Creating Borderlands using a Multi-Genre Approach: A Reflexive Ethnography

by

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Abstract

The Creating Borderlands using a Multicultural Approach: a reflective ethnography focuses on an exploration into the psychological landscapes of junior-level students, whose minds have been riddled with stereotypes, single-stories, and images of Nazi Germany and of the Jewish people. The research navigates these young minds through a sea of images and preconceptions of the German and Jewish cultures and attempts to break down barriers, and reconstruct a borderland and a geography of renewed/reshaped understanding.
CREATING A GEOGRAPHY OF CULTURAL AWARENESS

The research intends to explore issues of social justice through a multimodal, multi-literacy unit within the context of the Holocaust. Through the qualitative paradigm of ethnography the research uncovers a mosaic of preconceptions and stereotypes, a tapestry of emotions, and a puzzle of renewed cultural awareness.

Key terms:
Border Crossing, Social Scaffolding, Multimodal Literacy, Reflexive Ethnography, Narrative Inquiry, Cultural Awareness, Polyvocality, Autobiographical Narrative, Qualitative Paradigm, Bricolage, Reflexivity, Multicultural Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

My true religion is kindness.

-14th Dahlia Lama

The focus of this research paper is to provide an exploration into the psychological landscapes of junior-level students, whose minds have been riddled with acrid, bitter, sharp stereotypes and single-stories of Nazi Germany, and horrific, abhorrent, haunting, de-humanizing images of the Jewish people. The research navigates these young minds through a sea of images and preconceptions of the German and Jewish cultures and attempts to break down barriers, and reconstruct a borderland and a geography of renewed/reshaped understanding: to learn, to tolerate, to respect and to embrace cultural differences and by so doing understand that we all belong to one race: the human race. The students become border-crossers (Giroux, 1988) and thus define/redefine their understanding of these two cultures through social scaffolding. Our classroom is transformed into a new borderland (Anzaldua, 1987) where discourses of culture are created, where stereotypes are uncovered, where single-stories are eradicated, where students encounter cultural differences, and where we all learn more about self and other.
The research intends to explore issues of social justice through a multimodal, multi-literacy unit within the context of the Holocaust. I teacher/participant/observer/researcher, record and reflect on participant observation, writing and reflection using the social medium of the classroom blog, classroom discussions, informal student-teacher discussions, a culminating arts-based culminating performance task, and student-metacognitive reflections. Through the qualitative paradigm of ethnography and using the methodologies of narrative inquiry and case study the research uncovers a mosaic of preconceptions and stereotypes, a tapestry of emotions, and a puzzle of renewed cultural awareness.

As teacher/researcher, I am determined to give my students agency beyond the confines of the classroom curriculum through their voice: their experiences. Teachers must provide students with a sense of agency; that is, to be able to teach themselves. The curriculum in my classroom, partially shaped by my educational experience, and yet, still defined by the expectations of the Ministry, consists of a lived curriculum – a curriculum that thinks about the individual, their past, and the way in which that past shapes their identity in the classroom and in the world. I embrace cultural diversity and encourage my students to do the same by encouraging them to share their personal stories and commentaries through classroom discussion and writing. Their narratives, commentaries and reflections serve on two different levels. For the narrator, it is an
opportunity to feel accepted, valued, and appreciated. The students are introduced to different cultures, they share their feelings and opinion of these different cultures, and they write their own stories of their past and their parents’ past – stories that relate to what they have read. The students are eager to share their experiences knowing that they write to a real audience: their peers. For the listeners, it is an opportunity to learn about others, to learn their role among others, to accept, and to become responsible global citizens: “culturally responsive education” (Feuerverger, 2007). Students read and reflect on their peers’ narratives. They read, reflect, question, and learn and learn about different cultures and each other. And between the narrator of the stories, “compassion emerges from a sense of belonging: the experience that all suffering is like our suffering and all joy is like our joy (Feuerverger, 2007, p.113).

Sympathy, compassion, and understanding toward others is a moral lesson that educators need to promote on a daily basis because teaching is not only about information and technique; it is about “the capacity for connectedness – the courage to be” (Feuerverger, 2007, p.2). My students are encouraged to share their own cultural experiences while learning about those of others in the mainstream classroom. It develops the students’ capacity to see the world sensitively and to shape their own reality positively. “A major goal of multicultural education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, the
mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures” (Wang, 2006, p.2) promoting respect for all peoples by remembering the lessons of the past and how they impact positively on our future. Students learn to exchange ideas, to highlight the need to respect our past, to learn from it, and to create inclusive school communities. Atticus Finch, the voice of equality and justice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, teaches his young daughter Scout that we must learn to honor and respect all individuals, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view… until you climb into his skin and walk around it (Lee, 1960).” It is my intention as an educator, “to select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems that by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experience” (Dewey, 1963, p.75). At times my participants will walk in the shoes of the victims and at times they will climb into the skin of the victimizers (those that hate) to experience cultural/ historical realities through multiple lenses.

Prior to embarking on this research, a colleague and I discuss the proposed Holocaust unit. The lengthy conversation takes place in my classroom at the end of the school day. It is takes place of the course of two days. It is spontaneous, open-ended and it is recorded. To my surprise, the first topic of conversation is empathy:

R (researcher): So what do you think? Will this borderland idea work?
C (colleague): I think it is a very interesting project. I think it will work well for the kids. The area that I am particularly interested in is where they will learn about empathy and how they can put themselves in other peoples’ shoes.

R: Yes … that’s basically my goal.

C: That’s great … interesting!

R: I mean through Holocaust Literature … to show them that we should step into other peoples’ shoes and realize that their suffering could one day be our suffering (C. Woods, teaching colleague, personal communications, January 11-12, 2012).

Such teaching allows for authentic and meaningful learning to occur; learning that begins in the classroom and continues in the world. It is such teaching that allows the world and its issues, all part of daily life, to become the student and with this, the student becomes a real person who feels, sees, experiences, and grows. The student comes to understand that someone else’s suffering could have been their suffering. Compassion and knowledge intertwine to create intercultural understanding. This type of learning creates critical thinkers apt to meeting the challenges and demands of our world. I concur with Paolo Friere that, “pedagogy has as much to do with the teachable heart as the teachable mind, and as much to do with efforts to change the world as it does with
rethinking the categories that we use to analyze our current condition within history” (Feuerverger, 2007, p.3).

My teaching allows for individual expression and individuality. Above all, “the self” is an integral component encouraged in the classroom. Each student is unique and carries distinct past experiences that together with new experiences provide continual growth and learning, and foster authentic education processes. I allow and encourage my students to remain individuals: to maintain their individuality in their voice. The skills taught in my classroom are life skills as well as the skills necessary to understand the challenges of the discipline. I maintain a sense of social sympathy and social justice in my classroom through multicultural education, “teaching all children as individuals” (Wang, 2006, p. 3). My role as teacher is to help students tell peers what they have learned from life’s stories, and to enrich dialogue around difference, acceptance, and community. Stories, dialogue and discussion of self and others break down ethnic, cultural, and linguistic barriers. I realize that not all cultures have values that include sharing or discussing of personal issues in public spaces. I remain respectful of these cultural values and remain hopeful that our classroom is viewed all students as a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment; a place where differences are shared and embraced, and a place where respect for self and others remains at the forefront of our learning.
To create the proper learning environment to foster intercultural awareness, our multi-media classroom transforms into a borderland: a place where, “two or more cultures edge each other; where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 19). Borderlands are not limited to lines on a map, “they also serve as metaphor for dynamic psychological, social, and cognitive transactions” (Anzaldua, 1999). Thus, negotiation is acquired as the academic English students encounter borders and attempt to cross, transact, and engage with them. This negotiation fosters cultural awareness and learning. Learning about other cultures through Holocaust literature is my attempt to help students discover that although there are differences between cultures, there are also many similarities that we share as one race: the human race.

The rationale for using Holocaust literature encompasses: consequence, connections and parallels, and collective responsibility. Introducing the cultures of the German and Jewish peoples in context to the Holocaust teaches children not only about victims and victimizers, acts against humanity, the need for compassion and sympathy, and the unbridled thirst for power, but more importantly Holocaust literature is a means of teaching young adolescences about choice. Humans make choices, act upon these choices, and must live with the consequences of these choices. Reading, viewing,
discussing and reflection upon Holocaust literature allows students to read, view, discuss, and reflect upon choice. They engage in various reading and writing activities that allow them to engage in discussion about the consequence of the choices one makes and they take this knowledge and relate it to their personal lives. This, in turn, is linked to moral awareness and social injustice.

Social injustice is a central unifying thread of Holocaust literature. Students discuss, read, and reflect upon injustices in Eastern Europe during the 1940’s and make global connections. In addition injustice is discussed at a local and personal level: their country, city, community, school, and personal lives. Topics dealing with racism, bullying, and personal tragedy surface in the students’ discussions and in their writings. The lessons learned are life lessons of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The aim of the study is to emphasize humanity not humanity’s victimization. What role can the student play in order to affect how history unfolds? As responsible citizens we are all collectively responsible in determining how democracy unfolds. It is our responsibility as educators to ensure that our students learn that all humanity is treated equally, that all people have agency to express themselves, and that all individuals are respected and embraced as one race: the human race. We must empower our
students to examine their own lives and to make choices about equality, freedom, and democracy.

I embark on this study with the assumption that these junior level English students are not too young to navigate through the realities of the Holocaust: the violence against humanity, the de-humanization, the victimization, the degradation, and the abuse of power are graphically portrayed through shocking images and through bone-chilling narration. However, a discussion I have with a colleague challenges me to reconsider my preconceptions. The discussion warns me of the possible dangers of navigating across unknown boarders, of the possibility of wandering aimlessly across unknown territory, and of the maturity of my participants.

C (colleague): And then, when you mention navigation, that really brings to mind how the kids will, you know, eventually learn how to move their way through everything that they’re learning; what they’re getting to know for the first time. You mention graphic images or images as well as stories that are being told from various perspectives of the victims and the victimizers. I think that is very important. That word navigate though, raises some questions for me.

R (researcher): Good questions or bad questions? Like concerns?
C: Yes, I guess so. Because on the one hand...yes they are going to be ... you expect them to eventually be able to navigate themselves through it, but at the beginning it is understood that a teacher has to guide them.

R: Yes, right.

C: I think that that's where a teacher might be a little bit, not reluctant, but maybe hesitant sometimes, because you know, there's a risk involved? There is a certain responsibility that a teacher has to set it up right so that the students are steered in the right direction. Crossing borders can be dangerous; Right?

R: I suppose.

C: Because by crossing borders you never know what the effect will be on the person doing the crossing. As much as you are there to hold their hand at the beginning, there is going to be some wandering. They will be entering territories that might affect them even in a more negative way. So, if as a teacher you are not psychologically preparing the kids, then it might have an adverse effect? And then, at a certain point they have to navigate themselves, so they might be entering some dangerous territory without the guidance of a teacher.
R: What do you mean by dangerous?

C: By dangerous I mean how it affects them psychologically and emotionally.

R: The Holocaust literature? The images…?

C: The images in particular. I remember watching the documentary Night and Fog and remember many people in the classroom walking out. This was in my first or second year of university. And while you would expect that people would walk out in a scene where they actually see, you know, it happening - that these people are being killed, just the panning of the camera over piles of human hair was stomach turning enough for people to walk out. There was disgust; there was this feeling that it was almost being imposed on us because we would never perhaps have ventured to see it on our own.

R: Do you think that my students- the Grade Nine students are too young to navigate into the realities of the Holocaust? Because, I don’t want to dwell on the negative images; although there are negative images, what I want to dwell on is their sense of being responsible and culturally aware students.
C: And I think that’s very important.

R: Do you think that they’re too immature for that?

C: No…I think it’s important. They’re exposed to these types of images every day on the newspaper, even on YouTube, and they are on their own sort of finding these things on the Internet every single day, without the guidance of adults.

R: Sure. They navigate the World Wide Web themselves.

C: This unit is at least being guided. The thing is from the perspective of a teacher who has to set this up, these are the kinds of things that might make it difficult for a teacher, or make the teacher feel uncomfortable.

R: The only thing that I look at is that I want them to navigate across the border just to learn the different cultures. I will be a participant – I will navigate along with them, not because they need me as a security blanket, but simply because I want to experience what they experience and hopefully make my study richer by doing that.
C: Yes.

R: And it is kind of interesting that you also mentioned that they are not only border crossers, but you mentioned the word wander. I think that I need to allow them to wander a little bit in these new territories or across these boundaries because every time we do cross boundaries we tend to wander a bit because we are either in awe, or fascinated by it, or in shock, or whatever the emotional response is.

C: Right. And as teachers we have to allow them…there have to be allowances for them to wander and to show curiosity, even if it borders on insensitivity to the subject, because they are coming into it with preconceptions. But in a way, with proper guidance, this has to be entertained. If not, we can’t analyze those preconceptions and we can’t balance them with more mature truths. So, it really does require that a teacher comes into it prepared, but at the same time there has to be some leeway. So a teacher has to make some allowances, but also be able to pull the reigns as needed. There will be some preconceptions that will bring out insensitivity (C. Woods, teaching colleague, personal communications, January 11-12, 2012). (see Appendix H: Conversation with a Colleague).
Wandering presents itself as, a real possibility. It is a reality that I must come to terms with, and that my colleague and I discuss as a positive learning experience:

R (researcher): I think that the whole issue of blogging is going to set some pretty clear parameters as to how far they can stray and wander across those borders. But you know what? I really would like to give them the freedom to wander as far as they want. And when I say wander, I don’t mean to wander aimlessly...to wander in a guided sense and also to wander back into their own lives because they are going to see the culture of others and hopefully that is going to make them reflect, or if we want to use the word wander, wander back and maybe talk about their own personal experiences of being bullied like the Jewish people were bullied – if that is what they perceive, or maybe they’ll take these discussions back home and talk to their parents/grandparents about how they were treated as perhaps immigrants into a new land. So, yes, they are going to be wandering across a lot of different borders: cultural borders and even personal borders, but I think they should be responsible enough to understand that we are viewing part of history and hopefully to learn about history and not to make the same mistakes again.

C (colleague): And the other thing is with wandering, there may not be answers to some of the questions they have. They have to be prepared. There has to be an acceptance of this. They are learning. It prepares them for higher level thinking in that way. There’s
not going to be “What’s the answer to this question?” type of work. There is going to be a lot of wandering; a lot of ambiguity that is the very nature of life itself… And, in doing that, they are better able, I think, to show compassion not only for victims but also for the victimizers. A lot of times there will not be answers to the questions of why these people did what they did to hurt others. They are learning how to sort of understand that. How are they going to make sense of that in their world? And then that whole question of how do you find grace in humanity if there is so much ugliness in the world to which they will be exposed. Some of them may have heard of such things, but when they see a picture it’s going to really hit them. Oh my goodness, this really happened? … But how can they then justify, how can they make sense of the world when all this ugliness comes out and there are no answers to the questions that they are asking? (C. Woods, teaching colleague, personal communications, January 11-12, 2012).

I prepare myself for an array of emotions and reactions: anger, frustration, horror, disbelief, hated, sorrow, compassion, despair, and even tears. We will journey together, learn together, share together, and we will stop and listen to each other’s emotions and reactions at various points on our journey. I remain confident that the students are capable of journeying through unknown territory and of viewing, reacting, and sharing ideas about rights and responsibilities; after all I believe you can teach students anything as long as your teach it the right way – through compassion and respect.
My Grade Nine Academic English students engage in the novel, the interview, children’s literature, the documentary, the film, the diary entry, the news story, the classroom blog, and digital media to construct background knowledge that assists them in understanding the Jewish and German cultures. The study unit incorporates multimodal learning with multicultural and international literature and text, “to facilitate intercultural understanding while engaging multiple new literacies – information literacy [to determine acceptable sources of information], media literacy [to view and listen to various points of view], web literacy [to navigate the internet], visual literacy [to negotiate meaning through images, illustrations, and film], and cultural literacy [to understand and reflect on various cultures and one’s own culture]” (Booth, 2009, p. 110). I concur with Jamie Campbell Naidoo (Booth, 2009) that such units of study allow students not only to navigate new forms of traditional literacy strategies: locating, evaluating, reflecting, and synthesizing information, but at the same time to allow them to reach, “beyond the scope of their cultural experiences in Toronto” (Booth, 2009, p. 110) to learn about historical events involving other cultures as depicted through various forms of text. These texts provide a rich learning environment where students examine race, class, and culture. These “authentic and accurate [texts] about other cultures foster acceptance of diversity, challenge stereotypes, and encourage stronger relationships with classmates from diverse cultural backgrounds” (Booth, 2009, p. 111).
The twenty one grade nine students in the Academic English class represent different cultures: Vietnamese, Romanian, Polish, Portuguese, Italian, French, Indian, Guyanese, American, Serbian, and Canadian. My intention is to allow the students to build cultural bridges between academic learning, students’ home cultures, and world cultures. By integrating a multi-genre approach that promotes cultural discovery, understanding, and acceptance of the Jewish and German cultures, I hope to foster intercultural connections.

My colleague reminds me that my students may find this journey difficult; however, through their struggles, they may encounter an epiphany: grace in humanity:

C (colleague): That just goes to show that, with this experience, regardless of how awkward or how difficult it is for these students, it may put them in a better position not only to notice the ugliness of the world but also to, at least, look for where grace lies in humanity and how to make sense of this world.

R (researcher): You know, I’m prepared to … I’m going to have to accept different emotions elicited from the literature, the movie, the film, the documentary, etcetera, … I mean fear, anger, and frustration. There will probably be tears as well, but I’m hoping that they can manage and understand why it is that we are showing these atrocities of historical reality. It really links back to … well it happened long ago, but how does this
now link to our world and what does it mean to our world? Hopefully we can bring it back to the issues of accepting others and issues of bullying in our own community and in our own school for that matter. Hopefully that will be our outcome; getting them aware that there are different cultures and the importance of understanding different cultures and not remaining isolated in a cocoon.

C: I’m reminded of this whole idea of inviting them to search further. I mean this is not just a task; it’s not just that you have to navigate or that you have to cross this border. It’s the whole idea that it’s an invitation; that they are being invited to cross this border with the teacher as guide and with their peers along the way…

R: Yes, and hopefully even with their parents.

C: …and with their parents. And the choices that they are being offered from the teacher-you for the various assignments will give them the opportunity to choose. Maybe there’ll be certain borders that they want to cross, and others that they are not ready to cross, but there is always that curiosity because of what is presented to them.

R: Yes, exactly. Regarding the issue of curiosity that you talk about; hopefully their peer posts, and the sharing of their posts with their peers on the classroom blog will arouse a
lot of questions and a lot of curiosity and this will eliminate the fear of crossing that border because – Hey, my peers crossed it so maybe I’ll cross it too and I want to experience it too!

C: You almost want them to get to the point where they are at a place where they are hesitant to cross, but eventually, they cross it, or at least they express a curiosity about it. And, in asking the question about what’s on the other side will get them to think about it. And, when they are ready, somewhere down the line, in their more adult years, they can harken back to their learning experience inside the classroom which might give them more confidence to follow up on that invitation that started in high school.

R: You know, the real invitation is for them to step into another person’s shoes, and not to prejudge, and to try to eradicate that single story that exists in our minds about certain cultures and certain races; to understand that you have to step in a person’s shoes to understand them. Once you do understand them, hopefully there is this embracing of cultures; embracing of others (C. Woods, teaching colleague, personal communications, January 11-12, 2012).
My research examines the following questions: Do students recognize the connection between reading and discussing Holocaust literature in the classroom: connecting social injustices in their own community, and understanding their role in the community? Do students cross the bridge to empathy when engaged in Holocaust literature by understanding that someone else’s suffering could have been our suffering? Do students bring their own lived experiences such as bullying, racism and personal tragedy to this study? Are stereotypes and the single story erased or altered after border crossing into the German and Jewish cultures? Three related questions to this discourse are: How can we give our students agency beyond the confines of the curriculum through their individual voices and experiences? Can we promote a lived curriculum – one that thinks about the individual, their past and the way that past shapes their identity both in the classroom and in society? What is a culturally-responsive education?

This thesis is based upon the original motivation that came from a very early age when I, a child of Italian immigrants, was trying to understand my home life and my interaction with the mainstream culture of Toronto during the 1960’s. I was raised in an old Victorian semi-detached red-bricked house in Toronto’s Little Italy with 6 adults, 8 children, and 4 male boarders. Only my paternal grandmother remained with me at home. All the adults were off to work, and the other children (my aunts and uncles) were in school attempting to learn a new language and a new way of life. I am reminded of my uncles’ and aunts’ stories of trying to mask the sweet acrid smell of onions - a smell that
my aunts and uncles carried with them for many years: this was the result of the 35 cents each of them earned daily immediately after school, as a bushel of pearl onions to be peeled awaited each of them on the front stoop of our house. The money earned by the "smelly group of seven" as we affectionately refer to them today (I was child number eight) and the $9 per week the four borders paid, bought the family groceries and allowed for memorable visits to Honest Ed's Department Store and opportunities to navigate the city by streetcar along its screeching railways tracks, often ending in the noisy, bustling neighborhood of Kensington Market where we met other immigrants attempting to make ends meet in this new foreign city called Toronto.

My parents quickly learned that the streets were not paved with gold, that the streets were not paved at all, and that they were expected to pave them. Work in the 60's was a daily ritual. Fixed in my memory is the shrill sound of the alarm clock beckoning my parents and grandparents in the early hours of the morning to wake and faithfully fulfill their parental obligations and duty. The clatter of coffee cups, the whistle of the stovetop espresso pot and the soft whispers of mom, dad, ‘nonno’ and ‘nonna’ seemed to be perfectly orchestrated. The drone of the car's engine, the crunching of the frozen tires and the final clanking of the screen door announced, as the lark announces the coming of morn, my family had once again left me behind with ‘nonna’ and they were off to earn a living.
I vividly recall sitting alone in my study prior to commencing this research, staring at a large bookshelf that some 52 years ago journeyed together with my parents and grandparents as the ocean liner bid farewell to the bustling shore of Messina, Sicily and left its wake in the warm blue waters of the Mediterranean, only to battle the frigid white-capped waters of the Atlantic. After 12 days, the mighty Vulcania and my family came to rest upon the beckoning unfamiliar shore of Halifax harbor. This bookshelf was hand crafted from large majestic chestnut trees that basked along the hillsides of the Calabrian countryside under the warm, nurturing Mediterranean sun that had glistened since the beginning of time. It was a product of love and labor; carved by some Tuscan artisan with the love and precision only a master craftsman could understand; it was one of a kind.

I recall sitting at my desk, staring at an icy metallic silver coin that lay on this warm chestnut bookshelf. The coin, a centennial coin that marked one hundred years of Canadian confederation, reflected winter's icy blue sunshine and beckoned me to recall my early childhood years and pivotal moments in my education. The coin represented my beginnings in the Toronto public elementary school system. The coin was a gift from my Kindergarten teacher on the very first day of school. However, this coin was also a gift for my parents, who after six years in Canada remained hopeful that one day they,
too, would be considered Canadian citizens and would be liberated from the label: immigrant. I stared at the coin and thought of my parents' and extended family's arduous bitter-sweet 12-day voyage, (what to me remained for many years a mysterious and mythical journey) and the new life that lay before them beyond Pier 21.

In a short story I wrote as a Graduate student at the University of Toronto, “The Attic Window” I recall the sights and sounds of our old Toronto neighborhood of the mid 1960’s where, “we were foreigners on the block” (Rodriguez, 1982, p. 11).

I stand barefoot on the Eaton’s catalogue and prop myself atop the large olive-green baule Americano. I stand on my tiptoes, hold on to the frame of the window tightly, and look down. Shiny golden metal belts and the golden rivets wrap around the old trunk. Beside my right foot a white sticker with faded blue letters says Pier 21-Halifax Harbor via Messina, Italy- May 1, 1960. I peer out the attic window of our red-bricked house, and follow the mid-morning activities of the neighborhood.

The big white oak tree on the corner of Brock Avenue casts dark shadows on Mr. Facciolo’s front lawn. Squirrels scurry along drooping telephone wires and disappear behind blackened chimneys stacks that line Moutray Street. The pewter green spire of St.
Helen’s Catholic Church rises beyond the yellow diamond shaped sign of Orpen Lane. Church bells clang, pigeons take flight, and streetcars screech and rattle beyond the steeply pitched black rooftops of Brockton Village.

Father Perna exits the rectory. He ambles along the stone path leading to Sheridan Avenue, crosses the small patch of green grass between the rectory and the tennis court, slides his right hand inside his cassock, and scatters a handful of cracked corn for the pigeons. A beaded rosary dangles in his left land. The shiny silver crucifix sways back and forth, back and forth. Father turns onto Moutray. I lean closer to the window, press my nose against the glass, and look down. Father stops in front of our veranda. He adjusts the red silk sash around his waist. “Thank you Bertha. I’ll place them on the altar. They’re beautiful!” he says to old Mrs. Coxhead, our 86-year-old neighbor. He tips his hat, trundles along Moutray, crosses Brock Avenue, and disappears behind the white pine that sprawls over Orpen Lane.

I look towards Dufferin Street. Joe Carlascio’s two-toned 1958 Buick with the shiny chromed grill and sleek white-walled tires stands out among the other vehicles parked along the street. Mr. Remington’s delivery truck clonks and clatters as it idles in front of J.J. Lang’s Onion Factory. Mrs. Witherfield and her two sons hurry along the sidewalk toward College Street to catch the 506 streetcar to Kensington Market. Further
up the road the Silverwood Dairies Milk Truck stops in front of Sheridan Jug City Convenience. Mr. Jenkins, the milkman swings open the rear doors, hops off the truck, and walks up and down Moutray delivering milk to every household. He swings a metal basket lined with twelve glass bottles in his right hand and grasps a clipboard in his left hand. He deposits a bottle of fresh milk on the front stoop of each house, jots something on his clipboard, and re-fills his basket with empty milk bottles. I have always wanted to ask him if I could put on his uniform hat with Silverwood Dairies stitched across the front, but I never have. Jimmy Olivieri, the shoemaker’s son, weaves his bike in and out of parked cars delivering The Telegram. Jimmy reaches in his large blue knapsack and tosses a rolled up newspaper on the front lawn of each house. He attends high school and speaks perfect Americano. On Sunday afternoons Jimmy knocks on our door and collects money for the newspaper.

This morning, I see someone new. She is young and pretty. She carries a brown leather briefcase in her left hand. She wears shiny black shoes and a flowered dress with a large white belt around her waist. Her big silver buckle shimmers in the sunlight. She stops and speaks to Mrs. Coxhead who waters her rose bushes. She places her briefcase on the ground, hugs Mrs. Coxhead, picks up her briefcase, and faces our house. She walks up three steps onto our front stoop.
I climb off the trunk, and place my bare feet onto the warm, creaky hardwood floor. I open the door of the attic and listen. I hear the faint footsteps of my Nonna Filomena in the kitchen. I smell the sweet scent of onions and basil. I hear the muffled voices chatter on from the new black and white television set. I anticipate the stranger’s knock. I wait. No knock. Has the stranger in the flowered dress realized that 53 Moutray is the wrong address? No such luck.

Three sharp knocks echo through the house. The attic door closes with a thud. I scurry down the first flight of stairs. Two sharp knocks. I stop on the landing. I crouch, and peer down the second flight of stairs through the square whitewashed spindles along the dark narrow hallway leading to the front door. Another knock. I tread softly down the second flight of stairs one step at a time. The young woman with the briefcase knocks once again. I scurry to the door and call out to my grandmother “Nonna, c’è qualcuno alla porta. Vieni, nonna!” (Come grandmother, someone’s at the door.) The cuckoo clock startles me, cuc-koo - cuc-koo. I turn, look up, and glare at the cast iron pine cone-shaped weights as they inch their way down the wall. The blue and yellow bird emerges nine times through the small trap doors.

Nonna, 78, arrives to meet the stranger. Nonna wears a powder blue zip-up dress with tiny red and orange flowers and holds a wooden ladle in her right hand. A green
apron hangs over her dress. She smiles at me and with a simple nod instructs me to open the door. The hinges creak as I open the front door. Sunlight crawls along the hardwood floor, edges up the whitewashed walls, filters through dancing dust particles above my head, and paints the hallway an amber-honey colour. The sounds of the neighborhood scramble up our front stoop and saturate the silence of our home.

“Hello, there. Are you Rocco?”

“Si’… I mean, yes. I’m Rocco … ciao.” I turn and point to my grandmother.

“And this is my Nonna. She doesn’t understand Americano.”

“I understand.” the young woman says. She looks straight at my Nonna, but she speaks to me. She smiles at my grandmother. Nonna places the wooden ladle in the large pouch of her green apron, blushes, and smiles back.

“May I come in Rocco? I’ll just be a minute. Is your mother or father home?” “Si … I mean, no. Yes, come in. No, mamma and papa are not home. They’re at work at the onion factory.” My face feels hot. Nonna’s hand rests on my shoulder. My eyes follow
the young lady as she places her briefcase down on the faded parquet floor next to the cracked board of my Snakes and Ladder game. She extends her hand to me. The cast iron radiator gurgles and hisses.

“Would you like to shake hands, Rocco? My name is Miss Wilcox. Are you enjoying the summer? You’ll be in my Kindergarten class next month.”

I wipe my sweaty hands on my pajamas and shake hands with my new teacher. I stare at her big shiny belt buckle. I gaze up into her deep dark eyes and nod.

“Well then, this is terrific! I’m going to ask you to do me a big favor, Rocco. Will you print your name for me on this?” She leans over and pulls out a square sheet of white paper from her briefcase. She places her hand in one of her dress pockets and pulls out a bright orange crayon. I recognize the word Crayola. It’s the same word on the box of crayons that Jimmy Olivieri’s mother gave me last year on my fifth birthday. I take the orange crayon and print my name: r—o—c—o. Miss Wilcox smiles and nods. She folds and places the paper in her brown briefcase. “Excuse me Signora, who taught Rocco how to write?” she asks Nonna.
There is no answer, just a simple smile. I stare at Miss Wilcox and then at my grandmother. I hear the muffled voices from the television set. I feel embarrassed, nervous, and ashamed.

“My Nonna does not understand Americano. Commander Tom, Casper, and Fred Flintstone from the T.V. taught me to speak and write” I say in a trembling voice.

“Very good, Rocco. That’s terrific!”

Miss Wilcox hands me an envelope and pats me on the top of my head. She crouches and looks into my eyes. “It’s been a pleasure meeting you and your grandmother. Please give this to your parents. I’ll see you in September.” Miss Wilcox’s smile reveals pearl-white teeth and ruby-red lips. She wears a pearl necklace and silver hoop earrings.

She stands, nods, and smiles at Nonna. Miss Wilcox leans over, picks up her briefcase, and walks out the door onto the front stoop. The front door closes with a thud.
Amber sunlight cascades down the walls, slithers along the floor, and disappears behind the door. The screen door rattles, scrapes, and clicks shut.

I stare at the big brown envelope and hand it over to Nonna.

“Che bella signorina. E’ la tua maestra?” (What a pretty young lady. Is she your teacher?) Nonna asks, as she turns and makes her way back into the kitchen.

“Yes Nonna! She’s my new teacher!”

I scurry up the stairs to the attic window. I stand on the Eaton’s catalogue, catch my breath, and prop myself onto the trunk. Miss Wilcox strolls down Moutray Street and disappears around the corner of Sheridan Avenue.

My uprooting immigrant experience: the struggle to find voice, meaning, and home is a metaphor for my students as they border cross into new territories and new cultures. This narrative shaped my personal and professional landscape and motivated
me to embark on this ethnographic inquiry. Through reflexivity, I relive some pivotal, pluridimensional experiences in my education dealing with language acquisition, acceptance into a host culture, living a liminal existence, attempting to redefine one’s identity and culture, and creating a third space (Wang, 2006). These border-crossing experiences are part of my personal narrative as a student in Toronto during the 1960’s and 1970’s. These narratives unleash an array of emotions: loneliness, shame, inequality, failure, submissiveness, isolation and alienation; emotions experienced and reflected upon by my research participants as they too learn about new cultures through Holocaust literature and experience similar emotions.

Reflexivity permeates my research; however, it is not the end purpose of my research. I draw from Grace Feuerverger’s discussion on reflexive ethnography, which claims that, “reflexivity…is the means through which knowledge of a social reality outside ourselves […] can be approached and can be explored and presented in various formats (Feuerverger, 2001, p.8). One such format is narrative. Autobiographical narrative in ethnography inquiry: the methodology of reflexivity is used so that my interpretations of my participants are understood through the embodiment of my own life experiences. The participants’ experiences/stories in the field of research inform my study and allow me to learn and reflect on myself: to arrive at an answer to the epistemological question: How do my students learn best about other cultures and how
do I come to know myself? Synonymous with postmodern ethnographers I, teacher/participant/researcher remain visible throughout the study. My voice, along with the voice of the participants is central to my research during the fieldwork, data analysis and the discussion of my findings, as “a means of better understanding and interpreting the interaction of [my] past life experiences with the life experiences of [my] participants” (Feuerverger, 2001, p.11).

Discovering and learning about others promotes cultural awareness and fosters reflection about our own culture resulting in culturally responsive citizens of the world. The material presented to the students is appealing and allows them to become engaged in various topics that allow for an understanding of our changing world. This type of learning was not fostered when I was a student. I reflect back to my experience as a high school student in Toronto.

The classrooms of the early 1970’s were all exactly the same in size and sterile in appearance. They were stark white, with rows of individual desks all facing a dusty chalkboard, a large teacher’s desk that seemed inaccessible and distant, and a lectern that was the pulpit of Socratic instruction. The school existed on its own, isolated from the community and family, oblivious to the depth and riches of the students’ past and their
future aspirations. The method of instruction rarely changed “… for all students to use identical methods of learning, is a highly questionable procedure from the standpoint of efficiency in stimulating and using intelligence” (Taba, 1962, p. 308). Inequality in the opportunity to learn was prevalent. Rarely was there opportunity for student interaction. Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory recognizes that at the center of curriculum is the learner who experiences a journey through learning. However, this learning space offered little opportunity for “the social”: the opportunity to become actively involved in the journey of learning and to allow others to share in one’s knowledge of the world. In the classroom, our prior knowledge and prior experiences remained cloistered, and it was expected that we acquired the “new” knowledge transferred upon us from their mighty lecterns. The teacher and the books were the sole source of wisdom and knowledge.

My secondary teachers appeared afraid to stray from the text and were reluctant to incorporate a curriculum that strived to bring humanity together. A student’s personal experience, that would have added some relevance and interest to the individual lesson, remained irrelevant. The teachers functioned as the all-knowing, silent interrogators. There was no trust and safety, no community and confidence in the classroom. I was the Italian-immigrant child who was giving in to the limitations and restrictions imposed on me by my culture, identity and language. I did not have a place in my new classroom or within Canadian society. It was definitely not a thought of any teacher to preoccupy
themselves with my experiences. A large gap existed between the experiences of the teacher and my experiences. The teachers neglected their responsibilities to understand my needs and capacities as an individual learner and violated the principles of learning through personal experience. “What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worthwhile, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned [past experiences] and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?” (Dewey, 1963, p. 49) To what end, then, was I attending school if the curriculum and my persona were distinct entities in the same classroom? I concur with Pinar (1994) that the learner must be allowed to bring their personal experiences into the classroom, thus producing a better learning environment and allowing the possibility of developing and maintaining a personal identity.

The reflectivity I offer in this introduction is an instrument for knowing and being more aware of my research participants, and being more aware of my teaching practices. The embodiment of my life experience as a student, shape my role as teacher/participant/researcher in this study. The excursion in to the landscapes of the Jewish and German cultures affords my students: agency to voice and make meaning of their own experiences, a welcoming learning space, and an opportunity share their views
openly. They learn about others, reflect about themselves, and share personal experiences and prior knowledge while always maintaining their personal identity in the classroom.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

doctus cum multis libris
(Learned with many books)

Five philosophical assumptions shape this reflexive ethnographic study. These assumptions frame my research and act as the pillars that support: the development of cultural discourse, the reconstruction of a borderland, the dismantling of cultural barriers, and the reshaping and renewal of the geography of cultural understanding through the context of Holocaust literature. The ontological assumption of my research is that the junior level English students enter the classroom with preconceived notions and single stories of the German and Jewish cultures, and with fixed images of the Holocaust. This is the nature of reality: the worldview that is shared by my students. The study invites participants to border cross into these two cultures through fiction, film, documentary, diaries, news articles, and narrative. This study attempts to eradicate the single story, and bring a new perspective to the images engrained in their minds. It offers alternate lenses through which to learn and reflect upon these two cultures. Researching how students react and what students learn when border crossing into new cultures allows the epistemological question of this study to surface: How do my students learn best about other cultures, and how do I teacher/researcher come to know myself? The axiological assumption I bring to this study is that students learn to value cultural differences given the proper learning environment, and given the opportunity to build
cultural bridges between academic learning, their home cultures, and world cultures. Cultural discovery by learning, tolerating, and embracing the Jewish and German cultures; that is, fostering intercultural connections, is what this study proposes. This is what I promote as a teacher, what I value as a global citizen, and why I embark in this researcher. The rhetorical assumption of this study is social justice and empathy. Such language promotes discussions about lived personal experiences such as bullying, racism and tragedy. This study promotes a lived curriculum – one that thinks about the individual, their past and the way that past shapes their identity both in the classroom and in society? The methodology used in this ethnography includes, narrative; classroom discussion; dialogue; interview and reflexivity. These methodologies foster cultural awareness, and allow students to make meaning of their own border-crossing experiences.

A journal I wrote on Oct. 24, 2012, after delving into the philosophical-pedagogical discourses of Maxine Greene (2005) and while reflecting on my research, best outlines the philosophical assumptions I bring to this study:

Wow! Maxine Greene, I’ve reached an epiphany in my journey as researcher…thanks a bunch! I have come to the realization of what I must do to improve my teaching and also
to improve my research. I will attempt to teach my students about different cultures without removing them from the classroom; that is, bring the cultures into the classroom.

I would like to create a borderland in my classroom: a place where students can intermingle, ask questions, write reflections, and share responses about cultures. Ultimately I want the students to understand that we are all part of one race: the human race, and we must learn about others and accept others by understanding and tolerating differences. I will do as Greene suggests: include multimodal literacy in my teaching. I will also attempt to teach new cultures (the Jewish and German culture) through the context of Holocaust literature using a multi-genre approach. I will observe how students react, interact and learn. I want to foster critical thinking and to have students understand the importance of being a global citizen. This idea stems from my school’s motto: As ambassadors of Christ: We need to know about our world: We need to care about its people and its environment; We need to act as responsible citizens.

I believe I share a lot of Maxine Greene’s philosophical ideas about education and educators: students need to be self-learners; the classroom must be a place where imagination flourishes, where students are given voice, and where teachers foster learning through thoughtful planning. I will use these philosophical ideas to carry out my ethnographic research. A breakthrough!

Thanks Journal.
Throughout this inquiry I rely on my participants’ views of: the Holocaust, stereotypes, the single story, and border crossing. Their views shape the practice of my research. I use the paradigm of social constructivism in this study. It allows me to focus on the interaction with my participants during the fieldwork and to focus on my interpretation of how they view the world. I embark on interpretive/reflexive inquiry realizing that as researcher I must make an interpretation of what I see, hear, and understand. My personal background, history, context, and prior understanding of Holocaust literature and social justice impacts this study, and greatly influences my interpretations of the inquiry. My participants and the readers of this study interpret the finished project; thus, offering multiple views of the research. This approach mirrors the understanding of qualitative research foregrounded by Merleau-Ponty. He suggests that, “we must seek understanding from a multiplicity of perspectives in order to gain a truer picture of the nature of anything that we are questioning…we must delve deeply into a multiplicity of perspectives in order to arrive at a core of meaning that each perspective provides” (Cooper, 13).

This qualitative study allows me the opportunity to empower students to share their stories, and provides the possibility of minimizing the power relationship between me/researcher and the student/participants. I allow the participants to become involved in
interpreting the data and to write in both a literary and other flexible styles of writing: blogs, stories, journals, dialogues and reflections. I commit to extensive time in field research, and in so doing engage in sorting through large amounts of data to show multiple perspectives. I present a holistic account by developing a complex picture of the problem being studied. I identifying determining factors, and identify the complex interactions of factors, while maintain a single focus; that is, having students encounter cultural differences through the context of Holocaust literature. In so doing, we all learn more about self and other.

As researcher I ask: What research is important to me and to my readers? What research methods are readily accepted in today’s society? Which writing style would best represent my research? The qualitative methods employed in my research promote positive social change through accepted and valued research. We all learn from our past actions (history) by reflecting on what was good and what could have been different. I (the researcher) hope to better the present and to promote a positive future knowing “that [researchers] are agents of the future (Cooper, 61). My research will exist within a historical context: it will keep in mind what happened in the past, how it affected society, and how we can learn from what happened. My research aims to make sense of life, and make it better.
The study includes three qualitative approaches to inquiry: case study research, ethnographic research, and narrative research. The study involves exploring and learning about new cultures through the context of Holocaust literature. I explore the observations and reactions of grade nine students in an academic English classroom once a borderland has been created and the students have been invited to border cross into the lives of the Jewish and German peoples. This bounded system allows me to observe, collect data using multiple sources of information: observation, discussion, audiovisual materials, reports, and surveys. The case study method allows me/investigator to write about my experience in this field of research. I offer vivid descriptions, holistic analysis of the entire case, and embedded analysis of specific aspects. I focus on the context of the case, and develop case–based themes such as acceptance, tolerance, stereotypes, cultural unity and peace, cultural awareness, global responsibility, and social action. The case study method also allows for assertions of the meaning of the case: assertions by the investigator, the participants, and the readers of the final paper.

The study is founded on the research of Davies (1999) and her discussion of reflexivity. “The term ethnography is used to refer both to a particular form of research and to its eventual written product … a research based on fieldwork using a variety of (mainly qualitative) research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time. … It draws its data primarily form this
fieldwork experience and usually emphasizes descriptive detail as a result. (Davies, 4-5). As ethnographer, I examine shared patterns of behavior, beliefs and language, and attempt to interpret these shared patterns as the participants engage in learning about the German and Jewish cultures and border cross into new territories. I enter the field of research and engage in extended periods of participant observation by immersing myself into the daily lives of my students and their interaction in the English classroom. I interpret their behavior and language while they engage in many multi-modal, multi-literacy activities within the context of the Holocaust. The ethnography takes into account issues of respect, ethics (how the students and the study is presented), reciprocity (how I as researcher give back to the participants), and the organization of data (observations, elicitation methods, surveys, and various forms of narrative). My final product offers a holistic cultural portrait of the group incorporating emic (the participants’) and etic (the researcher’s) views.

The ethnographic study offers reflexivity, a dimension of inquiry that strays from traditional ethnography where the researcher is removed from the research. Reflexivity plays a significant role in my study. I concur with Davies that, “All researchers are to some degree connected to, a part of, the object of their research. And depending on the extent and nature of these connections, questions arise as to whether the results of research are artifacts of the researcher’s presence and an inevitable influence on the
research process. For this reason, considerations of reflexivity are important for all forms of research… [Reflexivity] is of central importance for social research, where the connection between researcher and research setting – the social world- is [close] and where the nature of the research objects – as conscious and self-aware beings- make influences by the researcher and the research process on its outcome both more likely and less predictable” (Davies, 3). As researcher I cannot investigate something that remains distant or foreign: something from which I am completely isolated.

Maintaining objectivity is a challenge in this reflexive ethnographic study. How can the ethnographer maintain objectivity if he/she immerses themselves in that which is being researched? I embrace Davies’ discussion of the ethnographer’s involvement and detachment. While observing my students border crossing and experiencing cultural diversity, I make a conscious effort to “step in and out” (Davies, 5) of the research group so that both, I and the participants, construct the world of living in a borderland: a co-construction of reality.

The relationships between the participants in the field and the researcher form the basis of my theorizing, interpretations and conclusions. Social interaction between the researcher/ethnographer and the participants constructs the observations that in turn
become the data of the research. I develop the study acknowledging and utilizing subjective experience as a fundamental part of research. This is where reflexivity becomes a central focus of my research. What I bring to the field influences my study; what my participants offer influences my study, and in turn, the study influences me as researcher. It allows me to reflect upon where I came from, how my past influences my present, and how the present shapes who I become. This is not only true of me but also true of my participants. Reflexivity occurs on many levels, “… considerations of reflexivity are compelled to move beyond the notion of the researcher’s effect on the data and begin to acknowledge the more active role of the researcher in the actual production of those data. Thus, the ethnographic enterprise is not a matter of what one person does in a situation but how two sides of an encounter arrive at a delicate workable definition of their meeting” (Davies, 8). To offer reflexivity in ethnography becomes a way to approach knowledge of a social reality: a reality that exists outside our selves.

I remain cognizant of my sociocultural context as ethnographer: the child of Italian-immigrants struggling against the uprooting nature of living in Toronto during the 1960’s where I was a stranger/foreigner for many years. I research that which I am necessarily a part of, “so that knowledge of self does not become self-absorption but remains an instrument for knowing others (Davies, 225). This reality shapes my study. It launches me into the study, and impacts the interpretation of my findings. Research
findings are heavily influenced by the ethnographer and his/her life experiences, “To avoid reactivity the ethnographer may be an inconspicuous bystander; or they may take the opposite approach and reduce reactivity by participating as fully as possible, trying to become invisible in their role as researcher if not as human participant” (Davies, 7). This requires a very fine balance between researcher-as-observer and researcher-as-participant. There is dialectic between observation and participation in ethnography, “Observation…is the governing term in the pair, since it situates the [ethnographer’s] activities. However much one moves in the direction of participation, it is always the case that one is still both an outsider and an observer… In the dialectic between the poles of observation and participation, participation changes the [ethnographer], and leads him to new observation, whereupon new observation changes how he participates. But this dialectical spiral is governed in its motion by the starting point, which is observation” (Davies, 73). As ethnographer, I observe and interact with my students/participants to an extent where I come to understand the culture of my participants. I incorporate a series of techniques to record and to facilitate the observations of my students’ observations and then select those that I consider to be most fruitful. I listen and record group discussions and language during field work; read and respond to individual posts and peer responses on the classroom blog; participate in small and large group reading sessions; read and comment on written reflections of audio-visual presentations: documentaries, motion pictures, photos, videos, and art.
Although I am sole researcher, the final research paper presents different voices to the fieldwork, the data, the findings and the conclusion. The issue of ethnographic authority is important to me as researcher. As the students encounter new cultures, I include their voices and the different voices of the researcher. The voices of the research encompass researcher as observer of intercultural encounters, as participant, as ethnographer sharing personal and fragmented pieces/experiences of the study, as narrator, and as analyst. This polyvocality offers the ethnographic study multiple perspectives and multiple narratives (Davies, 1999).

As the narrator of this study, autobiographical considerations are of utmost importance. My study brings participants and readers into the events of the Holocaust; in turn, these historical events allow me to reflect and connect to my life history. I concur with Maxine Greene’s postmodern consideration of qualitative inquiry that my role as qualitative researcher is of a transactional nature; that is, “It is from the research text that the sense of self is generated and, reciprocally, it is also from the sense of self that the research text is developed. We act and are acted upon” (Cooper, 23). Although autobiographical narrative in ethnography offers “thick description” it also presents solipsism as a central concern. How can one find the balance between solipsism and an autobiographic approach to qualitative research that provides an adequate amount of
creating a geography of cultural awareness

the researcher’s life experiences providing the opportunity for the readers of the research to make personal connections in relation to their own lived-experiences?

In a journal written September 26, 2012, I dwell on this question and think about where I position myself in the research?

Dear Journal,

I ask this question because I am a firm believer that if a body of work does not offer me the opportunity to make personal connections to my own life, no matter how far removed the work may be from my lived-experiences, then the work remains “flat”- a string of words and thoughts that mean very little to me. If I place myself in the researcher’s shoes, then I want to my readers to experience what I experienced: taste, touch, smell, hear, and see all that I’ve experienced. How much is too much without making my research a confessional? I would like to find a fine balance allowing the reader of my research to view the research through my lens, yet allowing them the space to enter into my research and connect with it – whether it is a comparison or a contrast to my lived experience. I fear research screaming out to the readers: “Hey, this is me so listen closely!”

I feel that I am asking questions and making statements that border on postmodern considerations and the analysis of “self” in research. It is always interesting to examine how one positions themselves in their research.
Thanks Journal.

The autobiographical context is a salient aspect of my qualitative research. As the main research instrument in the construction of the study and in the analysis of the data, I believe it is important that my readers learn about the researcher/author/me. Incorporating autobiography allows readers to peel back layers of my life allowing them to link to my personal life. Reading autobiography in qualitative research provides “an understanding of the researchers’: position with regards to the research; assumptions held; suppositions examined and a specific lens through which to view the research” (Cooper, 33). William Pinar states that readers of autobiography are situated as, “partners in the shared experience of existence …they share a raw and personal glimpse of the researcher’s life experiences and make personal connections in relation to their own lived experiences/one’s own biography- whether the connection is a comparison or a contrast to the researcher’s lived experience” (Cooper, 33). Fragments of my life experiences are dispersed throughout this inquiry.

Narrative research is a method employed in my study. The study invites experiences as expressed in lived and told stories. I/reflexive ethnographer together with the participants/students offer spoken or written text giving accounts of lived experiences which surface because of the experience of border crossing and encountering new cultures. Autobiographical and personal experiences are the two types of narratives that
permeate my study. These narratives allow the readers of this study to become observers of the intertwined experience between researcher and participants.

The works of Clandinin & Connelly (1994, 1999) and that of Richardson & St. Pierre (2000) also influence my qualitative inquiry. I concur with Clandinin & Connelly that all inquiry may be seen as, “interactions of experience of participants in a field and researchers’ experience as they come to that field” (161). According to Clandinin & Connelly experience is the stories people live. Stories, “lived and told, educate the self and others, including the young and those, such as researchers, who are new to their communities” (154-155). I/researcher enter, observe, and participate in the community of the classroom while the students experience a borderland, cross cultural borders and learn about new cultures. This experience becomes a collaborative work – a collaborative narrative: the participants’ stories, the researcher’s stories, and the researcher’s storying about the shared experience. In this collaborative storying experience, I construct a relationship in which both voices are heard: the participants and the researcher. The participants are given the time and space to tell his or her story so that they too gain authority and validity in the research. The participants’ voices are collected and presented through a rich data source in the form of field notes of shared experiences, journal recordings, dialogue transcripts, other’s observations, storytelling, blogging, reflections, and autobiographical writings. Noddings (1986) emphasizes the collaborative nature of
the research process as, “one in which all participants see themselves as participants in the community, which has value for both, researcher and practitioner, theory and practice (4). This research paper reads as a collaborative document: “a mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant[s]” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 12).

As qualitative researcher I write about my field experience and that of my participants’: our educational experience. John Dewey best links education and experience when he provides the answer to what it means to study education; “One learns about education from thinking about life, and one learns about life from thinking about education (154). The inquiry builds links between experiential inquiry and life experience. It is experience that functions as the ultimate explanatory context: it is because of experience that teachers do what they do, and it is because of experience that students do what they do. Thus, we must study experiences.

I observe, record, and write about the life drama unfolding in my classroom. Why do I select narrative to record experience? “…when persons note something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, they do so not by the mere recording of experience over time, but in storied form. Story is, therefore, neither raw sensation nor
cultural form; it is both and neither…stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experiences. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history. (154-155). I reflect upon my role as ethnographer/teacher and story my participation/interaction with my students: my narrative of experience. Teacher’s narratives, as Connelly & Clandinin (1990) explain, are seen as, “metaphors for teaching-learning relationships. In understanding our selves and our students educationally, we need an understanding of people with a narrative or life experiences. Life’s narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations”(3). The research focuses on collaboration and relationship between the students/participants and the ethnographer/teacher/researcher. Noddings draws attention to the way researchers, “situate [themselves] in relation to the persons with whom we work, to the ways in which we practice in collaborative way, and to the ways all participants model, in their practices, a valuing and confirmation of each other … [highlighting] the relationship, space, and voice in establishing the collaborative relationship, a relationship in which both researcher and practitioners have voice…”(4).

The collaborative nature of ethnography is reinforced by Michael Elbow (1986), “it implies that we play the “believing game”, a way of working within a relationship that calls upon connected knowing that involves a process of self-insertion in the other’s story as a way of coming to know the other’s story and as giving the other voice”(4). Britman
develops the importance of voice suggesting that, “voice suggests relationships: the individual’s relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual’s relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process” (4). My research is then one of learning to tell and live a new mutually constructed account of inquiry in teaching and learning about the Jewish and German people through the context of Holocaust literature.

The scholarly work of Richardson and St. Pierre (2000) serves as a guideline for interesting, engaging and valuable ethnographic writing in the fields of education and social science. My post-modern approach to this inquiry offers a writing that does not have solid demarcations of fact and fiction. The writing encompasses different formats for a variety of audiences: “CAP [creative analytical processes] ethnographies” (962). The blurring of various writing genres present in my work represents the social: the interaction of students discovering new cultures, and the relationship between the material presented, the participants, and the researcher. Some formats of writing - “ethnographic species” (962) present in this study include: auto ethnography, writing stories, conversations, journals, visual texts, and artistic displays. Postmodernism claims that, “writing is always partial, local, and situational and that our selves are always present no matter how hard we try to suppress them – but only partially present because in our writing we repress parts of ourselves as well” (962). The variety of writing
formats, tell and retell my experiences as post-modern ethnographer, and the experiences of my participants. I agree with Richardson and St. Pierre that, “there is no such thing as “getting it right,” only “getting it” differently contoured and nuanced” (962).

Diversity in writing found in post-modern ethnographic inquiry does not imply that it simply offers an array of “novelty” writing. Creative analytical processes in ethnography maintain high standards: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact. This research presents a credible account of my attempt to create a borderland in the classroom. It invites interpretive responses though an artistically shaped, complex paper. I as author am responsible to the standards of learning and telling about my students and what I have learned from the fieldwork while including subjectivity in the study. This inquiry generates an emotional response for the reader and the participants. It moves the reader to action in the fields of education and social sciences; it moves the participant to action as a culturally responsive global citizen. The research has the capacity to explain culture through collective behavior, and moves the reader spiritually.

I believe that mankind is inherently good and it is only in light of repressed and oppressed potential and the true self that goodness does not occur. I believe that
sympathy, compassion, and understanding toward others are moral lessons that educators need to promote on a daily basis. It is incumbent of educators to provide students with opportunity to learn about others, to learn their role among others, to accept, and to become responsible global citizens. It is also incumbent on education to use careful methodology and choice of procedure that enables this goodness, and allows for the needs, interests and potential of the students to be integrated into the curriculum - freedom of expression: a voice. Bricolage, a multifaceted, multidimensional approach to research is the research method that supports my philosophy as educator. This interactive nature of the research fosters a sensitive pedagogy, designed with collective knowledge building in mind permeates my study.

The term bricolage as a method of qualitative research can be described as, “a methodological and representational metaphor increasingly adopted by researches that require multi-methods in conducting and writing contemporary research” (Vernon, 2005). Various metaphors developed by academic scholars help conceptualize the method of bricolage. By comparing this multifaceted, multidimensional paradigm of qualitative research to concrete objects such as; the crystal, the quilt, the journey, and the toolbox we arrive at a clear image of this type of research and at a clear image of the researcher: the bricoleur. The bricoleur is represented as a quilt-maker, a tinker, jack-of-all-trades, and a handyman/craftsman.
Bricolage is compared to a ship on a voyage of discovery (Hammersley, 1999). At some point, the ship may encounter obstacles along the journey and may suffer damages and require repair. The metaphor of the journey emphasizes that bricolage involves a reconstruction of the ship but never a total rebuilding of the ship – parts of the boat can simply be replaced. The metaphor underscores that ethnography and bricolage, like the rebuilding of a ship, uses blended elements from different sources. The ship’s crew, similar to the bricoleur, mixes various paradigms: uses materials that are readily available to them.

Kincheloe (2005) uses the metaphor of the toolbox to represent bricolage. The bricoleur must use the diverse tools readily available in the researcher’s toolbox. The bricoleur studies and makes use of the contributions of the various disciplines (tools) and avoids disciplinary domination. Kincheloe clarifies that the bricoleur engages in the process of crossing boundaries between more than one discipline: interdisciplinary, and engages in the melding of disciplines to arrive at a new methodological synthesis constructed by the bricolage, “it is not uncommon for contemporary scholars in a particular discipline to report that they find more commonalities with individuals in different fields of study than they do with colleagues in their own disciplines. We occupy a scholarly world with faded disciplinary boundary lines (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 683). The bricoleur engages in a process where disciplinary boundaries are crossed and where the
researcher uses more than one discipline and more than one analytical framework: a new angle of analysis due to the synergy between the multiple paradigms.

Reynolds (1999) further develops the metaphor of the toolbox. The bricoleur is compared to a teacher in the classroom that makes-do with what is available, “The ability to cope, even thrive, in circumstances with severe limitations is considered…” (Reynolds, 1999, p.10). This is analogous to the researcher making-do with what tools they have available to them in their research. Reynolds proposes that the teacher, like the bricoleur, engage the students in higher-level thinking skills of substituting, improvising, and inventing. The meaning of the term bricolage is clear: something constructed out of available resources. Strauss (1960) introduces the metaphor of the bricoleur being a jack-of-all-trades and the bricolage fieldwork is compared to a car where parts are pieces assembled from scrap. Kincheloe’s (2001) advances this metaphor and sees the bricoleur as being much more skilled than a simple handyman. Kincheloe’s bricoleur is a handyman that looks for fragile bonds between disciplines and between bodies of knowledge. Kincheloe terms this type of fieldwork boundary-work: knitting race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class to form a new consciousness.
Multiple perspectives are a key feature of bricolage. Markham (2005) foregrounds that bricolage presents a mosaic of fragmented narratives so the reader and the researcher are not presented with only one path to follow. Fragmented narrative sources of information (scholarly, fictional, research journal, and participant narratives) are interwoven to construct an ethnographic research report aiming to study how different people interpret things differently, “The goal is to illustrate […] two ideas about method. First fragmented narrative, pastiche, or bricolage can function politically to encourage multiple perspectives, yet the interpretations are not unlimited, as the author still structures the experience of reading… the arrangement and rearrangement of disparate but related threads of information can be an essential process of analysis” (Markham, 2005, p. 814). This qualitative research weaves the perspective of the participants with that of the researcher to offer alternate lenses of experiencing and learning about culture through the context of Holocaust literature.

Bricolage is taken to a new level by Kincheloe (2005). He discusses bricolage as an eclectic process and a more complex domain. He believes that the bricoleur constructs research methods actively; using the tools readily available rather than universally applicable methodologies and pre-existing guidelines. The bricoleur “tinkers” with new methodologies rather than planning research strategies in advance, which in turn produce a critical consciousness. Different dynamics come together in bricolage producing a
synergistic interaction where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The message is that the bricoleur considers numerous representations of reality simultaneously. This too is a new concept that breaks away from more traditional research concerned with sequence and linearity. The bricolage is like a crystal that is ever-changing and simultaneously refracting and reflecting the “light” of the social world. The comparison is clear: the bricolage offers research and researchers new patterns and new shapes – unanticipated images that emerge throughout the research.

Engaging in the bricolage allows me/researcher the freedom to use the tools in my toolkit, and to make meaning by encountering a phenomenon, deconstructing it, and rebuilding it into a complex truth. In this bricolage collaborative dialogue, writing, and reflection of Holocaust literature enhance understanding and cultural awareness, and generate a memorable experience for researcher, participant and reader. I honor the layered dimensions of bricolage by honoring diverse perspectives of my participants throughout the research. Diverse perspectives, like different colors, hues, and shades of light reflected and refracted by a crystal, are a salient aspect of this study. Among the various metaphors used to represent bricolage, the metaphor of the puzzle, an array pieces representing various research paradigms, perceptions, and lenses that when pieced together culminate in a intricate web of multifaceted, multidimensional knowledge, best resonates with me and this study.
The initiative to use blogging, a social constructivist approach to learning, as a medium for writing-to-learn stems from a 2009 research study focusing on positive impacts on student-centered design of learning. It proposes that, “weblogs have increasingly been used in education in the past few years” (Andergassen, Behringer, Finlay, Gorra, & Moore, 2009). The classroom blog allows for individual or collective online journals (see Appendix A– Classroom Blog Posts). Every entry could be referenced or commented on by others (Andergassen, et al., 2009). Applying this constructivist theory to learning allows knowledge to develop because the students actively engaged in writing-to-learn activities through blogging – our discourse community. This approach to teaching and learning is known as “knowledge in action” – understanding grows and changes as learning progresses. In this study, I implement the medium of the classroom blog to demonstrate how collectivism: collecting knowledge through collecting people enables learning. The students post comments about the literary and media selections, and they post reflections and questions based on peer posts. All selections focus on various issues of the Holocaust as presented through different cultural lenses (see Appendix B - Genres and Titles). This ethnographic inquiry is also based on the study of Henderson (2005) who presents an exploration of what it means to read and interpret culturally diverse literature in appropriate ways. Peterson’s (2008) work instructs how to weave writing and content area instruction together in the classroom. This work introduces practical pedagogy to incorporate writer’s workshop while teaching
in various subject areas. Of particular interest to this ethnographic study is Peterson’s
discussion of using Internet websites to teach writing (e.g., wiki’s, weblogs, and digital
storytelling). Literary and multi-media selections tell stories of the Holocaust that are
"...distinctive of a given culture's lived experiences, and likewise, [are] enjoyable, fresh,
and inviting for all readers" (Henderson, 266).

Our classroom blog "a social software" (Andergassen, Behringer, Finlay, Gorra,
& Moore 2009, p. 203) is a social constructivist approach to learning; "... the process of
writing will somehow lead inevitably to a better understanding of information gleaned
from texts or from a teacher's presentation" (Mac Arthur et al., p. 238, 2006) because the
students write what they learn about the literary-media selections rather than having the
teacher tell the student at the end with a test or assignment what learning components
were deemed important. When students deem learning (or parts of learning) important,
they do not forget it; it becomes authentic and meaningful learning. Students gain a
deeper understanding and awareness of cultural differences and "they ‘mull over’ the
ideas independently and/or bounce the ideas back and forth in conversations with others
to gain from their understandings, perspectives, and experiences...Other students and the
teacher could then add comments and questions to the blog that reinforce and extend the
blogger's ideas" (Peterson, 2008, pp. 59-60). The participants of this study agree to open
the blog to parents, school Administration, and Curriculum/Literacy Resource Teachers.
Chapter 3: Curriculum Implementations and Methodology

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.

- Carl Jung

If school boards are the trains responsible for transporting our learners towards success, and our educators are the conductors; then, the curriculum are the tracks that lead the train in the proper direction. This analogy and many 20th century constructivists - curriculum theorists (Friere, 1998; Dewey, 1963; Taba, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Pinar, 1994) influence my classroom teaching, complement my research, and take me back to a pivotal moment in my education. The curriculum that unfolds throughout this study is partially shaped by my educational experience, and yet is defined by the expectations of the Ontario Ministry.

I reflect back to the early 1970’s where I, a child of Italian immigrants, was taught in a semi-private Toronto high school led by a group of Basilian Fathers. The school was based on the “Fordist model”. The classrooms were all exactly the same in size and sterile in appearance. They were stark white, with rows of individual desks all facing a dusty chalkboard, a large teacher’s desk that seemed isolated and distant, and a lectern
that was the pulpit of Socratic instruction. Not only were the classrooms void of bulletin boards displaying and celebrating students’ work, the entire school appeared very clinical. The classroom was where instruction was delivered, and the long poorly illuminated hallways linked this monotonous chain of rooms. The school existed on its own, isolated from the community and family, oblivious to the depth and riches of the students’ past and their future aspirations. The method of instruction rarely changed, “… for all students to use identical methods of learning, is a highly questionable procedure from the standpoint of efficiency in stimulating and using intelligence” (Taba, 1962, p. 308). Inequality in the opportunity to learn was prevalent. Variety was not based on differences in students’ needs, levels of comprehension, or ability. Rarely was there opportunity for student interaction. Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory recognizes that at the center of curriculum is the learner who experiences a journey through learning. However, this learning space offered little opportunity for “the social”: the opportunity to become actively involved in the journey of learning and to allow others to share in one’s knowledge of the world. In the classroom, our prior knowledge and prior experiences remained cloistered, and it was expected that we begin tabula rasa and acquired the “new” knowledge transferred upon us from their mighty lecterns. Newell (2006) proposes that when the teacher becomes collaborator rather than simply evaluator and the students become meaning makers rather that memorizers, then learning takes place and student performance increases. This static learning environment and method of instruction offered little process of exchange between peers, and between me and the
teachers. It was as if the teacher and the students existed in two different worlds and a fear of discovering each other lurked. The teacher and the books were the sole source of wisdom and knowledge.

My secondary teachers appeared afraid to stray from the text and were reluctant to incorporate a curriculum that strived to bring humanity together. A student’s personal experience, that would have added some relevance and interest to the individual lesson, remained irrelevant. My teachers offered no stories about their own personal experiences in classroom discussion. They functioned as the all-knowing, silent interrogators. There was no trust and safety, no community and confidence in the classroom.

My secondary experience shaped me into “a great mimic; a collector of thoughts, not a thinker; a dummy mouthing opinions of others…” (Rodriguez, 1982, p. 73). I remained submissive and was willing to mimic teachers. The failure to adapt the teaching materials to the needs and capacities of individual learners created non-educative experiences. I really wanted to tell them that if they listened to my story and the stories of others, our classrooms would be more interactive, more interesting; we would learn from each other and experience diversity and cultural differences. The classroom was not a site “of cultural encounters and spaces for dreams and friendship and knowledge” (Feuerverger, 2007, p.1). The classroom was not a time for sharing; rather, it was a time of silence, isolation and loneliness. Feuerverger (2007) foregrounds that
education is about ‘soulful education’: education that shares not imposes; education that shares loving authority not brute discipline that denies personal choice. I feared uttering one word. I, “became enormously obedient to the dictates of the world of school” (Rodriguez, 1982, p.51). So, like my parents and grandparents entering a foreign land, I remained silent, isolated, and, above all, frustrated. I was the immigrant child who was giving in to the limitations and restrictions imposed on me by my culture, identity, language and learning environment. I did not have a place in my new classroom or within Canadian society.

It was definitely not a thought of any teacher to preoccupy themselves with my experiences. A large gap existed between the experiences of the teachers and my experiences. The teachers neglected their responsibilities to understand my needs and capacities as an individual learner and violated the principles of learning through personal experience. “What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worthwhile, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned [past experiences] and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?” (Dewey, 1963, p. 49). To what end, then, was I attending school if my persona was lost; if the curriculum and my persona were distinct entities in the same classroom?
Besides the fact that there was very little choice in course selection, I was placed in classrooms where we were all taught at the same level with one sole objective in mind: passing the final examination. All disciplines were taught ‘in a vacuum’; that is, each discipline was taught in isolation and there was never any attempt to relate one discipline to another. Learning was sterile, clinical, and distant; both my identity and my experiences were alienated from the subject matter. Each discipline was distinct; hence, there was no collaboration of learning transpiring between any disciplines. My learning experience seemed to evolve in a “staccato” tempo: each period began with “Today’s lesson is...” and ended with the shriek sound of the bell announcing the end of one lesson and the monotonous invitation to begin another. There was no horizontal integration of learning, no cumulative progression of learning, no well-orchestrated learning through collaboratively developed common topics to unify our disciplines, “Learning is more effective when facts and principles from one field can be related to another, especially when applying this knowledge” (Taba, 1962, p.298). It really was a robotic, monotonous time in my life.

I definitely suffered through these years of education. I didn't want to continue learning and I definitely knew I had much more to offer, if I only had the opportunity to do so. I yearned to break away from the "cookie cutter" process of education. As a teenage-learner in a traditional educational institution I was subject to a curriculum and
learning experience that was exclusively controlled by the adult and society (teacher, administrator, curriculum developer). This adult world was inculcating a standard social construction of knowledge, culture, and self through the curriculum. I concur with Pinar, 1994) that the learner must be allowed to bring their personal experiences into the classroom, thus producing a better learning environment and allowing the possibility of developing and maintaining a personal identity. By creating a curriculum that is learner-centered and allowing the learner to explore and develop, the learner is able to develop their “true self”.

As I reflect back, I realize that the public school system had failed me. I was without a voice within an educational system that remained oblivious to my experiences and thus, created a culture of silence dominated by some distant hierarchical structure – this was “the truth” (Freire, 1998, p. 512). I was learning, yet, I was missing the opportunity to share my individual experiences (my story) with others; I was the silenced minority. I was missing the opportunity to listen, agree or disagree with the stories of others.

The discourse that encompassed my learning is not the discourse I presently encapsulate in my teaching. As teacher, I do not offer a learning experience that silences students, nor deprives them of relating what they learn to personal lived experiences. The students’ stories and my stories surface throughout our journey of border crossing into
other cultures; develop a culture of inclusivity and produce an ethnographic research paper centered on polyvocality. Does the Ontario English Curriculum (2007) provide the proper tracks for the students to travel along, and complete a successful journey towards learning?

This reflexive ethnographic study encompasses the four categories of knowledge and skills as outlined in The Ontario Curriculum Grades Nine and Ten: English (2007): knowledge and understanding, thinking, communication, and application within which the subject expectations are organized. The four categories are interrelated and reflect “the wholeness and interconnectedness of learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, p. 22, 2007).

The students gain the knowledge of the Jewish and German cultures through the context of Holocaust literature. Social scaffolding and multi-genres assists students in understanding how border crossing teaches us about different cultures and our own lives. By generating ideas from the various genres and by engaging in various literacies, the students generate ideas, gather and organize information, and engage in the creative thinking processes. They inference, interpret, analyze, synthesize and evaluate new information obtained from their classroom blog, and through the various genres and literacies found in this study about cultural awareness and global citizenship. They use an array of critical and creative thinking skills: oral discussion among peers and teacher;
analysis of various literatures, film, and documentary; creation of an artistic Culminating Performance Task. It is through the various text forms: note taking, journaling, blogging and art that the students communicate their learning. They apply what they learn to their present and past lives making connections within and between borders.

The students engage in all four strands of the Grade 9 English curriculum. The Oral Communication strand expects students to,” listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes; use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes; reflect on and identify their strengths as listeners and speakers, areas of improvement and strategies they found most helpful in oral communication situations” (42). It is important that the students are offered the stage upon which to voice their opinions and to listen to the opinions of others: peers, teacher/participant, authors, characters, and individuals. In so doing, they reflect upon the various voices, and learn about cultural differences, tolerance and acceptance through various lenses.

The Reading and Literature Studies strand expects students to, “read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning; recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning; use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently;
reflect on identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and strategies they found most helpful before, during and after reading” (45). By engaging in multiple literacies, the students not only experience the stories of the German and Jewish cultures through various literary formats (the novel, the narrative, the newspaper report, the blog, the film) but they also experience a number of narrative devices (theme, imagery, characterization, symbol, and conflict). One salient feature in this study is symbolism. The symbol of the fence permeates the entire cultural unit. The fence represents the barriers that the Jewish and German people encounter, the borders that separate the human race from itself, the obstacles that the student/participants overcome as they learn and discover about others and themselves, and the single stories that create racism and prejudice in all of us.

The students also meet the overall expectations of the Writing strand. They border-cross into new and undiscovered territories, make links between this experience and their lived experiences, and reflect about the future. The students; “generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience; they draft and revise their writing using a variety of literary, informational and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience; use editing proofreading and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively” (48). The majority of the writing occurs as students jot down notes while reading, listening or viewing the various
texts, while they post their opinions on the classroom blog; and while they read and reflect on the peer-posts and then comment and question their peers. They learn about the other cultures, reflect on what they have learned and improve their learning by accepting other perspectives. Although they post their comments on the blog for their peers and the teacher/participant, they are also aware that these comments will transcend the classroom and become reading material for parents, Administrators and Board Curriculum Consultants. The students agree to allow these stakeholders of education to follow and to participate on our classroom blog.

The Media strand, has students understand, create and reflect on different aspects of media. The students; “demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts; identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning; create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions and techniques; reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts” (52). The documentary Night and Fog (1958), the motion picture Schindler’s List (1993), the Ted Talk: The Danger of the Single Story (2009), the film The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (2006), the creation of our classroom blog Creating Borderlands: a multi-genre approach (2012), and the creation of the artistic Puzzle (Culminating Performance Task) are all media creations that convey a specific message to the viewing audience. These
media products offer stunning visuals, breathtaking stills, and pulsating sounds, which accompany the creation of a borderland within our classroom setting. The students journey across borders and dwell among the different cultures, learning that we all belong to the human race. Cultural boundaries are traversed and single stories are eradicated from their minds.

One specific expectation that unifies all strands is metacognition, “The process of thinking about one’s own thought processes. Metacognitive skills include the ability to monitor one’s own learning” (115) whether the student is engaged in reading, writing, listening, speaking or creating media products. The following prompts assist the students through this metacognitive process:

- “What did you learn about yourself as a writer as a result of the group writing experience?” (51)

- “What strategies helped you identify the implicit message conveyed by the [media product] viewed recently?”(54)

- “How did your participation in a literature circle strengthen your understanding of the novel?” (47)

- “What techniques did you use during your presentation to engage your audience? (44)
I provide students these prompts and similar prompts to help improve their learning and to have them tell me what and how they learned best.

Metacognitive exercises in this study include various survey questions that focus on their intercultural understanding and awareness, a final post on the classroom blog that allows students to share any final questions and concerns and a final metacognitive summary to be shared with all students. The summary which is distributed on the final day of the study categorizes what they have learned using recurring themes. The rationale for sharing this list is for the students to feel accepted, valued and appreciated; for the students to share what they have learned from the life’s stories; and to determine the group’s intercultural understanding and awareness. The Culmination Performance Task is also a metacognitive task. It asks students to show what they have learned by creating and presenting an artistic puzzle piece. Each student adds to the previous puzzle piece until a large artistic puzzle is created. This allows the students’ learning to be put into action, and to be displayed.

Parents have an important role to play in supporting student learning. Studies show that students perform better in school if their parents are involved in their
education. This is the rationale for inviting parents to follow and participate on the classroom blog. By becoming familiar with the curriculum, parents can determine what is being taught in the courses their daughters and sons are taking and what they are expected to learn. This awareness enhances parents’ ability to discuss their children’s work with them, to communicate with teachers, and to ask relevant questions about their children’s progress. The Classroom blog not only invites parents to participate (see Appendix F: Letter to Parents), it also provides them with a rationale for the multicultural unit of study and for implementing the social medium of the blog. The blog provides the parents with guidelines and Board policies for using social media (see Appendix G: Ground Rules).

In addition to supporting regular school activities, parents can encourage their sons and daughters to take an active interest in using language for meaningful purposes as a regular part of their activities outside school. They might also initiate conversations at home about what their daughters and sons are reading and viewing in the classroom (6). My aim is for the skills and lessons learned in the classroom to become essential life skills and lessons; to bring the outside world into the classroom without having the students leave our classroom.

The curriculum shapes this study by ensuring equity and inclusiveness. Antidiscrimination education is central to my research. A wide variety of learning
materials are used throughout my study that involve, “protagonists of both sexes from a wide variety of backgrounds…reflect[ing] the diversity of Canadian and world cultures…short stories, novels, magazine and newspaper articles…[digital media] and films provide opportunities for students to explore issues relating to their self-identity…” (33)

This study also allows students to use critical literacy skills; “these skills include the ability to identify perspectives, values, and issues; detect bias; and read for implicit as well as overt meaning” (34). The students are exposed to issues of power and justice within the context of Holocaust literature. Students ask questions about the Holocaust, but also reflect on personal experience dealing with issues of bullying, violence and discrimination. I listen to their stories/life experiences and offer them my personal stories of bullying, violence and discrimination. The understanding they acquire from these personal narratives helps the students make meaning with “the school’s anti-bullying and violence-prevention programming” (34).

My aim is to foster an awareness of bullying, violence and discrimination through the context of the Holocaust. Classroom discussion and blogging include narratives of physical, verbal, social, racial and religion-based bullying present in our school, community and world (Bill 13: the Accepting Schools Act, 2012). If the analogy is correct, the curriculum will offer students a direct route to learn about such issues and to discuss emotions of hopelessness: a feeling that nothing will improve or turn out well and
that everything feels wrong; anxiety: a feeling like fear but whereas we know what we are ‘frightened of’, we often do not know what we are ‘anxious about’ - it is often triggered by stress in our lives and can leave us feeling nervous and agitated; and anger: an emotional state that varies in intensity and that can be caused by external and internal events – a natural, adaptive response to threats” (Bill 13: the Accepting Schools Act, 2012). Hopelessness, anxiety and fear are emotions related to bullying, violence and discrimination. These are emotions that surface throughout this study.
Chapter 4: Empirical Findings

*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*

-Martin Luther King Jr.

The framework for this study stems from a five-week multi-genre, multi-media unit: one class of grade nine academic English students reads and discusses Holocaust literature. This becomes the catalyst for discussion, writing, and reflection using the social medium of the classroom blog. The study promotes opened dialogue in the classroom through the Holocaust unit – a dialogue that includes diversity and fosters a respect for differences. I concur with Henderson that teachers must “endorse the prospect of different people coming to different conclusions about the texts they read” (Henderson, 2005, xvii).

The blog, Creating Borderlands: A Multi-Genre Approach opens on February 9, 2012 and closes on the last day of classes, July 31, 2012. This multi-genre approach and the classroom blog are effective in motivating and engaging the grade nine academic English students to share their perspectives of Holocaust literature, to reflect, and to
comment on the perspectives of their peers. The classroom blog asks the 22 followers of the classroom blog: 21 students and me, to discuss, reflect and question 15 posts which cover an array of literary and multi-media selections: the fable, the interview, the Ted Talk, the documentary, the motion picture, journalism, and selections of children’s literature (see Appendix B – Genres and Titles). After reading, viewing and listening to each selection, the students post their own comments, and they read and post reflections on peer posts. As researcher/teacher/participant I include my comments to each post invitation. I offer a reflection of the students’ comments making specific reference to comments published by individual students. This honors the comments made by the students, ensures that the students’ voices are heard, emphasizes polyvocality, and illustrates the co-contribution of this reflexive ethnographic research. Collaboratively we engage in Holocaust literature, learn about the German and Jewish people, are motivated and empowered to share our own ethnic experiences, and hear our own voices. Through social scaffolding, they discover, discuss, reflect, understand, and learn more about themselves and others by border crossing into other cultures. Not all posts focus on literary and media selections: one specific post invites parents to add their own comments on the blog and another specific post asks students to reflect on their learning: meta-cognitive post (see Appendix A – Classroom Blog Posts).

The students engage in a Culminating Performance Task (C.P.T.) at the end of the unit. Students artistically (individually or in pairs) decorate their puzzle piece displaying
their knowledge and experience of border crossing into new cultures. Each piece is presented to the class and then photographed on the classroom blog as a photo stream (see Appendix C – Photo Stream).

The students voluntarily participate in a survey. This survey is anonymous and only the questions and the final numerical totals are available for viewing on the homepage of the classroom blog. The first three of the twenty survey questions are completed before the unit begins, and the remainder is completed at the end of the unit. 71% indicate that they have never participated in a blog, and 84% indicate that this will be their first classroom blogging experience (see Appendix D – Survey). I am anxious to begin blogging.

**Discovering the Truth through Fable**

Jamie Campbell Naidoo foregrounds, “Books are windows into the soul of a society, illuminating the social, political and cultural mores that underlie different worlds. It is through the illustrations and texts of books that children encounter these messages and discern the dominant culture view toward other cultural groups” (Booth, 2009). The students begin to cross cultural bridges and intermingle with the Jewish and German culture through John Boyne’s fable *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2006).
Many students select a quiet space in the multimedia room to read, reflect and jot notes on *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2006). They curl up in a corner, slouch in a chair at their computers, or isolate themselves in an individual study carol. Pads of yellow newsprint, soft gel markers, and open water bottles lay beside them. They read, stop, stare into empty space with horror and disbelief in their eyes, and jot down notes. I watch them and realize that John Boyne’s fable (2006) has engaged the students in the world of Nazi-occupied Poland; they are transported back to the 1940’s; they border-cross into a world where two different cultures clash and where “extremism corrupts justice and mocks mercy” (Boas, 1995, Foreward). This novel serves as a window into the soul of the German and Jewish society, illuminating the social, political and cultural mores that underlie these different worlds. It is through the characters of Bruno, the nine year-old son of a Nazi Lieutenant, and that of Shmuel, the nine-year old Jewish boy awaiting his fate in Auschwitz concentration camp, that my students encounter and discern the culture views present in this fable. I stand by my desk clutching a copy of the fable in my left hand. A red and green bookmarker with a golden tassel juts out from between the pages; it marks the spot where I stop reading for today. I stand by my desk and wonder how this cultural literary experience affects these 14-year old students?

I tread softly among the students reading silently in the individual study carols clustered to the left of my desk. I circle the group of students discussing and writing
notes at the large table in the center of the classroom. I pass behind the row of students posting, reading and responding to reflections on the classroom blog. Out of the corner of my eye I notice Rebecca (all names are pseudonyms) reading silently in a corner of the classroom. The fable *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2006) is in her right hand. With the back of her left hand she wipes away tears. She rises to her feet, closes the book on her study carol, and makes her way towards the opposite end of the classroom. She scans the spines of the books lined on the classroom shelf and pulls out a copy of *We are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust* (1995).

“Sir, I have to stop here. I need to know what happens on the other side of the fence” she whispers. She speaks to me but her eyes glance around the room. She dries her eyes with the corner of her uniform blouse as she speaks. She glances around the room. “I need to find out for myself. Bruno is so naïve, and Shmuel won’t tell him- I mean won’t tell the readers”.

“If you need to find out, then go ahead and discover what lies behind that fence.” I take Rebecca’s, *We are Witnesses* (1995), open the book and suggest that she reads a little of Yitzhak Rudashevski’s diary entry.
“Thanks sir. I just can’t wait any longer. This stupid fence! I need to know how Shmuel lived; what he did on his side of the fence. Then I’ll continue reading *Boy in the Striped Pajamas.*”

I hand the book over to Rebecca, smile, and turn towards my desk. “By the way Rebecca, did you ever consider that Shmuel may be thinking the same thing?” I say as I sit back in the chair and open my copy of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* to the bookmark.

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Don’t you think that Shmuel wants to know what happens in Bruno’s home; on his side of the fence?”

Rebecca frowns and says, “Well, I guess. I never thought of it that way.” She turns and begins to make her way to her reading corner.
“Rebecca. You’re not the only one who has tears. And you’re not the only one who has expressed the same desire to know.” Rebecca stops, turns, and paces back to my desk. “After you read a little of the diary entry, share your thoughts and feelings on your blog. I think you’ll be a little surprised as to how many of your peers are feeling the same way you are.”

Rebecca blushes. “Shmuel and the Jewish people had it bad; really bad. I’m glad my parents didn’t go through this stuff.”

I turn my book to the back cover and point at a sentence. I see Rebecca mouthing the words as she follows my finger across the page: “Fences like this exist all over the world. We hope you never have to encounter one” (Boyne, 2006). She smiles at me and doddles back to her corner of the room to read.

“O.K. class it’s almost time for dismissal. Let’s ensure that we all spend some time posting our comments on the fable tonight. I look forward to reading your comments. We’ll share some tomorrow. And, don’t forget to read my comments. I’m participating as well.”
The students tuck their chairs under desks, switch off computer terminals, dog-ear pages of their novels to mark where they stopped reading, fill their knapsacks with notebooks and pencil cases, and doodle to the front of the classroom. They glance up at the clock and wait patiently for the bell to ring. As they file out the classroom door, the group of students that was working at the central table stops, turns towards my desk and announces, “Total frustration, sir - totally!”

I look up, smile, and announce to the group, “I heard many of you uttering words like frustration, innocence, and victim as I was walking around the room. Tell me why? I’m interested to know. But not right now. You’ll be late for your next class. Post it tonight.”

Another student listening to the conversation squeezes through the group. Our eyes meet. Allison turns towards the group and says, “Frustration? Maybe. Anger, absolutely!” She exits the classroom clutching the fable in her left hand. I notice that her finger is jammed between the pages. I trundle towards the exit, peer down the corridor and watch as Allison fumbles through the crowd of students attempting to read a few more lines of the fable.
This conversation involving teacher-student and student-peer is a personal experience method of research, “conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow group participants to establish the form and topics important to their inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, p.168, 1994). As Rebecca and the other students engaged in conversation, I am able to probe the conversation. What is of interest is that this interaction between the teacher/researcher and the participants was one of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other. This illustrates the centrality of relationship between researcher and participants in ethnography.

At home, I turn my desk chair, lean forward, and push the door of my study closed. I swivel back, face the computer screen, and press the glowing blue neon button. The fan whirs, the hard drive chimes, and a hazy grey computer screen flickers and glows. I anxiously log onto our classroom blog. The blog asks students to post their initial reactions, comments, questions, and opinions on the fable Boy in the Striped Pygamas.

The majority of students’ comments focus on young Bruno’s naiveté, on the lens Boyne used to reveal the atrocities of the Holocaust, and on the symbolism of the fence. Frustration, anger, pity, disgust and despair are the words used by all students to
describe their initial emotions. Jessie posts, “By examining the Holocaust, one of humanity’s greatest failures through the eyes of a young boy who knows nothing of what truly goes on in the world around him, we are able to see the Holocaust through a much different lens… Bruno’s parents have kept him in the dark about everything… Bruno does not know where his family has moved, who the people on the other side of the fence are or even what his father does for a living. This lack of knowledge of what is really going on around him is disturbing to me… fills me with despair … is the contrast between the innocence of Bruno and the vileness of the situation that he is in. All around him, people are being tortured, killed and imprisoned at the orders of his father and yet Bruno knows nothing of his surroundings. His lack of knowledge is truly amazing and saddening. Allison concurs, “I felt completely disgusted with the way Bruno’s father acted when Bruno asked him who the people he could see from his window were. His father’s response was "they aren’t really people… The "not really people" were the Jewish people in the concentration camps.”

The grade nine students challenge the single story: the fact that all Germans were aware of what was happening in ghettos and concentration camps. Bruno represents the German child that has no idea of what is happening in his own backyard. Maria posts, “These people are all working, and from what Bruno and his sister Gretel can see, there
are only men, who like Bruno said, are wearing striped pajamas. These people are being tortured in the backyard of their homes and they are totally and completely blind to it”.

Engaged by Boyne’s novel, the students border cross back into their own world. Luke writes, “The story takes place in Germany, but the reality is, this could and may happen anywhere. That is what scares me. It is uncomfortable to think that kids just like me, typing at their computers as I am now, can be discriminated against in any way, shape or form. This is truly alarming…”

I scan all the comments looking for Rebecca’s post, remembering our brief conversation after class. Her anger and frustration leap off the page, “…it’s like watching a bullet come at you in slow motion. Maybe you can Matrix-dodge it; maybe it’s all a dream? … I felt unnerved in a way, like I was watching a horror movie and waiting for Bruno to open every proverbial closet door as I uselessly screamed “Don’t! The killer’s in there!” I honestly felt a pain in my chest, like a dark storm of sorrow and fury and frustration was brewing within me, growing more pronounced with each passing chapter… the Holocaust disgusts me… it’s repulsive… knowing that Boyne used the beautiful simplicity and forgivable naivety of a nine-year-old boy to portray that particular blemish on the face of history, really, really, infuriates me…. Here he [Boyne]
is throwing in a new angle to see the Holocaust, as if people weren’t already convinced of the evil of it all...” Rebecca’s emotions are real, honest and reflect the sentiment of the vast majority of my students.

These initial comments on our classroom blog have left an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach. I ask myself if the 14-15 year old students are emotionally mature enough to discover the horrors on the other side of the fence - in Jewish ghettos and concentration camps. However, I am able to shut down my computer knowing that students are assuming a very important cultural responsibility; that of discovering more about the Germans and the Jews through Holocaust literature. As Pete says in his comment, “we need to learn, understand and act.”

My comments to this initial post focus on the responsibility of culturally responsive students and focuses on the students’ emotional responses when they encounter the young German boy Bruno. I comment on a select number of student posts. Over the course of the unit, every student’s voice will be recognized in my commentaries; (all names are pseudonyms):
Joseph is correct to ask, “When will Bruno realize the truth?” Of course, pronouncing Auschwitz “Out-With” is our first clue that he’s naive. As Donald correctly says, “Bruno has no clue what is really going on outside”. I believe it is our responsibility as culturally responsive students to find out what is really going on. We really need to learn, understand, and act.

Tina correctly points out, “His [Bruno’s] lack of knowledge is truly amazing and saddening.” And Mat writes, “For Bruno, he did not have the slightest clue as to what pain his kind was causing the Jews beyond those tall fences.” Jess mentions emotional, depressed, and empathetic…right on! These are common feelings elicited by the novel. We must learn, understand and tolerate differences if we are to make a difference in the world.

Bravo Erica! I agree, “The irony of using the mind of young boy to display the horrors of the Holocaust is deceiving in the most devastating way. It gives you, the reader, an ill-born sense of hope, because Bruno is just a young boy. One tries to rationalize that he might not befall some awful fate and it is all just Boyne’s ploy to build suspense and emotion. Then we are back to reality.”
It’s so interesting to tell the story through different lenses. We are seeing the atrocities of the Holocaust narrated through the eyes of a child. Would the story have been different if it was told through the father’s eyes? Of course!

Interesting comments everyone. Congratulations!

This is my first experience of re-examining the participants’ comments on the classroom blog: their accounts of their experience with the novel. I keep the tone of my comments very conversational while focusing on central tenants of the literary selection. This is also the first journaling of my experience with the participants in the classroom. I concur with Clandinin & Connelly (1994) that we, “…often write journals of [our] thoughts, activities, and stories in attempts to make sense of [our] experiences” (166).

Throughout this ethnographic study, I will include on-going accounts of my experiences as participant/teacher/ethnographer, and those of my participants. These experiences will be documented through various field texts: journaling, storytelling, oral history, notes, stories and photographs.
The Author’s Perspective: Radio Interview

After reading, discussing and blogging about the novel, the students are introduced to the personal perspectives of the author John Boyne. They find the radio interview a very unique learning experience. Boyne discusses and answers questions about his novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, talks about physical and artificial borders, and explains about complacency and cultural awareness.

The symbol of the fence, Boyne explains, teaches us that we must intermingle, discover, learn and accept other cultures. James posts, “In a way, we are told the importance of being reflective of one’s culture and the cultures of others. We are reminded that metaphorical and physical fences are all over the world, and we must become aware of the fact that they are there, and figure out how to take them down piece by piece with our willingness to understand.”

Boyne discusses complacency as one of the reasons that the Holocaust happened with little or no intervention for many years. Boyne urges his reading and listening audience to be aware that differences should foster curiosity and in turn, learning and
understanding. Alex posts, “As Boyne points out, people during the Holocaust were not aware, did not react, and thought that it wasn’t their responsibility to respond to the situation.” He continues and offers a solution to global complacency, “Yet this is a continuous reality today! We are not stupid in the sense that we do not know of all the horrid events that are taking place this year, but are rather ignorant of them and their victims – who these people are, where they come from.” Alex reminds us that it is time for all of us to begin creating borderlands throughout every aspect of our lives and with each new person and culture that we encounter, because differences should foster curiosity and a desire for learning, not push people apart. Alex continues: “The magic of Bruno’s story [The Boy in the Striped Pajamas] is that he allows each difference that he finds between himself and Shmuel to pull the two boys closer together. He fills his lack of knowledge with an overflowing friendship and satisfies his desire for answers by learning from a person, not their label.”

Listening to the author talk about Bruno, the protagonist fosters reflection upon the students’ life experiences. Carly posts, “After listening to the interview between David Flicking and John Boyne, I was left with many thoughts. This interview has shed new light on the novel and has caused me to feel a sense of regret for becoming so very angry with Bruno at the beginning of the novel. When beginning to read the novel, I became so frustrated and angry at Bruno’s naivety and complacency toward what was
happening in Germany at the time. The interview made me realize that Bruno was ONLY a nine-year-old boy who was obviously unaware of what was going on because of his young age. This caused me to reflect on if this was my younger, nine-year-old sister and wonder, would she too be as naive as Bruno was? My answers to these questions were yes, she would. At the age of nine, most children are not worried about what is going on in the world around them and tend to only be concerned about them (not saying that they are so much selfish). During the interview Boyne made me think more about my culture and my family which in turn made me better understand the novel.”

The students write their reflections/reactions about the novel and the radio interview with the author using the social networking environment of the classroom blog. In so doing they address issues of race, class, and culture and link what they learn about other cultures to their own lives: intercultural awareness. Blogging allows students to learn, reflect and post while listening/reading peer posts. This learning environment allows them to learn and accept the cultures encountered through the context of Holocaust literature, and to accept cultures within the classroom walls that are different from their own: cultural acceptance.
The students read and respond to a minimum of two peer-posts about the fable. They are again invited to post any final comments. I then comment on their blogging and am amazed at the critical thinking skills exhibited in their comments:

"It felt as if it was expected for the curious and naïve son of the Nazi Commandant to suffer under his father’s cruel wrongdoings." That's an interesting comment Tim. I never thought about it this way. I guess Bruno was a victim of the Holocaust as Shmuel was.

Carol poses a very interesting question, "I would also like to know whether or not Bruno’s father felt a bit more sympathy for the families of those he was killing everyday because he now knew how they felt." Exactly Carol! I wish I could write another chapter to this novel Carol showing how Bruno's father acted after Bruno's horrific accident. Bruno certainly didn't deserve to die that way; and neither did Shmuel.

Rick says, "I learned during the reading of the book and class discussions that not all Germans, but a select group, were evil and positively hated the Jews". We can't label everyone the same Rick, even if they belong to the same culture. We must avoid the single story and look at the other side of the coin.
Good comments! Thanks everyone for sharing your thoughts about this wonderful literary work that attempts to tell the plight of the Jewish people through the eye of a German boy. We are looking at this story through the eyes of an innocent German boy. His friendship with Shmuel was based on the fact that despite all their differences they had so much in common. They could sit and talk, without the fear of being judged or ignored. They saw each other as equals and by doing so dismantled the barriers that were built to keep them apart. That is why *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is such a beautiful story. Despite all the hatred, misery and evil, Bruno and Shmuel are able to find friendship and in doing so show the best of mankind, while the world around them demonstrates the worst of it.

Thanks Mary for this sincere reflection: “Bruno was able to not only overcome cultural differences between the Jewish and German culture, which grown men weren't able to do, but embrace them, even though he did this without even knowing. He crossed the fence to another borderland”. Isn’t it funny that we are consciously attempting to cross into the Jewish and German culture, and Bruno did this unintentionally?

Jennifer you’re absolutely correct when you write that Bruno did what others have been struggling with a lifetime: “Bruno was able to do things during his childhood that take years for many people to do. Bruno learned not to base how he thought of people on
what they looked like or which culture they belonged to. He chose instead to befriend Shmuel, a boy who both his father and sister had deemed unworthy, a boy who had been cast into the devil’s domain by Bruno’s own people. His friendship with Shmuel was based on the fact that despite all their differences they had so much in common. They could sit and talk, without the fear of being judged or ignored. They saw each other as equals and by doing so dismantled the barriers that were built to keep them apart.”

I really like that you all mention emotions: loss, disgust, despair, anger, frustration, and happiness. And, many of you concluded with happiness and joy. This is a paradox; however, your reasons were justified. Michelle states, “these two boys weren't just nine year old children looking for someone to play with, they represented their two cultures coming together to be as one. I have mentioned before that I am thankful for Bruno's naivety throughout the story, because I believe without him really knowing what was going on around him; he was able to create the bond between him and Shmuel. The fence that was placed between them presented them with a challenge to work their way around the fence so that they could be friends, and that's exactly what they did.” Thanks Michelle for voicing you honesty. Terrific comments, great critical thinking skills exhibited.

Congratulations!
The Boy in the Striped Pajamas serves as, “a window into the soul of a society, illuminating the social, political, and cultural mores that underlie different worlds (Naidoo, 118). The participants of this study connect the novel study with new literacies (information, media and cultural) and technologies (the classroom blog, the radio interview) to explore and border cross into new cultural territories promoting cultural understanding.

Fostering Cultural Awareness: The Documentary and Digital Media

February 22, 2012

Dear journal,

A trembling-silence permeated the classroom on this cold and windy February morning. Unblinking, unbelieving, innocent eyes watched as silent images of several concentration camps—Auschwitz, Birkenau, Majdanek, Struthof flashed onto the projection screen, froze for 5 seconds, and then faded to black. The students, with furrowed brow, remained transfixed by the images of jagged barbed wire fences, endless rows of skeletal-bodies; blacken rooftops of cattle cars, huge plumes of billowing smoke engulfing large crowds of displaced people, large mounds of human remains bulldozed into mass graves, and lifeless faces of young Jewish children peering out into a foggy
decaying abyss. The only sounds that invaded the silence of the classroom: the whir of the air vent, and the occasional gasps of mortified grade nine spectators. The metallic glow from the projection screen and the early morning sunshine that framed the classroom blinds were the only signs of light filtering through the darkness.

Their fists were clenched under their chins and their elbows rested on their desks. Some students shielded their eyes from the horrors projected onto the screen; some turned their bodies towards their peers in an effort to momentarily escape the reality of man’s violence toward man. The darkness of the classroom, the expressions of horror, compassion and disbelief, the silent images flashing and fading on the screen, the occasional moans and gasps from the students all seemed perfectly orchestrated, like carefully blended hues of white, black and grey on canvass. However, this canvass was stained with the blood of innocent victims.

The documentary *Night and Fog (1955)* came to an end, the screen went black. The eggshell color of the florescent lights flooded the classroom, and a unified muffled sigh disrupted the stillness of our learning environment. The students stared into each other’s eyes, shook their heads, and remained speechless. They unzipped and shuffled through multi-colored pencil cases, and then almost shamefully began to record their inner most thoughts and feelings on yellow and white notepads. Many students slouched back in their desks, closed their eyes and reflected on the images on screen.
Without uttering a single word, I treaded softly to my desk and watched the students documenting this cultural border crossing. Our classroom had become a borderland: a place where “two or more cultures edge each other; where people of different races occupy the same territory…” (Andalzua, 1999). As they wrote, the students’ unsettled expressions amplified their interior monologues. Their unspoken words leapt off their pages and resonated throughout the classroom: “Was this real? Why did the world allow this to happen? Could this ever happen again?”

I glanced on the back wall of the classroom and read something a student wrote on the “graffiti wall” in large bold black letter: “FENCES = BORDERS= DIFFERENCES= GERMANS & JEWS= STUDENTS!” Written in red ink underneath this statement, “I encounter fences every day – BULLYING!” I shook my head in amazement. Some student, or group of students, had made the connection between the horrors of the Holocaust and crimes against humanity, and with what they had or were experiencing in their own society.

The bell rang. Students shuffled toward the exit. I stood and announced, “Great class everyone. I look forward to reading your blogs. Have a good day everyone. See you tomorrow. I look forward to some interesting comments on the classroom blog.” There
was no response. Their tongues had fallen silent. I spoke to my students however my eyes remained fixed on the graffiti wall.

I slouched in my chair and thought of my students and their emotional experience of being witnesses to the images on the screen: prisoners in blue-striped uniforms, barking dogs, glaring search lights, people hemmed in by observation posts, shaved, naked, bloated, tattooed, numbered, branded with patches of colored fabric: the worker, the political prisoner, the common criminal; the blood clotted bodies that have died with their eyes wide open in the search for the one driving obsession to live: food. The documentary began with the image of the iron gates of Auschwitz Concentration Camp inviting everyone to enter and live by the motto: Work is Freedom – Arbeit Macht Frei. Why had I invited these students to pass through these gates? I was overcome by a feeling of uncertainty. Had crossing through these gates been a positive learning experience, or had my students been subjected to 57 minutes of endless uninterrupted fear? After all, these gates (concentration camps) were meant to be passed through only once, and now my students were re-entering and witnessing the gruesome reality of the past.

Thanks Journal. This was positive????
I try and convince myself that this traumatic learning experience is positive because discovering and learning about others promotes cultural awareness. I also remain convinced that presenting this other dimension of literacy – the documentary, is a rich learning experience, and essential in helping students become literate and engaged members of their community. I anxiously await my students’ comments on the classroom blog. I need to know whether this documentary has fostered reflection about others and self, and has shed new light about the Jewish and German cultures and crimes against humanity. My fears are put to rest reading the comments on the blog.

Students intermingle with the German and Jewish cultures, with their own cultures, and they examine both sides of the fence. Vince’s comment summarizes the plight of the Jewish people, “No day; no night; hunger thirst suffocation madness; Night and Fog shows man's violence toward man; something completely unnerving and unsettling to watch. It puts me to a loss of words, for the moment, in awe of what is appearing slide after slide on the screen. It disgusts me….watching the screen in horror, learning facts that I did not want to know but now truly feel that I along with everyone else ought to know. We need to know, or else we might be presented with the idea that such horrors could come again”. And Misha says, “I actually quite enjoyed how we watched the film in silence because it really allowed me to focus on the pictures instead of on the words being spoken, and as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. I think the
images were so powerful that they did not need narration; they told a story all by
themselves, and as a matter of fact, a story more compelling and meaningful than could
be told with any of the words in the English language”.

Marian, a 15-year-old student questions her own cultures’ possible involvement
with the Holocaust, “John Boyne clearly expressed the horrors of the camp in the novel
and the documentary really brought them to life, in a way that was surprisingly
unnerving. Also, even though the people in the film were just ordinary people whom I
had no personal connection with it still puts my stomach in knots to see them go through
what they did. Now, if I were to imagine Shmuel and Bruno, who I had grown close to
throughout the novel; or worse yet, someone I knew personally or who was part of my
family, going through the evil and cruelty of the concentration camps, I do not think I
would be able to handle it. I think it would simply be too horrible, too brutal, to bear.
And yet, who knows, I am Polish, so some of the people could have possibly been my
ancestors”. Crossing borders, reflecting and drawing links to their own cultures is a
common practice among the students.

The most striking comments concern the German people and their crimes against
humanity. Although the documentary shows horrific images of the Jewish people “on
their side of the fence” my students cross the fence onto the German side. Salina comments, “The fact that thousands each day were taken away, and people behind these actions went to sleep at night sickens me. They truly thought “I am not responsible…”, that it was okay to kill innocent people without an ounce of thought, regret or hesitation, for that matter. The only real feeling going through their mind; was probably only pride to have served their leader and finished their job”. Simon expresses his emotions toward the German peoples, “My disgust and anger was directed at the Kapos, or anyone in charge. Do they not realize that they would look exactly the same in that situation? If you pin a star to your chest, shave your head bald and wear the same striped pajamas, you would be in those concentration camps as well! We are made up of the same thing! We have the same feelings as those victims! We feel hunger, loss, sadness, hurt, pain and anger. It makes me sick that they can pretend to play dolls with real humans. Dress them up, cut their hair, and label them. Their [German soldiers] minds are corrupted!”

Students question the stereotypes of Germans and show that the single story is possibly untrue or incomplete. I concur with Chimanda Adichie that “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete; they make one story become the only story” (Adichie, July 2009). The students experience a mental shift in the perception of the German culture, “I now view the Germans differently. I have to admit that I gave in to stereotypes and let myself
feel hatred to Germans for performing such violence. But now through class discussions and the documentary *Night and Fog*, I know that it is not all the Germans, or only Germans, that have taken part in such a large massacre of human beings. It can be anybody anywhere any day,” reflects Miguel.

As educators we must not allow stereotypes and popular images to rob people of their dignity. Stereotypes make our recognition of human equality difficult. The single story emphasizes differences rather than our similarities. Ida’s comments about the Ted Talk - *The Danger of the Single Story* (2009) reflects this notion, “When we look back and see the horrible things the Nazis did to the Jews we automatically think all Germans were wicked cold-hearted people. The truth that no one seems to realize is that some Germans (like Bruno’s grandmother in John Boyne’s, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*) were completely against Hitler and his political views and some even helped Jews hide and escape from the concentration camps”.

Jasmine, like many other students, comments on the dangers of the single story, “We cannot allow the single story to become the only story for it strips dignity, respect and humanity away from those it tries to classify, to group together in an attempt to make said group easily controlled and degraded. Is that why some Germans could live with
their actions; for they were only bombarded by the propagandas’ single story? Rather than obliterating the single story, they were, ultimately, obliterated by it. It is our duty; it is our right and privilege to speak up and to speak out. It is our obligation to humanize, to respect, to unite, to care, to understand, to interact, to empower and to love one another. By understanding that no true single story exists, and by spreading that message we create a little piece of paradise in our classroom, our school, our homes, a piece that can never be destroyed”.

My comments honouring my students’ comments focus on their ability to border cross and view the realities of the Holocaust through various lenses.

This is real border crossing Kayla - great stuff! I love what you say, "When I watched the Ted Talks, it made me realize there is more then one single story. When she said a young boy came up to her and said its too bad all Nigerian men beat their wives, it made me realize it is the same thing as saying ‘All Germans are Nazis and want to exterminate the Jews’… I reflected upon my classmates and wondered what if I had a single story in my head about all their cultures? Would they be negative? Would I not have any friends in this class? What about me? Would my friends accept me and my culture because I'm not Italian?"
I’ll conclude with Sam’s comment: "Hearing the speaker’s stories about her [Chimanda Adichie] upper-middle class life in Nigeria, I couldn’t help but think how little I knew about African countries besides the poverty; I hate to admit it but I found it hard to imagine people in Africa living like we do in Canada. This is not because I made myself a believer in the single story (because I am well-aware of the dangers of that), but because I have never been exposed to such a thought”. Excellent comment Sam! This scenario of cultural ignorance can be applied to any cultural group—including Jewish and German. From hearing the most common stories of the Holocaust, it is almost normal to feel hatred towards all Germans; but this is based only on the stories told to us. I think the Hollywood motion picture will help solidify our views on the Jewish and German cultures as far as Holocaust literature is concerned. I see the pieces of the puzzle coming together – terrific work everyone!

The Single Story And Film

These comments serve as the perfect chorus for me to introduce to the students the Hollywood motion picture Schindler’s List (1993). This motion picture presents yet
another perspective on the issue of Holocaust: some Germans sacrificed their lives to save the Jewish people.

March 2, 2012

Dear journal,

March 1st was a snowy day. Dark heavy snow clouds laboriously traversed the eastern horizon. I reached up and drew the blinds. The studio lights in the media room faded to dark. Darkness enveloped the 21 students eagerly waiting to view Schindler’s List (1993).

“Who is this Oscar Schindler, sir?”

“Is this film about the Holocaust? Is it as graphic as the documentary, sir?”

Questions and the feelings of anxiety occupied every corner of the classroom. I sat at the back of the media room in total silence, the 22nd spectator, and avoided answering any questions.
The image of two burning candles atop a dinner table, and a Jewish family standing around the table illuminated the screen. The family listened motionlessly as the patriarchal figure recited a prayer in Hebrew.

“It’s a story about a Jewish family,” a young female student announced. She broke the silence of the media room.”

A voice from the back row intervened: “Shh…listen. It looks like a good beginning.”

Suddenly, a high-pitched violin sound from the projection screen quivered to a crescendo. Graphic images of decaying bodies in mass-graves, mounds of human hair piled in a corner of a Jewish ghetto, and rows upon rows of skeletal bodies (young and old) lining the damp, smoke-filled train stations awaiting their apocalyptic-journey towards Auschwitz appeared on the screen.

“Here we go again!” someone shouted among the group of students.
The students watched in awe as they quickly realized that Oscar Schindler, Nazi-war-profiteer-of-slave-labor and womanizer, destroyed the single story that existed in the impressionable minds of my students.

“Is Schindler a Nazi like Bruno’s father in the *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*?” another student asked.

The students exhibited restlessness and anxiety. I wanted to respond, “Oskar is not like Bruno’s father; he employs 1300 Jews in his enamel factory and saves them from the gas chambers of the concentration camps, in the name of “production”, but I remained silent.

Although the film was imbued with hope and salvation, violence, horror, and inhumane scenes caused students to grimace, shield their eyes, shed tears of sorrow, and shout at the projection screen, “Oh come on! Not the children! Enough already!” as the German soldiers murdered innocent patients in makeshift hospitals.
I tiptoed towards the classroom window, lifted the corner of the shade and glanced at the large flakes slowly falling to the ground. They created a beautiful white blanket of snow that covered the dull, grey colors of March. The snow made the world outside beautiful. The images of human ashes falling like snowflakes on Oskar Schindler’s shoulders from the incinerators were projected on the screen and the words of John Boyne (2006), “Fences like this exist all over the world. We hope you never have to encounter one” resonated in my mind.

I stared at the screen and watched as the smiling-weeping face of Oskar Schindler announced to his 1300 hundred Jewish-employees that the war would be over at midnight. Instinctively I glanced up at the clock over the exit door. It said 9:42 a.m. The image of a Nazi soldier on horseback announced to a crowd of dilapidated Jews “You have been liberated by the German army.” The students were engulfed by the beautiful bold robust sounds of piano music and the images of the Schindler Jews lining up to place a stone on Oskar Schindler’s grave many years after their liberation. The classroom clock now said 10:05 a.m.

“Wow, what a turn of events, sir!” someone shouted.
Twenty-two teary-eyed students stood and applauded as the credits rolled up the screen; the music subsided to a diminuendo, and then stopped. The screen went black and the studio lights slowly began to glow bright.

An interesting experience!

As teacher-spectator-participant, I applaud my students’ insightful comments, opinions and questions on the blog about *Schindler’s List* (1993). Arthur’s comments mirror the emotions of his classmates, “I was left kind of speechless. It was a movie that, to me, was like a rose. If you’ll humor me, I’ll explain why. Schindler’s List was beautiful, in a complex way, and it was so sorrowfully beautiful that sometimes it was painful to watch, heart-wrenching to witness. Like a rose, you see it and are mesmerized by its fragility, its beauty, but when you go to pick it up you feel the sharp pricks of pain, the inevitable thorns that mark every rose…It has erased the single story of the Holocaust from my mind, irrevocably (as it probably has for every other viewer)”.

Salina explains how the character of Oskar Schindler helped to add to her single story of the Germans, “When Schindler and his assistant are typing their list, Schindler has a sense of urgency about him. It looks as if he feels if he does not finish the list in time, all these people will die and it would be his fault. This ties in at the end when
Germany surrenders and Schindler is talking to the Jewish people he employed in his factory. He ends up on the ground crying; a fully-grown, high-ranking army official on the ground crying. Crying about how he wishes he could have saved more people, and how he hasn’t done enough to correct his past wrong doings. Oskar Schindler was a very brave man… Even the Jerusalem government recognized this and allowed him to plant a tree on the Street of Righteousness. Oskar Schindler’s tree still grows there today. To me, that’s a symbol, even today, no matter what you have done in the past, you can still do good. It is a symbol that shows us that good always triumphs over evil and corruptness”.

The students capture the essence of creating a borderland, and through this intermingling of various cultures they learn to be culturally responsive citizens. Bessie’s simile best summarizes the power of the motion picture in helping to alter the single story of Jewish and German peoples during the time of the Holocaust, “There are always more sides, more stories, more opinions and ideas, and it is our job to learn as much as we can about them. Believing in only the single story about anything is like watching a 3D movie without wearing the 3D glasses; everything becomes blurry and unclear and it is impossible to fully understand what is going on.”
And another student makes the link between the events of the movie and the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. highlighted on the homepage of our classroom blog - *Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.* “I’d like to end with this thought that is posted on our classroom blog because it is very true. Oskar was not silent about what truly mattered—saving the Jewish people. Although, he may not have said it directly, it is apparent that Oskar’s main goal was to save the Jewish families”. Will my students remain silent?

Here is my post reflecting my students’ comments:

It was interesting viewing Schindler's List; however, your facial expressions and comments during the viewing were priceless as well. It was quite obvious that many made the link (similarities) between Schindler and Bruno's father. As Kat comments, "it was a roller coaster of emotions."

I enjoyed everyone's comments about power. "Power is being able to do the worst thing possible just like everyone else is doing, but controlling yourself and doing what is right." Good point Karol.
Samantha writes, "It was an unbelievable turn of events. There I was, thinking of the worst possible image of a Nazi lieutenant, and I had been wrong. Oskar risked his fortune and livelihood in order to possibly (and successfully) save thousands of innocent lives from sure-death, all due to his thought of the whole process being wrong." I agree with this and all our classmates commented on this turn of events. Congrats!

Terrific link to our homepage Vince: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. I’d like to end with this thought that is posted on our classroom blog because it is very true. Oskar was not silent about what truly mattered—saving the Jewish people. Although, he may not have said it directly, it is apparent that Oskar’s main goal was to save the Jewish families.

Outstanding work everyone! Our social learning environment: the classroom blog is definitely an asset to our understanding and learning about cultures.

**Multiple Layers of Meaning Through Children’s Literature**

The students discover more about Holocaust literature through the genre of children’s literature. The works *Rose Blanche* (1985) and *The Crayon Box that Talked*
(1996) are read and discussed as a class. The storybooks are then placed on the classroom shelf and made available for individual and small group reading and viewing. Naidoo (2009) foregrounds the importance of using children’s literature: “bold and blazing illustrations…leap from the page, creating a visual fiesta. Vibrant painted images loaded with magical realism provided a sensory celebration in which children can almost taste the foods, feel the heat of the sun, and hear the squeals of delight…the illustrations are suffused with colors and symbols…children pouring over the illustrations can gain cultural meanings that are not discussed in the text (111). Multicultural stories teach, “children everywhere [that we] have more similarities than differences” (Norton, 1999, p. 656). Students develop positive attitudes about and respect for individuals in all cultures. I agree with Norton (1999) when she posits, "... children need many opportunities to read and listen to literature that presents accurate and respectful images of everyone." (p. 585). I choose these selections because, "The best books break down borders. They surprise us - whether they are set close to home or abroad. They change our view of ourselves; they extend that phrase "like me" to include what we thought was foreign and strange" (Rochman, p. 9). Multiple layers of meaning are found in the text and illustrations that help students make the intercultural connections between their home culture/s and life experiences with those presented in the children’s book. The comments posted on our blog focus on the printed text, the power of the illustrations, and the main message of these two children’s books.
The central message of *Rose Blanche* (1985) is that not all people are aware of what is happening around them. The young German girl Rose Blanche is unaware of what the soldiers are doing in her town until one day she discovers that on the other side of the river many children in striped pajamas live behind the barbed wire fence. Michelle writes, “the message I took from this novel was that this young girl, Rose, died because she was ignorant/innocent, much like Bruno in the novel the *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. I think this is really important because people always say “ignorance is bliss” but in this case ignorance of a naïve German girl caused Rose’s death …this story really highlighted how unknowledgeable the world was on the subject [of the Holocaust], at that time, and that people were being killed for no reason, Jewish or not.”

The grade nine students draw many parallels between the message of *Rose Blanche* and the novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. “In many ways this book was strikingly similar…in that they [Bruno and Rose Blanche] were both naïve, young children who did not understand why everything was going on around them and why the fences were there; they were just curious, yet they did what some grown men and women cannot do - be at peace with and understand other people.”
The students analyze this genre with critical eyes commenting on the power of the illustrations, “many of the colors were really dark and faded while Rose Blanche stood out with her vivid red bow in her hair and a bright pink skirt…In the end when she returns to camp her colors seem duller maybe because she seems to understand that what is taking place … as if the reality of the war around her has made her realize what a place the world is.” Although Rose Blanche is a victim of the Holocaust, the students discuss the children’s book in a positive light, “when finally spring arrived colors popped out and had a happy mood…the image of the fresh flowers growing in the field were all illustrated in vibrant colors…symbols of spring, hope and innocence.”

The printed text is also a topic of discussion on the classroom blog. Words such as noisy, old, broken, gray, frozen, cold, and pale are often mentioned. Virgil says, “The printed text was extremely powerful and one specific quote stood out, ‘some of them had a star pinned on their shirts. It was bright yellow.’ This one line astonished me because all the vocabulary was dull or miserable.” The students recognize that the author wants the victims of the Holocaust to stand out above all the other characters in the story.

*The Crayon Box that Talked* (1996) is a folktale of magic and wonder. It teaches tolerance and preaches acceptance. This story is read and discussed as a class to deliver
the message that we all belong to one race: the human race. Students learn that when we all work together, the results are much more interesting and colorful. The central message of this children’s storybook is that we can create a much better world when we learn to accept one another and stop judging others based on the single story. Allie’s comment on the classroom blog states, “On the last page of the story it says ‘we are a box of crayons, each one of us unique. But when we get together, the picture is complete’. This shows complete border crossing and removal of fences…there is no longer hatred among the crayons.” Deborah posts “, “it conveys the same message we’ve been learning throughout this whole unit; to eradicate the single stories and stereotypes in our heads about races, genders, and religions…it’s about creating borderlands. This book displays crayons that act as people judging one another because of our differences, and following and believing stereotypes …”

Another student, Tanya, discusses the literary motif of the fence. She writes, “A quote that caught my attention was, ‘and no one likes orange, but no one knows why’. If we take into account that each crayon represented a race … it is almost as if we dislike each other for no reason. There are stereotypes and fences and malice for no reasons. Nobody really knows why we create stereotypes and fences against one another.”
All students enjoy discovering, discussing and learning about the Holocaust and related themes through the lens of Rose Blanche and through the lens of the animated box of crayons. The more perspectives students examine, the more likely they are to add to their single stories of the Holocaust and of the German and Jewish cultures. Both Rose Blanche and The Boy in the Striped Pajamas serve as excellent catalysts for understanding the cultures being explored. The participants engage in an interaction between the printed text and multimodal texts. They use newly created meaning from one source to gain a rich understanding of the information in the other source. Naidoo states, “… connecting international children’s literature with new literacies through the new technologies empowers teachers to explore issues of class, race, and culture with their students. Children generally display a high propensity toward the adoption of new technologies (Naidoo, 118). The grade nine English students’ blogging illustrates that they have succeeded in understanding and discovering other cultures and that there feel empowered to make these intercultural connections. These students are learning about life and these connections will last the rest of their lives. They connect what they experience through the children’s literature with their home cultures and their life experiences.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the students’ comments. My reply to them was:
A terrific job offering your analysis and comments on *The Crayon Box that Talked*. This is one of my favourite children’s storybooks because of the clear message and the vibrant colors that mesmerize the reading/viewing audience. The message is simplistic; yet, many impressed me with comments by showing critical thinking skills. Vicky correctly links our digital web selection to this literary selection, “On the last page of the story, it says, “we are a box of crayons, each one of us unique. But when we get together, the picture is complete” This shows complete border crossing and removal of fences. There is no longer the hate between the different crayons because they have learned to understand that they need each and every one of each other. This reminded me of Chimamanda Adichie’s closing remark, “When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we gain a sense of paradise.” When the crayon box stopped fighting and realized that there was no need to hate orange or yellow or green, they gained a sense of paradise. It is a much easier and simpler world when we learn to accept one another and not judge based on solely the single story.”

Bravo!

Allie mentions the symbol of the fence and links it with this children’s storybook. I found that interesting. If we take into account that each crayon represented a race or any tangible difference of any sort, it is almost as if we dislike each other for no reason. There are stereotypes and hatred and malice for no reason. Nobody really knows or understands why we create stereotypes and fences against one another. Great link! Great thinking!
I think that we have all understood the power of this children’s storybook. I’m happy that everyone is being to make links between the many different literary genres and many media sources that have help us create a borderland in our classroom.

Thanks again everyone.

**Newspapers and Radio:**

**An Array of Perspectives Through Informational Text**

There are many perspectives offered through journalistic writing. My intention is to read, discuss and learn that newspaper articles shed light and add to the single story that exists in our minds about the Germans and the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Bias and perspective are the topics most discussed on the blog.

Max comments on the importance and bias of news stories, “I think that journalism is another great form of literature that helps us to view and understand the theme of the Holocaust in yet another light. Newspaper articles, although they are all the same genre, are all so different because there are so many variables and factors – who
wrote it, when it was written, what its purpose was, who its intended audience was, and what it was about – this influences the writing.”

The class reads, discusses and comments on more than 65 articles found by the students. One article discussed on the blog presents insight on how the Germans see the atrocities of the Holocaust today, marking the occasion with a moment of silence. The student writes, “I was happy to see that Germany sees the evil that was done and the need to remember what happened”. This article makes the class stop to consider how Germans view and honor the victims of the Holocaust today.

John posts a different perspective of the Holocaust, “Articles often present new perspectives. One of the articles my group read was, “Mengele’s Children: The Twins of Auschwitz”, and it was about Josef Mengele, a notorious doctor who performed gruesome experiments on twins. The point of view of the article was not extremely clear because it simply stated facts. However, it definitely portrayed the Jews as guinea pigs, powerless against the superiority of the Germans and their cruel and merciless ways.”

News stories of the past and present offer new perspectives and help students broaden their knowledge about the events of the Holocaust, the stereotypes, and single stories of Germans and Jews. Mariam says it best when she compares the many news
stories to a puzzle, “Journalism is like a bunch of puzzle pieces, and it is up to us to decide the picture, and how to put the pieces together to bring the picture to life”.

My comments on the blog focus on three students’ responses that mirror the entire classes responses to the informational literature studied:

Bella writes: “This informational writing helped me border cross into the world of the Jewish and German culture because I was able to grasp the reality and real life stories and thoughts from these poor children. I was able to feel what they went through and the worry and sadness that filled their hearts. How sad is it to be living in a world where you know you can't just close your eyes and wake up from? You can't escape this terrible misfortune. Everywhere you turn is just another sign of your culture breaking and falling from shame and sorrow. But the worst part is that there's no way out.”

Martin comments, “I think this informational writing offers a unique way to cross the border into the world of the Jewish and German cultures because it is so real. These teenagers wrote these diaries as a way of expressing their thoughts and feelings during this horrible time when they could do nothing else. They could never have expected that their diaries would one day get published and would be studied as a way of insight into the past. They simply wrote down the things they had in their heads because they needed
to get them out but could not just go around talking about them.”

Tom says, “I do not claim that I can fully understand or imagine what it would have been like to live in such a desperate and terrifying time, but as a great philosopher once said “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” or in this case a single diary entry that allowed me to begin to comprehend the intense emotional rollercoaster that Jewish teenagers experienced.

Quite interesting comments! Thank you everyone. Informational writing (the diary entries and the newspaper reports) provides more facts, details and eyewitness accounts of the events. My comment to these diary entries is simply this: they are emotionally draining. For the reading audience it is quite difficult to listen to the words of teenagers (like you) that are no longer with us. These words are stark, painful, and unbelievable. I learned many different realities that I would not otherwise know through the fiction. For example, Yitzak teaches us that the yellow cards leads to certain death; Moshe escaped but he was plagued by the victimization of those who did not escape; and the fact that Jews were willing to arrest, torture and kill other Jews to ensure their own survival. Although this writing is a real-to-live (informational) to me it still reads like a Hollywood motion picture. How do I erase Hollywood images from my mind?
Thanks again for your insights. Our many voices + the many lenses = cultural awareness and discovery.

**Culminating Performance Task: Puzzle Piece**

The culminating activity is an arts based task that asks the students to artistically illustrate an over-sized puzzle piece. They work in pairs or small groups illustrating a puzzle piece that best reflects their experience of border crossing into the Jewish and German cultures through the context of Holocaust literature. The students artistically craft puzzle pieces with an array of images, words, phrases, illustrations and quotations from the various texts and from their own creative minds. The end result is a collective/collaborative puzzle that illustrates the participants’ experience of creating a borderland in the classroom (see Appendix C– Photo Stream).

Students scurry to occupy the front row of desks in anticipation of their classmates’ puzzle piece presentations, chairs screech against linoleum tiles, and multi-colored Bristol boards crackle as decorative puzzle pieces are stretched flat atop student desks. The incessant chatter of anxious students fades to a complete silence.
One-by-one the students approach the bulletin board, reach for some thumbtacks and begin interlocking their puzzle piece with those of their classmates. Green, red, orange, blue, white, and black puzzle pieces interlock creating a multi-colored quilt of ideas, symbols, images, phrases, and words. The white display board becomes our canvass upon which vibrant puzzle pieces paint an eclectic portrait of cultural discovery, understanding and acceptance. Magically the worlds CREATING BORDERLANDS forms across the top of the mosaic.

As the puzzle mushrooms before our eyes, cheers and applause break the silence. Students stand beside their desks, applauding, pointing, and commenting about the creative collage, “Wow that’s a neat way of representing the clash between the Jews and the Germans”, “I would have never thought to represent it in that fashion…very clever!” and “I love that quotation!”

I stand at the back of the classroom staring in awe at the students’ initial response, and at the culmination of weeks of reading, listening, viewing, discussing, writing, reflecting, posting, and creating. One phrase repeats in my mind: the capacity for connectedness.

Before sitting down to listen to the individual puzzle piece presentations, I say to my students, “Wow! I’m amaze at the amount of creativity and thought that has gone
into each puzzle piece. I can’t wait to listen to your presentations. We’ve learned a great deal along this cultural journey. What a borderland we’ve created …absolutely!” The students break out into cheers and applause. Their expressions show a sense of accomplishment in their individual creations, a feeling of amazement in the collective effort, and a sentiment of pride in their completed puzzle. I too share their feelings.

My eyes focus on the images of many opened hands. Each hand is decorated in the colors of the national flags of the students’ ethnic cultures. I follow an opened black hand pointing in the direction of a clenched white hand, and read, “You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist” (Gandhi). A collage of the word unity, written in the language of each student’s culture, surrounds the black opened hand. I listen and nod my head in approval as two students explain the rationale for the images of the hands and the collage of national flags:

“It is important to represent our cultures on this puzzle...we are part of this borderland and so are our parents, our nationality, and our languages. We are proud of our parents and grandparents. They maintained our heritage: food, cultural and religious festivals, and the many photos of their past … they were immigrants in a new land who had to struggle to gain a new language and a new identity. That’s why we also agreed to make sure that
the Canadian maple leaf is on the puzzle – to represent Canadian schools and us the Canadian students.” (Grade 9 students)

As the students present their individual puzzle pieces with clear, confident voices, I stare at the image of 3-D glasses with the caption, “Believing in only the single story about anything is like watching a 3-D movie without wearing the 3-D glasses; everything becomes blurry and unclear and it is impossible to fully understand what is going on. Break away from the single story and appreciate people and all their depth” (fellow student). I am extremely proud that this student makes reference to a peer post taken from our classroom blog.

Three minutes remain before the end of the period. I thank the students for their beautiful collage of puzzle pieces and leave them with this message, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” (Martin Luther King Jr.) They all stand by the desks and applaud their learning.

April 2, 2012
Dear Journal,
I pushed closed the classroom door and stood alone, in an empty classroom. I turned and stared at the puzzle piece collage. I stared at the string of white dolls all exactly the same; all holding hands. These represented all the different characters that we encountered in all we read and watched. My eyes followed the connected cutouts as they filled one puzzle piece and flowed onto another. I stepped closer to the collage and read the names of each doll, Oskar Schindler, Bruno, Moshe Flinker, Eva Heiman, Shmuel, Anne Frank… I thought of each of my students and for some reason thought of their parents and grandparents. I then thought of mine. My students have not remained silent. They have actively participated, learned, discussed, created and shared - not only among themselves, but also with me and with each and every character.

My hope is that that they talk about this experience with their friends, peers, parents, and teachers; that they reflect on all that we have done to become more culturally aware; that they continue to tolerate difference; and that they will never have to encounter any fences in their lives.

I trundled to the exit door, grasped the doorknob and placed my fingers on the light switch. I switched off the classroom lights and stepped out into the bright bustling corridor. The darkness disappeared behind the classroom door of Room 204.

Great border crossing journal!
Taking Learning Beyond The Confines Of The Classroom

Before walking away from this borderland experience, the classroom blog invites parents, Administrators, and Board officials to comment on our experience of creating a borderland. The students agree to share their experiences with the outside world. I am anxious to participate and record this new, interesting experience.

One Board Literacy Consultant blogs:

Hello Mr. Racco’s class!
Firstly, I’d just like to say that I had to keep reminding myself of the fact that I was reading entries from grade nine students and not students in grade twelve! Your comments and insights are so thoughtful and eloquent and there is much wisdom here.

I see very clearly in your comments how you reflect, look inward, and reach out.

It is evident that the stories within this unit have really had an impact on the way in which you view the world. Many of you commented on how many layers of “truth” exist in every story:

“The details of every side of every story, is what makes the truth, not the things we hear from someone else”;
“I’ve been living my life by believing only single stories about different groups of people, I have been sheltered from a world of possibilities”;

"Never assume or take a stand unless I know the entire story";

“There are a million things that we need to think in our heads before judging”.

Still others spoke of the importance of recognizing diversity by either recognizing differences or similarities:

“It is imperative to see that others are different, understand them better, and thus accept them for who they are, and appreciate them”;

“Embrace how we are all so similar but it is our given situations [which] makes us different”; “part of one race, the human race”;

“[N]ot many people can truly say that they opened their minds and hearts to new information about different cultures”;

"Break down the unjust fences that are separating you from embracing someone else's culture";
Sometimes, “the correct answer is that there is no answer, the question is left open-ended”, as one student suggested which is indeed frustrating. It is with hope that I envision you moving forward.

I am also deeply heartened by the fact that you are all looking beyond this unit to how you will act as a result of knowing what you know:

“How do I walk away from this unit? Really, I don’t walk away”;

“To share with others what I had the privilege to learn about”;

“May wear myself down with helplessness, but how can I bear to do anything else but hope?”

“Only we can make something happen”;

“I HAVE more border-crossing to do”.

A blog is a wonderful forum for expression as you have all demonstrated.
Best of luck with your future border crossings; may you find strength and courage to act in a way that honors your new knowledge and understandings about diverse cultures.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share in your reflections!

These comments are flashed onto the projection screen in our classroom and I remind the students of the terrific job that they have done. “These are testimonials to the great work you have done. Your thoughts and words go beyond the four walls of our classroom. They have touched the hearts of others. The blog has been our stage for learning and our learning grows with every new idea, reflection and comment. Congratulations!” I announce to my students. The polyvocality of this ethnographic study resonates with all participants. I am curious to see the expressions on the students’ faces when I project the comments posted by their parents.

Although only 25% of the students’ parents elected to participate, their comments are significant. They praise the students’ work, “I have had the pleasure of reading the insightful and thought provoking comments of this talented group of students. This blog has given each a voice as they create borderlands using characters and story lines. Such an innovative way to exchange ideas! Thank you all and keep up the good work!” (Parent), and they comment on the excellent writing on the classroom blog, “I would like
to thank … the talented writers for inviting me to read their well versed comments. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It's wonderful and amazing how much one learns from reading various texts and accounts of history. Undoubtedly this blogging technique and experience has been instrumental to all students enabling them to openly and in a non-judgmental way to convey their understanding and perspective on various literary pieces. I was very impressed. Great work!” (Parent).

The parents support the multiple perspectives and the use of blogging: “I'd like to start off by first thanking Mr. Racco for introducing this modern day form of communication--blogging, to allow our children the opportunity to share their heart-felt thoughts and opinions on the very sensitive topic of the Holocaust and borderlands. I would hope that it has allowed our children to appreciate a little more the meaning of freedom and peace, in this part of the world that they live in. In reading the various student-blogs, I realize that these students have gained an understanding of how important it is to accept people for who they are and not what the single story tells us of them” (Parent). Another parent writes, “This contemporary form of communication used to exchange perspectives and insights on the German and Jewish cultures and the Holocaust provided a unique opportunity for the students to reflect, share and critique. The postings were well written, thought provoking and interesting to read. Purposeful
blogging on such an inhumane historical event showed the maturity and depth of these excellent young writers. Thank you for the invitation” (Parent).

The students smile, congratulate each other with pats on the back, and blush as they read their parents’ comments. “As I told you before, I am amazed that our learning went beyond the walls of our classroom,” I repeat. I then project a final parental post, “When [my daughter] told me that she and her classmates were participating in a blog set up by their English teacher, I was happy to hear that they would be engaging in this enriching experience. It is not only a modern means of communication that teenagers would enjoy, but it is also an effective opportunity for discourse that goes beyond the classroom. The students' blogs have been enlightening and insightful in response to the topic of the Holocaust and borderlands. Well done!” (Parent)

I switch off the LCD projector, stand in front of the classroom and applaud my students: their enthusiasm, their contributions to a collaborative learning environment, their cultural awareness, and their sense of responsibility as citizens of the world.
Metacognition: Reflecting On Our Learning

The final leg of this journey is to allow students to reflect on how they learned best as they actively engaged in the process of reading and writing: “Now that you have experienced the unit on Creating Borderlands what knowledge, questions, concerns, uncertainties and emotions do you walk away with. Please limit your response to 150 words. You may select any form of writing you wish: paragraphs, letter, journal, chart, graph, bullets, numerical list, or any other form” (Post of May 2, 2012). It is the final opportunity for students to call forth the techniques that enabled them to address the meaning of the multi-genre texts. Prior to writing on the classroom blog I invited students to begin their thinking with leads such as: I wonder…. I noticed…I was confused…, I was surprised…, I think that the author…, I felt…, I liked…, and I disliked…. I concur with Carol Jupiter (2009) that leads are invaluable for students to probe different texts and to “think about thinking and learning about learning (Peterson, p.27). Using such metacognitive leads is a good application for students to ask questions of themselves, and to think about the various texts explored and their relationship to the world and to themselves.
My final contribution to our classroom blog is to respond to the students’ metacognitive comments:

All your comments are extremely interesting and thought provoking. I am glad that you will all be taking something with you from this unit of study. Over the last week I have been analyzing your meta-cognitive comments and have compiled a chart that lists the contributors to this post, what each has learned, accompanied by a significant quote, and how they learned. I will distribute this chart entitled: Here’s What You Said You’ve Learned in class on Monday morning. The depth of your thinking and emotion is remarkable. It's clear that you have met the learning goals that various texts and genres provide multiple viewpoints and engage the reader differently. You students have learned to be critical readers and analyzers and that's a skill that is crucial in a world where information comes flying at us from so many sources. More importantly, the activities were transformative... we all have been changed forever to see that we have the power to make a difference.

I would like to acknowledge a few metacognitive student comments:

Mia’s comment about recognizing the complexity of a diverse society is very profound, “I was affected by this unit in the sense that it provided me with information,
on top of everything else I already knew, so that I might form my own opinions about the
topic of borderlands. The Ted Talk, Night and Fog, Rose Blanche, and various news
articles supplied this evidence. I learned about the single story, the evil of men, the
innocence of children in the face of horror, and that there is always someone on the other
side. My perceptions about cultures, to be truthful, remain largely the same, even after
the unit. With my new knowledge, the ideas became more developed. We’ve been lead to
believe we should not focus on what makes us different from one another. Lately, I’ve
thought, why not? In my opinion, we, as a people, can only learn to live with each other if
we recognise that other people are different. We are not a single population, but rather a
complex society, with millions of different views and cultures, each with something new
and exciting to contribute. Rather than slowly submerge these differences in indifference,
or melt them down into our own societies, it is my personal belief that, to succeed, we
must embrace all the uniqueness in our world. It is imperative to see that others are
different, understand them better, and thus accept them for who they are, and appreciate
them.”

Mia, I appreciate your insights about how we can all be continuous learners as
we discover new aspects of different cultures. The key, as you also notice, is to build
understanding and that can only happen with opportunities to communicate across
differences and build compassion...that's where you get to your last statement: acceptance and appreciation. Awesome entry!!!

Vernon, it's clear that your experiences in the Borderlands unit helped you question information sources. You mentioned that you now understand that seeing an issue through a single lens can never render the full story. That alone, is huge!

“After the multi-media unit of Border Land Crossing, I walk away with many different emotions. This unit served mostly as a revelation for me. I never knew how much I did not know about not only the Holocaust but also many other cultures because of the single story glasses I was wearing. Now I have realized that living my life by believing only single stories about different groups of people, I have been sheltered from a world of possibilities; as if, a fence was blocking me from exploring the different worlds of new cultures. With the puzzle piece collage, it was evident that all of us learned a lot from this unit and it was a great way to share what we did learn. During one of the group presentations, they used the quote “you can’t shake hands with a clenched fist”. This quote shows that both parties have to agree to make peace. As Mr. Racco said in class earlier, in the school that was built, there are problems [reference Oasis of Dreams, Feuerverger] and it is not perfect, but people are trying to make a difference. This shows that when we ourselves begin to border cross and try to make a difference we are going to experience problems but we must continue trying.”
Vernon, you learned that to make a difference, you have to embrace difference (cross that border!) Amazing insight! Thanks!

Eric, I hear such passion and energy in your words that it gives us all hope.

“Helplessness, such is the feeling that grates upon me most insistently. There is too much I do not know, why did it the Holocaust start? Why are there still genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia and Sudan? If I go up to Kony or a gang member or who ever it is on which we choose to lay the blame, and show them “Night and Fog” will they cringe? Laugh? Cry? Will they even care? Are there not enough humane humans out there? Whatever happened to sympathy, empathy, and even some selfish, condescending pity?! Perhaps I am so vehement because I am ashamed. Who am I to judge, when I have just as much power as I accuse others of misusing? Hatred and racism and genocide and border-blocking are still happening, and I could crawl through this pessimistic rut eternally, dig myself a grave, but I cannot. What is the point? As an individual I cannot bring world peace, and I doubt I’m expected to, but I can help it along, everyone can help it along, and maybe one day all our little ‘peaces’ will make “one big peace”. If there is one thing that can stand against anything, it is hope; sure it’s hard to get, and even harder to keep, but when you have it, you’re unstoppable. I understand it isn’t so much about legacy but about being the best person you can be, and to stop thinking about everything as if you
were a superhero on a quest to save the world. I walk away understanding that multiculturalism and border crossing are really just buzzwords, definitions for those who need to find a way to describe an unexplainable bond. The bond of the human race, living together in one home, Earth, and our dazzling potential unity that would make us invincible. I may wear myself down with helplessness, but how can I bear to do anything else but hope?"

Whenever I feel overwhelmed with the bigness of the situation, I think of Jean Vanier, who also felt that way when seeing the overwhelming poverty in Calcutta. He knew he couldn't help the tens of thousands of people he saw suffering before him so he just took two out of that misery. That's how L'Arche began (two by two) and now there are over 130 L'Arche communities all over the world. Small loving actions do make a huge impact.

Finally Martin writes, “After experiencing the unit on border crossing, I feel that my journey has only just begun. I feel that now, it is my responsibility to share with others what I had the privilege to learn about. For me, this unit of study was like reaching a fence and opening the gate to get to the other side. I know that I have crossed the fence and made it to the other side, but I also know that now it is my job to explore what lies far beyond this fence. Each form of literature that we studied opened my eyes to new
possibilities and ideas, and although I feel very enlightened, I know there is still so much more to learn, and there always will be. Beyond this first fence lie meadows and valleys of other cultures, stories, and stereotypes, and along with them lay more fences that need to be crossed to achieve peace and understanding. Through this unit we may have only crossed one border, one fence, but you always have to start somewhere.”

Martin, your comment about privilege and responsibility reflects the big learning that happened for you. You were certainly privileged to have had this learning experience together with your classmates. It is good to hear that you feel inspired to bring justice and peace to others to those in your "backyard" and beyond as a result.

Congratulations and thank you for all your comments. I too walk away from this unit learning more than I had ever imagined this social interactive medium could offer.

On May 22, 2012, I record my observations of students engaged in metacognitive discussions stemming from their blogging:

The students fill the empty rows of desks, open their notebooks, and chat among their peers. The classroom door slamming shut momentarily interrupts the constant classroom chatter. A student trundles into class. An incessant drone begins again. I overhear a group of students at the front of the room discussing their last blogging
assignment: the metacognitive reflection. I turn my back on the students and shuffle through a stack of papers on the classroom shelf.

“After I posted my reflection last night I chilled a little and then read most of the other posts. Pretty awesome... a lot of students are starting to use the lingo” someone announces.

“I too think it’s neat. I really like using the lingo…like *culturally responsive*, and like *border-crossing*, like *the single story*, and of course, *creating borderlands* … all that lingo we’ve been using in class” another student adds.

“How about *metacognition*?” another student suggests. “Now that’s an awesome word. I’ve gotta try it on my friends …it’s a super-heavy-duty awesome word.”

I count the number of handouts I’ve prepared for the class, “twenty, twenty–one, and twenty-two.” I listen attentively as the conversations between the students continue.

“I’m gonna miss chilling with my computer and the blog … it’s a neat way to learn…first time for everything I guess.”
“Blogs are o.k. however, I’d recommend Twitter…..it’s less writing” another student laughingly says.

I overhear the group laughing and exchanging high fives. I chuckle, continue sorting through papers, and await the bell to single the beginning of class.

A voice from the center of the classroom says, “Yup, it was a heavy unit. I liked it; especially the C.P.T. …That’s a pretty impressive puzzle,” she says, pointing to the large puzzle on the back wall of the classroom.

At the sound of the bell the murmur of voices subsides. I turn and face the class. I pace up and down the rows of desks and I place one copy of a Metacognitive Reflections Summary Chart on every student’s desk.

“I overhead some interesting conversations developing in class this morning before the bell. And, I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed reading your metacognitive reflections on the classroom blog over the last couple of evenings. Great work everyone!” I announce, as I place the last chart on a student’s desk.

I walk back to my desk, sit in my chair, and watch the students’ expressions. The room becomes silent expect for the ruffling of paper. Their eyes remain glued to the
handout. I follow their eyes. They dart up and down scanning the chart for their name and their comments to our final post (See Appendix E: Here’s What You Said You’ve Learned). Their heads move left to right, left to right as they first read their metacognitive comments and then search and read those of their peers. Students turn and face their peers sitting in the rows next to them. They raise their eyebrows, smile and nod in approval. Some nod back in acceptance. Others blush, bow their heads, or hide their faces behind a notebook after they receive the thumbs up from peers.

After a few minutes I break the silence. “I heard someone ask, what’s next?” Let’s begin with some general comments about what you see in front of you, and then we’ll discuss the next step.”

Many students raise their hands eager to offer comments about the metacognitive reflections.

“It’s obvious that this unit unleashed many emotions: disbelief, sorrow, disgust, isolation ... anger. I mean this chart shows that we learned about many different themes, but I think it’s the feelings that are important … obviously we’ve experienced common feelings” one student says.
Everyone nods in agreement. I remain intrigued by this overwhelming desire to discuss their learning through emotions. I stare at the copy of the chart in my hand and ask myself, “Why have I categorized their metacognitive reflections thematically, and not by emotions? I look up at the students, drop the chart atop my desk and announce “O.k. so let’s talk emotions.” I sit atop my desk eager to listen. Apprehension surfaces within me.

The students discuss their learning. To my relief, they do acknowledge, agree and comment on the thematic links found on the chart: tolerance, stereotypes, friendship, unity, cultural awareness, border crossing, equality, prejudgment, world peace, global responsibility, and social action. They discuss these common themes and vehemently express an array of emotions: anger, hatred, disgust, horror, sadness, disbelief, isolation, anger, confusion, surprise, and emptiness. They also include emotions such as relief, hope, love, compassion, unity, acceptance, and equality. I am glad that students include both positive and negative emotions.

Many students express their anger for the dehumanization and atrocities against humanity they witnessed in many of the genres. They discuss the different genres (as outlined on the chart) and include words such as brutal, senseless, pitiful, and genocide.
One student raises his hand and says, “I’m shock! No, I’m livid at human beings …that we can become like animals!”

I expected anger would be an emotion that would surface in our discussion; however, I am taken aback when another student interjects and says, “I’m embarrassed! I feel like crawling under a rock!” The class becomes totally silent and we all turn to face this student. She stands by her desk and addresses her peers. Her cheeks are flush and there is a passion burning in her eyes. Emotion spills from her lips and tugs at our heartstrings. She turns as she speaks, and makes direct eye contact with everyone in the class. “Our society needs to be reminded to work on stopping discrimination? WOW! … It’s embarrassing that we have to be taught this. It should be understood … automatic… part of who we all are.” There is a long pause. She remains pensive and then adds, “Or should I say, part of who we should be. I’m embarrassed. That’s it!”

The class remains silent. I anticipate applause for her honesty. I lift my eyes from my notebook, complete jotting down a few notes, drop my pen on my desk, and stare at the students. Many nod in agreement and most smirk in shame. I stand and turn to the teenage girl who is now slouched in her chair twirling a pen between her fingers. “Well thank you for that” I say. “You’ve given us a lot to think about. So I guess the questions most of us are asking ourselves right now are: When will we ever stop discriminating? When will we ever learn?”
“Right on, Sir! You got it, and so did she. I think we all were thinking the same thing, but I guess we all couldn’t find the courage to say it. In the 21 century, the world…us… are still committing crimes against humanity like in the ghettos and camps behind those fences during Shmuel’s and Schindler’s times.” The student turns and faces the students behind him. “Guess she’s right…” pointing to the girl twirling the pen between her fingers, “we should be embarrassed.”

I am amazed to think about how much we’ve all grown by the end of this border-crossing journey. And, how much this unit has really affected us. I end the class by offering some closing remarks:

Take time to learn about others even though they may seem different at first. We’ve all learned that acceptance doesn’t necessarily mean that we have to do what others do, but we all have to respect each other’s differences, each other’s cultures, and we have to learn to tolerate these differences and live in harmony. We’ve all gone through a rollercoaster of emotions. I hope that we all continue to learn and grow and become culturally responsive global citizens. It’s never too late.

The class bell rings. I announce, “Our last step is to complete a student survey on our classroom blog. I hope you all find time to complete it. Have a good day everyone.”
The survey results confirm all that has been observed and recorded during this reflexive ethnographic research. The students are once again invited to complete the survey. When asked to select what expression best describes their blogging experience, 66% of the students selected - I enjoyed posting my ideas and reading/reflecting on the ideas of my peers, showing the importance of collaboration: sharing opinions, asking questions, reflecting on peer responses. Even though the vast majority of the participants had never participated in a classroom blog, 77% of them ranked the blogging experience between Good and Very Good, claiming that the most enjoyable aspect and the best learning experience was reading peer comments about their posts. It is very interesting to note that only 2% of the participants selected – Reading teacher’s comments about the class’s posts, as the most enjoyable aspect of blogging. This is very telling of the amount of input the teacher/participant should have in the classroom blog. In fact, 39% of the participants said that after posting their personal comments, they felt curious as to what their peers had to say about their post. It is clear that sharing comments among peers is paramount when learning via the classroom blog.

An overwhelming majority of the students voted – Yes when asked if the blogging experience helped them learn about other cultures, and 60% of indicated that the multicultural unit on the Holocaust made them reflect more on global cultures rather than on any specific culture. This was a very telling statistic because my aim was not only to have them border cross into the German and Jewish cultures through the context of
Holocaust literature, but to reflect about culture on a global level and to reflect on their own cultures as well. They surveyed showed that 52% of the participants selected the diary entries *We are Witnesses* as the genre that they reflect about the Jewish culture; 65% selected the film *Schindler’s List* as the genre that made them reflect about the German culture; and the genres that most made them reflect about their own cultures were: the Ted Talk: the single story (50%) and the children’s story: *The Crayon Box That Talked* (45%). The data shows that as teachers we must “ensure that our students have ample opportunity to explore the world of new literacies…then they will delve deeper, unearth meaning, read critically, and assess the value of these sources” (Peterson, 32).

When asked if they would enjoy participating in a similar unit where they had the opportunity to intermingle with different cultures? 82% answered - Yes. Is this ample evidence to prove that students have the capacity to reach out beyond the text to history and people, generating empathy and concern for peoples of different cultures?

The following narrative composed by a participant of our blog serves as evidence that this border crossing experience has created culturally responsive students; students that have reached beyond the unit of borderlands and are able to generate empathy and concern for people:
It was April 4th, 1940, an incredibly bright and vibrant morning. My entire house was filled with an aroma of German sausages, fresh bread, and coffee. Exhausted, I tumbled out of bed and walked towards my bedroom window. I gazed through the small window to see the sun shining brightly through the white clouds over my town of Berlin. The sun shined like a jewel in the soft blue sky. Busy people made their way through the streets. It seemed like another promising day in the new Germany.

I walked towards my bathroom sink, and splashed ice-cold water onto my face in an attempt to wake myself up. I looked into the mirror to see my short, light blonde hair and deep blue eyes staring back at me. My ice-cold blue eyes sparkled and danced in the reflection. They were my pride and joy, and many people admired me for having them. I was of Aryan decent, and a pure German. “The Führer (leader) would be proud,” I thought to myself. I was a tall boy for the age of fifteen, and according to several people, I was awfully handsome.

I then carefully put on my finely pressed Hitler Youth uniform, which consisted of a light brown buttoned jacket, long jet black pants, a soft peak brown trench hat, and gleaming black shoes. The best part of the uniform was the crimson red armband with a
bold swastika on it. I looked into my reflection and hollered, “Heil Hitler!” thunderously with the corresponding salute. With this uniform on, I was ready to conquer the world.

“Yes!” my mother called in a singsong voice, “Come downstairs for breakfast!” she added quickly.

I swiftly ran down the stairs of my small Berlin home to find my mother sitting at the kitchen table with my father. My mother was a tall woman with fair hair. She was a friendly and talkative person. However, when my brother was sent to invade Poland in September of 1939, she talked much less, and she always seemed nervous. She often paced around the house like an untamed animal waiting for something to happen.

“Guten morgen (good morning)” my mother said softly as I sat down at the kitchen table. “Your father and I are extremely pleased with what you are doing for the Fatherland!” she added proudly.

“Thank you,” I said to my mother proudly. I looked over at my father who was reading an article about Adolf Hitler in the newspaper. My father did not talk much. He was a tall man with light brown hair and blue eyes. He was in the manufacturing industry before Germany’s economy crashed in 1929. I was just a little child then, but he told me
stories about how complicated life was at the time. There was very little to eat, and it took millions of Reichstags just to buy a loaf of bread.

When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, everything changed. He rebuilt a strong Germany, ignoring the Treaty of Versailles set in place by the inferior cowards that all the German people despised. We had been, “Stabbed in the back” as the Führer said, but everything was changing now. A new and strong Germany was set in place, and we were ready to conquer all of Europe, throwing all cowards and weaklings out of the way.

“Thank you for breakfast” I said to my mother in a rush. “I must leave now. There is a compulsorily Nazi Youth meeting today. Auf wiedersehen (Goodbye)!”

“Goodbye Hans!” my mother said with a friendly smile.

“Hans!” my father said as he stood up, “Heil Hitler!”

“Heil Hitler!” I replied as I stepped out the door. I was becoming exactly what Adolf Hitler wanted…a young German as swift as a greyhound, as tough as leather, and as hard as Krupp’s steel.
I walked out of my home and began to trundle exuberantly towards the building where the Hitler Youth held its meetings. It was a fragrant spring morning, and the air was fresh and cool. I could feel the fresh German breeze press against my skin. It was a chilly day, and snow still lay pattered along the grey uneven cobblestone road.

As I walked through Unter den Linden, I could see people making their way around the city, as they laughed and conversed together happily. The streets were filled with red Nazi flags that flew proudly in the German breeze, and everybody saluted each other with a friendly “Heil Hitler.” The linden trees along the boulevard made a beautiful canopy over the street, and the stunning Brandenburg Gate stood tall in the distance. I looked above, and I could see the bright blue sky. Every few minutes, a German military plane would soar by like a bird, humming loudly as it passed through the white clouds over the horizon. As I continued to walk, I saw Nazi soldiers marching through the city with their shiny silver helmets, and their finely tailored grey uniforms. They stood tall and proud with rifles in their hands. Military cars, tanks, and motorcycles buzzed past me, as they drove down the bumpy cobblestone street. I continued to walk through Kurfuerstendamm Street, where people filed into small restaurants and cafés with their friends to enjoy coffee and pastries such as Gebäck and Kleingebäck. The aroma of the pastries was so strong, that I could almost taste them on the tip of my tongue. The streets were filled with tall buildings and shops that were booming with business. Some shops had a star drawn on them that said “Jude (Jew)” inside of them. Germans were not to
shop at these stores. We were told to beware of the Jews, because they had caused all of Germany’s tribulations. Outside of the store, I saw a Nazi Strom Trooper beating a man with curly black hair and a long beard. He appeared to be one of the dreaded Jews, and I felt no pity for him. This man was nothing but a parasite. Although my country was in war, Berlin was full of excitement.

As I observed the newly formed German spirit, I began to think about my life under Nazi Germany. Ever since I was a young boy, I pledged allegiance to the Nazi flag, promising to fight, obey, and die for my Führer. Adolph Hitler became my idol. In school at a young age, I learned several lessons. One of these lessons involved a fox eating a rabbit. I was told that the rabbit was democracy, and that it was weak. My teachers told me that the rabbit was a coward and deserved to die. They also told me that there was no room for weaklings in this world, and that the world belongs to the strong and the brutal. I also learned that Germans are the strongest race and that we were unconquerable. According to my teachers and the Führer, all other races were inferior, especially the Jewish. Today we ruled Germany, and tomorrow we would rule the world!

I finally arrived at the meeting place, which was held in a large room. All the young men sat down in an orderly and disciplined fashion, in front of a short rotund man. His shiny black hair was neatly swept to the side. The room was uncomfortably quiet.
The man began to speak, “Seig heil (hail victory)!” he cried out piercingly with a serious look on his face.

“Heil Hitler!” we cried back. We eagerly waited to hear what he had to say.

“We have begun with the young, and we are chiselling away the old and weak. With you youngsters, we can create a new world! We want men who can suffer pain!” the man said firmly.

Across the room, I could see my friend Dominik. He was a tall boy with brown hair and blue eyes, and he always had a sombre look on his face. He was a year older than me, and he already started manning anti-aircraft batteries. Dominik also despised the Jews. He told me stories of how he helped burn down a Berlin synagogue, along with books written by Jewish authors. Every time Jews would pass on the street, he would yell “Out with their blood! You blood sucking capitalists!” He would also sing songs with hateful lyrics such as, “When Jew blood spurts from the carving knife.” Up and down the street he would sing these songs as he smashed the windows of Jewish businesses.

The rotund Nazi man announced that the older children in the Hitler Youth would have “Jew hunts” along with the Nazi Storm Troopers. We were to plunge into
nightclubs, theatres, cafés, and houses, dragging out any person that looked like a Jew, and beat them bloody on the sidewalk.

Prior to leaving the meeting, the rotund man came up to me and Dominik with two Hitler Youth knives, and two copies of Germany’s best seller, Mein Kampf (My Struggle) which was written by Adolph Hitler. The words, “Blut und Ehre!” (Blood and Honour) were engraved on the blade of the knife, along with a swastika.

“Congratulations!” said the man as he handed us the knives and books. “You earned these, and you have made the Fatherland extraordinarily proud,” he said with a grin.

“Danke (thank you),” we said taking the knives and books. Overwhelmed with pride, we began to trundle home looking forward to bringing the Fatherland and the Führer more pride.

A week later, Dominik and I began the “Jew hunt” along with the Nazi Storm Troopers. It was a lethargic and gloomy day. I could tell that a storm was coming. We decided to travel to the outskirts of Berlin, and to look inside homes for any remaining Jews. When we reached an old Jewish neighbourhood, the silence in the street was uncomfortably quiet, and the entire area was a ghost town. Dominik spotted a house with a star painted on it. Inside the star was the word - Jude (Jew).
“Climb through the window and take a look around the premise,” Dominik said, quietly. “I’ll wait here for now.”

I painstakingly crawled through the window inside the old house. It was dark and dingy inside the house, and it seemed to be abandoned. Fearful that something was lurking inside, I clutched my new Hitler Youth knife in my hand for reassurance. Just then, it began to rain and thunder. I could hear the tapping rain as it hit the roof. Lightning flashed, and thunder shook the entire house. I stepped forward inch by inch on the creaking floor until I heard someone weeping softly behind me. I turned around in a flash clutching my knife. I saw a little girl with long black hair and charcoal coloured eyes rocking back and forth in the corner. She had an armband with a yellow star on it. Inside the armband, I read the word, Jude (Jew). The girl looked at me fearfully, knowing that I was there to take her away. She was as skinny as a pole, and she looked very malnourished. Her soft eyes filled with tears. She wept quietly. I faced a decision at this point. For the first time in my life, I did not feel hatred towards a Jew. In fact, I felt ashamed that my people had done this to such an innocent being. I knelt beside her on the dirty wooden floor, opened her hand, and gave her a piece of stale bread that I left in my pocket a few days earlier. Just as I was handing the girl the piece of bread, Dominik walked into the room and stared at me, appalled at what I was doing.
“What are you doing?” Dominik said furiously. The girl beside me began to cry louder until she was screaming. “Why would you associate yourself with one of them? You back stabber!”

Before I could explain myself, Dominik ran out of the house. Within seconds a tall Nazi soldier entered the house with a rifle in his hand, and saw me standing with the Jewish girl. He grabbed the Jewish girl violently and ran out of the house. Another tall soldier entered the room, and began to reprimand me.

“You are a disgrace! You have brought us nothing but dishonour. What would the Führer say?” he said wrathfully until he was red in the face.

Before I could explain myself, he hit me impulsively in the face with the butt end of his rifle, leaving me on the floor in excruciating pain. He trudged over me in his gleaming black boots. I could feel hot blood spilling out of my nose and mouth. Dominik and the soldiers left me on the cold dirty floor in the abandoned house, without a shred of dignity. I could hear the high-pitched screaming of the small Jewish girl growing fainter as the soldiers threw her onto a truck, and drove away. Half consciously, I reached into my brown coat and took out the book Mein Kampf, staining the pages with my bloody hands. I grabbed the Hitler Youth knife that was shimmering in the light beside me, and I
began to tear the pages of the book out, shredding them to pieces with the knife. I did not want to be a Nazi anymore. In fact, I never was one.

That is where my story ends. I could tell you about what I did after being beaten, and the disappointment I brought to my parents, but that is not important. Immediately after the war, I left Germany to pursue a new life. I moved to New York City in 1946, leaving my sadistic behaviour behind. I transformed that day into a new person. I was tired of growing up in Hitler’s shadow, tired of having my head filled with lies and propaganda, and tired of older men declaring war and leaving the young to fight and die. I was brainwashed, and transformed into a mindless puppet. Today, as an 87-year-old man, I live in a country of freedom and liberties, where my descendants do not have to be puppets, and fight the war of a bloody tyrant. This was “Mein Kampf (my struggle),” but I survived it.

The consequence of the social interaction that has taken place in the classroom demonstrates cultural literacy that moves this student to action. The narrative is the product of this action. This beautifully crafted story moves the reader spiritually. It shows how the student-author-narrator steps into the shoes of the young Jewish girl, and how he understands and shares her suffering and dehumanization. His shameless acts of tyranny as a mindless Nazi puppet lead him to experience an epiphany denouncing a life
of lies, of propaganda, of violence, and of living under the shadow of a power-hungry tyrant.

The narrative shows the transformative power of engaging and interacting with cultural literacy, “I transformed that day into a new person” (student narrative). This ethnographic study has transformed us: we now understand that we have the power to make a difference.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

*I trundled to the exit door, grasped the doorknob and placed my fingers on the light switch. I switched off the classroom lights and stepped out into the bright bustling corridor. The darkness disappeared behind the classroom door of Room 204.*

-Researcher’s journal entry

Integrating various genres and multi-literacies promoted cultural understanding and empowered the Grade Nine English students to make intercultural connections that will last the rest of their lives. They collected knowledge through the social medium of the classroom blog and this enabled them to learn that people may be different on the outside but they are the same on the inside, thus incorporating cooperation and friendship. Showing diversity made the world appear like a box of different colored crayons. Tolerating and embracing diversity made the world appear like a wonderful group of crayons co-existing in one box.

Students shared their view of knowledge as an active construction of the individual or group. They were able to cross cultural borders resulting in a deeper understanding of others, and in turn, a deeper understanding of themselves. By reading, sharing, discussing and working together we have all accomplished more and we have created a
better environment to grow and learn. We have understood the importance of respect and caring for others who are different.

Open reflection and writing on our classroom blog (328 published comments; 4464 page views, 16 posts, 22 followers) encouraged students to cross cultural boundaries, to embrace the Jewish and German cultures presented through various cultural lenses and various genres, and to help understand themselves and others. Through this writing-to-learn process, students practiced "slipping under the skin of other people" (Peterson, 271); crossing borders, and in so doing, acquired an emotional sensitivity towards various cultures. Blogging allowed students the opportunity for informal “learning activities that happen outside of seminars and courses and that are not guided by teachers” (Andergassen et al., p.204, 2009). Students engaged in creative/reflective communication and critical thought. They made sense of the world around them through dialogue, reflection, writing, and sharing perspectives of the German and Jewish cultures portrayed in the various genres. They generated, gathered, and organized ideas and information to write for their audience with the intended purpose of better understanding the German and Jewish cultures, shared their knowledge, and in turn, became culturally responsive students. They added to their past knowledge by making connections and by reflecting about what they learned. The philosophy behind the educational initiative of blogging was to create” a geography of inclusion”
(Feuerverger, 2007, p. 692) within the context of understanding other cultures and in turn, about self. Learning about diversity occurred in the context of praxis; that is, the active participation in readings, discussions, writings, reflections, and artistic based tasks.

The research was rooted in constructivist theory implementing a writing-to-learn approach: students shared a view of knowledge as an active construction of the individual or group. Knowledge of cultural diversity, tolerance, and acceptance developed when students “[took] positions of topics and issues presented by others” (Mac Arthur et al., p. 237, 2006) discussed, reflected and offered their own writing commentaries. Understanding of cultural diversity grew and changed as learning progressed. This "knowledge-in-action" (Mac Arthur et al., p. 236, 2006) can be best described as knowing and doing. Such an approach to learning expanded literate thinking because the learning of the content (Holocaust Literature) increased, as did the students’ process of critical analysis, reflection, and interpretation. The various genres presented the students with multiple perspectives. Teaching perspectives became the best way for them to understand stereotypes and bias. The research showed how students gained knowledge when they read various selections and various genres that presented the German and Jewish cultures through the context of Holocaust literature, and when they wrote on topics that they found important (Applebee, 1966).
Writing, discussing, and reflecting on the classroom blog developed "students’ independence as thinkers" (Mac Arthur et al., p. 240, 2006). This methodology supported the students' learning using social scaffolding, which was most effective when, the “teacher establish[ed] an instructional context and sense of community that support[ed] reflection and thoughtfulness...fostered by writing-to-learn activities...”(Mac Arthur et al., p. 243, 2006). Classroom discussion, group work, personal and peer reflection, and blogging helped students reflect on what they learned about culture and diversity; specifically, the German and Jewish cultures, and the Holocaust. Student-engagement aligned to the Oral Communication Strand of the Grade 9 English Curriculum. They spoke and listened to communicate and learn: students "use[ed] speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes; [and they] listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

The study transformed our classroom into a borderland and assisted the grade 9 academic English students to understand that "no human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, [and] to inhabit another world" (Peterson, 275). I concur with Norton (1999) that, "Multicultural education can restore cultural rights by emphasizing cultural equality and respect, enhance the self-concepts of students, and teach respect for various cultures while teaching basic skills (Norton, p.


This study collected sufficient evidence of student learning about cultural diversity from different sources: observations, conversations, writing samples, and the artistic culminating performance task and surveys.

The research showed that students recognized the connection between reading Holocaust literature in the classroom and connecting social injustices such as racism, bullying and stereotyping in their own community. Students crossed the bridge to empathy when engaged in Holocaust literature by understanding that someone else’s suffering could have been their suffering. They connected to individual characters that existed on both sides of the fence: the young innocent German Rose Blanche, the naïve German Bruno, the heroic German Oskar Schindler, the intelligent young Jewish boy Shmuel, the Jewish victims that left behind their personal diaries, and the Jewish victims in the documentary. The students brought limited personal lived experiences to this study. This was not expected from such a young focus group; however, they actively engaged in discussions and blogging about stereotypes and the single story. The study showed that the single story of the Germans and the Jews during the Holocaust was not erased; however, this study added to the single story and altered it. It made the students more aware that the single story existed in everyone’s mind. The borderland that we created taught students to reflect on the single stories of the Holocaust after examining multiple perspectives through multiple lenses.
Our excursion into the landscape of the German and Jewish culture proved to be a journey of courage. Students were able to see the world sensitively, to shape their own reality positively, and to learn the important moral lessons of sympathy, compassion and understanding while encountering a litany of images: cattle cars filled with rotting corpses, concentration camps filled with frail bodies draped in striped pajamas, electric barbed wire fences dividing humanity, hysterical mothers desperately trying to help infant children, human ashes billowing out of chimney stacks, uniformed guards in white starched shirts selecting victims ripe for the gas chambers, frail, living bodies piled atop dead corpses, humanity attempting to justify their existence, and crossed wooden beams wrapped in barbed wire. These images and many others of despair, depravity, humiliation, degradation, and the thirst for power scattered through the various literacies, fuelled debate, discussion, and reflection among the students as they learned about others and more importantly learned their role among others; that is, their role of as responsible global citizens.

The students embarked on a journey of border crossing and discovery that resulted in authentic and meaningful learning; that is, learning that created intercultural understanding. They discussed in their blogs the current conditions within history and they discussed the power of action: any significant effort to help change the world. The salient feature of the study was the importance of individual expression and the uniqueness each student contributed. Listening, sharing, reflecting and commenting on different opinions presented through different lenses fostered moral awareness and social
injustices within the context of Holocaust literature. The participants of this study learned that not all humanity is treated equally, that not all humanity has the agency to express themselves, and that democracy is not the right of many. Students were given agency throughout this journey to express themselves freely, to examine their own lives after witnessing history through multiple genres and multiple literacies, and to make choices about equality, freedom, democracy, rights and responsibilities. The students shared limited personal experiences of bullying, racism and personal tragedy.

This ethnographic research allowed me/teacher/researcher to reflect more deeply on my life story and that of my parents. It allowed me the possibility of reflexivity: sharing my immigrant experience and pivotal moments in my education with my participants in an effort to emphasize that what happened in the past, directly affects us today. The stories presented in the literature, films, documentaries, diary entries, interviews, and newspaper reports do not exist in isolation. They allowed me, and my students to navigate through the realities of the Holocaust and to link them to our own lives and our own experiences; in turn, making global connections. The unifying link is collective responsibility: the human race is responsible for what took place, is responsible for what is happening in our personal lives, our community, our schools, our homes, and is responsibility for the consequences arising from the choices we make which will impact our future.
Although reflexivity permeated this study it was by no means the purpose of my research. My narrative together with that of my participants informed my research. This ethnographic inquiry was a co-constructed journey: the central focus of reflexive ethnographic study. It became a bricolage of experience captured through different narrative forms: scholarly articles, stories, journals, reflections, posts, conversations, and artwork. This tapestry of narrative engaged the researcher and the participants in various topics that allowed for an understanding of our world: past, present and future. The research became a collaborative work. Collectively we constructed cultural bridges between academic learning, home cultures and world cultures, promoting a curriculum that thinks about the individual, their past, and the way that past shaped their identity in the classroom and in society – a lived curriculum. The study incorporated polyvocality: the voice of the researcher, the voice of participants, the voices of the followers of our classroom blog, and the many voices of the characters in the literature, to present multiple perspectives and multiple narratives. There was a very fine balance between the voice of the participants and that of the researcher. The readers of this study should be able to view the research through the lens of the researcher, while reading and appreciating the views of the participants.

Different dynamics came together in this reflexive/ethnographic bricolage that produced a synergistic interaction. I as bricoleur constructed a puzzle of various methods, narratives, voices, and lenses where the whole became greater than the sum of
the individual components/puzzle pieces in the hope of having created a memorable experience for my participants and my readers. I certainly enjoyed experience of border crossing. It was exciting to for me to interact with the grade nine English students who demonstrated a commitment to global engagement.

Global engagement was also evident in The Pledge to End Bullying that was collaboratively written and then published as a poster to be displayed in our classroom. It was appropriate to see that students linked the events of the Holocaust to their school community. The poster which now is displayed behind the teacher’s desk in Room 204 reads:

We BELIEVE that everybody has the right to live in a community where they feel safe, included, valued and accepted regardless of their differences.

We AGREE to:

- Treat all students with kindness and respect
- Not engage in verbal, physical, or cyber bullying
- Be aware of and abide by our school’s anti-bullying policies
- Support students who have been victimized by bullies
- Speak out against all form of bullying
- Be responsible students who can make a difference
- Help others feel safe and comfortable in our school
- Live out our human values
We PLEDGE to be respectful of others in our school community and stand up against bullying whenever and wherever we see it.

This classroom pledge showed global commitment and responsibility. The border crossing experience did not simply happen; it was acted upon by caring grade nine English students.

At the Worldwide Forum of Education and Culture in Rome, Italy on November 29, 2012, United States Ambassador Lane addressed a large audience of educators. He remarked, “The world is strengthened by each culturally aware … committed person who sees him or herself as part of a global community. I am full of hope and optimism that…with the help of your students, we can improve the world we live in. I look forward having the young people that you teach deepen their involvement with the global community”. These words resonate with me and mirror my sentiments. My participants were committed to becoming culturally responsive students, and this commitment allowed them to become wanderers and border crossers. They wandered through the blood-soaked territory of Holocaust literature and crossed into new undiscovered territory of the Jewish and German cultures. This journey strengthened them by making them culturally aware and deepened their involvement with the global community.
I walk away proud of my participants phenomenal learning. I walk away with an increased awareness of the strength and fortitude of our young learners. I walk away in awe of their accomplishments.

A Board Literacy Consultant and a participant of our classroom blog mimicked my sentiments:

Just read this and had to pass it along because I thought of the phenomenal learning that you and your students experienced in you unit “Borderlands.” This quote can’t help but resonate with your students’ blog posts that express that they are forever changed because of their learning. I refer to one student’s post:

“How do I walk away from this unit? Really, I don’t walk away. I’ve been climbing a hill, and what I couldn’t see from the valleys I now see from the peaks. I now see not only cultural diversity, beauty and power, but also culturally unity, similarity and peace. The people I used to think were so different than I, and the life I used to see as a different universe from mine has now transformed into people whom I try to understand and ones that I strive to empathize. It isn’t about looking away from misunderstanding; rather, it is about walking into fog and then finding sunshine because I will never understand if I do not try. So if you asked me how I walk away from this unit, I would
tell you that I do not walk away, I only keep climbing to understanding this world and its people. Life is a journey and borderlands are the pathway.”

Here’s the quote that reminds me of [this student’s] learning; “We encounter grace anytime students stretch their minds to realize their God-give potential, wonder about new ideas, marvel at the intricate beauty of the world, strive for a more just and gentle world, and grow in love for themselves and others. This is what makes desks like altars, and all of us like sacraments pointing to the divine” (Kevin O’Brien, S.J., in The Classroom as Holy Ground: Jesuit Education and the Example of St. Ignatius).

Mr. Racco, thank you for including me in your “virtual classroom” where I experienced this grace. Peace and Prayers.

May 6, 2016

Dear Journal,

It’s been one terrific journey! I am very proud of the students’ accomplishments. I stare at the back wall of our classroom. The classroom puzzle brings back an array of images with which we all struggled, questioned, tolerated, accepted and learned. I recall the complexity of emotions cascading on us, the buzz of learning filling our ears, the silence pulling at our heartstrings, the struggle of leaping over barbed wire fences and
landing in unknown territory, the exhilaration as vibrant colors slowly surfaced on the blood–stained canvas, the stench of reality drowning smoke-filled train stations, and the awe of recognition. We were able to bring yesterday into today, and somehow have today’s generation accept the responsibility of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

I appreciated the students’ insights about how we can all be continuous learners as we discover new and different cultures. I applaud the students’ comments about recognizing the complexity of a diverse society. I guess the key is to build understanding. This can only happen with opportunities to communicate across differences and build compassion: acceptance and appreciation can be a pretty awesome experience. It was pretty refreshing to hear excitement in the students’ voices as they learned and created a borderland; however, it was even more exciting to see how they have opened their minds to continuous learning…Bravo! I suppose it is safe to say that they learned about the fact that we are all, all of us, always learning about each other; and we did accomplished this as a class community. Hey, isn’t this what the term Homosapiens means? It’s Latin for man and women KNOWING. That’s so awesome. It’s incredible that the students learned this at such a young age and in such a real way…no lesson from a textbook, no board notes, no Socratic lesson from a pulpit … simply experiencing various texts from different perspectives.

There’s a saying: The more you know, the more you realize what you don’t know.” Living with uncertainty makes us uneasy. But that is a good thing because it
helps us seek understanding, and what better way to live? I know my students understood this, and what impressed me most was that they saw the application from the reading to their own lives/relationships. Excellent! I have so much more to say Journal. Please indulge me …

I was so inspired to read how inspired the students were to carry forth the spirit of good people…people like Oskar Schindler. Many said that they wanted to bring peace to others. I guess it’s good to hear that this teaching inspired them to bring peace to others; not only the people in our backyard, but to others beyond. I congratulate all of them for showing such passion and energy in their words. Their words give me hope; they’re heroes. Whenever I feel overwhelmed with the bigness of the situation, I think of our heroes. I’m thinking right now of Mother Theresa and of Jean Vanier. They too felt overwhelmed when they saw the overwhelming poverty in Calcutta. They knew they couldn’t help the tens of thousands of people suffering before them, so they just took two out of that misery – two by two and eventually… small loving actions do make a huge impact.

I don’t know if the world “difference” still has the same effect on these students as it did before they began this unit of study, but I do know that they now venture beyond the exterior. But are we really different? Do we not all have the same basic needs for safety, belonging, food, shelter, and love? What unite us are these same basic needs. Imagine what can happen if we learned to open up our community to encircle ‘others’,
what might happen to those borders? Eventually disappear? So, they did understand: to make a difference we have to embrace difference – cross that border!

The puzzle piece I stare at shows that they thought about and questioned issues that mattered to them; not just in school but also in their personal lives – stuff that is relevant to them. They embodied the ideal learner; they made the connections. They’ve learned the transformative power of learning about an issue from various perspectives and a variety of genres. They now understand that seeing an issue through a single lens can never render the full story. This alone is, huge!

I’ve always said that I would visit Auschwitz, and someday soon, I will. However, when I visit and meet with survivors of the Holocaust here in Toronto, I’m shocked how their love and hope shines brightly in them. They have the hope because of young people, like my students, who have learned a huge life lesson and wish to live differently as a result. As the survivors age, they urge us to carry on this message for them, after they are gone. "You are the witnesses, now" they say. We have been witness to the horrors that can happen when only differences are seen and used to justify injustice. We are now witnesses of hope that comes from seeing that the human thirst for justice can never be quenched.

To my students I say, “Thank you for being witnesses!”

Mr. Racco
This research paper that I present to my readers is a collaborative document: a mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participants in and out of the classroom. This study “becomes one of learning to tell and live a new mutually constructed account of inquiry in teaching and learning. What emerge from this mutual relationship are new stories of [teacher/researcher] and learners as curriculum makers, stories that hold new possibilities for both researchers and teachers and for those who read their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.12).
Chapter 6: Limitations of the Study

The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse.

- Helen Keller

This chapter aims to consider limitations of my qualitative research study. The suggestions made stem from my reflections of this bricolage and Vernon’s (2007) proposals of developing a new way to approach increasingly complex and sophisticated data acquisition and information structures in educational research.

As I embarked on this study, I did not approach it as a bricoleur; rather, the bricolage approached me. As it developed, it morphed into a bricolage. Scholarly writings sparked personal journal writings; observations took the shape of dialogues, reflections became classroom discussions, and unifying threads of discussion became posts on the classroom blog. The traditional paper became a tapestry of narratives, often fragmented. I was left with different puzzle pieces that had to be joined together to show the process and the outcome of our learning. The research considered numerous representations of reality simultaneously. This concept broke away from more traditional research concerned with sequence and linearity. The bricolage was like a crystal that is
ever-changing and simultaneously refracting and reflecting the “light” of the social world. The comparison is clear: the bricolage offers research and researchers new patterns and new shapes – unanticipated images that emerge throughout the research. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, “we must seek understanding from a multiplicity of perspectives in order to gain a truer picture of the nature of anything that we are questioning … we must delve deeply into a multiplicity of perspectives in order to arrive at a core of meaning that each prospective provides” (Cooper, 13). Bricolage was the final product.

Can bricolage, this fluid and flexible research method, be taken one step further? If we take into consideration the leaps and bounds of technological advancement in the last ten years, then we should consider the notion of bricolage beyond the realm of the printed word. I concur with Vernon that the idea of a final product (the metaphor of a quilt or the puzzle) will be replaced by a set of fluid interconnected images and representations using the virtual world: the application of the Worldwide Web as an organisational and learning device. We must also consider virtual research methodology as an evolutionary model, lifting research beyond the realm of the printed word.

Virtuality will transform fieldwork, type of data, and accessibility of data, and the relationship between researcher and participant(s). The researcher and the participants will be seen as “global players”. Virtuality will take us beyond postmodernism. In post-
modern research the research relies on metaphor, thick description, and literature review; however, hypertext and icons will replace metaphor and thick description by allowing readers to click on the words to reveal a vast network of incredibly thick definitions and descriptions. Literature reviews are fixed; however, virtuality will allow looping searching and unlimited sifting of scholarship. Future educational researchers will embrace the virtual world allowing for new research places, and new research methods. Virtuality will be the new epistemology that is beyond bricolage. We must now consider that the final product: quilt, puzzle, or collage is no longer a final product. With virtuality and the promise of all these new realities suggest “increasing interactivity” (Vernon, 207). This interactivity is only available in virtual space.

We must also consider that fieldwork will take on a new meaning. We no longer have to work in a fixed time or space. We can now conduct our research in a new field that offers unlimited possibilities with technologies such as Internet, Webcam, Skype and Icons, to name a few. Our data need no longer be in simple text, but with a click of the mouse our data can be received as voice, image or text. The researcher and the researched can simultaneously inhabit virtual space; therefore, the notion of, “moving from fieldwork to field notes to text to interpretation to research report” (Vernon, 207) can now be a reality. “Certainly the time has come to consider how educational researchers will write, inscribe themselves in the future by embracing the simultaneous
participatory digital media a research place, research method and virtuality as an epistemology that is beyond bricolage” (Vernon, 215).

This study did allow the students to learn beyond the confines of the classroom. The blog provided them their own time and space to engage in collaborative learning in a virtual classroom; however, there were limitations to the range of freedom offered. I believe that my future research could have provided a larger field of learning by allowing participants freedom to publish their own posts rather than simply respond to my posts. Although this was a very organized method of organizing and collecting responses, the opportunity to post questions and comments that come to mind as students engage in the blog can produce rich dialogue and deeper learning. Students can discuss what is important to them rather than simply responding to a prompt or question offered by the researcher/teacher. The metaphor of the rhizome best illustrates this branching off into sub-discussions from which new simultaneous discussions are created.

Another consideration for future research is to provide students the possibility to engage in shorter, more immediate writing through tweets. Offering a Twitter link to the classroom blog will make learning more immediate and more real: there will be no need to wait for the next post to be published. Twittering adds another dimension to learning: immediate, spontaneous responses to peer posts. It also adds another dimension to
research: a larger field of research, and the possibility for the researcher to provide immediate feedback to many participants simultaneously.

The classroom blog offered in this study was very limited when considering interactivity. Although the unit offered multiple genres and the invitation to participate in multiple literacies, the participation was limited by time restraints and the genre remained accessible to students for only a brief period of time. Future research involving multiple genres should provide links to these genres on the classroom blog making them readily accessible to students throughout the duration of the research. Participants may decide to revisit specific works and then comment on them. They may want to simultaneously share multiple genres among peers to strengthen learning, to provoke further questioning or to present new perspectives; therefore making all works accessible at any given time is important.

Due to the vastness of virtual research, I would embrace conducting the research using multiple researchers working simultaneously in the field(s) of research: the classroom, virtual classroom, and the Worldwide Web. This could help eliminate any research bias presented by the sole-researcher, and could curtail validity issues of accurately representing the lived experiences of the participants. Using multiple researchers would provide multiple researcher-perspectives and increase the polyvocality of the project.
Incorporating virtuality in research will make for more dynamic and interactive research taking us beyond bricolage.
Creating a Geography of Cultural Awareness

References


Appendix A

Classroom Blog Posts

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

**Final Post: Meta Cognitive Reflection**

Question: Now that you have experienced the unit on Creating Borderlands what knowledge, questions, concerns, uncertainties and emotions do you walk away with?

Please limit your response to 150 words. You may select any form of writing you wish: paragraphs, letter, journal, chart, graph, bullets, numerical list, or any other form.

18 comments

Thursday, March 22, 2012

**Post # 14: Invitation to Parents/Guardians**

This is an opportunity for parents/guardians of our ENG1DY students to post their comments, questions, and suggestions on the terrific work the students have done and continue to do in this International/Multicultural multi-genre unit.

5 comments
Monday, March 19, 2012

Post #13: Children's Literature Selections: Printed Fictional Text & Illustrations

Students are asked to post their comments/reflections on the two children's literature selections *Rose Blanche* and *The Crayon Box That Talked*. Discuss the themes in each and comment on the power of the illustrations and the printed text.

21 comments

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Post #12: Diary Entries: Informational Text

Students are required to offer their personal reflections on *We are Witnesses* diary entries and our group presentations on these readings. How does this informational writing help you border cross into the world of the Jewish and German peoples?

11 comments
Tuesday, March 6, 2012

Post #11: The Newspaper: Informational Text

How does Journalism help shape your understanding of German/Jewish cultures?
Discuss the impact of headlines, and comment on the point of views presented by the news story.

27 comments

Monday, March 5, 2012

Post #10: Sharing of Schindler's List: Film Text

Students are required to spend some time reading and reflecting on peer's initial posts to Schindler's List. Please comment on two peer posts. For each of your posts begin your comments/reflections with, "My response to Post #9 written by (name of student) is..."

22 comments
Thursday, March 1, 2012

**Post #9: Schindler's List: Film** Text

Students are asked to post their reactions, comments, questions, and opinions to the film *Schindler's List* by Stephen Spielberg. Relate your comments to other genres of Holocaust literature that we have studied thus far. [21 comments]

Thursday, February 23, 2012

**Post #8 - Reflections on The Single Story**: Digital Text

Students are required to spend some time reading and reflecting on peer's initial posts to the TED Talk "The Single Story". Please comment on two peer posts. For each of your posts begin your comments/reflections with, "My response to Post #7 written by (name of student) is..."

[19 comments]

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

**Post #7: The Single Story**: Digital Text

Students are asked to post their reactions, comments, questions, and opinions on "The Single Story". How does the theme (main message) of this discussion influence your understanding & views of the Jewish and German cultures?

[27 comments]
Tuesday, February 21, 2012

**Post #6: Reflections on Documentary**: Informational Text

Students are required to spend some time reading and reflecting on peer's initial posts to the documentary *Night and Fog*. Please comment on two peer posts. For each of your posts begin your comments/reflections with, "My response to Post #5 written by (name of student) is..."

22 comments

Friday, February 17, 2012

**Post #5: The Documentary**: Film Text

We are building cultural awareness through a different medium: The documentary. Share your thoughts and feeling about *Night and Fog* - a documentary that shows man's violence toward man and presents the unsettling suggestion that such horrors could come again. Has this documentary shed new light on Jewish and German culture? Has it increased your knowledge of these two cultures? How does this relate to the fable and the interview? Do these images make you pose questions about your own family culture/s?

28 comments
Thursday, February 16, 2012

**Post #4 - Novel and Interview**: Fictional Printed Text & Digital Text

Inter-cultural connections: Discovering and learning about others promotes cultural awareness and fosters reflection about our own culture resulting in culturally responsive citizens of the world.

Reflect on this statement using the fable and the interview. In the interview section also discuss how the interview has shed new light, new points of view, new questions about the Jewish and German cultures.

25 comments

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

**Post #3: Final Reactions To Fable**: Fictional Printed Text

Students are asked to post their final reactions, comments, questions, and opinions on *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

24 comments
Tuesday, February 14, 2012

**Post #2: Reflections To Fable:** Fictional Printed Text

Students are required to spend some time reading and reflecting on peer's initial posts to *Boy In The Striped Pajamas*. Please comment on two peer posts. For each of your posts begin your comments/reflectios with, "My response to Post #1 written by (name of student) is..."

26 comments

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Thursday, February 9, 2012

**Post #1 Initial Reactions To Fable:** Fictional Printed Text

Students are asked to post their *initial* reactions, comments, questions, and opinions on *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. 24 comments
## Appendix B

### Genres and Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy in the Striped Pajamas</td>
<td>John Boyne</td>
<td>Fable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are Witnesses</td>
<td>Jacob Boas</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Interview with John Boyne</td>
<td>David Fickling</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Single Story</td>
<td>Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie</td>
<td>Digital Media – Ted Talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night And Fog</td>
<td>Alain Resnais</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schindler's List</td>
<td>Steven Spielberg</td>
<td>Motion Picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Blanche</td>
<td>Roberto Innocenti</td>
<td>Children’s Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crayon Box that Talked</td>
<td>Shane Derolf</td>
<td>Children’s Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Stories</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
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Appendix C

Photo Stream

Sample of artistic puzzle piece: Culminating Performance Task
Sample of artistic puzzle piece: Culminating Performance Task
Sample of artistic puzzle piece: Culminating Performance Task
Sample of artistic puzzle: Culminating Performance Task
Appendix D

Survey

1. **Are you:**
   - Male
   - Female

2. **Have you ever participated in a blog?**
   - Yes
   - No

3. **Was this your first classroom blogging experience?**
   - Yes
   - No

4. **What expression best describes this blogging experience?**
   - A great learning experience
   - I wish classroom blogs were part of every course
   - I enjoyed posting my ideas and reading/reflecting on the ideas of my peers
   - I could do without blogging
5. **Rate this blogging experience.**

   Excellent
   
   Very good
   
   Good
   
   Satisfactory
   
   Poor

6. **What aspect of classroom blogging did you enjoy most?**

   Posting my own comments
   
   Reading, reflecting and responding to others comments
   
   Reading others comments about my posts
   
   Reading teacher’s comments about the students’ posts

7. **What aspect of classroom blogging did you least enjoy?**

   Posting my own comments
   
   Reading, reflecting and responding to others comments
   
   Reading others comments about my posts
   
   Reading teacher’s comments about the students’ posts
8. What part of classroom blogging was the best learning experience?

Posting my own comments

Reading, reflecting and responding to others comments

Reading others comments about my posts

Reading teacher’s comments about the students’ posts

9. After posting on the classroom blog, how did you feel?

“Thank goodness it’s over.”

“I learned something new.”

“This is pointless.”

“I can’t wait to find out what my peers posted.”

“I’m looking forward to our next blogging assignment.”

“I only complete it because it’s evaluated.”

“I’m curious as to what my peers have to say about my post.”

10. Has this classroom blogging experience helped you learn about other cultures?

Yes

No
11. Has this classroom blogging experience helped you understand the importance of border crossing and intermingling with other cultures?

Yes

No

12. Did the multi-genre unit on the Holocaust make you reflect more on:

The Jewish culture
Your own culture
The German culture
Culture in general

13. Which genre did you enjoy most?

The novel: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*
The documentary: *Night and Fog*
The children’s story: *The Crayon Box That Talked*
The diary entries: *We are Witnesses*
The film: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*
The film: *Schindler’s List*
The interview: *Interview with John Boyne*
The Ted Talk: *The Single Story*
The newspaper articles
The children’s story: *Rose Blanche*
14. Which genre was the most effective in learning about the Jewish culture?

The novel: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The documentary: *Night and Fog*

The children’s story: *The Crayon Box That Talked*

The diary entries: *We are Witnesses*

The film: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The film: *Schindler’s List*

The interview: *Interview with John Boyne*

The Ted Talk: *The Single Story*

The newspaper articles

The children’s story: *Rose Blanche*

15. Which genre was the most effective in learning about the German culture

The novel: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The documentary: *Night and Fog*

The children’s story: *The Crayon Box That Talked*

The diary entries: *We are Witnesses*

The film: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The film: *Schindler’s List*

The interview: *Interview with John Boyne*

The Ted Talk: *The Single Story*
The newspaper articles

The children’s story: *Rose Blanche*

16. Which genre made you reflect about your own culture?

The novel: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The documentary: *Night and Fog*

The children’s story: *The Crayon Box That Talked*

The diary entries: *We are Witnesses*

The film: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The film: *Schindler’s List*

The interview: *Interview with John Boyne*

The Ted Talk: *The Single Story*

The newspaper articles

The children’s story: *Rose Blanche*

17. Which genre created the most classroom discussion?

The novel: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The documentary: *Night and Fog*

The children’s story: *The Crayon Box That Talked*

The diary entries: *We are Witnesses*

The film: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

The film: *Schindler’s List*

The interview: *Interview with John Boyne*
The Ted Talk: *The Single Story*

The newspaper articles

The children’s story: *Rose Blanche*

18. **What part of this unit did you enjoy the most?**

Reading/ viewing/ listening to the different genres

Classroom discussions

Blogging

Culminating Performance Task: puzzle piece presentations

19. **Rate the Creating Borderlands unit:**

   - Excellent
   - Very good
   - Good
   - Satisfactory
   - Poor

20. **Would you enjoy participating in a similar unit where you had the opportunity to intermingle with different cultures?**

   - Yes
   - No
Appendix E

Here’s What You’ve Said You’ve Learned

Student Z ---

What: The **innocence** of children in the face of horror

How: *Rose Blanche*: children’s literature

What: There is always someone on the other side

How: Newspaper articles

What: The **evil** of mankind

How: *Night and Fog*: documentary

What: **Acceptance**: “To succeed we must embrace all the uniqueness in the world”

How: Borderland unit
Student D ---

What: **Acceptance:** “After completing this unit I am more welcoming of other cultures...stereotypes and the single story make no sense...you can’t judge a book by its cover.”

How: *The Single Story:* Ted Talk; *The Crayon Box that Talked:* children’s literature

Student V ---

What: **Tolerance:** “When we begin to border cross and try to make a difference we are going to experience problems but we must continue to try.”

How: CPT: puzzle piece presentations

Student I ---

What: **Stereotypes:** “In life we have to realize that everyone deserves chances, and there are a million things...to think about before judging.

How: *Schindler’s List:* film; *Boy in the Striped Pajamas:* film
Student J ---

What: **Friendship:** “Every person is unique and has their own story and by learning their individual story, we are able to make friends we never thought we could have.”

How:  Borderland unit

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Student F---

What: **Cultural unity and peace:** “The people I used to think were so different then I, and the life I used to see as a different universe from mine has now transformed into people who I try to understand and lives that I strive to empathize. It isn’t about looking away from misunderstanding; rather, it is about walking into fog and then finding sunshine because I will never understand if I do not try.”

How:  Borderland unit

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Student C---

What: **Understanding:** “Before starting the unit, I did not even know what a borderland was.”
How: Borderland unit

Student S---

What: **Global cultural awareness**: “…when we focused on the Holocaust, I thought we’d simply be recounting the events and learning about how it affected the lives of only Germans and Jews. However, after all we analyzed the various genres in our unit; it amazed me to see how the understanding of that specific example of the effects of the single story can be applied to almost any situation in my daily life. I feel that throughout our unit we really learned to open up about issues that matter, and I feel that we have succeeded in creating a borderland not only between the four walls of our classroom, but also in each of our personal lives.

How: Multi-genre focus on the Holocaust

Student G---

What: **Border Crossing**: “… break down the unjust fences that are separating you from embracing someone else's culture.”
How: *Schindler’s List*: film

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Student T---

What: **Social Action**: “I walk away from the unit on Borderlands with a desire to make a change in the world and work for equality and justice. After watching the film, I realized that I too could work so that all people could be treated with equality and respect.”

How: *Schindler’s List*: film

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Student H---

What: **Equality**: “Why do we separate ourselves from others and define ourselves as different? Instead of pushing away our differences, we should be aware of them. Instead of rudely pointing them out, we should include them. And think, before we judge.”

How: Borderland unit
Student P---

What: **Thirst for knowledge**: “…my mind and heart are left unsatisfied. At first I thought I knew everything there was to know… I was supposed to hate Germans because they were bad, and feel sorry for the Jews because they were the victims. It was like a slap across the face. …There is another side to the truth, to the story? I was confused on what to feel and how to respond.”


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Student J---

What: **Prejudgment**: “One major thing that stuck out to me was to not judge a person based on what I see. They have their own lives that I know nothing about. Looking around to my own classmates I realized that I might have judged them without even getting to know them. In fact I know I did… the details of every side of every story is what makes the truth, not the things we hear from someone else.”
How: Borderland unit

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Student L---

What: **Global responsibility:** “Beyond this first fence lie meadows and valleys of other cultures, stories, and stereotypes, and along with them lay more fences that need to be crossed to achieve peace and understanding.”

How: Multi-genre focus on the Holocaust

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Student O---

What: **Global responsibility:** As an individual I cannot bring world peace, and I doubt I’m expected to, but I can help it along, everyone can help it along, and maybe one day all our little ‘peaces’ will make “one big peace”

How: *Night and Fog*: documentary; CPT: puzzle piece presentations
Student P---

What: **World Peace:** “I became a much more open minded person not only to what causes fences between people, races and cultures (being single stories and stereotypes) but how I should gain different perspectives of one story so I gain a full picture... find myself stricken with the idea that we still face racism, discrimination and brutal hatred across the world, and replay our ugly pasts… hope is that if people slowly start to eradicate the single stories in their heads at a young age that we can slowly gain our way to a slightly more peaceful world and learn from human kinds mistakes.”

How: Multi-genre focus on the Holocaust

Student R---

What: **Social Action:** “what matters is what you do to contribute to our society. When I look back in history it does not matter the information on a person, what I care about are their actions.

How: Borderland Unit
Student W---

What: Cultural Awareness and Stereotypes: ``This unit had a great impact on me. It has changed the way I view other people, how I perceive the world and more importantly the way I approach new situations. I was able to learn more about my own classmates. How they thought, what their feelings on the topic [the single story] were and if any of us though alike. … I was able to see the importance of living unified without any borders. Respecting the other culture is the most important step after acknowledging that it is there``

How: The Single Story: Ted Talk; CPT: puzzle piece presentations
Appendix F
Letter to Parents

Dear Parents / Guardians,

This semester Mr. Racco's ENG 1D1 Grade 9 English class will participate in a class blog. The purpose of this activity is to promote cooperative learning in a virtual space, to meet, learn, understand and accept various cultures through different genres: the novel, the diary, the film, the documentary, and children's short story. Students will reflect, respond, and critique each other's posts based on their understanding of the Jewish and German cultures and Holocaust literature and film.

The creative writing activities posted are culminating tasks that stem from the reading and discussion of the various genres. The students' responses will inform our understanding of the preconceptions of different cultures, and how these relate and affect our daily lives.

The aim is to create an awareness of various cultures in our daily lives and to create a borderland where various cultures come together to learn and accept one another.

Given the sensitive nature of this learning activity, please be aware of the following:
The blog will not be published on a public listing; this prevents anyone who has not been personally given the site's URL from accessing the blog.

Since only my students will be given the web address for this blog, they are asked not to share it with anyone except their parents/guardians.

Administrators Board Curriculum Consultants and parents will be given the URL and invited to participate.

On the blog site, I have posted the "ground rules" - the parameters, which will help to ensure a safe and enriched learning environment. Should there be a breach in these ground rules at any point, this activity will cease.

I encourage parents / guardians to enjoy my students' reflective responses on this blog. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the school.

Sincerely,

Mr. Racco, Department Head of English
Appendix G

Ground Rules

The following are the ground rules for classroom blogging:

1. Academic language only please! Students are assessed and/or evaluated and therefore, the change in format does not translate into a change in expectations in terms of the kind of language and phrasing that is acceptable. This includes refraining from the use of text messaging language systems.

2. Inevitably debate will arise since students are expected to comment on their peers' postings. That said, personal attacks and offensive language and remarks will not be tolerated. If this happens at any point, the class blog will be shut down and serious consequences will follow.

3. Meet deadlines. Each posting comes with a date and time stamp.

4. If students refer to information from other websites in your postings, the expectation for citing your resources remains the same. At the end of your posting, always include the URL for any sites that are referred to in the posting, in addition to proper citation within the text, depending on the teacher's preference.
5. Students are asked not to share the blog’s URL with their friends. The class blog is for students, parents, Administrators, Board Curriculum only.

6. Parents will be made aware of the URL and a notice to parents in advance to using the blog in class will be sent.

7. Administration (along with the Department Head of English) will be made aware of the URL and be made aware that this software will be used in our course.
Appendix H: Conversation with a Colleague

(January 11, 2012)

R (researcher): So what do you think? Will this borderland idea work?

C (colleague): I think it is a very interesting project. I think it will work well for the kids. The area that I am particularly interested is in where they will learn about empathy and how they can put themselves in other peoples’ shoes.

R: Yes … that’s basically my goal.

C: That’s great … interesting!

R: I mean through Holocaust Literature to show them that we should step into other peoples’ shoes and realize that their suffering could one day be our suffering.

C: And then, when you mention navigation, that really brings to mind how the kids will, you know, eventually learn how to move their way through everything that they’re learning; what they’re getting to know for the first time. You mention graphic images or images as well as stories that are being told from various perspectives of the victims and the victimizers. I think that is very important. That word navigate though, raises some questions for me.

R: Good questions or bad questions? Like concerns?

C: Yes, I guess so. Because on the one hand…yes they are going to be … you expect them to eventually be able to navigate themselves through it, but at the beginning it is understood that a teacher has to guide them.

R: Yes. Right.

C: I think that that’s where a teacher might be a little bit, not reluctant but maybe hesitant sometimes, because you know, there’s a risk involved? There is a certain responsibility that a teacher has to set it up right so that the students are steered in the right direction. Crossing borders can be dangerous. Right?
R: Absolutely!

C: Because by crossing borders you never know what the effect will be on the person doing the crossing. As much as you are there to hold their hand at the beginning, there is going to be some wandering. They will be entering territories that might affect them even in a more negative way. So, if as a teacher you are not psychologically preparing the kids, then it might have an adverse effect? And then, at a certain point they have to navigate themselves, so they might be entering some dangerous territory without the guidance of a teacher.

R: What do you mean by dangerous?

C: By dangerous I mean how it affects them psychologically and emotionally.

R: The Holocaust literature? The images…?

C: The images in particular. I remember watching the documentary Night and Fog and how many people in the classroom were walking out. This was in my first or second year of university. And while you would expect that people would walk out in a scene where they actually see, you know, it happening; that these people are being killed, just the panning of the camera over piles of human hair was stomach turning enough for people to walk out. There was disgust; there was this feeling that it was almost being imposed on us because we would never perhaps have ventured to see it on our own.

R: Do you think that my students- the Grade Nine students are too young to navigate into the realities of the Holocaust? Because, I don’t want to dwell on the negative images; although there are negative images, what I want to dwell on is their sense of being responsible and culturally aware students.

C: And I think that’s very important.

R: Do you think that they’re too immature for that?

C: No…I think it’s important that they’re exposed to these types of images every day on the newspaper, even on YouTube, and that they are on their own sort of finding these things on the Internet every single day without the guidance of adults.

R: Sure. They navigate the World Wide Web themselves.

C: This is at least being guided. The thing is from the perspective of a teacher who has to set this up, these are the kinds of things that might make it difficult for a teacher, or make the teacher feel uncomfortable.
R: The only thing that I look at is that I want them to navigate across the border just to learn the different cultures, but at the same time, I will be a participant – I will navigate along with them, not because they need me as a security blanket, but simply because I want to experience what they experience and hopefully make my study richer by doing that.

C: Yes.

R: And it is kind of interesting that you also mentioned that they are not only border crossers, but you mentioned the word wander. I think that I need to allow them to wander a little bit in these new territories or across these boundaries because every time we do cross boundaries we tend to wander a bit because we are either in awe, or fascinated by it, or in shock, or whatever the emotional response is.

C: Right. And as a teacher we have to allow them…there have to be allowances for them to wander and to show curiosity, even if it borders on insensitivity to the subject, because they are coming into it with preconceptions. But in a way, with proper guidance, this has to be entertained. If not, we can’t analyze those preconceptions and we can’t balance them with more mature truths. So, it really does require that a teacher comes into it prepared, but at the same time there has to be some leeway. So a teacher has to make some allowances, but also be able to pull the reigns as needed. There will be some preconceptions that will bring out insensitivity.

R: I think that the whole issue of blogging is going to set some pretty clear parameters as to how far they can stray and wander across those borders. But you know what? I really would like to give them the freedom to wander as far as they want. And when I say wander, I don’t mean to wander aimlessly...to wander in a guided sense and also to wander back into their own lives because they are going to see the culture of others and hopefully that is going to make them reflect, or if we want to use the word wander, wander back and maybe talk about their own personal experiences of being bullied like the Jewish people were bullied – if that is what they perceive, or maybe they’ll take these discussions back home and talk to their parents/grandparents about how they were treated as perhaps immigrants into a new land. So, yes, they are going to be wandering across a lot of different borders: cultural borders and even personal borders, but I think they should be responsible enough to understand that we are viewing part of history and hopefully to learn about history and not to make the same mistakes again.

C: And the other thing is with wandering, there may not be answers to some of the questions they have. They have to be prepared. There has to be an acceptance of this. They are learning. It prepares them for higher level thinking in that way. There’s not
going to be “What’s the answer to this question?” type of work. There is going to be a lot of wandering; a lot of ambiguity that is the very nature of life itself.

R: Absolutely.

C: And, in doing that, they are better able, I think, to show compassion not only for victims but also for the victimizers. A lot of times there will not be answers to the questions of why these people did what they did to hurt others. They are learning how to sort of understand that. How are they going to make sense of that in their world? And then that whole question of how do you find grace in humanity if there is so much ugliness in the world to which they will be exposed. Some of them may have heard of such things, but when they see a picture it’s going to really hit them. Oh my goodness, this really happened! And if this is being taught in a Christian school, for example, their experiences will be very different and it allows them to put themselves in the shoes of people that are of a different faith, which is good. But how can they then justify, how can they make sense of the world when all this ugliness comes out and there are no answers to the questions that they are asking? I thought of the subject of the book *The Bite of the Mango*…

R: Yes, by Mariatu Kamara. When she came to visit our school…

C: Yes, a very similar experience; she suffered when they cut off her hands and one of the questions one of the students asked her was, “Have you since been back to Sierra Leone? She said, “Yes, I have.” Another question was, “What did you say to the children soldiers that cut off your hands? She is friends with them. Of course there were other questions: “How could you be friends with people that did this to you? And she said something to the effect of, “Well, after you’ve experienced so much evil, you can’t help but see the goodness in the world.” This is not what we expected her to say.

R: For sure.

C: That just goes to show that, with this experience, regardless of how awkward or how difficult it is for these students, it may put them in a better position not only to notice the ugliness of the world but also to, at least, look for where grace lies in humanity and how to make sense of this world.

R: You know, I’m prepared to …I’m going to have to accept different emotions elicited from the literature, the movie, the film, the documentary …I mean fear, anger, frustration,. There will probably be tears as well, but I’m hoping that they can manage and understand why it is that we are showing these atrocities of historical reality. It really links back to … well it happened long ago, but how does this now link to our world and what does it mean to our world? Hopefully we can bring it back to the issues of
accepting others and issues of bullying in our own community and in our own school for that matter. Hopefully that will be our outcome, and getting them aware that there are different cultures and it’s important to understand different cultures and not remain isolated in a cocoon.

C: I’m reminded of this whole idea of inviting them to search further. I mean, this is not just a task; it’s not just that you have to navigate; you have to cross this border. It’s the whole idea that it’s an invitation; that they are being invited to cross this border with the teacher as guide and with their peers along the way…

R: Yes, and hopefully even with their parents.

C: …and with their parents. And the choices that they are being offered from the teacher for the various assignments will give them the opportunity to choose. Maybe there’ll be certain borders that they want to cross, and others that they are not ready to cross, but there is always that curiosity because of what is presented to them.

R: Yes, exactly. Regarding the issue of curiosity that you talk about; hopefully their peer posts, and the sharing of their posts with their peers on the classroom blog will arouse a lot of questions and a lot of curiosity and this will eliminate the fear of crossing that border because – hey my peers crossed it so maybe I’ll cross it too and I want to experience it too.

C: You almost want them to get to the point where they are at a place where they are hesitant to cross, but eventually, they cross it, or at least they express a curiosity about it. And, in asking the question about what’s on the other side will get them to think about it. And, when they are ready, somewhere down the line, in their more adult years, they can harken back to their learning experience inside the classroom which might give them more confidence to follow up on that invitation that started in high school.

R: You know the real invitation is for them to step into another person’s shoes, and not to prejudge, and to try to eradicate that single story that exists in our minds about certain cultures and certain races, and to understand that you have to step in a person’s shoes to understand them. Once you do understand them, hopefully there is this embracing of cultures; embracing of others.

C: This type of learning offered to your students reminds me of an experience I had going to a contemporary art exhibit…I think we spoke of this once before? Where there was this old piece of furniture at the Art Gallery of Ontario and I was expecting to see modern pieces because it was contemporary art, but there was this old piece: a chest with many drawers and it was in the middle of the room. This is not what I had expected to see there. So, well I’m on my own. So in terms of navigation, I’m not with anybody
else…so it was my choice to go to the center of the room because it sort of stood out among all the other pieces of art. And of course, one of the drawers was opened, and something was sticking out of it. Out of curiosity I went over…and it didn’t say, “do not touch the drawers” so I pulled the drawer out even more, and inside… just a corner of a photograph was sticking out…so I actually had to pull the photograph out to see what the photograph was. It was of a woman being tortured. So I guess the point of the artwork was to…you know…it sort of evoked my curiosity. I felt like I was tricked, though. I felt like, Oh my goodness I didn’t want to see that…I threw the photo back in, I shut the drawer, I looked around because I felt that maybe I shouldn’t have opened it. I had all these weird sort of emotions happening: on the one hand I was disgusted by what I saw; on the other hand I was very mad because I didn’t want that to happen. I was…I felt tricked by it. But I never forgot it. I carried that with me over the years as a reminder of how effective contemporary art can be to highlight some atrocities of history. I can’t place it in its political time frame or exact historical moment…

R: It? The torture?

C: Yes, the picture of the woman being tortured. I don’t know if it was the Holocaust, I don’t know if it was…I don’t know. But I have never forgotten it. I’m still disgusted. I can still talk about it though, and it’s raised a lot of questions. The only other thing I remember from that art show were Andy Warhol-like photos of Elizabeth Taylor – before and after; a photo of her looking dreadful with no make-up on and her hair haggard. And another picture of her in her prime all done-up nicely: her violet eyes, and whatnot. That’s the only other thing that I remember from that exhibit. So with all of those emotions and with me feeling the way I did, it helped me: it allowed me to put myself in the shoes of the victim because I felt I could relate to the woman-victim.

For me, that’s an example of crossing a border. I didn’t want to go there, but I did. But that was me on my own: without the guidance of a tour guide or a teacher. So, I guess you would want the students to get to the point where they wander and then they find themselves upon something that they would not otherwise venture to see, but they take that initiative after they sort have been guided along the way; the idea that there’ll be more border crossing along the way.

R: That’s interesting. Well I guess we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it. Our school motto: To Learn, To Care, and To Act is going to be of central importance in this study.

C: And questions about our own faith and how we use our faith to learn about others?

R: Yes. Faith, and how do we tap into that faith?
C: Also the questions: What keeps us in line with our faith? Why don’t we lose our faith when there are all these ugly things happening in the world? This is not something that happened in the past. We learned from the author who spoke about her experiences in Sierra Leone that evil happens all over the world; even now as we speak. We can’t change what is happening, but we definitely can make better sense of ourselves as good individuals in the face of these atrocities and all the ugliness in the world. Maybe our faith can strengthen that regardless of whether we share the faith of the victims or the victimizers.

R: This is true. Basically my intention is to continue to build…and here I’m going to use the metaphor of the bridge… the cultural bridge…

C: Yes, I like that.

R: … between the academic learning, the learning that happens at home, and the learning about the world in general. Hopefully, by integrating a bunch of different genres in this unit, I’ll promote this cultural discovery, and cultural understanding. Hopefully foster intercultural connections between them – my students, the German culture and the Jewish culture.

C: Can I ask a question? How well-studied on the subject should the teacher be before venturing into study of the Holocaust with the students?

R: I went through all the different genres: the short stories, the films, and the documentaries. I experienced these first and I did have to question whether these would be too harsh for my students. But the bottom line is that, I want to put my own academic understanding of the Holocaust aside, and allow them to experience it amongst themselves, and see what they arrive at, through their own collaboration on the classroom blog.

I’m not going to drive towards any bridge or border. They are going to have to arrive at their own bridges and cross their own bridges when the time comes, or cross the border when the time comes.

C: If the teacher is not well-studied on the Holocaust, it’s still O.K.?

R: Yes, because I think the intent is to allow them to discover on their own. Because I’m doing this research, and I’m also the teacher, I also want to be a participant in the study so that way I can journey along with them and observe and record how these students
react, what their emotions are, and what they learn from border crossing into different cultures.

C: So, the students are getting a sense that we are all in this together; we are all going through this together.

R: Yes. That’s correct. So, I’m not a guide in any shape or form at all. I’ve laid out the plan and I’m going to allow the plan to take its own course.