chapter articulated the theoretical tension between the anti-foundationalist and deconstructive aims of poststructuralism and the strategic need to address the historical and material realities of nondominant or marginalized communities. Within the field of SLA, interest in poststructural perspectives has offered a way to deconstruct and disrupt ‘fossilized’ theoretical and conceptual understandings that have contributed to essentializing and potentially oppressive discourses and practices in English language teaching and learning. Though the use of poststructuralism has entailed emancipatory aims, few SLA researchers have engaged with the tensions arising from this expectation and the epistemological shifts it entails. Poststructural theorizations of identity in SLA research can be useful for the decentering of subjectivity and experience necessary to disrupt the production of monolingual, monocultural practices, particularly as normalized in and through English-medium education. At the same time, poststructural orientations involve risks for nondominant and marginalized communities that can be eclipsed by poststructuralist efforts at deconstruction. This contradiction suggests that understandings of identity and its connection to ‘the social’ require explicit theorization and acknowledgement of the debates surrounding these terms.

Opening a theoretical space to engage with these concerns, I have endeavoured “to take seriously the risks for those positioned at the margins” (Mawhinney, 1998, p. 13), suggesting that the practices and discourses that construct students’ subjectivity and experience need to be more fully addressed for the field of SLA to support social change. Mining this theoretical tension might assist researchers in SLA who aim to incorporate both the complexity of the subject and of power relations inherent in English language education. Next, in the methodology chapter, I
describe my approach to engaging with these tensions, articulating how I worked with and through them in my research practice.
Chapter 3
Methodology

1 Research as critical praxis

The previous chapter worked to de-centre the ‘native’/’nonnative’ dichotomy and reposition the subject of language learning in SLA research within broader theoretical understandings of difference. Engaging with this shift is not merely a theoretical endeavor, but an epistemological one, because what is known about the social world is deeply connected to how it is known. For my research, this connection between epistemology and methodology underscores the need for an approach to inquiry that intentionally interrupts the power relations inherent in the research process. Drawing on Patti Lather’s (2007) notion of critical praxis, my research was embedded within a school-university collaboration that endeavoured to create positive change in educational practice. However, my work also troubled this idea of positive change. In the uneasy space between these dual purposes, I negotiated what Lather described as “a structure of praxis and ethics without foundations in a context of demands for practices with more to answer to in terms of the complexities of language and the world” (p. 3).

Traditional, structuralist approaches to SLA research have privileged quantitative research methods. More recently, scholars have turned to qualitative research methods to engage with the social and affective processes at work in language learning. For instance, Norton and Toohey (2011) wrote, “methods that rely on static, inherent, and measurable learner ‘variables’ are not consistent with some of the major understandings of these approaches” (p. 426). Transcendent claims and grand narratives about the way language is learned are inadequate to account for the growing body of research that emphasizes a richer, more complex picture of
language learning that locates learners in social space, influenced by activities, relations, histories, and ideologies relating to language and society.

A strategic objective of qualitative research in SLA has been to challenge the normative construction of language learners and language learning processes. For instance, Suresh Canagarajah (2007) suggested that qualitative research supports efforts to, “practice a linguistics that treats human agency, contextuality, diversity, indeterminacy, and multimodality as the norm” (p. 98). Although not generalizable, qualitative research has assisted researchers in documenting cases that refute theoretical propositions and prompt new theory generation. These considerations influenced my methodological approach. Rather than reproduce existing ways of thinking and reinforce the legitimacy of dominant perspectives in the field, I searched for a methodology that would assist me to think critically about my beliefs and understandings. In particular, I wanted an approach to inquiry that reflected what I had come to learn as an English language teacher—that my relationships with students were just as important as the vocabulary and language functions that I was teaching. Before beginning my doctoral studies, I found these dimensions of the teaching experience to be absent from conversations about professional learning in English language teaching. To address my interest in these dimensions of practice, I looked for an approach to inquiry that would enable me to be in continual relation with students and teachers, a way to explore what mattered in the way we interacted and connected with one another. I also wanted to contribute to the growing critical dialogue among the many scholars in the field who are attempting to do research that matters to classrooms and communities.

The practice of research inquiry is inherently political, entangled in broader societal power relations. Those positioned outside of power have often had little say in research conducted on or about them. Addressing the connection between research and power, Linda
Tuhiwai Smith (1999) wrote, “the ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples” (p. 1). Much scientific research that has been conducted on and with marginalized communities has involved inquiry practices that inscribe normative and colonizing forms of research gaze, undermining transformative possibilities. Even research designed to ‘help’ communities has often been framed from a deficit model of understanding. Eve Tuck (2009) called for an end to this kind of ‘damage-centred research’, which she described as “research that operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation” (p. 413). These issues highlight some of the challenges of conducting scholarly research, particularly research that aims to ‘transform’ others or undo dominant and marginalizing perspectives.

Lather’s notion of critical praxis acknowledges this complexity, and “the necessary tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation” (p. 38). Lather points out that praxis is not innocent, but located in the failure to master speaking with people and the colonial idea of speaking for people (p. 38). Changing this positioning, she writes, will not be improved by ‘better’ research methods, but by working with an epistemology that is suspicious of notions of truth. Critical praxis aims to address this disjuncture, working both within and against the challenges of knowledge production. It is “doing it” and “troubling it” at the same time (p. 38). This approach entails a praxis after poststructuralism, one that complicates representations and recognizes that the condition of not knowing is the very basis for understanding.

By definition, the idea of praxis entails research as social action for change. The purpose of this approach is to ground knowledge about the social world in the experiences of people and
Praxis has roots in participatory action research (PAR), an approach associated with Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy. Working alongside people to transform the circumstances and conditions of their lives, Freire wrote, “no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed” (p. 54). Through a dialogic practice of action and reflection, praxis is a process of coming to understanding through involvement with, not for, people in the struggle for humanity (p. 48). Emphasizing political, social, and ideological concerns, research as praxis sees methodology as more than a technical domain. For instance, Danilo Streck (2008) writes that this recognition is based on the premise that, “without the participation of those with the greatest interest in transforming society towards democracy and humanization, the knowledge produced would have little effect on the life of people and society” (p. 29). The opportunity to have a voice and to have a say in the production of knowledge about oneself is an enduring concern and basic human right that has been expressed eloquently by writers, poets, artists and activists speaking from and for marginalized communities. For instance, Toni Morrison (1987) wrote in her book _Beloved_, “definitions belong to the definers, not the defined.” Claiming the right to speak for oneself is a means through which people become agents of their own experience, capable of speaking back to the powers that seem to govern their lives.

Current poststructural feminist perspectives raise important questions about praxis and the construction of social change. For instance, Lather has problematized the role of ‘transformative intellectuals’, and the notion of emancipating or empowering others. In the right conditions, every individual is an “intellectual being” (Ladson-Billings, 1995) with something important to say about social inequities and the means necessary for change. Nonetheless, complexities are inherent in claims of democratization of the research process (e.g., Cammarota
& Fine, 2008; Lather, 2007; Toohey & Waterstone, 2004; Tuck, 2009). Similar to Tuck’s perspective, Lather writes that “narratives of salvage and redemptive agendas” offer “ever deeper places for privilege to hide” (p. 108). Praxis and efforts toward participatory research processes do not operate outside of power. Rather, praxis entails a constant negotiation and acknowledgement of complicity in power relations (p. 108). Lather calls this “praxis under erasure”, a practice wherein emancipatory agendas are under suspicion for their implication in coercion, rationalism, and universalism (p. 109). The idea of critical praxis does not hide from the limitations associated with fixing, defining and confining that is the work of research inquiry; rather, it locates such work on shifting ground (p. 111).

1.1 Ethnographic fieldwork

My research was embedded within a school-university research partnership in a large urban school district in Canada. The purpose of the partnership was to support English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in implementing pedagogical strategies for engaging emergent bilingual students in literacy activities. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Jim Cummins, led this project. To meet the objectives of the partnership, I, as part of a team of university-based researchers, worked collaboratively with teachers and students to assist them in using digital technology for teaching and learning activities, and to encourage students to recognize and draw upon their home languages and cultural knowledge as resources for learning. The research component of this study documented students’ perceptions and feelings about the process of getting engaged with literacy in this way, and teachers’ observations about the effects of the project on students’

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4 This case study took place in the context of a broader project entitled Engaging Literacies which was financially supported by a Canada Research Chair awarded to Dr. Jim Cummins of OISE, University of Toronto.
self-efficacy and literacy accomplishments. We anticipated that this project would enhance the students’ engagement with literacy, and generate positive feelings towards using students’ home language(s) and technology for literacy activities in the classroom. Within the context of this project, I was fortunate to be able to work with teachers, students, and colleagues to address issues and challenges facing educators, children, and families in the school district. The opportunity to embed my study within this project provided me with valuable support, resources, training, networks, and connections, including access to laptop computers, wireless Internet connections, and licensed software.

My research design started from a basic initial plan that evolved as I entered the field and began to work with and get to know the teachers and students. Together, we determined the goals of our collaboration and created pedagogic activities based on our collective needs and interests. At the outset of this process, I articulated questions to guide the research and our work. The questions were as follows:

1) What happens when the students create identity texts that allow them to critically engage with their social realities?
2) What does literacy engagement look like among students who are in the process of learning English as an additional language in a multicultural, multilingual school context?
3) How do these literacy activities exert an influence upon the academic and social success of the students?
4) What is happening in the process of this work that strengthens students’ engagement with literacy, and how are these practices relevant to education policy?

I used ethnographic methods to guide this research. However, the imperative of doing school-based ethnographic work meant that I was not just a researcher, but a ‘doer’ in the classrooms (Gallagher, 2008). Kathleen Gallagher (2007) calls this approach a porous methodology that is driven by the explicit and immediate needs of the field (p. 55). My presence in the classrooms
week after week, and my need to talk to teachers and students, meant that I had to involve myself in the routines and work of classroom life. Drawing on my background as an ESL teacher of adult learners, I supported students in completing their work, I co-planned and co-taught activities with the teachers, I made photocopies, led games at recess, and accompanied the teachers at parent-teacher interviews. At the same time, I felt it was important to involve the teachers and students in the practice of research. I informed the teachers and students about my research purposes, and I told them about the resources that I could bring to our work. With this information, the teachers and I talked about what was feasible and possible to accomplish together. We created a plan and timeline for the pedagogic and research activities, and we shared these plans with the students. We invited the students to contribute their thoughts and ideas to these plans, and I talked to them about university, graduate studies, and research. For instance, I explained to one class that being a researcher was like being an investigator, a detective, or a journalist.

I got the idea to describe my work in this way after a third-grade boy in one of the classes was reprimanded for creating a secret ‘spy club’. The student, Hassam⁵, had created five mini spy books. He had stapled pages into a book and created a title page labelled Spy Notes, Top Secret. He distributed these books to his close male friends, and instructed them to follow the female students in the class and write notes about their activities. Hassam and the other boys got into trouble when the teacher found out about their espionage. I decided to put Hassam’s investigative skills to good use for our research, and I appointed him to the task of recording the

⁵ All participant names are pseudonyms.
titles of books that students in the class were reading. Like the spy books he created, Hassam created a *Literacy Investigation* book. Here, he describes what he did:

This is Hassam for *CTV News*. I put tabs [in the book] for the students in my class. For example Saamini. I’m recording what books she reads….For Mohammed, I’m doing them in alphabetical order. This is my first book for Mohammed. He read the Spies book on Tuesday, February 23, 2010, and the book is non-fiction. Akash read the Hound of Baskervilles on Tuesday, February 23, 2010, and the book is fiction.

Based on these efforts, Hassam’s teacher and classmates started appointing him to conduct other investigations for them. He proudly reported to me the first time this happened: “I did one investigation already. I had to look for a missing hat.” Involving Hassam in chronicling our experience reframed his interests and capabilities as positive contributions to the learning community and our research practice (Kinloch, 2010). Moreover, I learned that school-based definitions of literacy engagement do not constitute all of the literacy practices that students are involved in, even within school and during school time.

As this example illustrates, my research did not take a conventional approach to ethnography. As Gallagher (2007) articulated, the theoretical and pragmatic imperatives of the research and the desire for reciprocity with participants required a more critical and less traditional approach. Amidst “the tension between standing apart and being fully involved” (p. 61), this research was intersubjective and produced through engagement in educational practice—not research “on or about education,” but rather research “in and for education” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986/2003, p. 156).

Many ethnographies in language and literacy research have documented the language and literacy practices of particular, often marginalized, communities rather than more dominant institutional ones. However, Anneke Van enk, Diane Dagenais, and Kelleen Toohey (2005) pointed out that school-based ethnographic research offers the opportunity to understand the
sociocultural context of education and the circumstances and conditions that enable or obstruct language and literacy learning. They noted, “School literacies, while not superior, are more socially powerful and therefore operate differently, which needs to be studied and acknowledged” (p. 503). Working to address this need, my research aimed to elaborate a more complete picture of multilingual, multicultural classrooms, particularly the practices and discourses that support dominant monolingual, monocultural language and literacy practices to the exclusion of students’ rich cultural and linguistic resources.

The ability of ethnography to understand and portray knowledge of the social world is contingent, arising from the impossibility of certainty in social research. Observations of the social world are not objective, but situated in between the observer and the observed. Moreover, what scholars express in their representations is never transparent, the research story will never be completely “right” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 384). This failure of representation highlights the role of the researcher as meaning maker. Meanings are not inherent, but produced through the forces, affects, and temporality of experience circulating with and in embodied subjectivities and social space (ie. Ahmed, 2004; Britzman, 2003; Gallagher, 2008; Lather, 2007; Springgay, 2011). These social and affective dimensions of experience suggest reasons to doubt the capacity for ethnographic research to ‘draw close’ to its objects (Lather, 2007). Relationships, histories, and trajectories of participation between and among researchers and participants influence both the practice and findings of research. Meeting the limits of this knowing entails the need for reflexive understanding of the researcher’s own participation in the circulation of power and knowledge. This reflexivity is important because ethnographers do more than observe circumstances, contexts, and relationships; they play a part in them (Vidich & Lyman, 2003). Attentive to these concerns, I carried out the fieldwork with an awareness of my role in the
process of data generation. Volunteering in the classrooms, I built trust and rapport with teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. We had many conversations to elaborate and clarify the research aims and process. Nonetheless, I heard and understood these needs according to my particular theoretical, ontological, personal, and cultural frameworks, in the context of the unequal power relations that inevitably permeate the process of research inquiry (Lutrell, 2000, p. 499). Though these considerations underscore the limitations of this study and the impossibilities of representation of the social world, I believe that research that foregrounds these concerns remains “good enough” (Lutrell, 2000).

In Working the Ruins, Elizabeth St. Pierre and Wanda Pillow (2000) ask, do we continue to use the categories of research that humanism’s science has defined? Poststructural feminist research has engaged, in explicit terms, the politics of recounting and being accountable in research (Britzman, 2000, p. 30), evaluating research outcomes according to an ethic of caring, personal responsibility, praxis, and dialogue with participants. Among these considerations are the situatedness of knowing, the intersubjective, negotiated, and collective nature of knowledge production, and the existence of multiple, sometimes contradictory, affects, experiences, and perspectives. Prioritizing emic perspectives and triangulating different understandings, the criteria for evaluating such research relies on the coherence, insight, and trustworthiness of the research narrative (Eisner, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and the use of multiple, interconnected methodological practices to contribute rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to research inquiry (Flick, 1998, p. 231 as cited in Lincoln & Denizen, 2005, p. 5). To me, questions of validity and legitimacy entail an ethical and social dimension, suggesting that inquiry practices should have more to answer to than generalizability or replicability. When spending time getting to know people, building up relationships of mutual
obligation, and stepping into normally private areas of their lives, validity and legitimacy entail responsibilities and commitments to participants and communities. As Lather (2007) wrote, traditional notions of objectivity can be replaced with a validity and legitimacy developed in and through practical action, concerned with, "not so much the nature of science as its effects" (p. 2).

Grounded in these ideas, I sought an alternative, critical evaluation criteria that was, “at once evocative, moral, critical, and rooted in local understandings” (Lather, 1993). When I revisited one of the teachers a year after finishing the main activities of this project, he described the changes, in both him and the school, that had happened arising from of our work together. To me, his comments illustrate this reconceptualised notion of research validity and legitimacy:

We made it real, you know. It’s easier to talk about the classroom and pedagogy because it’s not so closely tied, it’s a part of me, but it’s not me. This process really has been a game changer for me. I think so. Not to say that I wouldn’t have ever got here on my own eventually, but in my teaching career I’ve had road blocks and impediments and stuff that has impeded my development as a teacher. And maybe if I didn’t have certain bad luck things happen in my life then maybe I would have been farther along this particular path ten years sooner. That’s entirely possible.

2  Researching language, literacy, and identity in school

The research activities in this project involved the cooperation and collaboration of multiple stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, school administrators, and university-based researchers. This collaborative approach challenged the belief that research can and should be conducted only by university-based “experts” (Anyon, 2008; Denos, Toohey, Neilson, & Waterstone, 2009). Sharing similar objectives to improve education practice, we engaged an inquiry process that mattered to students’ experiences at the school. In practical terms, this approach meant that I collaborated with teachers to identify issues and challenges that were relevant to their practice, and I drew upon this information to define the questions and purposes of the research. The research evolved in an iterative fashion, progressing to new stages as our
relationships and understandings expanded and deepened. The intended outcome of this approach was to assist teachers to achieve their goals and create change in their practice, and to produce understandings rooted in our experience.

Despite the participatory nature of this research, our collaboration remained influenced by issues of power and privilege. Teachers did not have the time to conduct this research alone, nor did they have access to the resources, including laptop computers, required to carry out this project by themselves. Though we collaborated on most aspects of the project, our different roles and positions sometimes made collaboration difficult. For instance, teachers’ institutional responsibilities and accountability to school administrators affected their agency to enact the change they wanted to see. Moreover, the pressure of addressing curriculum expectations limited teachers’ time, flexibility, and interest in participating in all aspects of our collaborative work, such as writing up the research for publication. These challenges constrained our ability to create an equal partnership as co-researchers, so I sought other ways to support the teachers in analyzing and disseminating our work by presenting at professional conferences with them and by volunteering to help the teachers to do other projects in their classrooms.

An important dimension of ethnography is spending an extended period of time in the field. Fetterman (1989, as quoted in Cresswell & Miller, 2000) writes, “working with people day in and day out for long periods of time is what gives ethnographic research its validity and vitality” (p. 46). I collaborated with the teachers for a period of 18 months. Our collaboration was documented in verbal, written, and digital forms. Though many of our conversations were dominated by the necessities of planning and preparation, at the heart of our work was an interest in connecting with students’ lives—their experiences, their linguistic capabilities, and their families. Immersed in the school and in the practice of teaching, I gathered research data
through multiple methods. Taken together, these practices constituted a pragmatic and strategic *bricolage* that suited the research context (Denizen & Lincoln, 2005). Each method made visible different dimensions of our experience, which was suitable to the challenges of doing classroom-based research with teachers and young children. As Blommaert and van de Vivjer wrote, “an object as complex as humans in society and culture surely tolerates multiple and very different views which, together, might perhaps bring us closer to a comprehensive picture” (p. 2).

As a participant observer, I documented my observations in the school and in the classrooms with field notes that were either written or digitally recorded and later transcribed. I interviewed teachers when it was convenient for them, after school or during their planning periods, and often over lunch at South-Asian food stands at the nearby shopping mall. The teachers invited me to attend various professional events with them. These events included a professional development workshop on teaching children from war-affected countries, an Eco-Schools certification training program, an English language assessment planning meeting, and school technology committee meetings (though I declined to be involved in the school technology committee). I also participated in afterschool social activities with the teachers, including end-of-term dinners, a local environmental clean up, and nature hikes and ice-skating near the school. To gain understanding of students’ perspectives, I encouraged them to write about our work together, asking them to identify something they learned or what they liked most or least about what we did each time I visited. Students often wrote journal entries, and sometimes they created pictures, poems, or letters that reflected on our work. To involve the students as co-researchers, I arranged for them to interview their classmates and family members. I became involved in the school community as well, doing presentations about language and literacy learning for a local parenting group and for the executive board at the
community centre. I volunteered to teach English classes to adults at the local public library, and several of the students’ parents attended my classes. Overall, my data sources included researcher field notes, audio- and video-recorded observations and interviews, multimodal artifacts of student work, digital photographs, and survey data.

With the students, I made sure that all of the data collection activities were developmentally appropriate and relevant to the classroom context. As an example, instead of asking students to fill out a questionnaire or survey about their backgrounds, one teacher and I created a learning activity called “Our communities”. We posted a map of the world on a classroom bulletin board, and students put a pin in the cities or countries where they were from. We tied a piece of yarn to this pin and stretched the yarn to our city in Canada. To learn more about students’ communities in their country of origin, we had them complete a worksheet comparing features of their home community with their new Canadian community. This activity connected with a curriculum expectation that students develop their understanding of community resources. Similarly, when we wanted to interview students about their experiences learning English, we invited the students to create the interview questions and interview one another, rather than having me interview each student. Though this meant that the interview data was not perfect, it was certainly rich enough to gather important information about the students’ perceptions. The figure below shows two images of the student-created interview questions.
As a whole class, we debriefed our pedagogic research activities and documented on chart paper what we found out. These dimensions of the research process aimed to bridge the traditional university/school divide (Denos, Toohey, Neilson, & Waterstone, 2009) and create a dialectic between theory and practice (Freire, 2006; hooks, 1994). Moreover, the collaborative involvement of the teachers and students grounded the research findings in the practice of education and the experiences of the teachers, students, and me in their school (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 1996; Howe, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; August et al., 2008; McTaggert, 1997; Schwab, 1969).
My analysis intertwined fieldwork, thematic analysis, peer review, and writing. Engaging with the multiple sources of data gathered over the course of the project, the analysis was iterative, recursive, and intertextual (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Merriam, 1988). I took the perspective that no one source of data could stand on its own, but had to be understood within the larger project data. I mapped the activities, relations, and participation relating to language, literacy, and students’ identifications in the classroom context, looking for patterns, connections, and ‘bright spots’ across the data. My analytical process comprised three stages. First, I did a thematic analysis of the data gathered from the first eight months of the research. Taking into consideration students’ texts and images, as well as roles, relationships, and interactions among the students and teachers, these multimodal data were thematically coded using NVivo 9 qualitative analysis software. I did open coding with several interviews, and then developed a coding strategy that synthesized the codes into broad categories. Rather than coding line by line, I read and coded “chunks” of data. Findings arising from this process were shared with other members of the Engaging Literacies Project team, and we discussed the findings, raised questions, and debated differences in our perspectives. The categories included:

1. Use of first language in teaching and learning activities
2. Role of technology in teaching and learning activities
3. Language awareness and language learning
4. Literacy engagement
5. Parent and family involvement
6. Home and family literacy practices
Another dimension of analysis occurred concurrent to my fieldwork, wherein data collection and analysis was a simultaneous process. Throughout the various stages of our work, I noted abstractions and patterns that were of theoretical significance, including the dynamics of language and literacy teaching and learning in the classroom. I also noted the various ways that the teachers and the students referenced and integrated the use of home languages and digital technologies in the classroom. Analysis of these data became a dialogic endeavour among the students, the teacher, and me. The teachers and I shared our reflections and discussed our interpretations as we planned instructional activities. We discussed critical moments we were encountering and practical difficulties that we were facing (e.g., making time for EQAO standardized testing, increasing students’ accessing the internet at school), and we brainstormed ideas for resolving these issues. We discussed ways to alter, if needed, instructional practices and ways of supporting students’ progress. In many respects, these discussions took our work through “the self reflective spiral” of action research (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2000). Throughout this process, and especially as themes began to emerge in the fieldwork, I engaged the students in “member checks” (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) as a means to see whether they agreed with my understandings, and to shift notions of validity from the perspective of the researcher to the perspective of the participants. As I developed ideas and recognized patterns in what I was hearing and observing, I started to ask the students if they could clarify, expand, or correct any of these emerging impressions of their experience (Bradbury & Reason, 2001; Denos, Toohey, Neilson, & Waterstone, 2009). Generally, I did this during circle time with the whole class when we reflected on our learning together. Some of these sessions were audio recorded. As an example, after the students had conducted and
presented research about their school community, I asked them to tell me what they thought about doing research and what they found difficult. The transcript excerpt below elaborates the students’ perceptions:

Hisham: It’s exciting because you get to learn lots of facts, you can read the books, go on the computers and check some pictures and some facts and stuff like that.

Saskia: Great, Asra?
Asra: I feel that I’m really smart now, learning about things that I never learned before. And becoming an expert, like a real researcher

Saskia: Great. Rifat?
Rifat: I felt strong and like powerful.

Saskia: Why?
Rifat: About writing and learning about foods from different countries, and we get to see the books, computers with our teacher

Saskia: Ramisha?
Ramisha: It feels good because you learn about new things and sometimes when you do it, it feels good, sometimes it’s hard.

Saskia: Great, thank you. Would anyone else like to say what they liked? Ahmed?
Ahmed A.: I liked the way we write. It’s easier, it’s…

Saskia: Was it easier than you thought, you mean?
Ahmed A.: I don’t know

Saskia: Ok, you think about it. Akash?
Akash: It was fun, because we got so many facts that we didn’t know. Like one quarter of it we didn’t know and some parts we knew

Saskia: Did you remember Ahmed?
Ahmed A.: I liked to write and learn new words

Saskia: Great. Was there anything that was kind of hard?
Ahmed I.: Thinking

Ramisha: Finding information.

Akash: I used my brains to find information

Qahira: Finding subtopics was hard and when you write you have to make titles, and when you write your hand gets tired

Saskia: Hassam?
Hassam: The smarties.
Saskia: What? Smarties?
Hassam: Not like the candies, *smarties* [with emphasis].
Saskia: Can you tell me about the smarties?
Hassam: Like in your brain.

Through this process students became analysts of their own experience, and often offered insightful elaborations. These whole class discussions generated further data on topics such as language learning, migration, communities, and the school context. However, Lather (1986) points out that the nature of power and hegemony limits the capacity of member checks to contribute to validity—particularly since people’s ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain their powerlessness (p. 76). Despite this challenge, I was always transparent about the purposes of my research, and presented my questions and observations in ways that positioned the students as experts of their own experience.

The teachers and I continued to discuss and analyze themes that emerged from these data during preparation to disseminate what we had learned over the course of the project. We shared our analysis with the school community, with educators working in similar contexts, and with the students’ families through events and activities that included: creating a digital documentary film (with the students) about our work; screening and discussing the film with parents and other classes and teachers in the school; participating in an international exhibition showcasing projects involving multicultural students and their teachers; co-presenting at two district-level professional learning conferences for teachers; and co-presenting at a provincial conference about research and English language teaching. We video recorded our conference presentations, and I later reviewed these recordings to assist me to understand the teachers’ perspectives.

Taken together, these activities contributed to a process of peer review for the research. Peer
review is “the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or phenomenon being explored” (Cresswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Furthermore, I worked closely with my dissertation committee and the principal investigator of the Engaging Literacies project to discuss and get feedback on emergent findings. These peer review activities contributed to the credibility of the study and the findings emerging from the analysis, and drew from the principles of my theoretical framework.

When the project was complete, I began a third phase of analysis: the process of writing up the research findings. I began to construct a text that would help readers to think about and understand the experiences and concerns of the teachers, students, and me. To prepare for this phase, all student and teacher interviews were transcribed either by me or by an independent transcriptionist. Once transcribed, I listened to each interview with the transcript, correcting mistakes, and reviewing the transcript alongside information that I had recorded in my field notes relating to the transcripts. I then viewed all the video footage recorded during the project. Many of the videos were transcribed for analysis, but not in their entirety. Instead, a summary of each recording was created, identifying the activity being implemented. Critical segments of each class where language and literacy teaching and learning were addressed (ie. direct messages, conversations, and activities in which the teacher and students discussed home language use, literacy activities, use of technology in the classroom, etc.) were highlighted in these summaries and these segments were transcribed in their entirety. Taken together, these data comprised the field texts that served as the basis for this stage writing up the data. I began by reconstructing the classroom activities, the experiences and perceptions of the teacher and students, and important interactions that occurred from the beginning of the project to the end. I attempted to provide rich detail about the project, the students, the teachers, and their
experiences. I focused in on individual students, and looked more broadly at practices within the classroom and the school community context (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Duff, 2008). I read and reread the data, adding reflections of my experience, and notes about abstractions, patterns, and exceptions that I identified.

The final product of this work, my dissertation, is written as a seamless text that blurs the distinction between my perspective and the story of what happened during the research process. Creating this coherent narrative involves belief in several assumptions that underlie ethnographic work. Deborah Britzman (2000) articulates these assumptions: first, that it is possible for the ethnographer to know by ‘being there’; second, that meanings can be made by interacting with people who say what they mean and mean what they say; and third, that the reader’s reading and the text’s telling are one and the same (p. 28-29). Britzman writes, “the ground upon which ethnography is built turns out to be a contested and fictive geography” (p. 28). She continues, “the ethnographic promise of a holistic account is betrayed by the slippage born from the partiality of language of what cannot be said precisely because of what is said, and of the impossible difference within what is said, what is intended, what is signified, what is repressed, what is taken, and what remains” (p. 28). Writing up the analysis is no different from fieldwork as an interpretive act; structuring an understanding of what took place, the text itself is a site for the production of knowledge and power (Bochner & Ellis, 2003). Writing the experience of what happened blurs the distinction between the writer and the research. The narratives I tell about the research are framed—their interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting parts to a whole. Ethnographic accounts, therefore, are not objective truths. Purported knowledge of what someone thinks or feels reifies a universal approach to knowledge, and does not attend to the affective, relational, and intercorporeal dimensions of knowledge production (Springgay, 2008).
3 Analysis: A double(d) reading

Attempting to account for these concerns about ethnography, I wrote up the story of this research in a way that forecloses easy readings. In the chapters that follow I present two different tales from the field (Lather, 1992; 2007). Each of these tales draws upon the empirical work of the project, and looks at the work in different ways. Following chapter four, which introduces the research context and the pedagogic activities that generated the empirical data, chapter five presents a critical story, offering my researcher account of students as plurilingual social actors and the role that plurilingualism can play in education. This critical story is based on the assumptions that teachers’ instructional practices need improvement and that they are invested in learning about how they might change and improve their educational practice, once assisted by me. By contrast, chapter six presents a deconstructive story and a suspicious reading, which probes the desires of liberatory pedagogues to ‘empower’ unliberated students (Lather, 1992, p. 95). Drawing on materialist critiques offered by the affective and ethical turns in feminist theory, this story details my construction and production of meaning as an affective and embodied experience of understanding (Coole & Frost, 2010).

Together, these two stories offer a double(d) reading that articulates alternate, conflicting representations. The stories map onto each other to illustrate the unresolvable tensions inherent in research with human subjects in the social world. Moreover, the stories beg the question, how do our very efforts to liberate perpetuate relations of dominance? (Lather, 1992), and how do we understand what is at stake in creating meaning out of data in SLA research? Connecting with Lather’s idea of critical praxis (1992; 2007), these questions speak to my dual interest in supporting change while advocating a place for deconstructive empirical work in SLA research and practice. These chapters support my argument that the field of SLA needs to respond to the
questions of scientific authority raised by the ‘post’ and ‘post-post’ discourses in the social sciences and humanities. For instance, what are our responsibilities when we frame meaning of empirical data; and how do emancipatory desires shape the texts we create? On many occasions during this research process, I asked myself, and bothered my dissertation committee members to tell me, what does my interest in onto-epistemological-methodological questions have to do with research in language and literacy learning? In the chapters that follow I hope to illuminate a possible response to this question—that power, knowledge, research practices and discourses, and the politics of global location and diversity—these concerns all have to do with language and literacy teaching and learning.
Chapter 4
Going to School at EnglishTown

1 Introducing EnglishTown Public School

Parveen: In one year, we don’t have lots of holidays. Sometimes we have Christmas holiday, we have *Eid* holiday, we have *Eid-al-Fitr*

Mrs. Gopal: So at Christmas time you get a holiday as well in Pakistan?

Abdulazim: We don’t have Christmas.

Mrs. Gopal: [Moving on] Good, so let’s sing. Let’s start.

Miss Yoon: Okay, one line at a time.

[The students sing] We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas. We wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year. Good tidings we bring, to you and your kin. Good tidings for Christmas and a happy New Year!

Miss Yoon: Very nice. Who knows what this word is, kin?

Parveen: Candy?

Miss Yoon: It sounds like that. We say ‘good tidings to you, to you and your kin’. What do you think kin is? Abdulazim?

Abdulazim: Kids.

Miss Yoon: Kids? You’re on the right track.

Monira: Children? For school children?

Miss Yoon: Not for school children. Your kin is like who you live with. Your…[many students raise hands and say, ‘oh, oh…’ hoping the teacher will select them to answer]

Several students: Your family!

Miss Yoon: Yes, your family. Good. We’ll practice this again tomorrow.

Mohammed: I have a question. What I want to know about Christmas, is Santa real?

Miss Yoon: What do you think?

Mrs. Gopal: [laughing] That’s the question!

Miss Yoon: *Sure* [with emphasis] Santa’s real!

Monira: Why you’re celebrating this?

Miss Yoon: Many children believe Santa is real.

Mrs. Gopal: Why? Umm, it’s a Christian celebration.
Monira: I know, *I know* [with emphasis].
Mrs. Gopal: It’s the birth of Christ. The birthday of Christ who is the... And, I believe, in Islam, Jesus was a prophet, correct? In Christianity he is considered to be the son of God. And it’s his birthday. That’s why.
Miss Yoon: Okay. We’ll continue practicing this song tomorrow, Okay? Yes, Mohammed?
Mohammed: Are you [sic] have to come on January 1?
Monira: And Christmas?
Miss Yoon: No, you are home. Okay?
Mrs. Gopal: We have two weeks of holiday. From the 19th of December to January 4th. We come back January 4.
Abdulazim: What about school?
Miss Yoon: No school.
Mrs. Gopal: You can skate. I saw some ice rinks opened yesterday.
Miss Yoon: Okay, guess what? Saskia is here today!

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the community, the school, and the classes involved in this study. Drawing on the metaphor of ‘language ecology’, I aim to highlight the context within which students’ language practices were situated. Encompassing not only human interactions, but language policies and social ideologies, the idea of language ecology highlights how language functions within a broader system (Creese & Martin, 2003; Hornberger, 2002). Language ecologies can shed light on the status and use of languages in society, addressing the question, “Why do individuals opt to use (or cease to use) particular languages and varieties for specified functions in different domains?” (Ricento, 2000, as cited in Creese & Martin, 2003). In this chapter, I elaborate the language ecology of the classrooms involved in the study, and connect students’ language use with the particularities of this context.

By way of introduction, the transcript excerpt at the beginning of this chapter points to the negotiation of difference that permeated the interactions, curriculum, and pedagogy in the school. Inherent in discourses and practices that structured relations in the school was both a
celebration and respect for students’ racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, and a tendency for social reproduction of dominant cultural and linguistic norms (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008; Knight, 2008). These circumstances contributed a tension between the official discourses of social justice articulated by the school district, and the lack of attention to the impact of social power relations on educational practices. Teachers’ efforts constituted a superficial engagement with multiculturalism, underscoring what Elizabeth Marshall and Kelleen Toohey (2010) describe as the “institutional violence of schooling in the form of language and literacy practices that often ignore, attempt to remediate, or devalue the lives and experiences of children and their families” (p. 222).

EnglishTown Public School is one of three schools in the community. It is an elementary school serving 2000 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. The school district website reports that EnglishTown’s student population “represents 47 countries”. The website also reports that 97% of the students speak a language other than English at home, and 30% of the students were born outside of Canada. The school is located in one of the top receiver communities in Canada for new immigrants. According to statistics from the city, the community has a mobility rate 15% higher than the city average. These statistics also suggest that most families in the community live on an income 48% below the city average, and spend over 30% of their income on housing. The neighbourhood is comprised of a cluster of high-rise apartment buildings that are the residences for members of the community. There are no single-family dwellings in the school catchment area. At the time of the project, the local community centre and the public library had been closed for two and a half years for renovation, and there

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6 The name of the school has been changed for confidentiality.
was one small playground in the neighbourhood for preschool children. Beside the school is a small shopping mall, anchored by a national discount department store, a large dollar store, two banks, and a bowling alley. The other shops in the mall are small independent clothing, houseware, and dry goods stores catering to the largely South Asian community. Other shops and restaurants in the area include an Afghani kebab restaurant, several samosa shops, and South Asian groceries and bakeries, as well as a franchise coffee shop and a franchise chicken restaurant.

My fieldwork at EnglishTown began in March 2009, and continued to September 2010. As part of a team of university-based researchers, I worked with 3 teachers and 46 students in 5 classes. This work took place over three school terms, with every new term involving a different teaching context, different students, and different pedagogic activities. Each collaboration built upon what I learned in the last, entailing a cumulative progression and refinement of our processes and understandings. Though the final stage of our work was the most developed, the earlier stages contributed critical knowledge that informed both what we did and what we learned. My connection with the school has continued since the research project ended. The teachers and I stay in touch and share updates about progress relating to their work as teachers, and my work as a doctoral student researcher. In the section that follows, I briefly describe the different teaching contexts of the study.

2 Introducing the classes

2.1 English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Literacy Development (ELD) classes

The school board delivery model for supporting early-stage English Language Learners was to integrate the students into their mainstream class for half of the school day, and to withdraw the
students into self-contained ESL or ELD classes for the other half of the school day. Students at higher levels of English language proficiency received support in their classrooms from an ESL teacher who visited the class once or twice per week for approximately 30-45 minutes at a time.

In Spring 2009, I worked with a fourth grade ESL class and a fifth grade ELD class. Mrs. Gopal taught the ESL class, and Miss Yoon taught the ELD class. Each of the classes began with 7 students, and the two teachers and their classes shared one portable classroom located at the rear of the school property, across the playground from the main school building. The students attended their ESL or ELD class every morning, and they were integrated into their mainstream classes every afternoon. The students in the two classes were at different stages of early English language proficiency development, and most of the students had arrived to Canada within the past two years. All the students in the classes were from Afghanistan and Pakistan. The students in the ELD class had experienced gaps in their formal schooling prior to coming to Canada. In the ESL class, Mrs. Gopal worked on language development and social studies curriculum topics. In the ELD class, Miss Yoon worked on language and literacy development, and social studies and math curriculum topics. At the time of the project, the students in the fourth grade ESL class were learning about the provinces of Canada, and the students in the fifth grade ELD class were learning about ancient civilizations. Below, I describe one of my first visits to the class, which I wrote based on my observation of one specific activity and the layout of the classroom.

The students are settling in at their desks after hanging up their coats after recess. The students’ desks are six round tables in the middle of the room, and the children sit four to a table. The two teacher desks are pushed up against the windows along one wall of the classroom, and a blackboard extends the length of another wall, lined with bookshelves below. One computer sits in the corner of the classroom, which the teachers have told me they use to check their school email account and to prepare report cards. The room is decorated with many bright posters; mostly
anchor charts and literacy posters, and one map of the world. Big letters of the alphabet are posted on one half of the blackboard, marking a word wall for new vocabulary words to be added.

The students call out, “Hello Miss Saskia” when they see me, and each in turn launches into a story or comment to share. Miss Yoon tells the students to quiet down, and to remain seated while she hands out worksheets that they started yesterday.

As Miss Yoon distributes the students’ work, I notice that each student has a small paperback book in front of him or her, about 8-10 pages long. I ask Ibrahim to show me his book. The book title is ‘Nova Scotia’, and Ibrahim flips through the pages to show me what he’s reading. Each page has a picture from the province, such as the flag, some houses, or fishing boats. There are three to four lines of text on each page, simple sentences that describe the picture and explain some details about the province. Miss Yoon hands Ibrahim his worksheet, and he finds where he left off.

The worksheet is a graphic organizer that the students are using to record ‘jot notes’, or point form notes about the provinces that they are studying. Ibrahim copies down a sentence from the book on one of the lines in the graphic organizer. He is neat and careful with his printing, and he checks to make sure he has copied and spelled each word correctly. I ask Ibrahim to read his work to me. As he reads, he stops many times to ask me how to say some of the words and what the words mean. Although he has copied accurately, he does not understand all that he has written. Miss Yoon comes by Ibrahim’s desk and reminds him that he should not be copying sentences from the book. She tells him that he should be putting the information into his own words and using point form. Ibrahim erases the work he has done, but the lunch bell rings before he has time to start again.

In this activity, Ibrahim’s effort seemed to be more about “doing school” than actual learning. Gutiérrez et al. (2010) describe doing school as engaging in the valued and recognized practices of schooling institutions. Citing Bloome, Puro, and Theordorou, they define this as a “procedural display in which students learn how to display pseudo-learning without demonstrating competence of subject matter knowledge” (p. 223). This model of instruction in the ESL/ELD classes precluded rich curricular learning opportunities. An overemphasis on English language skills acquisition can “systematically ignore or miss what children can actually accomplish” (ibid) because the
model is based on a deficit notion of the skills, knowledge, and abilities that students bring with them to the classroom.

2.2 Newcomer classes

In Fall 2009, I worked with Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon again, this time with their fourth and fifth grade Newcomer classes, which are unique to only a few schools in the district that have high numbers of recently arrived students. The teachers co-planned and co-taught many lessons since they were both teaching Newcomer classes. The classes took place every morning, and students were integrated into their mainstream classes every afternoon. At the beginning of the year there were 11 students between the 2 classes, and 3 more students had joined the classes by the time we finished our work together. All the students had arrived to Canada within the past six months, from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bulgaria, and Mexico. The students spoke a range of languages, including: Urdu, Pashto, Dari, Farsi, Saraiki, Punjabi, Spanish, and Bulgarian, and all the students were at beginning stages of English language proficiency development. Because the students were new to the school, the teachers were in the process of finding out about the students’ educational backgrounds and learning needs. The teachers knew that four of the students had limited prior schooling, including two students who started formal schooling for the first time when they enrolled at EnglishTown. Several of the students in the class had additional educational needs, including two students whom the teachers thought had cognitive delays, and one student who had vision and hearing impairments. The Newcomer class did not have a prescribed curriculum to cover, so the teachers had flexibility in determining what to teach. The teachers focused their instruction on language and literacy development and school routines. The narrative that follows is taken from an audio recording of one specific activity that I observed in the classroom, as well as my field notes pertaining to the activity.
Mrs. Gopal beckons us to the carpet. It’s circle time, the way every morning in class begins. She takes her place in a rocking chair beside the whiteboard, which is hung on the wall at the rear of the classroom. A calendar is posted on the whiteboard, along with signs listing the days of the week. The carpet is in front of the whiteboard, and the students sit in a semi-circle with their legs crossed. They chat with their peers in Urdu, Pashto, and Dari languages as they settle into place. The student from Bulgaria and the student from Mexico don’t chat with anyone. “Clap, clap, clap-clap-clap” goes Mrs. Gopal, sounding a rhythm with her hands. The students clap back in the same rhythm. The class goes silent and all eyes are on Mrs. Gopal.

In a typical initiation-response-feedback (IRF) sequence, Mrs. Gopal asks the class, “What day of the week is it today?” Several voices call out, “Monday!”. Mrs. Gopal selects the sign for Monday and sticks it to the calendar. Next, she asks for the date, the month, and the year. When the students have provided the information, the class repeats together, “Today is Monday, October 19, 2009”. Mrs. Gopal chooses one student to do the weather. Samira gets up and timidly walks to the front of the group. Samira is from Afghanistan, and arrived to Canada four months earlier. When Mrs. Gopal asks her about today’s weather, a routine that has been repeated every morning since the beginning of the year, Samira doesn’t answer. Mrs. Gopal prompts, “Is it cool or cold today?” Samira does not answer. She keeps prompting. “Did you wear a coat today?” Samira shakes her head slightly, no. “So it’s not cold then. It is...?” Her rising intonation signals that Samira should fill in the blank, but Samira just glances around the room. Other students raise their hands high, bouncing on the floor with enthusiasm for answering the question. Mrs. Gopal admonishes the students on the floor, her voice raised slightly higher than necessary: “No, no! Give Samira a chance.” She turns back to Samira. “Samira, it is cool today. Repeat after me, ‘It is cool today’”. Samira repeats quietly. Mrs. Gopal moves on to the next question in the routine, “Tell us what you did on the weekend, Samira. What did you do this weekend?” Samira pauses for a long time. “My uncle” she answers. Mrs. Gopal looks to the class and asks if someone would like to help Samira answer the question. Asad says, “Me, me!” Mrs. Gopal tells him to ask Samira the question in Dari. Asad asks Samira the question in Dari, and she gives a short answer back in Dari. Another student adds to her explanation in Dari, and then Asad tells the class in English, “Her uncle came to visit.” Samira nods. Her hands are clasped. She looks at the floor then looks back up at Mrs. Gopal. “OK, you can sit down now.”

One of my dissertation committee members pointed out that this interaction was difficult to read. I agreed. The relation between speaking and silence in the interaction seems
heavy with imposition—a struggle over cooperation, compliance, and self-preservation in
which the unequal distribution of power between students and their teachers is evident.
Reading this, and even sitting there watching it at the time, brought back for me the
memory of being ‘that’ girl, not ready (or willing) with the answers, staring, hot and
uncomfortable at the floor and trying to disappear. The interaction seems to demonstrate
the impossibility of ‘helping’ marginalized voices gain discursive space (Boler, 2004);
voice cannot be granted to others, particularly when speakers are “confronted by the
apparatuses of power within which they must simultaneously speak against” (deCastell,
2004, p. 53). Below, I describe what happened after Samira sat down:

Mrs. Gopal flips open the chart paper that is on a stand sitting next to her. “Can we
have everybody standing up to do our chant? We’re going to do our Apple Chant
now. Everyone stand up.” “In a circle,” Parveen says. Mrs. Gopal says, “Yes,
Parveen, in a circle. Everyone stand up in a circle.” Mrs. Gopal uses a long pointer
to tap on each word, and the students follow along, chanting in unison: ‘Apples
here, and apples there. Apples, apples everywhere. Apples high, apples low.
Apples everywhere we go. They’re in the trees and on the ground. Apples, apples
all around. Red, and yellow, green ones too. Some for me and some for you’. The
whole class repeats the chant twice, and then Mrs. Gopal chooses groups of four to
each have a turn chanting on their own. The students’ voices are loud and clear,
rising and falling together in rhyme and intonation. They clap loudly after each
chant and Mrs. Gopal exclaims, “Well done!” for each group.

Like the ESL/ELD classes, the Newcomer classes appeared to be focused on a technist or
remedial approach to English language teaching and learning. In general, classroom
activities tended to be organized around narrow forms of assessment and an overemphasis
on basic skills. These approaches did not constitute developmentally appropriate tasks for
students in fourth and fifth grade, meaning that students were working below grade level
in curriculum learning. As Lisa Leoni and colleagues (2011) articulated, “When the
classroom becomes an ‘English-only’ zone, much of students’ existing knowledge is,
unfortunately, likely to be banished from the classroom along with their home language” (p. 50). Moreover, these activities developed unproductive and weak strategies for literacy learning with little connection to content or the practices of literacy (Gutiérrez et al., 2010).

2.3 Third grade class

In winter and spring 2010, I worked with Mr. Ed Kendrick. Mr. Kendrick taught a third grade class. There were eighteen students in the class, seventeen of whom had immigrated to Canada, and one who was born in Canada. All the students in the class spoke a language other than English at home, and several students spoke three or more languages. These languages included: Dari, Pashto, Arabic, Gujarati, Tamil, and Turkish. Most of the students were high-stage English language learners who were no longer receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) support. Several students in the class received additional language support: two students were withdrawn to a self-contained ESL class each morning; and one student was withdrawn for most of the school day to work one-on-one with a support teacher. This student was visually impaired and was learning Braille in addition to learning English. This student, Rasha, occasionally participated in class activities with the assistance of her vision support teacher. All the students and/or their families were from countries in South and Central Asia, including three students from India, one student from Afghanistan, four students from Pakistan, two students from Saudi Arabia, one student from Iraq, one student from Sri Lanka, and one student from Turkey.

The narrative that follows is taken from an excerpt of an audio recording of two activities that I observed in the classroom, along with my fieldnotes about the activities, and my recollections about the layout of the classroom.
Mr. Kendrick has all the children line up outside the classroom door. “We’re not going in until you’re all standing still. Hassam you’re not standing still. Nashir, you’re not standing still. Saamini is listening, she is ready. Thank you Saamini. Asra is ready. Qahira, where are you going? We’re lining up now to go inside. Get back in line.” The children are ready soon enough and Mr. Kendrick steps aside. They don’t file past but rush through the door, heading to the carpet. Mr. Kendrick reminds them, “Everyone sit down, on the carpet please. No, do not stop at your desk, Hassam. On the carpet.”

I walk in behind the students and take in the features of the classroom. Most notably, there are only three and a half walls as the rear of the classroom is open to the classroom next door. The neighbouring class is also a third grade, and the two teachers often co-plan and co-teach activities to both classes together in the middle space that connects the rooms. In Mr. Kendrick’s class, the students’ desks are in groups of four in the middle of the room. Three computers are lined up on a table at the side of the room, which stands beside storage cupboards, a microwave, and a sink. Shelves along one wall of the classroom hold instructional materials, including a globe, a scale, several microscopes, and a giant protractor. Class sets of textbooks fill bookshelves under the blackboard along another wall in the room. The teacher’s desk is tucked away in a corner by the door. Two rocking chairs sit by the big windows at the rear of the classroom, and eighteen white paper cranes dangle from the ceiling above our heads.

Mr. Kendrick takes his place on a chair at the front of the carpet and begins to talk about recent international news, the earthquake in Haiti. He folds his hands together and crosses his legs, as though settling in for a long talk. “How many of you know what happened in Haiti?” he asks. At least half of the children raise their hands. “Good, good. We’re going to talk about the earthquake.” He begins to fill the children in on the natural disaster and its effects. Every few minutes a student raises a hand and Mr. Kendrick sometimes invites the student to share his or her thoughts. The students contribute information that they have heard and Mr. Kendrick provides them with more details about the earthquake and similar natural disasters that have occurred elsewhere in the world. He pauses every few minutes to check what the children know, asking questions like: “Who knows how strong an earthquake can be?” “Have you ever felt an earthquake?” They talk like this for over half an hour, and when the discussion is over, Mr. Kendrick asks the children to go to their desks and write a response to the discussion in their journals. While they write, Mr. Kendrick talks with the teacher next door about their plans for the rest of the day.

As I circulate among the students I notice that some students write a page or two of text, while others manage only one or two lines. One student spends the time searching for his journal, which seems to have been misplaced, and two students go back and forth to the automatic pencil sharpener, never really sitting down to write.
The next time I visit the class, Mr. Kendrick and the children talk about the earthquake again at circle time. The students’ understanding of the earthquake and its consequences seems to have deepened since my last visit. On this day, the focus is on the people of Haiti and the devastation that the earthquake has had on their communities. Mr. Kendrick wants to do something to help people affected by the earthquake, and together the class discusses what they can do. They decide to raise money not just by asking for donations, but through their own efforts. The students and Mr. Kendrick settle on the idea of raising money by running laps around the school playground during every morning and afternoon recess for three weeks. They will ask teachers and administrators to sponsor their runs. The sponsorship will be based on the efforts of the whole class—the cumulative number of laps run by each person: the more laps that everyone runs, the more money they will raise. The students begin their effort by creating a tally sheet to keep track of their runs, and a pledge sheet to keep track of their fundraising. The students prepare posters to display outside of their classroom and around the school, and they deliver presentations to other classes about their idea. When the runs begin, one student is posted at the starting line with a clipboard and the tally sheet, recording the laps run by each member of the class. On the days when Mr. Kendrick is on yard duty, he holds the clipboard. When he is not on yard duty, he runs. On each of my visits to the class, I am asked to run too. The students generate awareness within the school about the earthquake and its effects. After two weeks, the principal asks the whole school to join in the fundraising effort because an anonymous donor has pledged to double the amount of money that the school raises and donates to the Canadian Red Cross for Haiti. Many classes join in the effort to raise money, planning their own fundraising activities. Mr. Kendrick’s class is credited with starting the momentum.

Mr. Kendrick’s engagement with the earthquake in Haiti and its devastating effects illustrate his unwillingness to shy away from “democratic dialogue” in the classroom (Boler, 2004). Aware that several students had similar experiences with environmental disasters, Mr. Kendrick deliberately created a space to talk about social realities and current events in the class, “risking” their transformative value, and loss of instructional time, in the pursuit of a conversation about social justice (Houston, 2004).
3 Data collection

3.1 First and second terms

From March to June 2009, and September to December 2009, I worked with Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon to assist their students in creating identity texts using PowerPoint and Desktop Author digital storytelling software. I visited the classrooms two to three mornings per week to work with the teachers and students to accomplish the activities we had planned. I worked in the classroom for three hours each visit, for a total of approximately 90 hours during each phase. The class took place in the morning, so I was there from 9:00 and 12:00 during each visit. The teachers and I co-planned and co-taught class activities during this time, and after the students were dismissed for lunch at 11:40, when we debriefed the morning’s activities and planned for the next visit.

As a participant-observer, I audiorecorded some classes, and towards the end of the project the students and I took digital photos and video recordings of our teaching and learning activities. One of the richest and most satisfying ways of generating data was through engaging the students themselves. Classwork, particularly circle time with the whole class, provided an opportunity for data collection beyond the constraints of interviews, and unique opportunities to observe interactions, and combine my observation with students’ questions and reflections. I interviewed each student at the end of the term. These interviews lasted about 10 minutes. The purpose of the interview was to learn about the children’s perspectives regarding their experience of the project, their perspectives regarding the use of their home language in the classroom, and their personal background. For this semi-structured interview, I interviewed the students individually or in pairs, and I used the students’ projects and Google Earth as a prompt. The
narrative below, written from an excerpt from an audio recording of one of these interviews illustrates this interview approach:

I am sitting at the computer in the back of the Newcomer classroom. Google Earth is open and my plan is to ask the students where they are from and what languages they speak. Using Google Earth, we’ll look up their hometown and look at images that people have posted from these geographical areas. I ask the first student to join me. It’s Parveen. “I speak Urdu, Punjabi, and English. I don’t speak Punjabi but I know it.” She also tells me that she is from Lahore, Pakistan. I type Lahore in the search field and say, “it’s going to flyyyyy around, all the way.” We watch the digital earth spin, stopping on the other side of the world. We zoom in for a closer view of the landscape, and click on an image that has been uploaded. “Beautiful,” I say. I do the same thing with the next student and the student after that. As each student finishes, he or she lingers behind, listening to others and soon piping in with their own contributions, in both English and the languages that they share with one another. “Her city is Kabul.” “His city is too small. Try another one.” “You spell it J-E-T...” “No, no, no, it’s J-A-I-T...” “It’s near Kabul, just type Kabul”. What had begun as one-on-one interaction turned into a shared group experience. The students who tend to dominate class discussions are also taking charge of their classmates’ responses, particularly the responses of students who seem to be quieter or who are at an earlier stage of English language development. Viewing images from their home communities sparks much dialogue and excitement. “We’re landing in Peshawar!”, “I see it, I was there!”, “I know that place, there’s my school!”. The entire class has gathered around the computer now. The students move between English, Pashto, Urdu, and Dari to talk about the places we see, the many places they have been.

This approach was helpful to keep the research activities developmentally appropriate and relevant to curriculum learning activities. Many of my questions were repeated and/or reformulated to help the students understand their meaning, and on several occasions, same-language peers assisted in translating the interview questions and answers. I also interviewed Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon at the end of the project. These teacher interviews were semi-structured, based on five general themes relating to the teachers’ perceptions about technology, literacy achievement, collaboration, teaching, and parent engagement. This interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes, and one of the teachers also provided a written response to the themes. I did a follow up interview to clarify several ideas that emerged two months later, which
lasted about 30 minutes. Overall, these research activities assisted me to gather more information about the school and school community, and I was able to learn about the teachers’ and students’ perceptions about using students’ home languages and technology tools for language, literacy, and curriculum learning activities.

3.2 Third term

From January to June 2010, and continuing on several occasions over the summer and into the fall, I worked with Mr. Kendrick and the eighteen students in his third grade class. I began working with the class by conducting 15 hours of naturalistic classroom observation, including observation of recess periods. These observations took place during 5 classroom visits of approximately 3 hours each. These classroom observations were audio recorded, and I wrote field notes after each visit. The observations had several purposes: First, I made myself available to assist Mr. Kendrick by providing support for some of the students while they completed their classwork. I also developed a rapport with the teacher and students. Second, I learned about the classroom routines and teacher’s classroom management style. Third, I became familiar with the curriculum topics that the class was engaged with. Fourth, I observed the kinds of language and literacy learning activities that seemed to take place in the class.

Following this period of observation, Mr. Kendrick and I began to introduce the activities that we had co-planned. From the end of February to the end of June 2010, I co-taught with Mr. Kendrick for approximately two and a half hours, 2 to 3 times per week, usually Tuesdays and Thursdays, and sometimes Fridays for a total of about 125 hours. I visited the school for either the full morning or afternoon, except when school assemblies or field trips took place, which usually abbreviated my visits. This work unfolded dynamically, characterized by a fluidity in which leadership and expertise resided with both Mr. Kendrick and I; “we were content to let our
voices co-mingle” (Denos, Toohey, Neilson & Waterstone, 2009, p. 112). I interacted with each student during instructional activities every time I visited, and I audio recorded most periods of direct instruction by either the teacher or me. Involving the students as co-researchers, the students audio recorded some of their group work, and took digital photographs and video recordings of their learning activities. Mr. Kendrick and I also video recorded many of the instructional activities, and I took digital images of all students’ work and the instructional resources that I created.

4 Pedagogic activities

The pedagogic goals of connecting with students’ home languages and integrating digital technology tools into the classroom were to affirm students’ identities, support participation and understanding in curriculum learning activities, and promote literacy engagement. In the section that follows, I articulate the specific pedagogic activities that the teachers, students, and I conducted in each of the three classroom contexts.

4.1 ESL/ELD classes: Dual language PowerPoint presentations

Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon decided to use PowerPoint for students to present their research on ancient civilizations and the provinces of Canada. We set a goal of encouraging students to use their home language for the activities, and to support the students in preparing bilingual presentations, using both English and their home language. The students working on ancient civilizations worked in pairs, studying ancient Rome, Greece, and China. The students working on the provinces worked individually, with each student assigned to a different province. The students had been conducting research on these topics using teacher-selected English language texts. The texts were expository non-fiction, with language that described and explained their
topics of study. The texts used some low-frequency vocabulary that was new to the students, but the syntax employed basic sentence structures that were easy for the students to follow.

To prepare the students to do their research, we talked about the key topics that the students wanted to include in their presentations. Students’ draft work was completed using graphic organizers, with each page labeled according to sub-topics to organize students’ work. The students searched for information in books to fit within the sub-topics: for ancient civilizations, these included topics such as clothing, food, and work; and for Canadian provinces, topics included examples such as location, population, provincial symbols, and famous places. The students working in pairs discussed their areas of interest and made decisions about who would do what. Students discussed that it was important to “do a good job” covering all the topics, and they often talked about whether each partner had done their share of the work. The students also checked each other’s work to see if it fit within the overall topic, gave suggestions, and supported one another in this process. For example, when one group member was behind on their research, the others in the group would help him or her to locate the information in the texts, and dictate the words to be copied down. This collaboration happened in both English and in other languages that the students shared, often with students moving between the languages that they spoke to explain a word, make their point, or argue more effectively.

To do their research, students located main ideas and details in their texts and copied the information down on paper. When students did not understand a word, they used some strategies, including asking a friend or their teacher, or checking the bilingual dictionaries available in the classroom. However, students often wrote and spoke words that they did not understand. Their interest in moving forward to the next step in the development of their project kept them moving past language that they had yet to learn.
When the students’ research was complete, we introduced the computers and the software that students would be using to document their research. We brought a computer for each student working alone, and one computer for each group working together. We began by teaching the students how to create and name a folder in which to save their work. Working from their drafts, students typed their work into MSPowerPoint. We discussed the importance of saving work in the correct location and saving work frequently in order to stay organized when using a computer. Some students learned the hard way about the perils of not saving your work or saving it in the wrong location when they either had to re-do work that they had lost or spend precious time searching for files that they had saved incorrectly.

To illustrate their research, we used Google images to search for digital pictures to download and insert into the presentations. Reinforcing the skill of finding the main idea, students searched for pictures for each topic that they had written about. It quickly became apparent that the students could spend hours finding the right pictures to use. They were captivated by all the images that their searches produced. To illustrate, in searching for a picture of Manitoba’s flower, one student clicked through at least ten images of the Prairie Crocus before (reluctantly) settling upon one. We decided to limit the number of images each student could download to five, but in spite of this would find students sneaking back to the one online computer whenever it was free to find “just one more”. To prompt students to think about the composition and significance of their pictures, we asked them to rename the image files before saving them. For example, rather than an image being saved automatically as “MB001.jpg” we prompted students to articulate the main idea of the picture and choose an appropriate file name, such as “Roman feast.jpg”. These files names helped the students locate the pictures later when they were ready to insert them into their presentations.
During this time, the students were translating their presentations into their first or home languages. This aspect of the project extended our work beyond the classroom as the students collaborated with their families to work on their translations. Parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings assisted in this task, helping students with choosing the right words and spelling them correctly. When students returned to school with the work translated, we spent time as a class discussing who had helped them and how they had worked together with their families.

The final steps in completing the student work included focusing on design and delivery. The students were eager to play with the design functions of MS PowerPoint, changing fonts, colours, and slide animation features. Among the students working in groups, these many options were the source of lengthy and animated debates. Because only one slide design could be applied to the entire presentation, students had to negotiate and achieve consensus to complete this aspect of their work. The images in the figures below show sample slides from students’ PowerPoint presentations from each class.
Figure 2. Sample slide from student presentation on *Ancient Inca* for social studies curriculum topic of ancient civilizations.

Figure 3. Sample slides from student presentation on Quebec for social studies curriculum topic of provinces of Canada in English and in Urdu.

The teachers were very proud of the work of the students, and planned a class presentation, inviting families and school administrators to attend. To prepare for the presentation, the
students practiced their presentations several times: with a partner, with a teacher, and in front of the whole class. Some students practiced several times—taking their presentations home to memorize, and one student even stood on a table in the class to perfect his delivery. In addition to having students practice their presentations, we talked about how students should introduce themselves, and what was important in communicating in front of an audience, such as speaking loud enough for everyone to hear, smiling and making eye contact with the audience, and standing comfortably.

On the day of the presentation, the teachers reserved space in the school library and set it up with a projector and chairs for the audience. They brought cookies, food trays, and beverages which were displayed on a tablecloth. The students drew and coloured a sign welcoming visitors to the presentation. Almost all the chairs in the audience were full, and all but one student had a family member attend the presentation, including aunts, uncles, and younger siblings. The teachers welcomed the visitors, describing the project and its importance to the class. Members of the research team spoke about our role in the project and its overall goals. Finally, the students did their presentations. All presentations on the Canadian provinces were bilingual, written in both English and the students’ home languages, except for two. Two students’ families were unable to help them with writing in their home languages, and because the teachers and I did not speak the languages, the students only felt comfortable writing in English. When they delivered their presentations, only one student delivered his presentation in two languages. The other students only showed the bilingual parts of their presentations. At the end of the event, we presented each student with a certificate recognizing his or her hard work and achievement.
4.2 Newcomer classes: Digital dual-language storybooks

In the Newcomer classes, Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon decided to use the digital technology tools to assist students in writing language experience stories about topics that were personally relevant to the students. The teachers gave the students four topics to choose from: All About Me, My Family, My Home Country, and My Journey to Canada. We connected this activity with goals for supporting the students’ language and literacy development, including communicating the main idea and supporting details. We also focused on developing the students’ knowledge of words that were personally relevant, including vocabulary relating to the themes of family, communities, recreational activities, as well as language for general classroom use. Another goal was to use students’ home languages as a scaffold for writing.

To begin our work, we introduced the students to an expanded range of children’s books, including high-interest grade level books and dual-language storybooks. Many of these books addressed issues that the students were dealing with in their own lives, including migration, learning a new language, and difficulties making new friends, and these topics generated much discussion among the students. We showed the students dual language books written by other elementary students that were displayed on the Multiliteracies Project website: (www.multiliteracies.org). Together, we read stories relating to several countries where the students were from, including Pakistan, Bulgaria, and Mexico.

To scaffold students’ brainstorming and generating of ideas to write about for their stories, we incorporated ‘show and share’ activities into our daily work. The teachers, students, and I brought family artifacts or photographs to the classroom (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011), and we took turns sharing thoughts and stories about these artifacts. Miss Yoon brought in a baby blanket that her mother used for her when she was born in China. Miss Yoon said, “When my
family came to Canada, my mother took it and put it in a suitcase and brought it here. She gave it to me when I grew up and I am very happy to have it. It is very special to me”. One student, Parveen, brought in her Barbie blanket. Monira talked about the dog she had in Afghanistan. Several students shared baby photos or their parents’ wedding pictures, and Mrs. Gopal and several other students showed jewelry that loved ones have given to them.

We scaffolded the students’ pre-writing process by encouraging them to use their home language to generate ideas about what to write. We also created vocabulary activities relating to this work, getting students to translate key words relating to the topics into their home languages.

The images below show two samples of students’ pre-writing work incorporating both English and their home language.
4.3 Third grade class: PowerPoint presentations, school garden, digital documentary film

My work in Mr. Kendrick’s class evolved in an iterative fashion; we did not determine in advance what the outcomes of our collaboration would entail. During the time that I observed and volunteered in the class, our ideas for the project began to unfold. Mr. Kendrick expressed a need to focus on curriculum topics in preparation for upcoming assessment and reporting processes. Because the class had been focusing on the fundraising efforts for Haiti, little student work had been collected and evaluated. We also discussed how to connect the students’ work on fundraising for Haiti with several curriculum expectations. For Mr. Kendrick, these connections gave legitimacy to his teaching priorities; he explained that connecting social justice activities with curriculum expectations “gave him permission to do...the stuff that’s at the core of life and the planet”. We decided to extend students’ developing knowledge about the earthquake in Haiti to the social studies curriculum topic of urban and rural communities, including
understanding differences and similarities in land use, community services, and needs. This topic set the stage for the main activities of the project in the months ahead. Mr. Kendrick and I also identified goals including increasing opportunities for student writing, engaging with students’ social realities, grounding learning in broader community issues, allowing for students’ independent work, and having ideas for the project come from students. The curricular topic of urban and rural communities provided a rich opportunity to meet several of our objectives, and it was decided that this topic could form the content-area focus of the project. Our work together developed into three activities: researching communities and creating PowerPoint presentations to share students’ findings; creating a school garden; and, producing a digital film to document our work in the school garden.

First, students conducted broad research about communities. The grade three social studies curriculum learning outcomes required students to demonstrate understanding of the features of urban and rural communities, so we gathered and read books from the school library about communities, community resources, and land use. To connect with students’ prior experiences, we used Google Earth to view images of urban and rural communities around the world, especially the countries where the students and their families were from. Students also conducted research about the local community. Using a digital video camera, students interviewed one another and their parents. They wrote interview questions such as “Where were you born?” and “What do you like about our community?”, and they recorded the responses on a graphic organizer. Students compared their school community with other communities where they had lived, as illustrated by the image of student work in the figure below.
The students summarized the attributes of the school community and shared their findings with the whole class. They identified access to nature as an important issue in their community. The land use in the community was primarily devoted to high-rise residential housing. Students and their families had few places to explore the natural environment or engage in outdoor recreation. One of the students’ notable findings was that many families had a great deal of experience in farming and agriculture. Students described growing dates and pomegranates; they told of taking care of chickens, and sifting rice by hand with their mothers. One student described the banana trees that grew on her family in Sri Lanka, explaining: “three children can fit under a banana leaf. When it rains, we use it as an umbrella.” Another student shared his favourite memory of gardening, when his uncle would lift him high up onto his shoulders to pick apples. The students’ families had few opportunities to draw upon their knowledge and experience in farming and agriculture in their new Canadian home. For instance, one mother explained:
“Surrounding our house we had tea and pepper, and around our house we planted vegetables and flowers.... Here we can’t grow anything.”

To showcase what they had learned, the students prepared PowerPoint presentations on topics of their choice, such as “Overpopulation in India and Pakistan” and “Traditional foods in Turkey”. We encouraged students to work with family, friends, and/or community members to write and practice their presentations in both their first language and English. We brought books from the library about communities into the classroom and the students used the books and their own knowledge about communities to prepare their presentations. Students did not always recognize that they had knowledge about communities that was relevant to what we were learning. For instance, Qahira was doing a presentation about where rice comes from. As we were searching the internet for images to include in her presentation, she found a picture that showed a farmer sifting rice using a woven basket. Qahira laughed when she saw the picture, and said, “Oh that's really fun, I do that.” “What?” I asked. Qahira replied, “I do that with my mother, you jiggle it and the dirty part comes away.” I encouraged her to write what she knew into her presentation, and she added some of her own words, as illustrated in the sample slide in the figure below.
As a culminating activity for the curriculum topic of urban and rural communities, Mr. Kendrick, the students, and I decided to create a garden on the school property to address the needs that the students had identified in the community. The figure below shows a picture of the garden that we created.

Figure 7. Image of the school garden made by third grade class.

The setting for the garden was one of several courtyards at the school. Caretakers were not permitted to take care of these spaces, and the school courtyards were unused, overgrown with weeds and littered with garbage. We set a goal of transforming one of these courtyards into a garden in order to create a space within the school which students and teachers could use and where they could relate to the natural environment. Because of school board and union policies,
we were not allowed to use any machinery to till the garden. The figure below shows an image of students using garden tools and tools that they brought from home to prepare the garden by hand.

![Image of students working in the garden using garden tools from home.](image)

**Figure 8. Image of students working in the garden using garden tools from home.**

We invited parents to assist with our work. Parents joined in day after day, volunteering their time and enjoying the opportunity to work with their children at school. Together we pulled weeds, added fresh soil, and turned the earth. Parents shared their gardening skills and promoted positive environmental behavior. The figure below shows an image of parents working in the garden with their children.

![Image of parents working in the garden with their children.](image)
Most of the parents had never volunteered at the school, as cultural and linguistic differences had seemed to present a barrier to their involvement with the school. In the garden, however, expertise resided with parents. Their knowledge and prior agricultural experiences were needed contributions to our work. Similarly, working in the school garden provided an opening for parents to contribute their knowledge and resources to the students’ learning. As one father said:

Most of the kids they are not doing outdoor work, they are busy with homework and video games, normally they are not doing any physical things. Gardening is good for physical things; it’s good learning. If you don’t learn anything about agriculture, you don’t understand how farmers are making food for you, how hard it is. So this is real learning. They [the children] know how people are making food for them. When you get food on your table you want to take it; now [they] realize what people are doing for them, and that they should be grateful for that.

Mr. Kendrick used work in the garden to connect with learning outcomes across the curriculum. Digging in the garden, sowing seeds, and watering plants are everyday tasks that engage with broader concepts in science, math, and social studies. For instance, the third grade science curriculum required students to learn about the life cycle of plants and soil composition. The garden provided unrestricted, hands-on learning opportunities to engage with these curricular concepts. In mathematics, the curriculum included estimating and measuring standard units of length and using grids. We practiced these learning outcomes by mapping the garden with stakes and string, and measuring the perimeter and area of the garden plots. Finally, regarding the
language arts curriculum, which required students to demonstrate the ability to write persuasive letters, the students wrote fund-raising letters to local businesses requesting donations to support the garden project. The students raised approximately $400 in cash and goods, which covered all the costs of the garden; in this manner, the students not only met the curriculum requirements but also received direct and authentic feedback about their persuasive writing skills.

The students documented the creation of the garden using digital film and photography. We used iMovie software to produce the digital film from this footage. The content of the film is comprised of three major components or themes: the students doing research about their school community, the steps we undertook in the creation of the garden, and direct and indirect interviews with the students, teacher, and parents. We learned about how to make a film by hosting a workshop called ‘Make a Movie in a Day’ run by staff from a local nonprofit film and multimedia organization. This workshop helped the students, Mr. Kendrick, and I learn about how to make a film. The figures below show the students during the workshop, where they learned how to hold film equipment, create a storyboard, and use vocabulary associated with filmmaking.
Mr. Kendrick and the students were involved in every stage of creating our documentary film. The students decided what events to film, they held the camera, and conducted interviews with one another. The students chose which footage of themselves to include in the film. Mr. Kendrick or I showed each student all of the raw footage in which he or she appeared. The
students selected one or two of these clips to incorporate into the film, and the students added voiceover narration of the scene if they wished. Finally, Mr. Kendrick and I assembled these clips into the final product, constructing a narrative to run through the film and connect the clips into a whole. We used techniques such as the insertion of subtitles to assist the audience in understanding transitions to new topics or cuts; and Mr. Kendrick created a montage of still shots taken over the course of the project at the end of the film, which plays to music while the credits role. The figure illustrates screen shot from the iMovie software used to create the film, called *Remaking the Ground on Which They Stand: Room 217 Makes a School Garden (12 min)*. The movie can be viewed by watching supplementary video file #1.

![iMovie software used to make the digital documentary film](https://example.com/image.png)

**Figure 12.** Screen shot from iMovie software used to make the digital documentary film, *Remaking the Ground on Which They Stand: Room 217 Makes a School Garden.*
Chapter 5
The Critical Story: Engaging in 21st Century Literacy Practices

In chapter 2, I outlined several theoretical and practical issues relevant to this study. First, I described the need for greater theorization of identity in language education research and practice. Exploring different conceptualizations of identity, I described how a strategic use of poststructuralism can be useful to interrupt dichotomous understandings of students as either native or nonnative speakers, foregrounding the dynamic and fluid nature of their identifications and affinities. I also explained that located within the social world, students’ subjectivities are constituted by material realities that cannot be overlooked. Second, I described how research in bilingual education has illuminated the challenges facing students from marginalized linguistic backgrounds. These students have had to negotiate their identities within English-medium classrooms, countering deficit-based practices and discourses that identify them as struggling language learners rather than linguistically talented language users. Third, I elaborated the influence of societal power relations on student achievement, and the role that identity investment plays in language and literacy learning.

Framed by these understandings, I worked collaboratively with teachers, students, and university-based researchers to integrate students’ diverse home languages and digital media into curriculum teaching and learning activities. Presenting findings arising from this work, the purpose of this chapter is to engage in a critical analysis of language in education. Denaturalizing the educational practices and discourses that are “no longer seen as construing a particular ideological line” (Creese & Martin, 2003), I attempt to locate the language practices that were valued and legitimized in the school, and focus attention on the process by which other language practices are marginalized. These practices and discourses produced students’
identities according to a subtractive model of bilingualism which conceived of students as different, as deficient, and struggling to catch up to an idealized native English speaking norm (García, 2011). Drawing on ethnographic data and multimodal artifacts of student work gathered over the course of the project, this chapter illuminates the monolingual, monocultural bias of standard school-based language, literacy, and instructional practices, reconstructing these practices from a plurilingual approach that affirms students’ linguistic identities, supports literacy engagement, and broadens the resources available for teaching and learning.

1 Migration and education

Most of the children involved in the project had first hand experiences of migration, and many of the children and their families were seeking asylum as refugees in Canada. The children’s experiences of coming to Canada were often complex, encompassing several stages of migration to one or more additional countries en route to their Canadian destination. For instance, when I asked the students to write what country they came from, one student responded, “I came from Kuwait once and from India once, so what do I write?”

Circumstances of migration often affect children’s experiences of and opportunities for formal education. Families’ relocation processes can be influenced by decisions relating to visa and immigration requirements, family contacts, and housing and employment needs. Among the students involved in the project, several families had moved more than once in a short period of time. Below, I share Monira’s journey to EnglishTown Public School, which was described to me by her mother:

Monira’s family of six was from Kabul, Afghanistan. Coming to the school community took many weeks of travel after months of waiting for the official documents necessary for the family’s departure. Only Monira, her mother, and her older brother were able to leave Afghanistan. They went first to Pakistan, then to New York, and to another American city, finally crossing a bridge to Canada. Arriving in Canada, the family lived first in a shelter
for refugees near the Canada-U.S. border. They stayed there for several weeks as they gathered information about Canada, filed paperwork with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and made plans about where to go next. The family then moved to a shelter in a large Canadian city where they stayed for one and a half months. The shelter provided for their food and basic personal needs, and the three family members shared one room with a single bed and a reclining “suntan cot.” Finally, the family relocated to a one bedroom apartment in the EnglishTown school community, and Monira and her brother were enrolled in school.

Following up with Monira’s mother two years after the project finished, I discovered that she is still waiting for her Canadian Permanent Residency status, so that she can sponsor her husband and her two other children to join the rest of the family here in Canada.

Unstable regional circumstances prompted the migration of many students’ families, including experiences of war, regional conflict, and natural disaster. Parents and students shared that they were hoping to find more stable and secure circumstances by coming to Canada. For instance, several of the girls in the Newcomer classes had never been to school before starting at EnglishTown. The girls were from Khandahar province, Afghanistan, where schools for girls had been closed because they were targets for insurgent military groups. In an altogether different circumstance, one student explained that she lost her father and two brothers in the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. Her family was displaced, and her mother brought her and her sister to Canada to start a new life. Similarly, the family of another student came to Canada from Sri Lanka because their community was destroyed by the tsunami in South Asia in 2004. The circumstances surrounding students’ migration processes added to the challenges they faced as they started school in Canada, in a language that they were in the process of learning.

Recently arrived migrant, refugee, and immigrant populations are necessarily concerned with maintaining their home language, acquiring new languages, and acquiring social capital in their new country (Patel Stevens, 2009). For instance, as Norton (2013) wrote, “a community
that is both literate and competent in English is also a community that has social, economic, and political power” (np). Moreover, the need to create a new home, find meaningful employment, and acquire legal immigration status contributes significant concerns to newcomers’ daily lives. These concerns are not offset by new educational experiences and learning English. For these reasons, framing language learning as the result of individual effort or technical skill acquisition overlooks other social and educational needs. Similarly, the idea of educational opportunity as meritocratic and equal is potentially harmful for students from marginalized social backgrounds (Carabello, 2012; Patel Stevens, 2009). Uncomplicated understandings of students as a homogenous group of English language learners neglects particular experiences relating to immigration, race, and global economic disparities that students and their families may be encountering.

During the project there were several occasions when students talked about social issues that they were dealing with, specifically concerning integration into the school community and making new friends. Students shared their feelings of loneliness and isolation. For instance, during one class activity we were doing a shared reading from a book called ‘A New Life’ by Rukhsana Khan. The story was about a girl and boy who had immigrated to Canada with their family from Pakistan. In one chapter, the boy is homesick because he has no friends to play with at recess time. We discussed the chapter, and the students made connections to their own feelings and experiences. Below are some of their comments from that discussion

“Me too, I just do like that…I don’t have any friend.”

“When I came here I was so excited when I made my friends.”

“I had no friends at first time.”

“Sometimes I didn’t do anything, I was playing at school and they say the F-word to me.”
The children had many questions about their experiences making friends, so we made a list of things they wanted to know. Figure 4 below shows two photos of the list of students’ questions about friendship and bullying.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 13.** Digital photos of students' questions relating to their concerns about friendships and bullying.

Drawing on their feelings and experiences, the students shared ideas about how to help children cope with the challenges that accompany moving to a new country. Monira said:

Monira: I have an idea. When we finish writing [our] stories, we can write about our ideas, about making friends, about somebody’s coming to a country and they can’t speak English.

Saskia: That’s interesting, Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon and I, we were just talking about what kind of stories to do next. Maybe we can make stories about making new friends.

Monira: We can make the stories better, like first of all, somebody’s coming and they can’t read, they can’t speak English, we can write about my life summary.

Saskia: Your life summary, that sounds wonderful!

Usman: We can make a story about bad things and do good, and at the end we could make boys playing with him.

Saskia: Yes, we could make a different kind of story, about people being friendly.
Monira: I have lots of titles!
Asad: If someone [is] new in your class, whatever he wants, you have to give him, if he wants to play with me, you have to let him, to play with me.
Saskia: What would be interesting, is that Asad has a good idea about if someone is new in your class, and Usman said play with them.
Mohammed: Don’t fight with him.
Saskia: I bet some other kids in your school would like to read those stories.
Parveen: And share with him.
Monira: When it’s finished we can do a book fair.
Saskia: Sure, we could do a book fair in the library. My goodness you guys have good ideas!
Asad: We can work for peace and help them.
Mohammed: When they need help you have to help them.

Monira’s comment was particularly significant, because the week before, we had attended a book fair in the school library. The book fair was hosted by a commercial children’s book publisher, which set up tables and racks in the school library stocked with shiny new books for sale. However, when our class visited the book fair, not a single student brought money to purchase any books. Because the book fair was scheduled during our day to visit the school library, our library period was cancelled. This cancellation had a significant effect on the students’ access to books. Due to the large size of the student population, overcrowding in the school, and the strain on school resources, each class in the school had a library period only once every three weeks. Moreover, the local public library had been closed for two and a half years because it was under renovation, and the public library BookMobile had stopped coming to the community. I asked parents why the BookMobile no longer came, and they reported that it used to park behind a local gas station, where the local (male) taxi drivers filled their cabs with gas. Mothers explained that they were reluctant to visit the BookMobile at this location. I phoned the offices of the city library system and was told that not enough people were using the BookMobile to justify including the community as one of its stops. Missing our school library
period therefore meant that the students would have no access to books to borrow for six weeks’ time.

On a short questionnaire about reading, I had asked the students how many books they owned at home. The majority of the students reported that they had no books of their own. A few students reported that they owned less than five books. No students reported having more than five books of their own. Considering that many families had recently moved to Canada, books are a heavy and possibly extravagant item to pack when relocating a household. Nonetheless, the availability of books is key to language and literacy development, because “literacy engagement is logically dependent on students’ access to print” (Cummins, Early, Stille, 2011, p. 34). A recent meta-analytic review provided strong evidence of the consistent relationship between children’s access to print and academic learning outcomes, particularly facilitating attitudes toward reading, reading behavior, emergent literacy skills, and reading performance (Lindsay, 2010, p. 85). In a school of 2000 students, where 95% of students spoke a language other than English at home and 30% had recently immigrated to Canada, lack of access to the school library removed a critical support for students’ English language and literacy development.

Returning to the stories that the students wanted to write about coming to Canada, their idea to rewrite migration stories with happier endings suggests that students were interested in intervening in the subject positions designated to them by stories of immigrant students struggling with bullies and friendships. Challenging the devaluation of immigrant students in their school, the students expressed their desire to articulate more powerful subject positions for themselves and others, as students with friends and having friendships, and as students who have the capacity to help and mentor others. These narratives articulated identities that students were
interested in investing in. Speaking from a critical perspective and taking on an evaluative stance toward limitations that they perceived in their school life, the students recognized that they could shift dominant narratives of their social world. Drawing from Hall’s (1997) perspective that identities are “points of attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 5-6), the students wanted to intervene in and refigure representations of their experience, highlighting their capacity to understand and act upon social realities of their own lives.

2 Dynamic linguistic repertoires

Like other research examining the nature of plurilingual competence, I found that students’ language knowledge had developed through “family experience and learning, history and contacts between generations, travel, expatriation, emigration, and more generally belonging to a multilingual and multicultural environment or moving from one environment to another, but also through reading, and through the media” (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 2009, p. 32). Understanding students’ linguistic repertoires as developed through a variety of trajectories and involving diverse linguistic abilities that can change over time and based on social circumstances (Blommaert & Backus, 2012; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), students’ language skills were developed with and in their dynamic, negotiated subjectivities. Moreover, students’ diverse experiences and backgrounds meant that associating language with particular speech communities was insufficient to reflect the diversity of their linguistic knowledge. The teachers and I needed to get to know students to learn the whole range of their language skills and experiences.

School information about students’ language profiles was not sufficiently rich to capture the full extent of students’ language skills and abilities or their home language context.
Reflecting the experiences and the circumstances of their lives, students’ linguistic capabilities varied across languages and language skill areas (oral communication, reading and writing).

Most of the students spoke fluently in one or two languages, and had partial oral fluency in one or two other languages in addition to English, particularly students from rural areas where the local language was different from the language in education or official national or provincial languages in their home country. Asra’s information about her language knowledge reflects this complexity:

Asra: I know Urdu, a little bit of Arabic. I know Urdu, English, Arabic, and just one or two words in Pashto. And that's it.

Saskia: Fantastic. And I bet you are learning French now too.

Asra: I will start next year.

Saskia: Which languages can you read and write in?

Asra: I can write in Urdu, only if I see someone write the word first, or if they tell me the spelling. Or some words, I know how to write by myself. And I can read a little bit in Urdu. I can read Arabic and I can read English.

Saskia: Oh, you can read Arabic. And you learned that in school?

Asra: I have Arabic classes now after school. My mom has a friend, Zoha’s mom, and I go to her house and I do Arabic. My mom said that we are thinking of going back to Saudi Arabia. When we go to Pakistan, my father will work there. If we like it, after we return to Canada, we might go back to Saudi Arabia to live. We are going to live at my cousin's house [in Pakistan], and you need to know Urdu too, so I am practicing.

Each student had a unique language profile, and even students from the same cultural background had different linguistic repertoires (i.e. Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Similarly, students’ language capabilities differed from those of other members of their families. For instance, the following quote from Hisham, a third grade student, illustrates:

I speak Urdu and English. When I first came to Canada, I couldn’t speak English. My little brother speaks only English, [he was] born in Canada. I spoke Urdu when I was four or three. When I was two I only knew car, Spiderman, and my name in Urdu. I speak Urdu now when I go home and talk to my parents and my friends. I don’t know how to read Urdu, because I have never studied Urdu, I haven’t been to Pakistan for a long time. I came to Canada when I was 3, then when I was 6, I went back to Pakistan, and in grade 2, when I was 7, I went there again.
The students in the Newcomer class hadn’t yet absorbed the dominant perspective that they don’t really “know” all the languages that they thought, because they could not communicate meaning in each of these languages; it might be more accurate to say that they knew “about” some of these languages (Blommaert, 2013). For example, I asked Monira about the languages that she spoke. “I know lots of languages,” she said. “Dari, Pashto, Urdu, English, Hungarian, French, Spanish. I know lots of languages!” Monira’s response was typical of many students that I spoke with. Each student proudly listed at least three languages that he or she knew, and often five or six. The students’ lists were part biographical, part indexical, both real and imagined at once. Responding perhaps to the recent expansion of experience in their lives; their developing English language abilities, their encounters with children from countries that they had never heard of before, the Core French\(^7\) class that the students had just begun, the students were discovering what linguistic diversity meant in their school and community context. The list of languages that the students provided reflected their experience of this diversity, their curiosity and interest in the languages that they were encountering, and the words they were learning from their teachers and their friends.

### 2.1 English as academic language

As the students developed their English language knowledge, particularly academic vocabulary, it became apparent that the students knew some concepts only in English. As Mr. Kendrick observed, “Obviously, English is the *lingua franca* in the school.” As the language of instruction, English was the language in which students developed curricular concepts and academic literacy skills. For instance, Mrs. Gopal described her observation that the students’

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\(^7\) Core French is a curriculum subject-area language class for students in the province of Ontario. All students begin taking Core French in fourth grade, and are required to take French as a curriculum subject through to tenth grade.
curriculum knowledge was solely in English, at the expense of knowledge that could be
developed with and in students’ home languages. She shared, “for a lot of them [the students]
it’s the English only that they make connections with. It seems that English is where they are
making the connection and not so much the first language.” For instance, working with Sorosh,
who spoke Dari and English, it quickly became apparent that his curricular concepts were being
developed only in English. Sorosh had been to school in Afghanistan up to second grade. I
invited Sorosh to write some of the science vocabulary words in Dari language. Sorosh was able
to write ‘life’ and ‘earth’ in Dari, which are higher frequency vocabulary words. However,
Sorosh was unable to write the words ‘atmosphere’ and ‘needs’, he couldn’t identify these
concepts in Dari but he was in the process of learning them in English. Similarly, other students
in third grade had a hard time being able to talk or write about curriculum subject-area topics in
their home language, as the transcript excerpt below illustrates. The transcript elaborates a
conversation involving three students and I. The students were practicing to deliver a
presentation in their home language. Two of the students spoke Urdu, and one student spoke
Gujarati. In the excerpt that follows, Ramisha and Ahmed are practicing to deliver their
presentation about the water cycle in Urdu. Note that the word panee means water in Urdu. I
have transcribed the Urdu words phonetically using the English alphabet. These words are
indicated in bold.

Ramisha: I only know like some of them [the words].
Saskia: OK, then do some in English and some in Urdu. Go.
Ramisha: Accha pena ca panee many places around the world live without accha
pena ca panee.
Saskia: Good. Who’s doing the next one?
Ahmed: I don’t know how to say that. [Points to a word]
Saskia: Well, say that in English.
Ahmed: Polluting the pane. Polluting is found in all types of pane and environments on earth including oceans, rivers, ground pane, and ice fields.

Saskia: Good. Who’s doing this one, the water cycle?

Ramisha: Me. The pane cycle. The amount of pane on Earth never changes. It does not increase or decrease.

Saskia: Can you say that in totally in Urdu?

Ramisha: No. I wouldn’t say never, but I’d rather say it in English.

At this point, one of the teachers walks in and asks what we are doing. I explain that we are practicing students’ presentations in their home language.

Saskia: We’re trying to do the first language but we’re having a really hard time.

Ms. Jahangir: What languages?

Saskia: Gujarati and Urdu.

Ms. Jahangir: You’re lucky I walked in, because I speak those two languages!

Ramisha: Ocean pane is very lumkien. People cannot use it for… for… drinking, cooking, washing, or watering pots. I forgot how to say…

Saskia: Do you want some help? Do you want Ms. Jahangir to give you a hand?

Ahmed: Yes.

Saskia: That’s okay. She knows it, so she can give you some help.

Ms. Jahangir: I don’t know how to say ocean.

Saskia: That’s ok, you can say it in English.

Ms. Jahangir: Ocean pane. Ocean pane lumkien [continues reading the presentation in Urdu, then pauses]…or…[laughing] See, I’m stuck too! That’s because sometimes we learn some words in English and we don’t use them at home as much.

This transcript illustrates the students’ effort to draw on their home language knowledge during a curriculum learning activity. The transcript highlights the difficulties that the students had using home languages for curricular concepts that they had been taught only in English. Students’ home languages were left out of development of academic vocabulary, leaving their home language mainly for personal communication with family, friends, or same-language community members. Ms. Jahangir’s comments offer her analysis of this kind of language use: “sometimes we learn some words in English and we don’t use them at home as much” emphasizing the role of context in determining patterns of language use, particularly concerning basic interpersonal
communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1981).

Students’ experiences from different global locations filtered into understandings of conceptual knowledge, highlighting the inadequacy of coherent and binary understandings of particular curriculum concepts. For instance, we found that the definition of urban and rural communities in the school textbooks bore little reality to some students’ lived experience. Students asked whether Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, would be classified as either an urban or rural community since it had some unpaved roads and few high rise buildings. A discussion about community needs and wants revealed different understandings about energy use. Talking about electricity, students from rural areas in Central Asia described that electricity was only available for particular hours in their home communities, and often went off several times a day. The students shared that they liked to “go for walks in the fresh air” when there was no electricity, particularly because they couldn’t watch television when the electricity was off. Discussing pets as either a community want or a community need, some students argued that dogs were a need rather than a want, as dogs were critical to protecting farm animals from predators. Finally, one student struggled with understanding the idea that government sets rules for communities. The student thought only village leaders made community decisions. These differences highlighted the situated nature of conceptual knowledge. Moreover, these differences pointed to the opportunities available for teachers to draw upon students’ multiple perspectives and experiences to develop rich, nuanced, and globalized understandings of curricular concepts.
2.2 Challenging the home-school language dichotomy

When I first started working at the school, one of the teachers said, “A few of them [the students] do speak their first language constantly in class and I am trying to get them to shift over to English.” The teacher’s comment was not surprising, as neither the school nor the school district explicitly supported the use of students’ home languages for curriculum learning. Although the school district gathered information from families about students’ first language, it did not articulate a pedagogic rationale for using students’ home languages in the classroom. The implicit message to teachers was that students’ home languages were peripheral to school-based learning. As a result, students’ home languages were treated with “benign neglect” (Stille & Cummins, 2013). At the beginning of the project, I observed that students moved easily between the languages that they spoke, using English in class and switching to their home language during recess and after being dismissed from school. As students poured out of the school building, their voices grew louder and their laughter and play was interspersed with shouts and calls to their parents, siblings, or friends in both English and their home languages. Seldom were these same lively voices heard using their home languages in school. For instance, Mrs. Gopal noted, “This was the first time I gave them [the students] free rein over their first language to use it in class on the projects and everybody refused!”

Separating students’ linguistic resources, perhaps inadvertently, constructs students’ home language use in terms of deficit (Gutiérrez et al., 2010). Mr. Kendrick observed, “Kids are pretty reluctant to speak their home languages to someone who doesn’t understand. They’ve got a lot of excuses and they’re hurt. In a trusting, loving environment it takes a lot of patience. It’s like overcoming abuse, linguistic abuse, can there be such a thing?” Students seemed to pick up on the construction of their home language as undesirable or unnecessary for school learning.
Students’ comments about their language use indicated how they divided language between home and school:

Saskia: Do you ever use your [home] language at school?
Bashir: Yes.
Hussein: Sometimes.
Akash: When some people know our language.
Saskia: But I hear most kids speak in English.
Hussein: Yes, but sometimes when I am walking home with friends I use my language.
Saskia: What is your language?
Akash: Gujarati.
Bashir: Urdu - I speak Urdu with my brother when we go home together.

Similarly, Hassam explained that he was unwilling to use his home language for school activities:

Hassam: Talk to anyone at school, [I speak Arabic with] only my friends who speak Arabic.
Saskia: Why?
Hassam: Because I don't know. My mum said to the police, "I don't let my son talk to anyone at school who doesn't speak my language."
Saskia: Do you know why she said that?
Hassam: [Shakes head no] I was only one year old.

...  
Saskia: Are you sure that maybe your parents wouldn’t like you to speak Arabic [at school]? They might want you to now.
Hassam: No.

Though moving between languages according to different contexts constitutes normal translanguaging practice, this distribution points to the assumptions about normativity that underlie the practice of separating home languages from the educational context. As Ofelia García (2011) writes, “Given the changing ways in which languages now function and in which people translanguate, complete compartmentalization between languages of instruction may not always be appropriate” (p. 79). Mr. Kendrick’s comments echoed this perspective:
It’s a little bit counter-intuitive using a language that excludes most people. So it seems illogical to speak in Urdu when out of a class of 20 there might be only 8 kids who understand you. But I think that the benefit of it [is] people speak other languages all around the world; it’s the global perspective thing. We hear different languages, so why shouldn’t the classroom reflect the world? The answer is yes, it should reflect the world; all the different languages. Even if it doesn’t transmit actual meaning the meta message is everybody’s important.

Lack of engagement with students’ home languages and the maintenance of an English-only language ecology sent a powerful message to students that their home languages do not constitute acceptable school-based language practices. Operating from this perspective, schools have a narrow understanding of students’ repertoires of practice, and disregard language knowledge as a resource for teaching and learning (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

3 Plurilingualism and learning

Although a significant body of research in bilingual education has demonstrated that students’ first language provides valuable support to learning (e.g. Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2002), the school had no clear language policy, and teachers were on their own to understand and experiment with ways to draw upon students’ home languages in the classroom. Working together, the teachers and I co-constructed pedagogic practices for incorporating students’ home languages into teaching and learning activities (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). To guide this work, we used Jim Cummins’ (2011) Literacy Engagement framework. The Literacy Engagement framework suggests that in order to teach emergent bilingual students effectively, teachers need to maximize students’ opportunities to become actively engaged with reading and writing: “Literacy engagement will be enhanced when (a) students’ ability to understand and use academic language is supported through specific instructional strategies, (b) their prior experience and current knowledge are activated, (c) their identities are affirmed, and (d) their knowledge of, and control over, language
is extended across the curriculum” (Cummins, Early, Stille, 2011, p. 38). These instructional dimensions are illustrated in the figure below.

![Literacy Engagement Framework](image)

**Figure 14. Literacy Engagement Framework.**

Note: Diagram copyright 2011 (Cummins, J.). Reprinted with permission.

Our ability to meet these instructional dimensions met with differing levels of success at each phase of the project, and we reflected on what we had learned at each phase to improve upon the next time. The first time that the teachers and I encouraged students to create dual-language presentations, most of the students did use both English and their home language to write. However, when the students presented their work orally in front of parents and school administrators, many of them chose to deliver their presentations only in English, preferring instead just to show the slides that were written in their home languages. Mrs. Gopal discussed the students’ choices:

I really loved that he [Hossein] spoke in his first language. Unfortunately nobody else did; I was disappointed by that. I didn’t think all of them would, but I thought Ibrahim might and Jayani might, because Jayani’s got both languages down pretty good. So I thought she
would be willing to do both languages. And Ibrahim, until actually the moment he got up to present, he told me he was going to do it in a second language. But I guess he just chickened out! But it was very nice that Hossein did; I think he was more comfortable in his first language rather than English giving the presentation. When he took off to give that [first language] part of it, he looked relaxed; as opposed to the other part of it when he was giving the English, he was tense.

From this experience, the teachers and I learned that incorporating students’ home languages is not just a technical activity. We needed to actively challenge the devaluation of students’ identities and home languages in the classroom. The following school term, the teachers and I endeavored to more explicitly incorporate students’ funds of knowledge into everyday classroom practice. Nancy Hornberger (2002) has theorized that students’ language use is embedded within a range of intersecting language and literacy practices that exist along a “continua of biliteracy” according to different levels of support for bilingual language use. Hornberger suggests that a change at one point in the continua will result in change along other dimensions of the continua, reconfiguring opportunities for bilingual language use and reshaping the language ecology of the classroom. Drawing on this idea, the teachers and I sought to move our existing practices along the continua, and to add additional practices and supports. We incorporated far more strategies than we had previously used, including: asking students to speak in their home language in class, translating new vocabulary words into students’ home languages, talking about students’ feelings and perceptions about learning a new language, encouraging students to work with same-language peers during class activities so that students could choose to speak in either English or their home language during curriculum learning, using students’ home languages for pre-writing activities, having students bring in artifacts from home, and reading dual-language books in class. After making these changes, Mrs. Gopal reflected how they compared with our work the previous term with the fourth and fifth grade ESL/ELD classes:

I think it helped make more connection to what they are doing. I think they felt good to be able to use both languages, to just be themselves. When they got up yesterday and they
were talking, [like] I can say this in English or whatever, Pashto, Bulgarian, Spanish, whatever. They did excellent. This is what I wanted last year in a way with using two languages. But I could not get it. Last year, I don't know if they [could have] gone beyond [what we did in class] using their first language. I mean they [the students] knew it, they knew their first language. But not going beyond, not using in it in a public sense.

Mrs. Gopal shared her perception that the Newcomer students seemed to be more willing to use their home language(s) because they were introduced to these instructional strategies from their first day of school.

We caught them early. I think maybe from now these kids would do both languages. For example, Khadija, she got to use something she already learned. That was good. That was kind of reinforcing to build some of her words over again. You know she's got what those words mean. But particularly with her, I am finding she is just like jumping in her language. I mean she is doing translation from Dari now. Obviously she understood everything I am saying. Whatever is going on the class, she is able to translate back in her language, which totally amazes me.

From these experiences, the teachers and I determined that we had a long way to go to encourage students to use their home languages in the classroom on a regular basis, and to counter the separation or “two solitudes” between home and school language use (Cummins, 2008). The students seemed to know that the school is an English-only zone, and that the other language(s) that they speak should be put aside when it comes time to learn. The teachers and I discussed that we can’t just say, ‘today we’re using home languages now’. The language ecology of the classroom must “move acceptable practice away from language separation” (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012, p. 659). We wondered if the students in the Newcomer class used their home languages more readily because they had recently arrived and perhaps hadn’t yet absorbed the dominant perspective that their home language didn’t seem to belong. We also noticed that when students were no longer receiving English language support and were integrated fully into mainstream grade-level classes, their capabilities of using their home language for academic purposes seemed to be diminished because development of these languages had not been supported in school.
Not all students were capable of reading and writing in their home languages. In most cases, neither the teachers nor I spoke students’ home languages, and we were unable to develop students’ knowledge of their home languages in school. Responsibility for this development fell on parents’ shoulders. Parents played an important role in supporting us to use home languages for curriculum learning by assisting their children to read and write in their home language. In the ESL/ELD and Newcomer classes, the teachers promoted this idea by encouraging students to ask their family members to help them. The need for this strategy provided evidence that teachers alone cannot provide the language and social experiences that are representative of multilingual communities; students need interactions with others who, “enrich this learning context as they embody, construct, reflect, and re-create the social communities from which language emerges” (Martin-Beltran, 2010, p. 272). One student’s description of his dual language writing process was typical, “I did some of it. My mom did some of it, the hard words”. Another student reported, “My mom didn't know some words, so we called her cousin and she helped.” Some students faced challenges getting help to write their projects in their home language. For instance, Malia, a student in the Newcomer class, shared, “I wanted to [write it in Pashto], but there was no time.” She explained that her mother was busy with her little sister who was sick, and her father had to work a lot when she was preparing her project. Similarly, after seeing the presentations of all the students in the Newcomer class, Samira’s father went to Mrs. Gopal to apologize for not having done more to help Samira with writing in her home language. Mrs. Gopal said, “He said, ‘if I knew what this project was going to be, I would help her more. I had no time to help because I am always working.’”

In the third grade class, we discussed with the students how we could use their home languages for writing up their research on communities. Brainstorming how we could get assistance with other languages, one student suggested, “If we want to use our language we can
ask our parents and other family members.” The transcript excerpt below is taken from an audio recording of a discussion in the third grade class, in which students described the kind of help they would like from their parents and family members:

Student 1: I would like help with the language.
Student 2: Translating.
Student 3: Writing.
Student 4: I want them to help me translate and write it and memorize the words so that I can read it.
Student 5: Get more information.
Student 6: Translating.

Arising from this work, the children recognized the value of their parents’ bilingual and biliterate capabilities to the school. Students expressed their enthusiasm and enjoyment for learning new vocabulary and improving their ability to read and write in their home languages. They showed pride in their work by sharing or emailing their work with their parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. These behaviours seemed to support students’ self-efficacy and interest in maintaining their home language skills. This evidence suggests that families play a critical role in home language maintenance. Parents or caregivers are children’s first teachers, and their partnership in maintaining and developing children’s home language skills is needed. When school activities facilitate this assistance, children’s bilingual resources are given space to grow, both at school and at home (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Furthermore, engaging parents in this way challenged dominant practices wherein parents who didn’t speak the school language tended not to play a significant role in the school.

Using students’ home languages for writing activities assisted students to develop new vocabulary in their home language. For instance, one student said, “It was interesting, to learn new words in our languages. First we learned the words, and then put it into sentences.” Moreover, students often assisted one another to learn new vocabulary in their home language
without the help of the teacher or me. As one student observed, “It's really neat to speak it [my home language] at school, because other kids at school can learn it too.” These examples illustrate how teachers might connect students’ home languages with curriculum learning, promoting the development of conceptual and subject-area knowledge in students’ home language(s), what Cummins (2008) has called teaching for cross-linguistic transfer. Using students’ home languages also promoted the development of language awareness among students in the class. Not only did students learn new words in their own language, they learned that these concepts existed in other languages.

4 Translanguaging practices

Rather than seeing students as “two monolinguals in one body” (Gravelle, 1996, p. 11, as cited in Creese & Blackledge, 2010), translanguaging can be seen as having pedagogic legitimacy. Students used their home languages and translanguaging to develop vocabulary and conceptual knowledge, generate ideas, write, and support collaborative learning processes. In the ESL/ELD classes, the teachers also asked students to use their home languages to interpret and translate words for other students at earlier stages of English learning. Students often used translanguaging as they communicated the teachers’ instructions or curricular concepts to one another. Evidence from students’ classwork and artifacts suggests that translanguaging was a tool for mediation, supporting thinking processes and helping students to make and negotiate meaning with their peers as they tried to understand concepts or solve learning problems. Further, students gained language awareness as they analyzed language differences and selected appropriate word choices. As Garcia (2009) writes, translanguaging is “a powerful mechanism to construct understandings, to include others, and to mediate understandings across language groups” (p. 307).
Students had the opportunity to develop meta-linguistic awareness of how to use their linguistic repertoires to support learning, particularly for concept development and pre-writing strategies. This opportunity can be illustrated by Khadija’s story writing process. Khadija was a student in the fourth grade Newcomer class. She came to the class halfway through the first term of school from Kabul, Afghanistan. Khadija spoke Dari and Afghani Pashto when she came to the school, and was silent during all English-medium whole-class activities. One other student in the class spoke Dari, and Khadija stuck close to this new friend. During small group or individual work, her new friend translated instructions into Dari and helped Khadija to understand what was happening in the class. Including Khadija in our story-writing activities, I asked the class what we should do to get Khadija started. Eagerly, the students suggested that she write her story entirely in Pahsto, and they said that they were willing to explain to Khadija what to do. So, Khadija set about making her story, working hard to catch up to her classmates who were already two weeks ahead of her. In just two days, her draft and illustrations were nearly complete. With detailed drawings and neat script, Khadija soon filled ten pages of her storybook. The figure below shows a sample page from Khadija’s story.
Throughout this activity, Khadija’s teachers provided encouragement for her progress, showing their expectation that she could do the work, and supporting her same-language peers in helping her. The teachers used Khadija’s story to scaffold her English language acquisition, assisting her to add labels to her illustrations in English such as “He is my father” which can be seen in Figure 15. Translating or creating labels can be used to scaffold translanguaging practice for emergent bilinguals, though it may emphasize that one language is preferred academically (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012).

The content of Khadija’s text described religious traditions important to Khadija’s family. She drew intricate borders around several pages in her story, which are details that signify and embellish important texts in Afghanistan. Because Khadija spoke no English when she made this story, her teachers were unable to communicate with her about what to include in her story.
Instead, the activity and expectations were interpreted and translated to Khadija through her peers who had also come from Afghanistan. The students provided her with suggestions and examples of what to write and draw. Khadija’s story contained many cultural and religious symbols, far more than other students in the class. This difference might reflect the students’ conceptualization of what constitutes appropriate content for a text of this topic, which appeared to be a broad and culturally relevant conception.

Writing a story almost entirely in Pashto, Khadija’s story was quantitatively longer than it would have been in English but, more importantly, it was qualitatively much richer and more representative of her experience than text she could have written in English at this time. The teachers reflected that encouraging Khadija to write her story in her first language promoted her literacy engagement and participation in the classroom. The teachers also decided that they were able to assess this activity as part of their understanding of Khadija’s literacy development, although this was contrary to their initial expectations of the activity, in which students were to write a dual language (L1 + English) version of their text.

Translanguaging practices have the potential to bridge the traditional divide between home and school languages. As the project progressed, students began using different languages in the classroom not only to scaffold learning, but also for culminating curriculum tasks such as written work, digital media productions, and public presentations. With teacher encouragement, students created new norms for language use in the context of curriculum learning. We could not predict whether and how students would use their home languages. The kinds of language use that the teachers and I observed were unique to individual learners, who switched between and mixed languages across forms and domains according to their capabilities, interests, and motivations. As Hornberger and Swineheart (2012) point out, these kinds of flexible language
practices focus attention on the agency of individuals who determine how to use their linguistic resources to communicate with multilingual audiences. Importantly, these practices constituted a dynamic bilingualism (García, 2011) wherein students bridged the separation of home and school language use.

To support these practices, teachers created opportunities for students to play with their language use. The students came up with their own solutions for resisting ideas of how languages should be used in school, experimenting with ways to draw upon the multiple languages that they knew. This experimentation resulted in a hybrid use of language that was not always limited by boundedness between languages, which is illustrated in the following example. Rifat, a boy in the third grade class, worked with a classmate, Hassam, to research and write a PowerPoint presentation called *Traditional Foods in India and Turkey*. Hassam prepared his part of the presentation only in English, and Rifat chose to prepare his part of the presentation in Turkish and English. Rifat reported that he could speak English, Kurdish, and Turkish, but he had only learned to write in English because he had come to Canada before first grade. Rifat was unable to get help from other students or family members to write his presentation in Turkish, so he worked by himself to sound out the Turkish words that he wanted to say, spelling them phonetically. The figure below shows a sample slide from Rifat’s presentation in Turkish.
Rifat said, “I am going to read it in English, but I will write in Turkish. I will look at the word in English, and then if I know it I will say it.” In this way Rifat wrote his entire presentation in Turkish and English, demonstrating the functional integration of his linguistic capacities. Rifat delivered his presentation orally in both languages when we practiced the presentation and did the presentation for another third grade class. However, when the students did their presentations in the school library for parents and school administrators, Rifat delivered his presentation only in English. When I asked him about this choice, he said, “When we did the presentation in Turkish in the library, I couldn’t do it, I couldn’t read the Turkish. I felt shy and there were butterflies in my stomach.” In another example, Asad, a boy in the fourth grade Newcomer class, prepared his language experience story called *My Journey to Canada* in English and Urdu. When it came time to present his story, Asad asked if he could present the story in English and in Pashto. Asad wanted to feature all the languages that he felt confident using, and though he could not write in Pashto, he wanted to incorporate his Pashto oral language abilities into his presentation. These examples illustrate that the students influenced and shaped
the flexible language practices in the classroom (Baker, 2010). The explicit acknowledgement and incorporation of these practices sent the message to students that they had an advantage by being multilingual, and their linguistic knowledge and flexibility was an asset to learning. As Li Wei (2011) wrote, “The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, beliefs and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and makes it into a lived experience” (p. 1223). Allowing and supporting students to express themselves using the full range of their language resources created a teaching and learning context that validated the students’ linguistic repertoires, and affirmed their plurilingual identities as legitimate and appropriate in the classroom context.

5 Materializing identities as potential through cultural production

Incorporating students’ home languages and digital media in the classroom can be understood separately; however, these practices intersected powerfully to influence the language ecology of the classroom. Significantly, these practices opened curriculum and pedagogy to connect with students’ lives, to support inquiry- and project-based learning, and to involve students in cultural production. The many multimodal texts that students made in the context of the project, including digital storybooks, PowerPoint presentations, the school garden, and the digital documentary film, were cultural products—representational resources through which the students created and communicated narratives of experience. These artifacts constituted identity texts, the products of students’ creative work that reflected their identities back in a positive light (Cummins & Early, 2011). The processes involved in creating these texts afforded the opportunity for improvisation: agentive moves through which the students and teachers could
shift dominant narratives and re/figure representations of the social world to illuminate their interests, concerns, or social conditions, and communicate these experiences to others. Participating in these processes supported students’ development of identities of competence, a becoming sensibility, and an articulation of possibility relating to imagined futures.

Akash and Hassam, two boys in Mr. Kendrick’s third grade class, prepared a PowerPoint presentation about Overpopulation in India and Pakistan. Some of the text the students included in their presentation was copied from books, as can be seen on the top slide in the figure below.

Figure 17. Sample slides from presentation about *Overpopulation in India and Pakistan*
On other slides in their presentation, however, the boys brought their own voices to the text, as can be seen in the slides below, where the boys drew upon personal knowledge accumulated from their experience of living in communities in different global locations. These slides were somewhat shorter, and touched on topics that were relevant to the students, such as watching television. The students also wrote about their own personal knowledge of earthquakes, and food and water shortages, information that was not included in the books that they used for their research on communities.

![Sample slide illustrating students' personal knowledge of water and food shortages.](image)

As I watched and assisted these boys to make their presentation, I was conflicted, because I wanted the children to make a presentation that portrayed their communities in a positive light. However, I realized that the boys were telling about the issues that they were concerned with. They brought their own voices, experiences, and reflections to their writing. The boys were
becoming producers of curriculum knowledge as they shared their experience and understanding with their classmates, their teacher, me, and the other adults who heard their presentations. These presentations reflected not static representations of students’ identities, but their emerging consciousness, empathy, and concerns. Mr. Kendrick and I chose to make space for these perspectives, facilitating more complex representations of students’ identifications.

Throughout the project, I saw evidence of students’ changing forms of participation in the classroom and in curriculum learning activities. Reviewing many of the hours of raw digital video footage recorded by the students, the teacher, and/or me both during our inquiry process, I focused on the roles, interactions, and processes involved in literacy and curriculum learning activities. The following excerpts from the video data illustrate the changing forms of participation that I observed. The first video clip (see supplementary video file #2) is from an activity recorded at the beginning of the project. It is a clip from my observation of Mr. Kendrick showing the students how to use Google Images on a classroom computer. In this clip, you will notice two things: 1) I am holding the camera; and, 2) the teacher is using the computer; the expert adults dominating the use of the technology. The figure below is a still image from the video.
Figure 19. Still image of Mr. Kendrick demonstrating use of Google Images.

The students cooperate with this arrangement, trying to avoid looking at the camera, but at times, they sneak a peek, admitting its presence and affirming the camera as recorder and me as producer of the story of what is taking place. By contrast, as evidenced in another illustrative video segment recorded several months later, the students took over as users of the digital camera and other technology tools (see supplementary video file #3). The figure below is a still image from the video.
When the students became active participants in the use, direction, and documentation of events, they performed entirely differently. As this video segment shows, the students used the gaze of the camera to their benefit, taking advantage of the opportunity to showcase their knowledge, to be the centre of attention, to play with the affordances of the camera in their learning process. With intentionality, they delivered what and how they wished to be read. And, the teacher remained in the background.

The students’ choices of what they chose to include in the edited film were filled with their sensibilities and motivations, their understandings of what constitutes learning and curriculum. Following the children’s lead, we started filming many events and activities that I initially thought were tangential to the research data. For example, the students began initiating, creating, and sharing creative works including rap songs, dramatic performances, poetry, and narrative writing. Every time someone in the class made one of these creations, the students or the teacher immediately requested that we turn on the camera and “get this on film”. In the next video clip, you can see one such moment (see supplementary video file #4). In this clip the
students and teacher appropriate the language and practices of a filmmaker, a culture maker.

The figure below is a still image from the video.

![Still image from the video](image)

**Figure 21.** Still image from the video recording of *Saamini’s poem*.

Similarly, I share one student’s reflection which was recorded as a voiceover to another creative moment. The students had written a rap song about a relaxation strategy that they had recently learned, called “Take a BOP [breath of peace]”. In the midst of telling me about this song, Mr. Kendrick suggested that the students perform and record the song with the digital video camera. The students eagerly suggested that the recording take place in the garden, and that they would make up a dance to accompany their performance. The video of this performance can be seen in supplementary video file #5. The figure below is a still image from the video
Figure 22. Still image from *Breath of peace* rap performance.

The pedagogical orientation and ecology of the classroom materialized students’ developing and identities as *potential*, not locked into static or finalized constructions. The products and processes of students’ literacy work were replete with meanings that were negotiated and constructed in self-other relation, with the teachers, the classmates, and me constructing students’ experiences from an asset-oriented perspective. This disposition to students’ resources and capacities set high expectations for students’ personal, academic, and social performances, and demonstrated to students that the teachers and I believed in them and their potential. This orientation to teaching and learning was upheld by our conceptualization of students as “beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (Freire, 1980, p. 84, italics original). From this perspective on students and student learning, the development of students’ identities was critical to our work in the classroom. As Hall writes:

Identities involve using the resources of history, language, and culture in a process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ but what we might
become, how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall, 1981; p. 4)

Students’ subjectivity itself is at stake in language and literacy activities. However, this importance does not suggest that every learning activity must be revolutionary. Even daily interactions contribute to conveying active resistance to dominant discourses and support for the becoming of students’ agentive subjectivities.

6 Conclusion

Over the course of this project, the classrooms became multilingual spaces wherein teachers and students made an effort take into account and build upon the diversity of languages and literacy practices present in the school community. This effort extended beyond acceptance or tolerance of home languages to the cultivation of language awareness and plurilingual competence as a valuable resource for teaching and learning (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 103). Taken together, these findings illustrate the kinds of plurilingual linguistic practices that are possible in multilingual classrooms, and the opportunities available for supporting students’ home language maintenance, English language learning, and functional integration of their language knowledge. As teachers supported and encouraged these practices, they sent a positive message to students about the value of their linguistic repertoires, showing students that their plurilingual language practices were useful for learning and for creating an environment of reciprocal exchange between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Opening a space to draw upon students’ funds of knowledge in the classroom required reflecting on and sometimes changing attitudes, beliefs, and practices associated with language and culture in education among both teachers and students. The teachers and I purposefully created a classroom environment that promoted the value of plurilingualism and students’
cultural backgrounds (Cummins & Early, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia & Sylvan, 2009). We achieved these purposes through the use of several strategies:

1) Using textual resources that were written from different perspectives, including indigenous stories and songs, multicultural children’s literature and poetry, dual-language books, and bilingual dictionaries;
2) Inviting parents and special guests into the classroom to volunteer and to share information from different cultural perspectives;
3) Creating visual displays that highlighted students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
4) Using Internet resources to explore curricular concepts from different global perspectives, such as digital images and videos created in other global locations;
5) Encouraging students to name curricular concepts in other languages and compare understandings from different cultural perspectives and global locations;
6) Encouraging students to use home languages as well as English to make meaning in writing and in collaborative work.

Translanguaging and the use of home languages in the classroom created “linguistic bridges” for students to “draw on multiple resources to meaningfully communicate, and create new opportunities for language learning” (Martin-Beltran, 2010, p. 273). Theoretically, these practices present a challenge to SLA researchers, “who have often assumed the L2 as a discrete unit of analysis” (Martin-Beltran, 2010, p. 273). These findings are relevant to education in general, and second language education and literacy studies in particular. First, students are mobile subjects who can draw upon a plurality of cultural, linguistic, and representational practices for literacy and curriculum learning activities. Second, inviting students to bring the full range of these practices into the educational context creates conditions for engaging students in literacy and curriculum learning, affirming their identities, supporting their literacy development and engagement, and promoting their academic achievement. Third, involving students in authentic forms of cultural production using digital technologies in school supports
students in representing and communicating their knowledge at a cognitively powerful level and prepares them for increasingly public roles as digital media makers and community participants.

The findings presented in this chapter offer empirical evidence, based in classroom practice, for the significance drawing on the full range of students’ cultural, linguistic, and representational resources in language, literacy, and curriculum learning. Students’ home languages, cultural knowledge, and global experiences served as powerful tools in supporting their language learning, literacy engagement, and academic development. These instructional practices created a “counter-discourse” to the implicit devaluation of students’ languages, cultures, and identities by normalizing school discourses. Students became more confident in using their home languages for learning, developed their translanguaging skills and became more plurilingual-proficient (García, 2011; García & Sylvan, 2011; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012). This approach can support and develop the plurality of languages, literacies, and cultural practices that students bring with them to school, particularly for students from marginalized or minoritized social backgrounds. Moreover, the findings speak to the sociolinguistic implications of changing global migration patterns and the growth of digitally mediated communication, conditions that are increasingly relevant to education in Canada.
Chapter 6
An/Other Story: Negotiating Cultural Difference

She has this fear that she has no names that she Has many names that she doesn’t know her names She has This fear that she’s an image that comes and goes clearing and darkening the fear that she’s the dreamwork inside somebody else’s skull

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987, p. 65)

Whereas the previous chapter presented findings from my dissertation project that focused on language use and the possibilities that plurilingual language practices might offer to processes in education, this chapter takes an altogether different approach. Drawing on several bright spots in the research data, I bring together ideas about language learners and language learning with perspectives informed by the affective and ethical turns in feminist theory. Remembering ‘nomadically’, I turn to the memories that lingered long after my work in the school was done. As Braidotti (2011) writes, these are “the kind of memories that are linked to ethical and political consciousness and concern events one simply forgot to forget” (p. 33, italics added). The chapter unfolds as several stories that bore what Braidotti calls “affective imprints”, traces of “what is left over, what remains, what has somehow caught and stuck around” (p. 233). I do not attempt to suggest that what has ‘stuck around’ for me in this work is what has stuck around for others involved in this project, nor do I think that the lingering thoughts presented here should discount what I learned as presented in chapter five of the dissertation. Instead, I invite you, the reader, to engage with the parts of the story that were left out of the ‘official’, critical analysis of the research. Moving across the stories presented herein, I introduce a kind of “difficult knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003) that prevents easy reading of the dissertation itself. This difficult knowledge breaks down the larger representation of the project into less than tidy parts. The
chapter illuminates the tensions, contradictions, and inconsistencies inherent in the practice of research, pointing to the ongoing, often messy, nature of research and analysis of the social world (Gonick, 2003; Lather, 2007; Springgay, 2008).

Before beginning, I want to make clear the specific location that I make myself accountable for—that of a white woman working from within a university institution, challenging a monolingual, monocultural system of education, but at the same time supporting its functions of social reproduction. As the daughter of immigrant parents myself, I not unaware of the challenges of migration and dislocation. However, writing this chapter I have come to better understand how I am implicated in the very processes that I seek to undo. As Braidotti (2005) writes, my location is only one of many possible locations, and I offer an embodied, situated account. I am also well aware of my incapacity to speak from the location of the students and teachers who were involved in this work with me. Each story below is just one story, a singularity that is irreducible to ‘the one’ (Ahmed, 2004, p. 36). Each story is the story of an other, but they should not be read as one. In what follows, I take up a close reading of parts of the ethnographic and textual data gathered over the course of the project (Liljestrom & Paasonen, 2010). First, engaging with students’ stories about their migration experiences, I explore how students’ representations became sites for negotiating understandings of cultural difference. Examining the relations facilitated by hearing the students’ stories, I explore the affective potential of ‘reading the other’. Drawing on the writing of Sara Ahmed (2004; 2010; 2012) I examine how affect and emotions “shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit” (p. 32) and open the possibility to be in proximal, ethical relation. Second, elaborating processes involved in making a school garden, I draw on Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (2005) idea of ‘knowledge in the making’ to offer an opportunity for developing understandings that are embodied, affective, and relational. Produced through interactions that do not impose but create
meaning, I examine the school garden as a site for becoming: facilitating encounters formed out of sensation, wonder, and participatory relation to the world and the other. Finally, this chapter aims to illustrate ‘what sticks’, that is, what makes social transformation, particularly in the context of education, so difficult to achieve (Ahmed, 2004, p. 12). Though the relations of power endure, pedagogical pivot points exist, offering the possibility for transforming understandings of difference through an affective practice and relation. However, these pivot points are temporal and situated. They are embodied, fleeting, and in process. Nonetheless, I explore the possibility to ‘feel our way’ (p. 12) through these moments toward a more ethical understanding, a different difference.

1 Malia’s story

At the end of the digital story telling project with the grade 4/5 Newcomer classes, I interviewed Mrs. Gopal about her perception about the project. We talked about the students’ presentations of their stories, specifically, the day when the teachers reserved space in the library to invite parents and school administrators to watch the children tell their stories. Mrs. Gopal and Ms. Yoon brought tablecloths to spread over a couple of tables in the library, and they laid out plates of cookies, juice and cups for refreshments. The children were very excited for this big day, and the teachers were hopeful that every child would have at least one family member present. During the interview, Mrs. Gopal brought up one child in particular. Malia, a ten-year-old girl, was from Afghanistan, and had never attended school there. Starting in the fifth grade class at EnglishTown P.S. three months earlier was Malia’s first time being enrolled in formal schooling. Malia was easy to teach, and she progressed in leaps and bounds in many areas of her schoolwork. For the presentation, Malia had written a story called My Family. Unlike the other students in the class who were able to write their stories in both English and their home
language, Malia wrote her story in English only because she could speak, but not write or read Afghani Pashto. Talking about Malia, Mrs. Gopal relayed what happened the morning of the presentation.

Malia thought her dad would come; until the morning she arrived she said he can’t come because he is still at work. Mom doesn’t want to come because she said she doesn’t speak English, doesn’t come to school. So I said to her, ‘you phone mom to tell her all the parents have to come’. I said, ‘you tell her the teacher said all the parents have to come’. So I tell her and this is what she said—she was talking to mom on the phone, and she said to me, ‘mom doesn't know where the library is'. So I said, 'tell her to go to the office'. She doesn't know where the office is. She said, "can I go and meet her at the portable?" which is why I said, ‘tell mom she has to be there in 10 min' because I didn't want to send her to wait her for too long. I sent her in 10 minutes so that she had enough time to get her mom and come. So, she came. I am so happy because she would have been the only one whose parents didn't show up. Everyone had someone there. I was so happy when she came. She listened and I know she understood. Even though though she [doesn’t understand English] I do know that she would have understood the five of them done in Pashto. I was glad she came.

During this conversation, Mrs. Gopal silently began to cry. Her eyes filled with tears that she wiped away, and she reached for the tissue box on her desk nearby. She seemed to start crying when she described how happy she was to see Malia’s mother come to the presentation. After pausing briefly after Mrs. Gopal stopped speaking, I commented about how proud Malia’s mother must have been. Following these comments, I moved on, I kept asking questions and didn’t specifically ask why Mrs. Gopal was crying. Malia’s story, her presentation, Mrs. Gopal’s telling, and my avoidance of the subject signaled a sticky affective encounter (Ahmed, 2004), full of the circumstances of injustice and social power relations. Grieving the circumstances of Malia’s life, her loss of educational opportunity, suggests that I saw her and her mother as subjects, as sharing something familiar, because of the shared sentimentality, or bond, of loss.

Though Ahmed writes that grief for the other can move the subject into a relationship with this other (p. 192), I turned away from addressing my feelings with Mrs. Gopal. According to Ahmed, affect arises from the messy presence of being in the world, ‘the drama of contingency’ and how we are touched by what comes near. Emotions and affect can remind us of the surface
of our bodies and our proximity to others. She writes that, “Emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and other, that surfaces how boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (2004, p. 10). In turning away from Mrs. Gopal’s response, I turned away from my own response—in fact my response constituted the absence of a response. I left the emotional response to Mrs. Gopal, and I think I felt the same way she did. Concealing my emotion, projecting it onto the body of an other, I attempted to stay in the realm of the rational subject, of research, of thought and reason. However, Ahmed writes, that “the ‘truths’ of this world are dependent on emotions, on how they move subjects, and stick them together” (p. 170). What this encounter has taught me is that there is no purely rational approach to knowledge about the social world—the stickiness of this encounter was precisely what my dissertation is about: inequitable global conditions and how these conditions are reproduced where language and education meet.

An ethical relation to an other, to reading an other, requires addressing the sociality and the politics inherent in affective encounters. For instance, the encounter with Mrs. Gopal about Malia’s story highlights the politics that empathy provokes. Empathy can sustain “the very difference it may seek to overcome” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 30). For instance, citing Lauren Berlant (2003), Ahmed notes compassion is the new conservatism (2004, p. 192); suggesting that “to be moved by the suffering of deserving others is to be elevated into a place untouched by others whose suffering cannot be converted into my sympathy or admiration. The threat of difference is transformed into the promise or hope of likeness—that child could be mine, that loss could be my loss” (p. 192). Within this narrative, compassion for an other’s suffering becomes a gift that can be extended, that might repair, heal, or rescue those who suffer. This discourse resonates
with many teachers’ descriptions about the reason why they teach (including my own): to help others and to make the world a better place. Ahmed writes, “if our hope is a gift, the other is indebted to us…grateful for being saved and being brought into civil society” (p. 193). The contradiction revealed by this analysis points to how notions of injustice and feelings of empathy “can repeat the forms of violence [they] seeks to redress, as [they] can sustain the distinction between the subject and object of feeling” (p. 193). Ahmed argues that injustice cannot be reduced to pain/hurt/suffering/feeling bad, or the idea that what makes violence bad is another’s or my suffering. She writes that this is a dangerous claim: “it makes the judgment of right and wrong dependent upon the existence of emotions”; a claim that would:

…allow violence to be sustained in the event that the other claimed not to suffer, or that I claimed the other did not suffer. We must remember that some forms of violence remain concealed as violence, as effects of social norms that are hidden from view. Given this, violence itself could be justified on the grounds of the absence of consciously felt suffering. The reduction of injustice to emotions also ‘justifies’ claims of access to the interiority of the feelings of others (p. 193)

Being moved by an encounter entails not only reading the encounter, but also reading “the other that is encountered as having certain characteristics” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 28). Ahmed describes this connection with the example that if ‘it hurts’ it is because ‘you hurt me’.

Connecting affect and emotion, Ahmed writes, “While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate. In fact, they are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated” (2010, p. 32). Extending this connection to grief and empathy implies that I grieve an other or I empathize with an other’s feelings because he or she is grieveable. Butler (2006), in the book Precarious Life, has written that grief can differentiate between others by identifying those that can be loved, by constituting some lives as grieveable. Malia’s story itself is a delightful, happy tale about the
people in her family and the things that they like and enjoy doing. She drew pictures of her siblings playing tennis, kicking a soccer ball, and having fun at the park. There is nothing sad articulated in her pictures or her written text. However, the unwritten story is that of a ten-year old girl who has never been to school before, about a family that had to move halfway around the world to access girl’s education and escape the difficulties of living in the midst of political conflict and militant insurgency. Her life can be recognized as a grievable life.

The tensions that Malia’s story provokes feed into a common migration discourse in “a stereotypical progress narrative of moving on and doing better, even in a journey fraught with challenges, set-backs, and proportionate tragedy” (Valovitra, 2011, p. 153). Malia’s story, and the story of her story, demands that the reader negotiate the ethical implications of this dominant narrative and its implication in broader social power relations. This challenge constitutes the ethics of reading an other. Elina Valovitra engages with Ahmed’s work to explore the ethics of empathy in feminist reading. Valovitra wonders, “how to experience ‘things as they do’ in an ethical way?” (p. 146). She proposes that despite the risks of stories that might reproduce narratives of victimization, power, and truth, these stories offer the potential of “withness” (Ahmed, 2004) as a way of forming agency. She writes that for Ahmed, withness is a reparative act of self-formation through the participation in the emotional responses of others. In withness, Ahmed writes: “others exist within me and apart from me at the same time. Taking you in will not necessarily be ‘becoming like you’ or ‘making you like me’, as other others have also impressed upon me, shaping my surfaces in this way and that” (p. 160). Instead, the idea of withness can invoke an invitation to a relationship. In relations with texts, emotions can work not only to “show the effects of injustice, but also to open up the possibility of restoration, repair, healing, and recovery” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 191).
2 Asad’s story

I turn now to Asad’s story. Asad, a nine-year old boy in the Newcomer class, wrote a story called “My journey to Canada”. Working with Asad, his story was initially very short, including a single sentence or phrase under each picture that he had drawn. Knowing that Asad usually contributed far more in oral class discussions, I sat with Asad to help him extend his story, asking questions about each picture and encouraging him to write out the long answers he gave me. For instance, he had drawn pictures of his family wearing shalwar kameez, and I invited him to provide a written explanation of this picture and where the clothes came from. One of Asad’s pictures illustrated a number of weapons, including an AK-47 and a grenade. These illustrations were very detailed, in contrast to other pictures in his story such as the picture of his apartment building where he did not even draw a door. The figure below shows images from Asad’s story.

![Sample pictures of weapons (right) and the apartment building (left) from Asad's story.](image)

When his teachers first saw the weapon picture, they reacted with hesitation and anger. To share quotes from this interaction recorded in my field notes, one teacher asked, “What are you doing
drawing pictures of weapons? You’re supposed to be working on your story!” Asad replied that this picture was part of his story, and he wished to illustrate the lack of safety in his home country Pakistan. He explained that this was the reason his family decided to leave Pakistan. The teacher probed further, asking “Whose idea was it to draw this? Who told you that you could do this?” Asad said that the picture was his idea. In my field notes, I noted that I felt the teachers held me responsible for the picture since I had been working with Asad on his written text. I suggested that the teachers read what Asad had written to accompany this picture (see figure below).

![Text from Asad's story.](image)

**Figure 24. Text from Asad's story.**
After reading and discussing Asad’s story together, the teachers decided to allow him to include the picture of the weapons in his story. However, they asked him to rename his story “My home country”, and had him move the picture to the second page of his story, appearing after the page about his family wearing shalwar kameez. He also had a picture with the Pakistani and Canadian flags, with the label ‘Goodbye’ beside the Pakistani flag and the label ‘Hello’ beside the Canadian flag. The teachers asked Asad to move this picture to the last page of his story. These changes added distance and separation between Asad’s experiences in Pakistan and his experiences in Canada, and the new title remade his narrative into a story about Pakistan, not a story about Asad’s journey to Canada as he had initially planned. As he initially wrote it, Asad’s story was an agentive telling of his experience. Intervening in his story, the teachers restored a victim/saviour narrative. Moreover, the story no longer ends with the reader left hanging—the last page with ‘Goodbye’ and ‘Hello’ beside the flags now signals an end to the violence in Asad’s community. The original ending of Asad’s story—the image of weapons—materialized a sense of ongoing disappointment, an acknowledgement of intractable social conflict and a stasis that was not resolved by coming to Canada. Lynne Pearce (2011) notes the pressure to tell migration stories with “happy endings and hopeful futures” (p. 151). She writes, “Without economic and cultural resources (e.g. the ability to speak a particular language), a person can travel halfway round the world and be as stuck in their new district or suburb as they were in their old; more to the point, their life has not been magically converted into a life-story by making the move” (p. 153). Without a comfortable and recognizable narrative, Asad’s story remains foreign and unimaginable to readers. Appropriating Asad’s narrative not only marked his experience as other, but it also created what Pearce calls a “textual other”. In interpreting this other, readers are caught up in the ethics and politics of reading. Pearce writes, “What we—as readers—can never escape, however, is the fact that these interpretive choices are ‘always
already’ political choices and that by serving one interest…we might be undermining another” (p. 162).

While it is important not to read too much into these short stories and what they might mean about students’ own perceptions and experiences, these stories can be read and interpreted within the broader discourses circulating in the public domain. The changes made to Asad’s story restored a more familiar victim/hero or saviour narrative. This narrative is part of what Himani Bannerji (2000) calls the official discourse of multiculturalism in Canada, part of the national imaginary of Canada as a safe haven for those who are escaping war, persecution, or environmental disaster. Within this construction, ESL teachers are seen as playing an important role, facilitating the acculturation and transition of newcomer and refuge children, and creating a safe, welcoming learning environment (see for instance the 2007 ESL Policy [Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a]; and Many Roots, Many Voices resource [Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005]). Leti Volpp (2011) explores how the cultural difference of immigrant women is often framed, noting that “certain narratives have traction because of already existing scripts about gender, culture, immigration, and Islam” (p. 91). The condemnation of religious violence is one narrative that has such traction. Volpp writes, violence “over there” is used “to buttress claims that Islam is evil and barbaric, in contrast ‘we’ are not. This categorization both reflects and further fuels already existing perceptions about ‘illiberal minorities’ and ‘liberal us’” (p. 91). This script features prominently in popular news media and political discourses about global conflict, a discourse that underscores demands for cultural assimilation of immigrants. Moreover, “the vision underlying both of these discourses presumes a host society of the West that is progressive, democratic, civilized, and feminist, in contrast to immigrants…most especially Muslim immigrants—as backward, barbaric, primitive, and misogynist.” (p. 93). However, the familiar narrative avoids questions about the West’s role in the ‘war on terror’.
These issues circulated throughout prior classroom discussions when the students brought up the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan. For instance, when I was preparing students to write stories about themselves, called language experience stories, issues related to the regional conflict in Pakistan and Afghanistan came up. As a pre-writing activity, we were discussing possible settings for students’ stories. Students listed ideas for locations that included: their home countries, their homes, their new apartments, the airplane, and school. I invited students to talk about possible settings for their stories in their first language. During the discussion, one student shared the news of a bombing that had taken place the day before in a busy market in Pakistan. One hundred and fifty people were killed, including many women and children. This news prompted a deep and personal discussion among the students, which the following transcript excerpt illustrates.

Saskia: What does this word say? Setting, right. What is a setting?
Monira: This story is about outside and about their home.
Saskia: Right.
Parveen: Like this? [Demonstrates action of sitting down]
Saskia: Oh, that is sitting. Sitting, yes. Does anyone want to talk about setting in a different language?
Students: Yeah.
Saskia: OK, say it out loud and your friends can say...
Students: [Conversation in home languages]
Asad: [Translating for Nazrat] You can say something about your original country.
Abdulazim: Outside.
Saskia: Yes, outside could be a setting.
Saskia: Do you see what Miss Yoon wrote on the board about setting?
Mrs. Gopal: Where. And when. Setting can be where and when something happened.
Saskia: And then plot. Can we remember what plot means? Let’s try to say that together. Plot. [Students repeat, “plot”]. What does the plot mean?
Abdulazim: What.
Saskia: Yes, what, like what happened.
Asad: Like my trip to Canada, my family, my country.
[Discussion in home languages]
Saskia: Do you want to add to that?
Abdulazim: Like yesterday in Afghanistan there was fighting.
Parveen: A suicide bombing.
Abdulazim: In Pakistan and Afghanistan.
Saskia: Where did you hear about that?
Abdulazim: In news.
Wagma: Not on the tv.
Rabia: Internet.
Mrs. Gopal: Abdulazim, Is that why your family left Afghanistan, because of things like that? Do you know why your family left Afghanistan to come here? That’s a good question to ask your family.
Monira: Because we are coming here because the security not good. Another guys, they say they don’t want the students to go in school. In Afghanistan, not city, in the--
Saskia: In the country?
Monira: Yes, in the country. They don’t have schools they closed the schools. And everybody they can’t go in the schools.
Saskia: So you are very lucky to come to school.
Monira: Yes but I miss my country.
Mrs. Gopal: But that is why your parents came? This is important for you to understand. I would like everybody to go home tonight and ask your parents, why did you move us to Canada? If you don’t know you need to know. Why did your mom and dad say you had to go? Why couldn’t you stay in your country?
Asad: Obama said all Pakistan will be mine.
Saskia: From America?
Asad: Yes.
Saskia: So they’re fighting about that. Is that fair?
Asad: No.
Monira: You don’t know that. Not America.
Saskia: That’s interesting, maybe that’s something we could try to find out.
Asad: Obama is giving lots of money because America is not a good country.
Mrs. Gopal: What’s not a good country? Sorry? America is not a good country?
Asad: They are giving money and they are--
Saskia: Sounds like you’re very interested in the news. Let’s try to find out some more questions about what’s going on because it sounds like Monira has a different idea.
Parveen: In Pakistan they said school is closed because people said you’re going to be bomb on the school
Mrs. Gopal: So they closed the school?
Saskia: Sounds very scary.
Marijka: My father came here for a good job and much money.
Saskia: Interesting. There’s some good reasons to think about moving.
Abdulazim: In Pakistan there’s a pin on the ground so anybody pick it up in the pin there is a bomb. So anybody pick up, boom.
Mrs. Gopal: Land mines, land mines. We call that land mines.
Saskia: Oh, land mines.
Wagma: In Pakistan one boy he’s going to school and he was under the bomb.
Saskia: So one boy was going to school, and then he, there was a bomb? Then what happened?
Abdulazim: And the guy died.
Saskia: Very scary.
Monira: In Canada too we have good guys and bad guys. In every country is good guys and bad guys. In Afghanistan and Pakistan there is lots of bad guys. They don’t want students to go to school. You know why? They don’t want, they don’t know what is the studying. I don’t know how to say it to you. They don’t know what is the writing, what is the reading because of that they don’t want the people and the kids to learn.
Saskia: Interesting.
Parveen: We came to Canada because in Pakistan there is all the cities have a bomb.
Saskia: Well, it sounds like you have a lot of information and a lot of interesting stories about what is happening in the world. It sounds like some things are scary and some things are maybe not fair. So, I think maybe we have some questions we want to find out about. Now, Monira was just talking about good guys and bad guys. Do you have any questions that maybe we could think about? You can say it in your language if you want.
Nazrat: [speaks in Dari]
Asad: Pakistan someone, a man there is a ball you can play with and inside there is a big bomb. When he took the ball to school the bomb go off. In Peshawar.
Saskia: Well that makes me think about some questions. Do you mind if we come up with some questions that as a class we can think about?
Mrs. Gopal: Sure.
Saskia: Like why are bombs in balls, for example. So, why is there a bomb in balls for children?

Monira’s comment, “In every country is good guys and bad guys” fit the dominant narrative about immigration to Canada from war-affected countries. When she countered Asad’s ideas, I felt relief because I was unsure of how I was going to respond to his comments. I had several
simultaneous desires, starting from my wish to create what Ahmed (2004) calls “the conditions of possibility” (p. 34) for hearing the pain of the children’s stories. Listening to stories of innocent children being killed because of a conflict that is not their own, dying for the mere act of going to school or picking up a ball, these stories caught me, they ripped at my heart as surely they must have caused fear and confusion for the children in the class who were repeating the stories. As Butler (2006) writes, “We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something” (p. 23). Acknowledging the pain of the children’s stories, I bore witness to them, granting their pain “the status of an event, a happening in the world, rather than just ‘something’ [they] felt, the ‘something’ that would come and go with [their] coming and going” (p. 30). Ahmed writes that witnessing gives pain a life outside the borders of the body, but an ethical hearing of this pain entails recognizing that it does not belong to me, I cannot claim it as my own. Witnessing should not appropriate another’s pain, but it can produce a response wherein “I come to feel that which I cannot know” (p. 30), and hear what is impossible (p. 35). Tied to my sadness at these stories was my sense of hopelessness, a loss arising from the recognition that I might not be able to help make the children’s world a better place. My hopelessness gestures to the politics of pain and the distribution of power inherent in the moment—a reminder of my privilege. Ahmed points out, “It is no accident then that the normative subject is often secured through narratives of injury” (p. 33). My sadness, their pain is a reminder that ‘over here’ we do not have to worry about landmines and bombs, the loss of our children to landmines and bombs.

I wanted the moment to pass because I felt the weight of my responsibility to do something, to apologize for the pain and condemn the actions. Yet saying sorry might have committed me to a responsibility that I did not feel was entirely mine. Moreover, I wanted to allow Asad the right to his opinion even though I judged his ideas to be wrong. Reflecting on his comments now, I see that he was trying—with his limited English language skills—to introduce
a conversation about the violence of American imperialism and America’s funding and support of particular political regimes. Asad was pointing out the irrelevant distinction between war and terror when innocent children are killed—does it matter whether the bombs or bullets are part of a legitimate war or not (i.e. Ahmed, 2004, p. 169)? The feelings that pulled me in different directions generated ambivalence. Citing Jane Flax (1990), Marnina Gonick (2003) describes ambivalence as a strength that arises from contradictory feelings and desires: “Ambivalence refers to affective states in which intrinsically contradictory or mutually exclusive desires or ideas are each invested with intense emotional energy. Although one cannot have both simultaneously, one cannot abandon either of them” (p. 14). Like Ahmed’s ‘stickiness’, this conception of ambivalence is powerful. Gonick (2003) suggests that this power rests in the capacity for ambivalence to resist collapsing contradictions into a coherent whole (p. 14), and its capacity to highlight indeterminate intersections among different dimensions of experience. I read my ambivalence as signifying that my understanding and sense of responsibility was implicated in the very construction it attempted to circumscribe. Though I was not the cause of the pain, my interest in not being responsible was precisely because of my recognition of the enduring inequities between the students’ experiences and my own, their countries of origin and mine (i.e. Ahmed, 2004, p. 116).

I thought carefully about how to respond, and decided that it was important to validate the students’ concerns. Documenting their questions seemed to be a useful strategy. The students came up with question after question about war and conflict, and I wrote every question down. The figure below shows images of the first and second pages of students’ questions.
Figure 25. Students' questions about war and conflict.

Documenting the students’ questions, my intention was to show the students that their concerns and experiences mattered as much as the other work that we did in school. After we created the list, I said we would set our questions aside for a while and we could add to the list if we thought of more questions. I wanted to talk to Mrs. Gopal and Miss Yoon to decide how to proceed. At recess time I had the opportunity to talk to the teachers:

Saskia: What do you think about where they’re going with this?
Mrs. Gopal: Well that’s why I asked that question. It’s opening up a good…
Miss Yoon: Some of them have had experiences or they’ve seen on the news. I’d like to see that as part of their story.
Saskia: Their stories were so much about children. Like about the bomb in the ball.
Mrs. Gopal: About schools being closed, or schools not being safe for a child to be in. All that.
Saskia: Or where people don’t want kids to learn. Those are big ideas
Miss Yoon: They are. It affects them.
Mrs. Gopal: It’s a personal thing. And when they’re looking at the news, even though they’re here they’re making a connection with what’s happening over there. Probably, I’m sure what you’re hearing is family discussion going on. They didn’t think of this themselves. They heard it from mum or dad, or family discussion or something. That can be part of their stories.
Saskia: That keeps a social justice focus to this.
Bannerji (2000) writes that within multicultural discourse, “focus shifts from processes of exclusion and marginalization to ethnic identities and their lack of adaptiveness” (p. 9). Bannerji notes that the ideas of the nation, the community, and multicultural ethnicities are themselves the constructs of colonial discourses, constructed forms of closure that displaces actual living subjects, their histories, and relations with ideological constructs (p. 10). Mrs. Gopal’s comment, “Well that’s why I asked that question” and my own attempt to package the discussion as part of a “social justice focus” were also constructed forms of closure, ways to separate and package the students’ experiences in a way that fit dominant discourses. Our statements were neither value- nor power-free engagements with difference and multiplicity, but practices of power in that they determined and constrained what was included as part of the discourse of belonging. This analysis can be extended to later comments by the teachers, when we reflected upon this discussion during an interview a month after the project was over. Miss Yoon shared how she felt dealing with issues of war and conflict in the classroom: “It really [was] a good discussion. We unfortunately haven’t gone back to those discussions, I don’t know if I would delve into that topic area, it’s huge and the questions and responses...are overwhelming.” She continued, “They come from countries where they have specific views that are probably not their own, but brought forward by their parents. I think the important thing is telling them about equality and fairness in their new country and how people are together.”

3 Monira’s story

Living in a New Country.
When I came to Canada I was sad and I don’t want to leave my country.
I am sad and I came to my school to say good bye friends.
My mom said, Monira is so sad but we have to leave our country tomorrow. I cry and I sad my mom you think I can leave my country, my dad, everybody. No, no! I cry and cry but we need to leave.
Now we are in the airplane. I was very, very sad and the flight was two days.
Now we are in Canada. This is my mom, this is my brother, and this is me. His name is Nezam and my name is Monira.
Here is a hotel. My family likes to live there for a short time.
Now we are in a hotel and it is night time. I need to sleep. When I sleep I saw a dream. In my dream I remember when my dad said, oh my dear, bye. I didn’t want to see you so sad. I will miss you a lot.
When I wake up from sleep I was so sad. But I saw some kind peoples. They are talking with my mom. I was excited. I tell them who are you. They told me Hi my dear, I am Dorothy and I am Sarah. What’s your name? I said my name is Monira and then they told me we have for you an ice cream. When they give me an ice cream for sure they are my friend and my mom’s friend.
And here is our apartment.

Figure 26. Sample page from Monira’s story My Journey to Canada.

The cover page of Monira’s story shows two self-portraits, one of Monira crying and the other of her smiling. In the beginning of her story, she writes, “When I came to Canada I was sad and I don’t want to leave my country.” She describes the sadness she felt leaving her friends and her father behind, “I cry and cry but we need to leave.” Monira’s story ends describing the kind
people her family met in Canada, including staff at the shelter when she first arrived to the city:

“When they give me an ice cream for sure they are my friend and my mom friend.” In contrast to Asad’s story, Monira’s story presents a more familiar cultural narrative, the sadness of saying goodbye to those you love, and the happiness of a new beginning. Rather than ending with a dismal picture of the effects of war and violence, the pressure of leaving behind family and friends, Monira’s ends with friendship and ice cream, neatly wrapping up but also masking the difficulties of her circumstances of migration. The difference between these stories, and between Monira and Asad’s opinions in class, provoked a tension. Both stories were ‘true’ self-representations and sad in their own way, however Asad’s story was judged as a source of negative affect, and Monira’s story was a source of positive affect. This difference suggests emotion is bound up with social hierarchy, with particular emotions being more acceptable or characteristic of some bodies and not others.

Mrs. Gopal: And with Monira, the other kids have made fun of her, they’ve told her she’s not Muslim. Which she takes complete offence to. Because she knows she’s Muslim but she is not in the category that they are. I think she’s a real believing Muslim but in a more liberal way. She doesn’t wear the hijab. She said to me the other day why are they always asking her, ‘Is this hallal? Is this hallal? They’re asking me if water is hallal.’ How can water not be hallal? So she’s caught on. A very interesting dynamic. I think she’s feeling left out. I think she’s feeling how’s she going to negotiate her identity? I think she doesn’t want to be one of them, but she knows she is one. One of that category. So it’s a very interesting dynamic set up.

Mrs. Gopal: Monira is very liberal compared to other Muslims in class.
Miss Yoon: Oh for sure.
Saskia: Well she said there’s good guys and bad guys everywhere.
Mrs. Gopal: You can tell she’s hearing that at home. You can tell from the things she’s said in the past few months. So I’ve really picked up on the fact that her family is a very liberal Muslim family. She’s even outright said to me that she’s having a hard time with these other Muslim children who are very closed in their thinking. I don’t think they’ll stay here in this community very long. Once they get settled they’ll be in another part of the city.
Miss Yoon: I think it’s good for her to express these kinds of things, and for them to hear it.

... 

Within this framing, Monira’s story is acceptable, it belongs. Asad’s story has to be changed, it doesn’t belong. His picture of weapons crosses a boundary and entails a risk that is shaped by past histories of contact, such as the threat of terror and violence. Connected to a longer history of articulation, Asad’s narrative “has come too close” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 22), and as such moving the weapon image closer to that which represents Pakistan in his story is a way of expelling Asad’s narrative from dominant Canadian discourse and community, a move that “secure[s] the white subject as sovereign in the nation...[and] recognizes all non-white others as strangers, as ‘bodies out of place’ (Ahmed, 2004, p. 2). Monira’s story is one that can be managed by discourses of multiculturalism and immigration; it doesn’t need to be changed.

The close reading of Asad, Monira, and Malia’s stories illustrates how representations circumscribe understandings of language learners and language learning, particularly in the institutionalized context of schooling where dominant perspectives prevail. Both the misrecognition of Asad’s story as something to be feared, and the acceptance of Monira and Malia’s stories point to the difficulties of disrupting this “hegemonic field of representation” (Butler, 2006, p. 150). Enchantment with the familiar narratives that flatten the Canadian public identity according to a liberal multicultural discourse shows how our self-representation is imbued with powerful discourses of progress and modernity. This disregard for difference creates, as Andreotti writes, a “condition of epistemic blindness where we see ourselves as independent and self-sufficient in a knowable and controllable world, moving ‘forward’ in a direction that we already know and contribute to” (Andreotti, 2012, p. 2). Within this discursive structure, how do individuals as subjects identify (or not identify) with the ‘positions’ to which
they are designated? How do individuals produce and perform particular subject positions? Identification entails a discursive binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, requiring what is left outside--its constitutive outside--to consolidate the process of identification. Butler (1990; 1993) writes that subjectivity does not exist before or outside of power. This materialization of subjectivity is not constituted as “the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, 1993, p. 2). In Butler’s perspective, identification comes together through discursive means that foreclose and disavow other possible identifications; a suturing of the psychic and the discursive that acknowledges both the necessity and impossibility of identity.

Considering these issues, I turn again to the questions raised by Butler (2006) of “whose lives count as lives?”, and “what makes for a grievable life?” (p. 20). These questions are central to ethical readings of an other. Rather than focusing on what is the same, an alternate orientation and ethical relation to an other, across difference, is one that across does not focus on deficit or erase those differences that exceed the boundaries and logic of our knowing. Central to this orientation and ethical relation is the need for lives that have been designated as ‘ungrievable’ to be grieved. Butler writes that apprehending the precariousness of lives is necessary for humanity and for solidarity; and for “a sense of ethical outrage that is, distinctively, for an Other, in the name of an Other” (p. 150). From this perspective we might see ourselves, as teachers and students mutually engaged in educational practice, as interdependent. This interdependence can inform an ethical relation. As Andreotti (2012) writes, we must see ourselves as “co-dependent in relation to each other and insufficient before a complex, uncertain, and plural world moving towards contestable ‘forwards’” (p. 2).
4 Nazrat and Abdulazim’s stories

To illustrate these ideas, I share several pictures that Nazrat and Abdulazim created for their stories called *My Home Country*. Nazrat created a beautiful story, full of pictures of the places that were important to him in Afghanistan—his home, the mosque, the market, the playground, a swimming pool, and his family’s dinner table. The image below is Nazrat’s picture of the mosque. There is an apple tree in front of the large mosque, and Nazrat has drawn himself smiling and picking apples from the tree.

![Figure 27 Nazrat's drawing of himself picking apples at the Mosque.](image)

What is notable about this drawing is that it stands in sharp contrast to the images of mosques circulating in the public domain in the Canadian news media. Images of mosques in the news show either large crowds engaged in a rally or pictures of vandalization or destruction of
property. The teacher and I had never seen a picture of a mosque like Nazrat’s. Another drawing that stood out to me was Abdulazim’s picture of a market in his home country.

Figure 28. Abdulazim's picture of a market in Pakistan.
There is a sign labeling the market in English and in Pashto, and bright clothing and fruit are displayed for sale. In front of the market is a man with only one leg. He stands smiling, with a pair of crutches. Abdulazim’s image of the market supplies us with another reality that we don’t often see represented, much less in a child’s drawing.

Through the children’s eyes we can get a glimpse of a world with which we are unfamiliar, a re-presentation of that which we thought we knew. Nazrat and Abdulazim’s drawings materialize what seems to be a happy way of life, a way of life left behind because of political and economic issues much greater than the boys could fully understand or illustrate at their age. Butler suggests that we ask, “in what narrative function these images are mobilized” (p. 143), examining how representation works in relation to humanization and dehumanization. These images must be considered within a larger representational practice and circulation of public images and discourse about Afghanistan and Pakistan that circulate in Canada. In this case, giving face to complex social issues reminds us of the possibility of loss that is so close to us all. The drawings point “beyond themselves, to a life and precariousness that they could not show” (Butler, 2006, p. 150). By illustrating happy images of Afghanistan and Pakistan that we don’t often see, these images disrupt the sense of a Canadian public identity built upon the belief that ‘we’ are better than ‘them’.

5 In the garden

On the surface, creating the school garden had very little to do with language and literacy learning. Initially, I was keen to create the garden out of feelings of reciprocity and responsibility—reciprocity to Mr. Kendrick for allowing me to do research with him and his students, and responsibility for making a material change in the conditions of the school and community. However, it soon became apparent that the work in the garden was important for
two other important reasons. First, creating the school garden was a kind of “pedagogical border crossing” (Gallagher, 2007, p. 170), a site for doing learning differently in this school context. Second, working alongside teachers, students, and parents in the garden opened possibilities for generating knowledge differently.

The first sign that we were crossing a pedagogical border was that we had to seek permission to create the school garden. Mr. Kendrick and I were very nervous that the school administrators would reject the idea, but we were delighted when they gave consent for us to work on one of the interior courtyards of the school. These courtyards were made when the original school building was expanded to make room for the growing population of school-age children in the community. Although the original intention may have been different, there were four large interior courtyards in the school that were overgrown with a tangle of weeds over one metre high. The courtyards were bordered by hallways and classrooms with large windows, bringing natural light into the school, but also providing a daily reminder of close proximity to an unruly, unused, and littered space. Looking at the courtyards as “social space” (Lefebvre, 1991/1974) suggests that the messy courtyards sent a message of a place neglected, forgotten. In the middle of this bright and cheerful school, one needed to pass by this scene sometimes several times a day. However, in choosing to remake one of these courtyards into a place for learning, the empty space became useful—a usefulness that arose from what was not there.

We were reminded of our transgression into new territory every time we worked in the garden. In the beginning we worked uncertainly under the gaze of other teachers, students, and administrators who paused as they walked by to watch us work. As soon as the weeds were gone, we started tracking dirt into the school, clumps of mud stuck on the bottom of shoes that made a path from the outside to our classroom door. Starting to cultivate the garden, we created
a noisy racket carrying shovels and rakes through the hallways. But in the end, all these
disturbances were forgotten—the children’s happy voices and laughter, their parents’ firm but
indulgent admonitions, the teachers’ clear orders and instructions combined to create a scene
worth watching. Other teachers brought their classes to help, and administrators brought visitors
to tour the garden. Notably, much of the work in the garden took place in the month of May, the
same month when third grade students were supposed to be preparing for the province-wide
standardized literacy test. During the week when the students were writing the test, Mr.
Kendrick planned the day so the students would spend three hours in the morning writing the
test, and a full three hours every afternoon in the garden. What was supposed to be a stressful
time for the students turned into a great deal of fun. We connected multiple curriculum
expectations with our work in the garden, which Mr. Kendrick documented and shared during a
professional development presentation for other teachers in the school district.

The garden created the dynamic experience of these curriculum expectations,
materializing pedagogy as not just textual or representational, but as material and sensational.
Ellsworth (2005) writes about anomalous places of learning, sites where the learning self is in
the making. This openness to multiple sites for learning provides “an attempt to understand and
talk about the nature of reality in a way that acknowledges that to be alive and to inhabit a body
is to be continuously and radically in relation with the world, with others, and with what we
make of them” (p. 4). As an environmental activist and former outdoor education teacher, Mr.
Kendrick talked about the importance of making science and social studies curriculum learning
come alive for students, and the challenge of making this happen. He described his feelings:

I couldn’t get over the hump of the feeling that there is much too much to do to wrangle a
trip to the ravine [that is across the street from the school]. It’s what I’d like to be able to
do, but I can just get a video and cover the facts and not make a real, holistic connection.
I’ve felt overwhelmed. This year I’ve been able to get the kids outside, we’ve made our own community based on human connections, not the institution.

Moreover, contextualizing the production of knowledge in material, social space we had the opportunity to explore questions about coming to know in relation to others, opening to issues of power, hierarchies of knowledge, and social change (Springgay, 2008).

Because of school board and union policies, we were not allowed to use any machinery to till the garden. We had to do all the work in the garden by hand, with whatever tools might be readily available to us. The day after we discussed this problem with the students, several children came to school prepared with dishwashing gloves and cooking spoons. The day after, even more children brought implements raided from their kitchens. Because all the children lived in high-rise apartment buildings, these were the tools they had. Although we also brought in donated garden gloves and hand trowels, we encouraged the children to use whatever they wanted to use. Many children used their tools from home, and we acknowledged that they were using ingenuity and creativity to figure out how best to work in the garden. This small gesture was a way to encourage the children to draw on nonlinguistic resources from home. A far more important resource from home were the children’s parents. Most of the parents had never volunteered at the school, as cultural and linguistic differences had seemed to present a barrier to their involvement. In the garden, however, expertise resided with parents. Their environmental knowledge and prior agricultural experiences were needed contributions to our work. Several parents returned day after day to work alongside their children in the garden. Their presence created connections between home and school, and provided an opening for parents to contribute to their children’s learning. As one father said:

Most of the kids they are not doing outdoor work, they are busy with homework and video games, normally they are not doing any physical things. Gardening is good for physical
things; it’s good learning. If you don’t learn anything about agriculture, you don’t understand how farmers are making food for you, how hard it is. So this is real learning. They [the children] know how people are making food for them. When you get food on your table you want to take it; now [they] realize what people are doing for them, and that they should be grateful for that.

The children’s words and the digital images of the garden did a far better job of illustrating our work. Out of the many digital images that the children, teachers and I took, we asked the students which pictures captured their experience of working in the garden. Drawing on the use of photo-voice as a method for prompting reflection (Mitchell, 2008), we invited the students to write captions for the pictures that they chose. The captions were written in English and in Braille to ensure that Rasha could read them. The images below are four of the six pictures chosen by the students.

![Representative images chosen by the students from the garden.](image)

The students’ captions were not descriptions of the pictures themselves; rather they were the children’s reflections on the images. Some of the captions students included: “I feel proud that
As I write this I am aware of the inadequacy of my words in describing the moments of curiosity, fascination, and labour in the garden; the understandings and experiences that our work generated. This inadequacy is similarly reflected by the challenges of producing knowledge about embodied subjects—how to capture the dynamic, uncertain qualities of experience and of bodied subjectivities without creating understandings that are frozen in time or collapsed into one-dimensional representations. Knowledge produced in the garden was of a material nature, full of affect, sensation, and encounters that communicated ideas, sensibilities, assumptions, and power relations (Ellsworth, 2005; Gallagher, 2007; Springgay, 2008a). As Ellsworth notes, the materiality of such knowing encourages a movement away from understanding the learning self through cognition, psychology, or phenomenology. Instead, embodied knowledge broadens understandings of how subjectivity is performed, constructed, and mediated in relation with other bodies (Gallagher, 2007; Springgay, 2008a, b). Emphasizing the particularity of different bodies, Stephanie Springgay (2008a) writes, “we are always ‘with’ others, not to consume or assimilate one another’s experience and subjectivity, but that in the event of the ‘with,’ difference and thus, thought is produced” (p. 25). Springgay draws on a feminist reading of Jean Luc Nancy’s (2000) notion of ‘being-with’ to underscore an inter-embodiment and relationality premised on difference, and she connects with Ahmed’s perspective on embodied others to note that “bodied encounters as difference dislocate fixed boundaries” (p. 26, italics original).

Relational and embodied knowledge, from this perspective, is helpful to think beyond the binaries that have structured understandings of bodies, subjectivities, and knowledge (i.e.
native/nonnative, us/them). For instance, the students’ stories discussed earlier illustrate how dominant discourses in teaching ESL have produced a particular kind of material body—a nonnative, migrant, potentially violent other. The idea of being with others prompts thinking about the process of exchange between particular bodies, and between bodies and space. Rather than thinking of the children in the courtyard, the garden itself was constituted by the children and the processes happening between the children and the earth. The garden itself materialized the dynamic nature of social space—clearing, sowing, watering, weeding, and harvesting facilitated processes of change reflected in both the children and the courtyard. In this sense, the garden was an in-between space, made not just of physical boundaries, but a space of movement, of development, of becoming (Springgay, 2008a). This porous area, the ‘in-between’ is where encounters generate experience and knowing. Springgay quotes Grosz (2001) describing the in-between “is what fosters and enables the other’s transition from being the other of the one to its own becoming, to reconstituting another relation, in different terms” (p. 27). New knowledge can be generated at these liminal edges, where the intensity of our identities and subjectivities begins to fade or bleed into something other. The process of creating this situated, embodied knowledge provoked alternative ways of theorizing self/other relations. For research in SLA, these perspectives might be useful to theorize identities and language learning processes more dynamically, reflecting students as mobile subjects whose resources shift and change according to encounters and relations across people, places, and networks of communication.

Telling people about the school garden generally produces a positive response. People are happy to hear a story about children doing this kind of activity in school. However, in a double(d) reading we might see the unseen stories and sacrifices that underwrote the garden and its need in the first place, materializing as it does the global inequities manifest in this school and community. Namely, the forced migration of people from rural, war-affected communities,
effects of urban development, and unequal access to land ownership and settled communities due to high costs of living. Because of his understanding of the complexity of environmental issues, Mr. Kendrick began to reflect upon several issues raised by the garden project. He said, “This is the stuff that’s at the core of the life and the planet. I don’t think we should be creating a world where people can read and can have all the food that they need and other people don’t; where those who can are going to grab what they’re able to grab and to hell with everybody else”. Mr. Kendrick’s comments reflected a tension between the broader project goals focused on language and literacy development, and the institutionalized “myth” of literacy and its transformative potential. Mr. Kendrick’s comment can be understood according to Berlant’s (2011) concept of “cruel optimism”. Berlant describes cruel optimism as faith or belief in normative promises that are bound to disappoint. She writes that cruel optimism describes a “relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility. What is cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that subjects who have x in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object or sense of desire…because whatever the content of the attachment, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world” (p. 21). Indeed this kind of cruel optimism is perhaps what fuels those of us who teach—a strong belief that we can make a difference in the lives of our students; and an equally strong belief that we can’t do it all by ourselves—teachers need a system, students need families, families need communities, and so on. Teachers’ optimism about these circumstances is perhaps what keeps us keeping on.

Toward the end of the project, Mr. Kendrick hosted a visitor to the class. He spoke to the visitor and I about his reflections on our work, and he later repeated a similar sentiment again. Pointing out the contradictions inherent in our work, Mr. Kendrick said: “What people are seeing is bare earth, they’re ripping everything out and they are so proud of their industry. I want my
students to recognize that this is a double-edged thing that we are doing. Although everyone says ‘oh this is a wonderful thing that you are doing’, it isn’t totally. This is the equivalent of, if you take what we’re doing on a micro scale and you scale it up it’s like forestry, like clear cutting.” Mr. Kendrick’s insights don’t sit well with a coherent narrative about the garden—his comments invite consideration of questions that Ellsworth (2005) raises: what are the pedagogical pivot points of these places of learning? What is inviting us into relation and what might we make of our time there? Mr. Kendrick’s comments suggest that we cannot know what those pivot points are; what the children (and we) took away from the garden depended on how we constituted that space, the discourse and practices that unfolded there. Moreover, as Springgay (2008a) points out, implicit power structures make mutual engagement not only unattainable but also problematic, and “encounters actually differentiate and produce difference” (p. 64). Mr. Kendrick’s feelings about the garden changed over the course of the project. Feeling both enchantment and disillusionment at once, Mr. Kendrick was moved to his own liminal edges where he began to question the boundaries implied by cultivating land. He explained to me that by reclaiming the courtyard from the weeds, we were also taking the land away from the insects, birds, and small animals that called the unruly courtyard home. Mr. Kendrick found a threshold that marked our relation to the natural world; an experience of proximity of “being-within an outside” (Agamben, 1993, as cited in Springgay, 2008a, p. 64).

Mr. Kendrick’s comments came at first as a surprise to me, revealing my own entrenched commitment to dominant narratives of resolution and redemption. Pearce (2011) points out the desire for such coherent narratives, asking “Why, that is, should any of us wish to write or read, a story that does not move its characters—and us—forward in some way? Why should we commit ourselves to a roller coaster of quest, test and suffering if there is not some reward, reprieve, or, at least, catharsis at the end? (p. 151). The story of the project would not be quite right without
accounting for the complexities that it provokes. Attempting to disregard such ‘outlying’ data would mean appropriating the story of what took place; it would presume a universal understanding that did not exist. Pearce writes that a possible way answer to her questions “lies in a political commitment to human lives that never quite translate into life-stories: a commitment shared by certain writers and readers to making visible frustrated, aborted modes of existence; to lives that ‘go nowhere’ and hence fail to signify as a biography in any meaningful way” (p. 151). Identifying the contradictions in our work, Mr. Kendrick also seemed frustrated that there were no easy answers to these environmental issues. Coping with the tension of his experience, he was unafraid to name the disjunctures. As Ahmed (2010) wrote, “To obscure or to take cover by looking on the bright side is to avoid what might threaten the world as it is” (p. 43). Quoting Audre Lorde, Ahmed articulates a critique of happiness: “Let us seek ‘joy’ rather than real food and clean air and a saner future on a livable earth! As if happiness alone can protect” (Lorde, 1977, as cited in Ahmed, 2010, p. 43). These ideas are at the core of a feminist ethics and consciousness, which Ahmed describes as consciousness of the violence and power that are concealed under the languages of civility and love. She writes, “And if it can cause disturbance simply to notice something, you realize that the world you thought you were in is not the world you are in” (p. 43).

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to elaborate an/other story of the research, one that employs an epistemology informed by the ethical and affective turns in feminist theory. Taking seriously the idea of becoming other, this chapter suggests that reconceptualizing identity is only a starting point in the effort to think otherwise in SLA research and practice. Engaging with a relational, affective, and embodied knowledge supports the possibility of understanding how difference is
“lived and encountered with, in, and through different bodies” (Springgay, 2008, p. 25).

Emotions can open lines of communication (Ahmed, 2004, p. 182); but rather than become an outcome of research or practice (which Ahmed notes would make emotions knowable in advance, following a ‘banking model’ of education), emotions can generate an opportunity to be moved in unexpected ways. The unknowable nature of this process is what is important; as Ahmed writes, it creates a sense of critical wonder about why and how things are or happen to be (p. 182). Wonder opens to discovery, a reorientation of one’s relation to the world that “keeps bodies and spaces open to the surprise of others” (p. 183). Language education is highly constrained by practices driven by standardized language and literacy assessments and the teaching of prescribed language functions and skills. Rich, engaging inquiry-based learning offers far more possibility to open to a sense of wonder that might reinvigorate an ethical, relational practice.
Chapter 7
Re/storying Dominant Narratives of Native/Nonnative Others

Asra: I always used to think that it’s hopeless, because I’m just a child and whenever somebody, a child has an idea, adults don’t really listen to it. They just ignore that person, that child. And that child could really help make a difference. So I thought to myself that I’m going to stand up for myself and make a difference.”

Saamni: I wish we had the best school ever, with children being really smart and without fighting or bullying. Sometimes children are smarter than grown ups, and I wish everybody in this school was smarter than grown ups.

Saskia: Do you feel that people aren’t smart now, is that why you said that?

Saamni: Some people are, most of the people are, but some people they have [inaudible], like Qahira, she doesn’t know about words, understanding the words. So you need to help her.

Saamni: Like you can say what this word means and she will learn something from it. And then she would use that word. At school she’s having trouble with reading too because it’s language. Like when you read something you could tell the meaning so she knows what’s going on in the story.

Saskia: [inaudible]

Saamni: Sometimes she will mess up her presentation, she’ll get sad. I came behind her and I said the words to her, ‘your presentation will go good and you’ll be happy’

1 Theoretical significance
The students’ comments above gesture to the central contradiction of my research—the concomitant attempt to undo exclusionary discourses of identity in the field of SLA, and to value the experiences of students positioned outside of dominant discourses of normativity in globalized educational contexts. The crisis of the subject that this contradiction implies sheds
light on the multiple purposes of my dissertation project: to assist teachers and students in negotiating their dynamic subjectivities, to decentre monolingual, monocultural discourses and practices in schools, and to support teachers and students in the processes required for language, literacy, and curriculum teaching and learning. These multiple purposes should not be thought of as incommensurable, but seen for the generative theoretical insights that the tension among them inspires. Taking seriously the risks for students located in marginalized and nondominant social positions, I have argued that the practices and discourses that construct students’ subjectivity and experience need to be more fully contended in how social change is supported in SLA research and practice. Theorizing identity as a site of difference, my aim has been to open a theoretical space to highlight the productive contradictions inherent in how the concept of identity has been used in SLA research. Mining the conceptual inadequacy of the term, I have endeavoured to illustrate both the complexity of the social subject and the power relations inherent in English language education, conditions that have been amplified by the flexibility and mobility of new global networks, contexts, and domains.

Feminist theorists have long struggled with the tension of this kind of work, comprising the need to strategically address material structural inequities while acknowledging the complex nature of subjectivity. Attempting to maneuver among these objectives, I drew upon the work of feminist theorists to assist me, as Judith Butler (1992) writes, “to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses”. Analytically, these perspectives have assisted me to acknowledge both the necessity and impossibility of identity, and the need for an approach to inquiry that acknowledges complicity in perpetuating foundationalist knowledge. The central text that has guided me in this work has been Patti Lather’s (2007) Getting Lost. In the book, Lather articulated what she calls a “double(d) science” that engages in deconstruction to “trouble the very categories [we] can’t
think without” (p. 41). Lather’s perspective has guided me in deconstructing both normalizing practices and taken for granted truths about identity and the social dimension of language learning. However, connecting poststructural ontologies with a materialist, feminist epistemology, I have worked to undo these certainties without getting ‘stuck’ in deconstruction—engaging in a critical practice of human science “with more to answer to in terms of the complexities of language and the world” (p. 117). Working “among the ruins” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) of foundational ideas in SLA, including understandings of language, bilingualism, and the native/nonnative dichotomy, I have attempted to push at the boundaries and limits of the field. However, as Lather (2007) writes, my research offers no corrective to these ideas, it offers no successor regime of truth.

Throughout the project, these theoretical issues informed my attention to language use rather than language systems, and guided my engagement with the notions of plurilingualism and linguistic repertoires. Rather than see language as unified and unchanging, the notion of language as a social practice emphasizes language use arising from participation; comprising an activity or process rather than a skill or ability that is fixed and unchanging. Taking place in the interactions between people, this understanding situates language use in particular social, cultural, political, and historical contexts (Pennycook, 2010) such as the home, community, or institutions. Viewing language as a social practice acknowledges its contested and ideological nature, and its connection to social space, embodied subjectivity, knowledge, and power. Existing and intersecting with and in these material and discursive fields, language use is entangled, produced by, and productive to the relations and encounters that construct and give meaning to subjectivity. This understanding foments a shift from the question of what language is, to what language does, opening a way of thinking about language as a material part of social and cultural life, rather than an abstract entity (Pennycook, 2010).
Engaging with the politics of subjectivity and the question of identity manifest in SLA research and practice, I explored how students’ identities connected to social, embodied, affective, and material experiences, and illustrated how knowledge about students’ experiences was framed within what these experiences represented or made possible. Consistent with the theorization of identity as a site of difference, I found that students could be thought of as *plurilingual social actors* who drew on their linguistic repertoires based on biographical, social, temporal, and affective conditions and encounters. Students choose how to use their linguistic resources depending on personal and social needs, interests and motivations, and according to particular situations and circumstances. This understanding stands in stark contrast to static, ahistorical notions about language and the funds of knowledge that students bring with them to school (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Marshall & Toohey, 2010). Students’ language use constituted a social practice, imbricated in a web of contexts, power relations, and interactions that were constructed out of both material and discursive conditions. Further, thinking about language learning as not only a social but an affective and ethical practice focuses attention on subjectivity, agency, and context. Taken together, these findings highlighted students’ agentive subjectivities and the possibilities that existed for students to negotiate available social positions. Moreover, the findings suggested that understandings of identity and ‘the social’ require explicit theorization and acknowledgement of the debates surrounding these terms in SLA research and practice.

Despite my engagement with these more dynamic understandings of language and language use, I still had to navigate the challenge of using concepts that have emerged out of traditional epistemologies in SLA research. For this reason, the findings of my dissertation were presented in two ways, inviting different readings of the data. These two readings are implicated in the structures that they struggle against, requiring, as Gayatri Spivak suggested, the need to
negotiate between “always impure positions” (cited in Grosz, 1990, p. 342). Whereas research in the field that engages with identity takes a critical approach, broadening conceptualizations of language learners and language learning processes toward a more transparent, equitable, and emancipatory research practice, theoretical and conceptual challenges relating to the notion of identity and the structuralist roots of the field remain. Based on my exploration of what the notion of difference might offer to representations and experiences of language learning, I suggest that the subject positions designated to students in the process of learning English at school comprise dualistic, exclusionary categories. By contrast, theorizing identity as a site of difference recognizes the complex, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory nature of experience, opening to a more intersubjective and inclusive understanding of ‘the subject’ of language learning. As Butler (2005) writes, the “self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed when the ‘I’ seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist” (p. 8). I approached the findings arising from my work mindful of these considerations, aware that I too was implicated in these practices and social spaces; constructing an audience “that governs the scene of recognition” (p. 23).

2 Educational significance

Though the focus of this dissertation is on language and literacy development in multilingual schools, this study also concerns the nature and purposes of education. Inspired by critical pedagogy, this dissertation aims to improve educational opportunities and develop literacies that support people to “read the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Enriching research with praxis looks upon education as a site of social change and a process of moving toward greater consciousness and humanity. Unlike the idea of education as cultural reproduction, a
technical approach to transmitting knowledge to students, education based in a sense of wonder sees students as intellectuals, cultural producers, and civic agents. Maxine Greene writes that this approach to education creates space for “the remaking of a democratic community with a new commitment to intelligence, communication, imagination” (p. 127). Over the past fifteen years of education reform in Ontario, curriculum policy has emphasized standardized literacy testing, language assessment, and measurable forms of literacy achievement. While these processes are likely here to stay, they should not turn pedagogy into uniform, routine, or reductive teaching strategies (Luke, 2011). Instead, pedagogy in Ontario needs to be reinvigorated by an approach that emphasizes imagination and curiosity, and the growth of students’ critical consciousness and civic engagement. These capacities can be developed as students learn to read and create culturally relevant, multimodal texts; as they participate in learning communities that reflect the contemporary social context; and as they engage with meaningful community issues and concerns in their learning. Based on these purposes of education, the project created a context of empowerment that helped students to recognize, care about, and participate in activities that challenged injustices in school and society—starting with the marginalization and exclusion of their home languages and cultures in Ontario schools.

The fundamental argument of this dissertation is that the monolingual, monocultural assumptions that dominate formal education in Ontario, Canada are predicated on a narrow perspective of the purposes of education and the resources available for teaching and learning available in our communities. This project gave a larger purpose to students’ literacy learning, explicitly addressing the need for education to be more equitable and humanizing. Moreover, it communicated to students that who they are and what they know matters not only to the classroom, but also to society in general. Regarding students as agentive, creative, and thinking beings meant that their learning process was shaped by their subjectivities and motivations, their
creative imaginations and their experiences. Taken together, this work materialized the students’ developing hopes and identities as potential—unfinished and in process, not locked into finalized constructions. Thinking of students’ identifications as a process of becoming rather than a unitary or unchanging identity, condition, or circumstance emphasizes both the continuity and transformation of social life and social actors. Within this frame of movement and unfolding, the findings arising from this research do not entail a prescriptive solution or approach; rather the research underscores the need to develop deep understandings, relationships, and reciprocity with people and communities, to refuse to flatten peoples’ lives and experiences, and to engage both individually and collectively across difference.

The dynamic nature of students’ linguistic repertoires suggested that their plurilingual identities were always under construction: open, shifting, and emergent in everyday activities, and shaped by and within the practices and pedagogies of the classroom. This finding is consistent with a sociocultural perspective on language learning, which emphasizes that language learning is mediated by social context and interaction. Making space for and connecting with students’ plurilingual language practices demonstrated to students that school was a context where their language knowledge was a welcome and needed contribution to learning and to the school community. For instance, the creation of multilingual, multimodal identity texts (Cummins & Early, 2011; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) constituted an opportunity for students to narratives of themselves, their experiences, and their learning that reflected their linguistic repertoires, cultural backgrounds, and capabilities in a positive light. These affordances were amplified by the public dissemination of students’ work, which positioned students as linguistically talented, creative, and intellectual beings to their families, school administrators, and peers. Students were seen as having valuable knowledge to share, and their plurilingual competences were constructed as legitimate language and literacy practices in the school.
Furthermore, these literacy activities were connected with real world concerns and circumstances, which made the activities meaningful to students. Engaging in collaborative inquiry and storytelling, students spoke from a critical perspective and took on an evaluative stance toward limitations that they perceived in their school and community life. Importantly, students had the opportunity to intervene in these circumstances by shifting dominant narratives and refiguring representations of the social world to illuminate their interests and concerns.

These activities highlighted openings and agentive social movements within which the students and their teachers could enact change and resistance to dominant discourses within the school community. Together, the teachers and students reshaped educational practice through their work, a process that comprised an opportunity for identity investment. As classroom practices shifted to include new forms of representation and more participatory approaches to learning, so too did students’ linguistic performances. In particular, students performed according to teacher and classroom expectations. When we began to ask for and expect students to demonstrate their conceptual and curriculum knowledge using the full range of their linguistic repertoires, and across new modes and social domains, students rose to this expectation. Furthermore, when learning activities were co-constructed with students, their performances were more representative of their linguistic repertoires and their personal and social experiences. Understanding these changes as reciprocal, I saw these linguistic performances as both constitutive of, and constituted by, classroom practice and relations. I found that when teaching and learning connected with students’ lives and drew upon the full range of their cultural, linguistic, and representational resources, students invested themselves into their literacy work, which supported them in accomplishing literacy activities at a high level of accomplishment. This process occurred in reciprocal relation: students saw themselves reflected positively in their work, deepening their further engagement and achievement. The correspondence of these
circumstances suggest that the construct of identity investment requires its equivalent; that is, the constitution of subject positions that students might invest in.

A suturing of students’ identities to subject positions is a mutual articulation rather than a one sided process. Emphasizing *routes* rather than roots, Stuart Hall (1981) writes that identities designate a meeting point, “a *suture* between on one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 5-6, italics original). Hall’s perspective suggests that identity investment requires moments, activities, and conditions that articulate identities for students to invest in. These identifications can be found, sustained, or abandoned. Though not without the material and symbolic resources required to maintain them, identifications are conditional and lodged in contingency (Hall, 1981, p. 3). To me, this theorization builds a matching half to Norton’s (1995; 2000) work on identity investment. If the first half of the theory of identity investment is that the subject invests in the target language, drawing from repertoires of practice and using resources to take up a subject position, then the corresponding half requires that there are conditions that facilitate these subject positions and investments.

### 3 Limitations

The findings arising from this study are bound by several limitations. These limitations arise from the issues and challenges of conducting research, particularly from the methods used to gather, interpret, and represent data. The research text blurs distinctions among these processes, and among understandings and intentions of the writer and the reader (Britzman, 2000). For
instance, as Althusser writes, “There is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must ask what reading we are guilty of” (cited in Britzman, 2000, p. 29). Attempting to address this concern, I foreground below the ‘non-innocence’ manifest in my work, and articulate the specific limitations of this study.

First, this study generated understandings rooted in a particular, local context. Despite the potential for the findings be relevant or speak to circumstances in other contexts, the findings are limited to the classrooms and school community in which the project occurred. How this project might bear out in other contexts can only be inferred. Furthermore, the participatory approach of this research inquiry would suggest that this research might look different if conducted in another setting, rooted in those particular, local circumstances. Second, the collaborative nature of this project means that the findings were generated by my engagement and involvement in the field. The research was constructed in intersubjective relation between the participants and me, shaped by our collective interests and investments, our biases and assumptions. These influences structured the meanings and practices that were made visible by this study, requiring researcher reflexivity to account for the partiality of the research. Notwithstanding this limitation, self-reflexivity and engagement in the field contributes legitimacy and authority to the claims arising from the research, supporting an ecological validity that is embedded in praxis. Third, the research was exploratory, documenting the processes involved in incorporating home languages and digital technology tools into teaching and learning activities. The research did not provide evidence for change in student learning, particularly long-term change. Fourth, like findings arising from all forms of inquiry, the research was limited by the extent to which I could come to know and understand the lives and experiences of the people involved. The findings arising from this research are necessarily partial, uncertain, and shaped by histories and trajectories of participation. Rather than turn away from these
challenges, I presented a double(d) reading to mine the constraints of knowledge and knowledge production to engage with the complexity of lived experience and to trouble coherent narratives and discourses of understanding. Finally, this account of the research and the understandings that emerged are temporal, specific to a place, space, and moment in time. Like the garden that the students created, planting seeds and later harvesting the fruits of their labour after a summer of growth, the students return to the garden after each long winter to find the plants dead and the ground hard. However, with renewed attention every spring, the possibility exists for the garden to come alive again. When new seeds are sown and the ground made ready, dormant plants will make their return. Borrowing from this analogy, some remembrance of what we did and what we learned remains, to be remixed with new contributions and to carry forward understandings to inform future work.

4 Implications for classroom practice

For those who have come from multilingual families, or for teachers of multilingual students, many of the findings arising from this study will come as no surprise. In my case, growing up and spending time in my Oma’s home, Dutch and English were seamlessly mixed, with my father, the youngest in the family, speaking mostly English, and my aunts and my Oma speaking mostly Dutch. Moreover, some words simply did not translate well into another language, and we preferred to use these Dutch words rather than English. For instance, the Dutch word *gezellig* is an adjective that denotes something that is cozy, welcoming. It references a feeling of belonging and togetherness. *Gezellig* might describe a feeling of someone’s home, a moment, or a person who makes you feel very comfortable. *Gezellig* is one of the most important words in Dutch language, because it describes an important cultural value and practice about how one is supposed to make others feel. This word and its cultural meaning can’t be said another way.
Drawing on my family experiences, my language exchange and learning in Quebec and in Korea, and my experiences as an English language teacher both in Canada and abroad, I have been surrounded by plurilingual language practices all my life. However, my knowing, the self-evidence of the relevance of these practices for teaching and learning is not enough to change education policy. To contribute to changing education policy, it is necessary to provide empirical data. The findings arising from this study provide evidence that is relevant to education policy concerning: 1) Plurilingualism in education; 2) Literacy engagement and identity investment as outcomes of instruction; and 3) Critical digital media production pedagogy. These implications are discussed in greater detail below.

4.1 Plurilingualism in education

Plurilingualism in education reflects a new social context and shifting orientations toward language difference in society. Adding a critical dimension to this perspective, not only does plurilingualism fuel a paradigm shift in applied linguistics (May, 2011; 2013; Blommaert & Backus, 2012), it reveals the monolingual, monocultural assumptions that frequently underlie approaches to English language teaching. This research documents that it is possible to integrate students’ home languages into ESL, ELD, and curriculum subject area teaching in Ontario schools. This practice can generate learning opportunities, and enrich the language ecology of the classroom to support the development of every student’s language awareness, plurilingual competence, and intercultural disposition. Moreover, students’ linguistic resources can be drawn upon to scaffold vocabulary learning and academic concept development, writing processes, and curriculum learning (Gibbons, 2002) and affirm students’ evolving identities as plurilingual social actors. In particular, this research has highlighted, from the perspective of teachers and students, how curriculum and pedagogy across subject areas can draw upon and incorporate
students’ linguistic repertoires as a foundation for learning. Overall, this research suggests that plurilingualism can be explored as a valuable resource to support language teaching and learning in English-medium classrooms in Ontario.

Schools across the province of Ontario, and across Canada, have become increasingly supportive of students’ home languages. For instance, recent policies communicate a positive orientation toward the maintenance of students’ home languages (Ontario of Education, 2005; 2007a; 2007b). However, these supportive approaches remain “locked in monolingual practices that fail to address in a sufficiently positive way the dual language realities of emergent bilingual children” (Cummins, 2012, p. x; Chumak-Horsbasch, 2012; Gerin-Lajoie, 2008). This orientation to linguistic diversity has led to a remedial approach to pedagogy that begins with what students do not know or cannot do; that is, speak English fluently. Furthermore, the monolingual practices that dominate education in Ontario mean that schools are failing to address the need for all students, not just students in the process of learning English or French, to develop the communicative and intercultural competence needed to engage productively with the multiplicity of cultures present in our classrooms and communities. Changing these circumstances cannot be left up to individual teachers; broader school- and province-wide policies are required that support the maintenance, growth, and use of students’ home languages for academic purposes. Students need direct messages and constant encouragement to regain interest and pride in using their home languages in school, and they need instruction to draw explicitly upon the full range of their cultural and linguistic knowledge in order for them to bring all of their capabilities and capacities into the learning context. Finally, this study provides evidence that pedagogy that is connected with students’ experiences, and grounded in funds of knowledge from students’ families and communities, can contribute to reshaping curriculum learning processes from a student-centred perspective across subject areas.
4.2 Literacy engagement and identity investment as outcomes of instruction

Large-scale international studies have provided evidence for the positive relations between the level of students’ literacy engagement and the level of their literacy achievement and academic success. Literacy engagement has been shown to push back the effects socioeconomic status on literacy achievement. These data suggest the need to promote literacy engagement as an outcome of instruction. Though education policy focuses extensively on developing students’ 21st century literacy skills, infusing literacy across curriculum, and achieving literacy standards, curriculum policy does not address the role that literacy engagement plays in these aforementioned goals. This research provides ethnographic data that reflects the circumstances, conditions, and practices of education that can be fed into the larger empirical data (Blommaert & van de Vijver, 2013, p. 8). These ethnographic data demonstrate what literacy engagement looks like and how it can be supported in globalized educational contexts.

This research shifts understandings of literacy from an individual, linguistic, or cognitive process into community involvement, participation, and integration into cultural processes, involving skills that are developed in and through social contexts and collaboration. From this perspective, literacy engagement comprises a social practice that relates to social contexts and conditions. For these reasons, teaching and learning that draws upon the full range of students’ cultural, linguistic, and representational skills and abilities might invigorate more inclusive, culturally sustaining, and democratic forms of knowledge production in school. Such an approach to curriculum and pedagogy is critical to creating opportunities for literacy engagement.
When students invest their identities into literacy activities, they are engaged with literacy in cognitive, affective, and behavioural ways. For instance, they use multiple strategies to read and write, they think positively about their literacy work, and they spend time on task to accomplish their literacy goals. Literacy engagement can be cultivated in “frames of activity” (Holland et al., 2001, p. 278) that affirm students’ identities. Every student needs opportunities to enter meaningfully into classroom discourse through their capabilities and resources, particularly students who have been positioned as outside of social norms at school (Stornaiuolo, Hull, & Nelson, 2009, 384). Showcasing students’ work to their peers and their families presents students as individuals with creativity, talent, and intellectual potential as a result of the work they have produced. These practices provide a context within which students can direct themselves toward producing literacy work at a high level of accomplishment. Creating identity texts with students represents a powerful tool for teachers to enable students, especially newcomer students, to develop “identities of competence” in school.

4.3 Critical digital media production pedagogy

The use of digital media entails a core literacy practice and civic resource for life in and out of school (Morrell et al., 2013). Digital social media is a site of mass cultural production, suggesting that young people need to develop the capacity to produce media to be active participants in contemporary society. This shift suggests that digital media needs to be addressed in educational priorities (Drotner, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Ito et al., 2013). As young people increasingly use social media and create digital content, the development of critical digital literacy and digital media production skills need to be a part of teaching and learning in school. Language and literacy cannot be taught in isolation of these realities. In particular, students need to become more knowledgeable and critical consumers of media. To achieve these ends,
teachers and students need understanding of how digital media shapes and is shaped by its use and social context, and of the knowledges and perspectives that are marginalized by dominant discourses in digital media. Education provides a natural context within which to support this learning, particularly when connected with the development of students’ critical literacy skills. Moreover, classrooms can include young peoples’ digital capabilities and build upon their familiarity and knowledge of digital tools to support curriculum learning and academic literacy development in a way that is relevant and motivating to students.

The prevalence of technology in the social and educational context is changing literacy practices. These practices entail new skills for reading, finding information, authenticating information, manipulating, linking, and recontextualizing information in a social, multimodal environment. Teaching students these “21st century literacy skills” is not just a technical process, it is connected to conceptualizations of the learner and the purposes of learning. Digital literacy should be thought of as comprising unique and multidimensional practices that are embedded in the ecology of learning, the nature of knowledge production, and the social context of the school community. Digital literacy can serve as an “amplifier” of student voice, particularly because technology tools can facilitate production of powerful, multimodal identity texts and creative work that can be shared with audiences locally and globally (Cummins & Early, 2011). These resources can assist students in becoming co-producers of knowledge in the classroom as they create content, raise questions, and initiate discussions with both teachers and their peers. Digital media production offers a site for cultural production, where students can create narratives, position themselves, and contribute to reshaping dominant educational discourses—constituting themselves as subjects in relation to educational discourse (Kendrick & Early, 2013; Morrell et al., 2013; Toohey, Dagenais, & Schulze, 2012).
5 Future Research

Building on the discoveries arising from this research, I can identify several areas for future research. These areas of research focus on two strands of inquiry, namely plurilingualism in education, and digital media production and education. I see these strands of research as interrelated, particularly in their relevance to the contemporary social context of education. These areas of research could contribute to the fields of applied linguistics, literacy, and curriculum studies, and they relate to critical diversity studies and issues of equity, difference, and social belonging in globalized educational contexts.

As an illustrative case study, this research contributes to a broader body of knowledge that is emerging across Canada relating to educational practices in multilingual, multicultural school contexts. This research needs to be synthesized and analyzed for crosscutting themes so that recommendations of what constitutes effective pedagogy can be articulated for teachers and policy makers. Further research on how students’ linguistic repertoires and translanguaging practices can be incorporated into curriculum teaching and learning also needs to be explored, particularly across grade levels and subject areas. Within this domain, research should also examine the intersections among language, literacy, and curriculum learning to identify conditions and strategies that effectively support students who are learning the language of instruction at the same time as they are learning curriculum in school at different ages and stages of language acquisition.

Relating to the use of digital media in education, future research could explore the digital media practices of culturally and linguistically diverse youth in both formal and informal education settings. Specifically, research needs to develop understanding of the opportunities and limitations for using new media and social networks to create counter publics, generate
alternate discourses, and instantiate new cultural logics for youth in globalized contexts. Additionally, research can document the relations among digital media, literacy, and curriculum subject area learning in teachers’ current instructional and assessment practices, the processes involved in this work, and whether and how this work contributes to student learning. This research could also explore notions of diversity and the politics of representation, particularly through narratives expressed in multimodal, digital content. Questions to explore might include what does it mean to go beyond representational inclusion to express difference and heterogeneity of race, class, language, ability, sexuality, or religion? Exploring alternatives to static, universal and homogenizing understandings of identity, such research might take into account notions of identification, affinities, and embodied subjectivities, and what the reconstruction of boundaries through social and technological change means for coherent narratives of identity.

6 Concluding remarks

The significance of these findings suggest that students need to be able to draw upon the diversity of linguistic, representational, and communicational resources available in the contemporary classroom context to: (1) assist them in representing and communicating their knowledge at a cognitively powerful level (Cummins & Early, 2011; Hull, Zacher, & Hibbert, 2009; Vasudevan, 2010); (2) support their investment and engagement in classroom literacy practices (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Cummins, 2011); and (3) prepare them for increasingly public roles as digital media makers and community participants (Buckingham, 2003; Ito et al., 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Sefton-Green, 2006). These findings also point to the complexity of cultural production in school, where students’ representations are produced with and in material
and discursive constructions of experience that legitimize some learner stories as acceptable and render others unspeakable.

As subjects defining their experience and understandings in relation to curriculum and learning, students’ identities are *becoming*—potential, unfinished, and in process. However, a careful reading of the educational practices, affects, and discourses over the course of this project suggests that rather than see students as plurilingual social actors, education policy, curriculum, and pedagogy sometimes approaches students as nonnative others. This dissertation invites consideration of a more ethical relation to students’ languages, literacies, and cultural knowledge and experience, based on attention to difference in globalized educational contexts. Within the plurality of linguistic, representational, and social practices in our communities, the singularity of each learner can be recognized as valuable to the experience of every student in class. Rather than an educational model for one type of student, education in globalized contexts needs to accommodate and support the mobility and flexibility of social life, the multiple contexts through which learners move, and the ways these circumstances contribute to learners’ *becoming* subjectivities. Apprehending and addressing these concerns, education research and practice might better engage in a critical understanding of the discourses, social practices, and production of knowledge within the new social and digital media landscape, and create possibilities for students to have equitable access to learning culturally valued literacy practices in and for these changing times.

In the field of SLA, dislocating fixed boundaries of understanding and moving toward the possibility of *not* knowing, invites a more ethical pedagogic and research relation. The use of universal, fixed, and static concepts (stable language systems, L1/L2, the ‘two solitudes’ of bilingualism, native/nonnative) has contributed to the formation of dominant, marginalizing practices, affects, and discourses in education. This challenge constitutes an ethical concern,
which, understood from the perspective of feminist philosophy, “is not confined to the realm of rights, distributive justice, or the law, but it bears close links with the notion of political agency and the management of power and power-relations” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 12). To address these issues, I do not mean to suggest that there is a linear path toward ‘progress’; rather, rethinking SLA in this respect entails something new altogether. As this dissertation suggests, a starting point might entail a more ‘nomadic’ theoretical perspective (Braidotti, 2011), moving toward a way of knowing that does not impose itself and that works in reparative, wondering and participatory relation to the world. As Gayatri Spivak suggests, “Even as we talk about feminist practice, or privileging practice over theory, we are universalizing. Since the moment of essentialising, universalising, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment; let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it” (1984, p. 184 as cited in Grosz, 1990, p. 343). Countering and displacing the effects of dominant and marginalizing discourses and theories must be the condition of the field’s effective critique and movement beyond them. Moreover, this effort might shift research and practice in the field of SLA toward more border-crossing and boundary work in the aim of achieving more ethical, dialogic, and interdependent understandings of the relations among multi-located subjects in the contemporary social context.


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