ESL EDUCATION FOR
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

by

Bahar Biazar

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Bahar Biazar 2015
ESL Education for Social Transformation

Bahar Biazar

Doctor of Philosophy

Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education

University of Toronto

2015

ABSTRACT

If one considers the colonial history of TESL, its ties to imperialism, and capitalism’s need for a cheap labour force which instigates movement of both people and corporations, one will see that TESL is a very social and political activity. Furthermore, since our current social organization and economic model are guided by capitalist social relations, it is crucial to place teaching ESL within these relations in order to shed light on its role in capitalism’s reproduction.

In this study, I focus on the learner as a social being and investigate the potential of English language learning as a social and political act for the purpose of social change. My main research question is: What is English language learning from the perspective of the learner who is motivated by pursuing social transformation? What would an ESL class aimed at social change look like from the perspective of the learners and teachers of this study and a dialectical theoretical framework? To what degree are ESL teachers and institutions aware or accommodating to these learners’ needs? To pursue these questions, I have conducted a qualitative research study to explore the barriers and successes that ESL teachers attempting to do critical work have had. I have also interviewed ESL learners who are motivated by their desire to be politically and socially active in order to gain insight about their English language learning and their ESL classes. My theoretical conceptualization has allowed me to see how our
actions as ESL teachers and theorists at times reproduce capitalist social relations and at other

times challenges and disrupts them. It is my hope that this study will generate theory in the field

of language education that helps other language learners and educators to politicize, decolonize,

and radicalize the field of ESL.
DEDICATION

To Khashayar, Yassi, and Morvarid
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the participants of this study for generously sharing their time, thoughts, and ideas with me. It is indeed heartwarming to see so many teachers and learners dedicated to social transformation.

This study and degree would not have been possible without the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Shahrzad Mojab. Shahrzad helped me find my voice and that has made all the difference. The thesis group and radical reading group that Shahrzad gathers proved an integral part of my intellectual growth and for that I am grateful to all in those groups.

I owe a great debt to radical adult educators such as Dr. Sara Carpenter and Paula Allman. Their words, Sara through our discussions and Paula from the page, shed light where there was darkness and for that I am utterly grateful. I have enjoyed the continued support and encouragement of Dr. Bethany Osborne. Her support has been invaluable.

It is important to thank my place of employment and my colleagues at the English Language Institute of Seneca College, in particular Martine Allard and David Cowper-smith. Without this support I would not have had the time to conduct this study. It is truly a privilege to work in an institution that values the intellectual growth of its employees.

I am deeply appreciative of the influence of my parents. My father by encouraging political discussion and introducing me to radical thought and my mother by teaching me independence have been the most important sources of impact in my life. I would not have pursued a doctorate had it not been for them.

Most importantly, I must thank my family, Khashayar, Yassi, and Morvarid. Throughout the past years, I have been supported in any way imaginable: emotionally, intellectually, and financially. Words cannot describe my deepest appreciation.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................... v
List of Appendices .......................................................................................................................................... ix

Chapter One .................................................................................................................................................. 1
   Introduction: My intellectual journey ........................................................................................................... 1
   Who I am as a researcher ............................................................................................................................. 3
   Purpose of research: Decolonization and Politicization of ESL Education ............................................. 6
   Not Critical but Radical ............................................................................................................................... 9
   Rationale and Process of Study .................................................................................................................. 14
   Qualitative Research as Methodology ........................................................................................................ 18
   Qualitative Inquiry and English Language Teaching and Learning ...................................................... 22
   Semi-structured Interview ........................................................................................................................... 27
   Methods and Procedures .............................................................................................................................. 29
   Recruitment and Criteria ............................................................................................................................. 30
   Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................. 32

Chapter Two .................................................................................................................................................. 34
   ESL Education an Historical Overview ....................................................................................................... 34
      The Politics and Pedagogy of Second Language Education ................................................................. 35
      Federal Government of Canada and ESL Education: A Historical Overview ................................... 43
      Federally Funded ESL Classes in Canada .............................................................................................. 44
      Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) .................................................................... 48
      Reflection and Analysis ........................................................................................................................... 56

Chapter Three: ............................................................................................................................................. 58
   Critical Debates in Language Learning Literature .................................................................................... 58
      Race, Racism, and Language Education .................................................................................................. 60
      Gender Relations and Language Education ............................................................................................ 63
      Class Relations and Language Education ............................................................................................... 67
      Globalization, Empire, Migration, and English ....................................................................................... 69
      Critical Approaches to Teaching ESL ...................................................................................................... 79
      Critical TESL: Who is teaching what? .................................................................................................... 85
List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of Abbreviations ........................................................................................................221
Appendix 2 – Dialogue as Code ................................................................................................................222
Appendix 3 – Interview Questions for ESL Teachers ......................................................................................223
Appendix 4 – Interview Questions for ESL learner/Activists ......................................................................224
Appendix 5 – Letter of Information and Consent (Activist-Learners) ..........................................................225
Appendix 6 – Letter of Information and Consent (ESL Teachers) .................................................................228
Chapter One

Introduction: My intellectual journey

My interest in this research emerged from my MA thesis where I did life history interviews with 5 Middle Eastern activists to understand their motivation for activism as well as the learning that took place through activism. Through the course of my Master’s study I was introduced to the dialectical conceptualization of learning. I found that learning occurs in the process of the ongoing development of one’s critical consciousness, and that critical consciousness develops within the dialectical relationship of thought and action. Furthermore, I found that the women I interviewed were not shocked into activism. In other words, there was no “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991) which acted as a catalyst to activism. From their social location, they always knew that oppression existed and at the first opportunity to organize, they did.

I was amazed at the accomplishment of all the women. They had organized against social and political repression in the face of horrific danger. They had led marches, spoken publicly, written and dispersed political leaflets, lived in mountain camps, and broadcasted subversive radio talks. What I could not understand was the turn that this activism took after some time arriving in Toronto. I could not understand why they were not active in Canadian politics, why they were not applying their knowledge or focusing their energy to effect social change in Toronto. The only woman who had entered the Canadian political landscape was one who was proficient in English. The others despite having a wealth of political knowledge about organizing and resisting were not devoting their time and knowledge to actively take up social causes here in Toronto. These women were not proficient in English and when they did
participate in political events, it was in their native language and for causes related to their native country. What was happening here that although the dangers of organizing had been alleviated, direct action was not being taken?

In the years following the end of my MA research, several events in the Canadian political landscape have made me think about the activists. One was the G20 meeting in Toronto and the exaggerated police force used against demonstrators. Another was the Occupy Movement which had a short life span in Toronto. These events signified to me the contradictions of a flawed system that have come to the surface and spontaneous resistance to them. The 2008 recession had brought to the surface contradictions which would otherwise not be visible. The recession had resulted in what Alan Sears in a talk on ‘Society and Security’ at OISE has called “neo-liberalism in a hurry” and how successful these neo-liberal policies were going to be depended on how much conscious, not spontaneous, resistance they would get. And in this very city we have people who have spent their lives organizing against state repression, social and economic injustice. If a connection was made between new local activists and experienced global activists, the result could in the long term be progressive social and individual change. I set out to explore whether the ESL class could be a space where these connections can be made and if so, what would be the theoretical basis of such a class.

I have since devoted the past four years and this dissertation to the study of ESL education for social transformation. I have navigated through the vast ocean of literature in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), English language teaching (ELT) to find an answer to the question of how English as a second language can be taught for social change, activism, and social justice. I made a temporary stop at linguistic imperialism theory and was greatly influenced by the proponents of critical pedagogy. Although these theories have enriched my

1 A list of all abbreviations along with their full forms is included as Appendix 1.
study, I realized that linguistic diversity is not the social transformation that I am striving for. As I pressed on to find answers to what it is I am being critical of and what has caused the contradictions for which I believe social change is necessary, it became evident that I need to look at more than the English language, or ESL education. My vision needs to encompass the whole of the social world while at the same time I look at the role of the English language and ESL education within the whole. It is only by seeing the role of the particular in the whole that I can hope to intervene to make changes in the particular in order to effect change in the whole. And since the social world we are currently living in is guided by capitalist social relations, it is through the exploration and critique of capitalism that I can find the conscious social change that I would like to engage with. My journey took me to the theorization of several radical adult educators and eventually changed my mode of thinking not only in regards to this study but all social phenomena to come. In this sense, this study has transformed my thinking, my consciousness and my way of being. This is exactly the transformation that I refer to in the title of this dissertation: *Teaching ESL for Social Transformation*.

**Who I am as a researcher**

My personal beliefs, values, and convictions play a role in the topic I choose and guide my attention to information and interpretation of that information. My perspective is “especially significant in qualitative interviewing, where meaning making takes a center stage in the interpretive process” (Warren, 2001). My assertions in this study are formed from my own experiences, the narrative of the research participants, and my study of dialectical conceptualization and the theory of praxis. I will express my own experiences. I am an Iranian woman and a teacher of English as a second language as well as a one time student of ESL. My
family moved to the United States from Iran when I was in grade school. The most important event of my life which had a profound impact on my consciousness was living through the 1979 Iranian revolution and its following turmoil. I was a child growing up in a very politically charged time in a politically active family at the time of the revolution; this has shaped my political consciousness and plays a role in my beliefs and convictions to this day. I also lived in the U.S. at the time of the hostage crisis\(^2\); I saw the full wrath of classmates, teachers, principals, immigration officers. We were deported, displaced. In short, I saw the ‘land of the free’ without its camouflage and the experience has since characterized my values, political beliefs, and alliances. I have wholly experienced immigration, second language acquisition, language loss, acculturation, language suppression. These experiences have made me aware of the deeply personal nature of struggle in light of global events and have remained a primary point of reference.

I hold a graduate degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from Iran (which is not recognized by Languages Canada because it is from Iran) and I have taught English as a second or foreign language for more than two decades. During this time I have taught in private language institutes in both Iran and Toronto. I have taught credit courses in university in Iran and I am currently full time faculty at Seneca College where I teach non-credit ESL classes to international students. Through all of my training, I was not presented with any reading, article, book, lecture that took a socially critical look at teaching ESL until I went to look for it. I realize that I cannot generalize the field of TESL based on my personal experience; however, in this section, I would like to explain to the reader the perceived shortcomings of my training which led me to pursue this dissertation. My TESL training mainly involved the study of sounds,

\(^2\) From November 4, 1979, to January 20, 1981, fifty two American citizens and diplomats were held hostage in Tehran following a takeover of the American embassy by a group of Islamic revolutionary students.
structures, cultural nuances and how to transmit these to students. However, when I was teaching, especially in the university undergraduate program to students in their 20’s in Iran, I could feel there was something more going on. I felt that teaching ESL is not just about teaching the English language or culture. I could feel that this space is ripe for politicization. I did not have the theoretical grounding at that time to understand or articulate this but I felt it. My scholarly understanding of this ‘feeling’ came when I was doing my MA thesis at OISE/U of T.

Having been made aware of politics very early in life, I have lived, experienced and interpreted the world with an ever changing critical lens. This lens I have taken to my profession and have attempted to teach ESL “critically” to my students. I have had some success and have experienced many barriers and much resistance while doing this. Therefore, I am very curious to explore critical ESL learning from the perspective of students and teachers. I have learned that many times it isn’t what you teach but how you teach that can be oppressive or liberating. My experience of teaching undergraduate ESL in Iran is a clear example of this. The university atmosphere was fraught with repression, more so than other areas of society. I found that after two semesters of teaching, I had been marked as a subversive educator and I was being closely watched. I was quite shocked by this because I knew better than to have any radical or political content in my classes. I even diverted any discussion that hinted of politicization. However, after being interrogated by the university ‘morality guards’, I realized that it was not the content of my courses which they found threatening; it was the space that I with the help of my students had created in the classroom. We sat in a mixed circle as opposed to the gendered segregation of the university. I called all students by their first names as opposed to the usual Mr. or Ms. I strived for a jovial atmosphere and when a student or two risked a joke and saw that it was met with encouragement, word got around. It was in the dialogical teaching that I saw the classroom as a
radical space, not in the content. Through interactions with alternative ways of being, the students’ and my attention was drawn to the partiality of our knowledge and social practices. I learned that being dialogical and critical is not a method; it is a way of being and that is what made it threatening.

As a researcher, I have no claims of neutrality. I view education as a social and political act. This claim extends especially to the education of ESL as English is the language of imperialism and colonization, both very violent processes. This view makes me uneasy with the ESL industry and my role in it. I also view the learner as a social being who cannot be severed from his or her experiences. At the same time, I do not signify putting chairs in circles and sharing experience as critical teaching. These experiences only when penetrated theoretically can shed light on the contradictions of our time. And I view the experiences of the ESL learner particularly social because he/she is the embodiment of the contradictions of our time. Forces of globalization, migration, displacement, capitalism’s need for a cheap workforce, immigration laws at the service of the market have all played a role in bringing the ESL learner to the class. This gives the ESL class its potential to be a transformative space and ESL learner-activists an arena to receive and share tools to practice critical, active citizenship.

**Purpose of research: Decolonization and Politicization of ESL Education**

"Natives of all the underdeveloped countries unite!"

(Introduction to Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon)

Historically, the spread of the English language and the professionalization of ESL education have been tied to colonization, imperial expansion, and advancement of globalization and capitalism, all violent processes. However, I do not believe it is possible to stop the spread of English; I am also not interested in struggle for linguistic diversity and the dominance of national
languages over English. The enormity of such an endeavour leads one from “analysis to paralysis” (Mojab and Carpenter 2013). We cannot remove English now because of its colonial intrusion any more than we can stop using the Canadian Pacific Railway because of its treatment of Chinese workers. However, as Caliban in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* declares, if he has been taught language, he has also been taught to curse his tormentor. “The red plague rid you for learning me your language” Caliban shouts. I believe the ESL classroom is an excellent place to do this kind of ‘social cursing’. As the first place that newcomers experience their new setting, the ESL class can be a space where contradictions are brought to the surface and made visible and social relations of race, class, and gender are uncovered. For this potential to be realized, we need an educational space where learners and educators work towards critical consciousness with language learning as a by-product. By seeing the learner as a social being, we must examine the processes that have brought the learner to the ESL classroom. What has made this person leave their homeland and relatives behind? What factors have contributed to this immigration? Why is life with dignity deteriorating in many parts of the world? Why is life in Canada perceived to be better and how are these two related? Otherwise, the ESL classroom will be a space for reproducing existing relations and continued subjugation of immigrant and third-world populations. The supremacy of the English native speaker will be reinforced as a submissive workforce is produced.

For the past four years, I have been immersed in the literature of two fields. I have studied ESL teaching in relation to critical pedagogy, transformative learning, globalization, and colonization. I have also been engaged with a pool of knowledge in radical adult education and critical theorists such as Karl Marx and Paula Allman. In this dissertation as I navigate through the wealth of knowledge in the two fields, I also bring these two important disciplines in
dialogue with each other. I believe the two fields have enriched my study as well as enhanced my scope of analysis. The study of critical theory and radical adult education has helped me understand what it is that I am being critical of when I refer to critical ESL education. I did not set out on this study with my theoretical framework in mind. It was the quest for answers that deepened my questions and led me to my theoretical framework, not the other way around. It is clear to me now that without the examination of capitalism and imperialism, I cannot find the answers to my questions. And without an analysis that encompasses social relations of capitalism and imperialism, I cannot see the ties that bind the TESL industry with the growth of evangelical Christianity in regions that are of importance to the United States; I would not see the role of the TESL industry in upholding the already present class structure in countries like India and Sri Lanka. Critical analysis of the ESL teaching industry can shed light on many of our practices which reproduce the existing social relations of power. The experiences of ESL learners and teachers when penetrated theoretically can illuminate much of what is going on not only in the ESL class but in society as a whole. This illumination increases when we seek the experiences of ESL learners and teachers who are aware of existing relations of power and are attempting to disrupt them. For this reason, I have sought and interviewed ESL learners who have been activists in their country of origin or are currently active in social and political causes in Canada. I have also interviewed teachers of ESL who have a strong commitment to social justice and are bringing this commitment to their teaching. These interviews have been for the purpose of gaining insight to lay the theoretical groundwork of Radical ESL Education; this is the main purpose of this dissertation.
Not Critical but Radical

I intentionally avoid using the term critical, from here on, in relation to the knowledge that I would like to produce and the theoretical knowledge that I am engaged with. Various uses of the word critical in association with ESL education, such as critical reading or listening, are depoliticized cognitive activities. The term has become synonymous with cognitive skills and high order thinking. For instance, Eskey and Grabe (1988) define critical reading as evaluating the author’s arguments. Richard-Amoto and Snow’s (1992) list of critical thinking skills include evaluating and synthesizing readings. For Shih (1992) critically examining content is to recall main points and details and then synthesize them from the original reading. For Chamot and O’Malley (1987) critical reading is a cognitively demanding activity and a “higher level reading comprehension skill” (p. 238). In the vast majority of ESL literature, the word ‘critical’ is usually attached to reading, writing, listening or thinking and is a neutral skill which encompasses evaluation, inference, analysis, synthesis, and comprehension, in short, higher order skills.

However, the ESL field is being challenged by a handful of theorists who are questioning the field’s pragmatic assumptions based on its limited look at ESL teaching as a solely linguistic endeavor. Cummins (1989), Auerbach & McGrail (1991), and Wallerstein (1983) define critical thinking as a democratic learning process which examines unequal power relations. Critical ESL education for these theorists involves raising issues from students’ daily lives such as work, school, and housing. For Wallerstein (1983) critical thinking occurs when personal issues are viewed with an eye on public policies. Wallerstein asserts “Critical thinking begins when people make the connections between their individual lives and social conditions. It ends one step
Proponents of critical pedagogy and critical discourse analysis have made important contributions to the field. Critical pedagogues (Pennycook 1990, Cummins 2008, Morgan 1998) have challenged ESL education’s isolation from broader social issues. Pennycook asserts “a major lacuna in second language education is its divorce from broader issues in educational theory” (1990, p. 303). Proponents of critical pedagogy assert that the project of critical pedagogy is to expose the production and legitimization of knowledge in schools and society while attempting to legitimate and produce other forms of subjugated forms of knowledge. Pennycook describes “critical pedagogy as the most provocative area of educational thought today” (1990, p. 304).

In their study of 17 critical pedagogues, Beatriz Ruiz and Juan-Miguel Fernandez-Balboa (2005) found that the majority of their participants had vague definitions of critical pedagogy, its principles, and its purpose and three of the study participants had no definitions for it at all. Given this lack of clarity, they concluded that there is little wonder why these critical pedagogues at times sway from critical pedagogy principals and revert back to transmission-based pedagogy and “oppressive practices” (p. 258). Perhaps what has led to these critical pedagogues uncertainty is what McLaren and Farahmandpur (2000) call the postmodernization of the left. They in no unclear terms argue that critical theorists “have been disinterred from Marxist soil where they first drew breath, and their graves now spout the saplings of postmodern theory” (p. 26). McLaren (2003) further asserts that critical pedagogy must return to its Marxist roots and place less emphasis on counter-hegemonic praxis. However, hooks (2003) and Lather (2001) argue that reiterations of Marxist social theory within critical
pedagogy has been at the expense of feminist, anti-racist educational projects. Sandy Grande (2003) asserts that failure to engage with race-relations in favour of class relations further marginalizes the political potential of critical pedagogy. It is clear that critical pedagogy is not only ambiguous and hazy for the participants of Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa, but also for its most robust supporters.

I see critical thinking in a dialectical relationship with action. To me, critical thinking never ends; it gets deepened with action and action gets riskier (more threatening) with critical thinking; the cycle goes on to create an ever-changing transformation of the self which itself is involved in a dialectical relationship with transformation of the social.

In other words, to me, being critical is being dialectical, and the much talked about critical thinking is in fact dialectical thinking. Dialectical thinking is “a way of thinking about social life as relationships in which social phenomenon are not abstract, separate or fragmented from one another” (Mojab & Carpenter 2013). That is to understand the present as a historical result and to see the present as a result of social relations connected to one another. Mojab and Carpenter (2013) state “to say that something is understood ‘dialectically’ is to see it through the lens of its historical emergence, to see the way in which it appears in daily life, and to seek out an explanation of why it appears the way in which it does in order to understand the essence of the contradictions that form social phenomena” (p. 2). Thinking dialectically one would see how a policy decision made half way around the world plays out on the ground in people’s daily lives in another part of the world. In relation with ESL education, we can see that when a teaching method gains popularity, it need not necessarily be due to the superiority of that method. Other factors play a role. The movement of people which brings with it an influx of international students paying exorbitant fees make way for learner-centred pedagogy. Immigration policies
which aim at creating a workforce make way for functional pedagogy with dialogues on customer service and speaking with an angry client at its center. Dialectically, one would never see a phenomenon as an isolated incident; one would see all occurrences, i.e. everyday life, as tied together in a complex web of relations. By seeing the social world in such a light, the researcher’s task becomes one of exposing social phenomenon for its underlying social relation. The educator’s task would become one of facilitating the emergence of a consciousness that breeds dialectical thinking of the social world. And the activist’s task is to target change in the underlying social relations that give rise to unequal social phenomena. However, I must state here that these not necessarily be three different people; an educator can be both scholar and activist.

For example, in the ESL classroom, we can evaluate, synthesize, analyze abstract content severed from its social origin; this is not critical. Or we can begin with learners’ personal experience and uncover the relationship of that experience in relation to social structures, politics, policy and their historical emergence while all the time envisioning change of root causes; this is dialectical. It is revolutionary and radical. Perhaps a concrete example of undialectical view of an issue in an ESL lesson would be helpful.

It has become very fashionable for ESL textbooks and websites of the past decade to include units on the environment. The popular ESL website, Breakingnews.com, offers several lesson plans on global warming; one of which has a simplified reading on the melting of the arctic ice followed by vocabulary, grammar, listening and writing activities. In the section titled ‘action’ in this lesson plan, students are asked to rank the most effective actions one can take regarding global warming. The choices for action that are given are: “walk instead of drive, use 50% less water, use energy-saving light bulbs, stop eating meat, turn heaters and AC down,
grown your own food, invest in solar energy, turn off electrical goods at night” (http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1208/120829-arctic_sea_ice.html). While this neutral way of presenting information and individualistic mode of action appears to be ‘critical’ by tackling an important issue of our time, in essence it is not looking at the issue of global warming in a radical way. To understand environmental degradation dialectically, one would have to see it in its historical emergence. This would force us to see its acceleration in tandem with capitalist development in conjunction with the movement of corporations to regions with lax environmental laws. The action that would emerge from such an understanding would not be one of individual behaviour change (although I am not saying that there is no value in this kind of change, only that it is extremely limited). A dialectical understanding of environmental degradation is both the cause and the result of the development of critical consciousness and the action that would follow would be radical/revolutionary as opposed to uncritical/reproductive (Allman 1999).

Radical education, in this case radical ESL education, is interested in transformation as opposed to inclusion. I advocate radical ESL education which would pursue cultivating a consciousness which uncovers underlying social relations of a phenomenon in the hope that this mode of uncovering and thinking would be internalized and used to look at all phenomena long after the ESL class has ended. This consciousness would be in a dialectical relationship with action towards transformation of the self and the social; however, more, much more, on this later.

---

3 Paula Allman (1999) differentiates between revolutionary praxis and reproductive praxis. The latter, being the norm, reproduces the status quo while the former creates change in underlying relations.
Rationale and Process of Study

Canada is home to many new immigrants and refugees many of whom have fled repressive states because they have been active in social and political causes. One of the important hurdles in the settlement process of these newly arrived activists is acquiring the language of the new setting. Many newcomers to Canada begin their settlement process by taking part in one of the existing English as a second language (ESL) programs offered in Canada. However, at times, these efforts have proven unproductive and end in a feeling of failure when the newcomer still has not achieved proficiency after several years of living in Canada. For instance, in a study which followed 5000 immigrant students through Vancouver high schools between the years 1991 and 2001, Gunderson (2006) found that ESL students had the highest dropout rates. In 2014, the province of British Columbia alone spent $10.5 million dollars on top of their usual funding of ESL programs to help transition English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to a new model where immigrant settlement services are administered. According to the Canadian Immigration Report, the province of Alberta tops up its regular ESL program fund by an annual $11 million ESL Enhancement Fund. In general literacy terms, sixty per cent of immigrants in Canada have low literacy, compared to thirty seven per cent of native-born Canadians (CIC, 2002).

As an ESL teacher, this is both disturbing and intriguing. Why is it that despite the large sums of money being invested in these programs the results are so dismal? Certainly there is strong motivation on the part of the learners as it is clear that language proficiency is necessary in their new environment. Furthermore, the points system employed by Immigration Canada ensures that a certain type of immigrant be admitted. The desirable immigrants are those within

---

4 The points system is a system in which qualified applicants are evaluated against six factors to determine their eligibility for immigration to Canada. Applicants must obtain a total of 67 points out of a possible 100 in order to qualify. The six factors are English or French proficiency, education, experience, age, arranged employment in Canada, and adaptability.
a certain age range the age range of 18 to 35 years old, with post-secondary education, and with some English language background.

Jenny Horseman has done extensive research on the relationship between violence and learning (2000, 2004). Her research is invaluable when it comes to understanding the role an educational setting plays in learning. She states “the nature of the educational setting, interactions, and curriculum are all crucial in making learning possible, ... a reality not often understood by funders who see this as extraneous rather than simply the bare minimum to facilitate learning...” (Horsman cited in Osborne 2010, p. 112). ESL classes, in the context of resettlement, do not only serve the purpose of learning grammar and vocabulary; they are the site in which the newcomer experiences the new environment for the first time. As such, the ESL class serves as an important site which could influence the process of resettlement for many years even after the program has ended.

Second language education can and should go beyond teaching the basic, functional skills and move towards self-actualization and social transformation. It is appropriate to call on political engagement for social change as a strong purpose for language acquisition. One of the basic tenets of critical epistemology is that new knowledge should be linked to old knowledge or experience for it to be deemed ‘meaningful.’ As for those newcomers to Canada who have been active in social and political causes prior to arrival, the ESL class has great potential for being a space for transformation, for social change, social analysis, economic equity, and political enfranchisement. The learners’ political knowledge, organizing and mobilizing skills can be linked to new knowledge about their new context, the Canadian political arena and Canadian social causes and language acquisition can be a by-product.
According to Immigration Watch Canada\textsuperscript{5}, Canada has steadily been accepting 250,000 immigrants a year since 1990 and a range of 25000 to 33000 refugee claimants entering each year since 2002. Although I am not aware of specific statistics, I do know through the process of my master’s research, that many of the newly arrived immigrants and refugees in Canada are experienced activists who have resisted against political and social repression in their countries of origin. Many, although not directly involved in action, have come with an understanding of and commitment to social justice. They arrive in Canada with a wealth of knowledge about organizing for social change. The activist-learner present in the ESL class could potentially be the embodiment of the contradictions of our time and the consciousness of that experience and action can be both developed more and be utilized in their new setting. The extant knowledge that newcomer activist-learners bring may be new knowledge for Canadian activists and vice versa. The ESL class can be a space to create alliances and relate knowledges. Bethany Osborne (2009) states that “the very nature of developing methods for populations that have traditionally been silenced due to their ideas and lack of resources is both political and social” and sharing stories of resistance can teach the rest of us about the tenacity of the human spirit. It would be intriguing to create a class specifically for activists for the purpose of activism and to shift the focus of the ESL class from the learners’ deficit (language proficiency) to their strength (political consciousness). Conceptualized as such, the language classroom becomes a space for Revolutionary Social Transformation (Allman, 1999).

As the principal investigator of this study, I bring certain strengths and hold some weaknesses. As previously mentioned, through my master’s study, I came to grasp an understanding of activism and the consciousness of the activist. Furthermore, as an experienced teacher of English as a second language, I am familiar with the profession as well as ESL

\textsuperscript{5} http://www.immigrationwatchcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/cic_research-stats-page-102.pdf
educators’ responsibilities. I hold a master’s degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and am familiar with the theoretical underpinnings of teaching English as a second language.

Possible limitations for this study could be the fact that although I have over 20 years of experience teaching ESL, I have no experience with teaching ESL for the purpose of social transformation. Having always taught in formal institutions, I have always started the class with a predetermined set of skills to be transmitted, a textbook to be covered, and a pre-determined curriculum to be referred to. However, by reflecting on my past experience as a teacher in formal institutions such as universities and community colleges, I have come to gain insight into the essence of these institutions and one’s inability to do radical work within them. This insight has led me to pursue the barriers in place within these institutions during the data collection process.

My sources of information in this qualitative study are two groups of participants. One is ESL learners who have been activists in their country of origin or are currently involved in social or political causes in Canada. The other is ESL teachers who identify themselves as critical educators and have a strong commitment to social justice and reflect this commitment in their teaching. I have chosen these two groups of participants in order to gain insight into what radical ESL education appears to those who have a commitment to social change. These participants will be introduced in detail to the reader in chapter four; however, since I plan to refer to the participants’ experiences and ideas in relation to the theoretical debates and review of literature, I will briefly present them here. The ESL learner-activists are Charlotte, Kabira, Feng, Adanna, Simin, and Belma (all pseudonyms). All have been actively involved in a social or political movement in their country of origin or are currently involved in a social or political cause in
Canada. This group of learner-activists speak Chinese, French, Farsi, Turkish, and Kinyarwanda. Their social and political involvement ranges from underground movements and political parties to Canadian NGOs and community centers. The ESL teachers are Dayani, Cecilia, Brad, Ya, Mary, Valerie, and Jinjing (all pseudonyms). All are accredited, experienced teachers of English as a second language. They speak a variety of languages other than English such as, Arabic, Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, and Sinhalese.

In an attempt to understand the current state of the ESL industry and lay the theoretical framework for radical ESL education, this dissertation will pursue answers to the following questions. My primary research questions are:

- How do learners of ESL who are motivated by social transformation perceive language learning and what has been their experience in a Canadian ESL class?
- What has been the experience of ESL teachers while doing work towards social transformation in the field in a Canadian ESL class?

Other related research questions that I will address in this study are:

- Is the ESL class a useful space for organizing and mobilizing for social change?
- Is political engagement a motivating factor for learning English as a second language?
- What would an ESL class specifically designed for activists for the purpose of social transformation look like from the perspective of learners and teachers?

**Qualitative Research as Methodology**

I wished to gain insight into the consciousness and activity of ESL teachers and learner-activists. Not to learn solely about this particular group’s thoughts and actions, not even to learn solely about the field of ESL, because ESL education is not isolated from any other social activity. ESL
education is historically developed and dialectically related to other human activity occurring in different places and times. Social relations are organized by power and tied to other relations such as race, gender, class, the market, and the state. The ESL classroom is such a relation. It is not a ‘thing’. The ESL class arises from the activity of actual people who have come together, most of them not of their choosing.

I have used qualitative methodology informed by critical, feminist, anti-racist perspectives to collect and analyze data. Since I wished to gain insight into the consciousness and social activity of activist-learners as well as educators, I chose a method which allowed me to focus on certain areas that I wish to explore but also gave me the freedom to digress and probe further in other emerging areas. The specific method of data collection that I used is open-ended, semi-structured interview. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the basic premises of qualitative research and method of semi-structured interview and how they have been used in the field of language learning. I demonstrate how I have adapted the qualitative method to aid in my inquiry. In the section titled Data Analysis, I explicate how my theoretical lens with concepts such as ideology, revolutionary versus reproductive praxis have expanded my understanding of the data I have collected.

Qualitative research has become increasingly recognized with Second language researchers. In fact, in a 1995 review of qualitative research, Lazaraton commented that although the number of qualitative research studies published on second language learning and teaching is small, the prospects seem promising. She then continues to ask “whether 10 years hence qualitative research will be on an equal footing with quantitative research in how frequently it is employed and how it is received by the profession” (p. 467). Actually, another review conducted on qualitative data-based articles published in 10 major journals more than a
decade later showed that qualitative research is well on its way to achieving this status (Benson et al, 2009).

Currently, the qualitative and quantitative research traditions in second language research are not seen as opposing dichotomies. As more and more researchers are using multiple methods in a single study (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), these two traditions are more complementary and allow researchers to investigate the complex phenomena of second language acquisition. However, since I am interested in gaining an understanding of human actions and reflections i.e. their consciousness, I will be conducting a solely qualitative research study.

The general definition of qualitative research that I will use is that used by Mackey & Gass (2005). They use the term qualitative research to “refer to research that is based on descriptive data that does not make (regular) use of statistical procedures” (p. 162). I will expand on the characteristics of qualitative research as having a rich description, providing a holistic representation, having few participants, being a cyclical and open-ended process, and the possibility of having particular social and political goals.

The goal of the critical qualitative researcher is to uncover the social relations and structures that are enabling and/or hindering people’s actions and interactions. Auerbach and McGrail (1991) suggest that we ask questions to examine the social context of our work such as: What are the goals of this project for the funders, administrators, students, and teachers? What is the political agenda of these players? How and why did this project come into being? Why does the government want this training for refugees? Why does the employer want this program for immigrant workers? What are the assumptions of this program (p. 98)?

Furthermore, although it is individuals who are interviewed, the qualitative researcher is concerned with the group rather than the individual. Thus, the individual is treated as
representative of a group. For this reason, I will interview specifically community college ESL teachers in order to gain a better understanding of the community college sector and the ability to do critical work within this institution. By looking at the particular, I will attempt to understand the social. It is important to avoid looking at each interview as an isolated event or an individual experience. Such an approach would only lead to individualized understandings of the social world. For instance, an interview with a critical ESL teacher would entail focus on the social organization of the ESL classroom and institution rather than on individual teachers’ experiences.

Another frequently mentioned characteristic of qualitative research is that it is holistic. Meaning, behaviour is described and explained in relation to the entire system in which it is a part. This is described as a series of concentric rings moving from micro-contexts to larger and more macro-contexts. For example, an ESL writing lesson would be seen through the larger context of the relations within the classroom, the school, the district, and the society. For instance, in an ethnographic study of two sixth-grade writing classes, Cazden, Michaels, & Watson-Gegeo (1987) examined writing lessons in the context of all classroom activities as well as the training and background of teachers, family and neighbourhood cultures of students, the school’s social organization, the district’s implementation of writing, and the state’s writing examination. Additionally, the qualitative researcher is not only interested in what happened but also in why or how things happened.

Another principle of qualitative research as stated by Watson-Gegeo (1988) is that the researcher’s theoretical framework precedes data collection. Theory guides data collection and interpretation and helps the researcher to decide what is significant for answering research questions which have been posed at the onset of the study but are being developed throughout
the study as well. The importance of theory is heavily stressed in literature on qualitative inquiry because as Diesing (1971) puts it, if data collection is not guided by an explicit theoretical framework, it will be guided by the researcher’s values, attitudes, and assumptions about the world, that is his or her “implicit ontology”. I see language learning as revolutionary social praxis (Allman, 1999) and thus claim that the ESL class can be a space for revolutionary social transformation. This theoretical conceptualization has led me to the question: what would an ESL class aimed at revolutionary social transformation look like? This conceptualization along with my method of inquiry has taken me to participants with the experience. It will guide the questions that I will ask them to target their thoughts and actions aimed at social transformation. And throughout data analysis, my theoretical conceptualization will guide me to find instances of critical and uncritical praxis.

**Qualitative Inquiry and English Language Teaching and Learning**

From a qualitative inquiry perspective, language learning is one of language socialization rather than the language acquisition perspective of linguistics (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The language socialization perspective places language learning within social interaction. That is rather than viewing language learning as the acquisition of words and grammar rules, this perspective places language learning within its function in society. It implies that language is a vehicle of socialization: of social and cultural norms, reasoning, interpretation and thinking. Thus, when one learns a second language, one is not only learning structures for communication; one is also learning values, attitudes, and modes of interpretation. Therefore, when an ethnographer is observing a language classroom, or when a qualitative researcher is interviewing participants, the researcher’s attention is not only on the teaching and learning of language skills but also on what else is being taught and learned along with the language structures.
Therefore, using a qualitative mode of inquiry to study second language learning and teaching offers a valuable alternative to other forms of educational research. It addresses the very basic questions of the relationship of theory and practice. Praxis, the interplay of theory and practice, rests on understanding of complex relations and taking action toward changing the “maldistribution of power and resources underlying our society” (Lather, 1991, p. 51). Qualitative methods allow us to systematically document teaching and learning experiences in rich, contextualized detail with the aim of linking them to the larger society in which they are a part of. Thus by exploring experiences of language learning and teaching in the classroom, we do not only learn about that classroom and the relations of the people within that context, we also learn about the bigger circle that the classroom is a part of, the school, the district, the community, and society. This orientation to qualitative research is inspired by a more complex and politicized view of culture in both anthropology and political economy (Canagarajah, 1993). One way to characterize critical ESL research is those studies that share “an emancipatory interest in the overcoming of social oppression” (Hammersley, 1992, p. 99) as well as those studies that “are committed to examining the local and macropolitics that constrain the actions of oppressed people (often the subjects/objects of social research)” (Toohey, 1995).

Qualitative research can make several valuable contributions to ESL research and has been used widely. The role of culture, shared values and attitudes, in second language learning and teaching is addressed. For example, White’s (1987) ethnographic study of a Japanese class found that Japan’s educational success lies in parents’ and schools’ harmonious agreement with children’s developmental needs. She supports this thesis by masterfully conducting an ethnography of Japanese education and family life. She weaves a tapestry of the complexities of social life by displaying the interactions and actions of Japanese mothers, teachers, and students.
Furthermore, an analysis of the institutional context of schooling which the ESL classroom is a part of can be included. Societal and institutional pressures that affect the lives of second language learners and teachers can be comprised in the research. For instance, in an ethnographic study of a French immersion program in Montreal, Cleghorn and Genesse (1984) uncover the links between societal and educational factors influencing program objectives and goals. Also, Guthrie (1985) uncovered the relationship of the school district, federal policy, and local community in his ethnographic study of bilingual education within an American Chinese community.

Bethany Osborne (2009) conducted qualitative research with a group of former political prisoners from Iran. She used the women’s prison narratives as text for language learning and instruction. She met with the women every two weeks and they told her their life histories. She then recorded and transcribed their stories which then were used as language lessons based on those narratives. Through these bi-weekly interviews, she developed a teaching method which she called The Narrative ESL Teaching Method. Osborne states that “the very nature of developing methods for populations that have traditionally been silenced due to their ideas and lack of resources is both political and social”.

Teacher training programs are also applying qualitative methods to their training. Student-teachers observe and are observed throughout their training. The trainees observe a minimum number of classes to fulfill their hours for certification while taking notes. Also, observation and interviewing is used as techniques of providing supervision and feedback for student-teachers. These techniques allow teachers to become aware of interactions that are usually outside of the teacher’s conscious awareness. By increasing one’s observational skills, teachers gain new consciousness of classroom organization and interactions. Interestingly,
teachers’ improved observational skills can lead them to observe themselves and reflect on their own practice and improve their classroom role. In fact, some critical ESL pedagogues are using qualitative methods of observation and interview as teaching tools as their students go out in the field within their own communities and the material from the students’ observations and interviews becomes the content of the lesson (Heath, 1983).

Qualitative research has revealed the extent of the success of the latest educational fads unanticipated by the original founder. For example, Cazden et al. (1987) studied two sixth grade classes that employed computers in their approach to teaching writing over two years. The use of computers to teach language skills in the late eighties was considered cutting edge and still today many language institutes use computer software for learners in very expensive computer labs. This study found that the institutional pressures placed upon teachers to use the computers in their teaching forced the teachers to concentrate on the students’ mechanical errors at the expense of time spent on developing ideas, enriching content, and becoming aware of the standards of good writing. Eventually, the computers ended up being used as nothing more than electric typewriters.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution that qualitative inquiry can make in TESL research is that it allows for a systematic study of the student’s own point of view of the ESL teaching. ESL students have historically been the linguistic and cultural other as well as the “beneficiaries’ and recipients of linguistic capital. Within the academy they are marginalized as are their teachers by being enrolled in non-credit courses. Within the context of migration and globalization, they are expected to reap the rewards of living in the West after quickly acquiring the language of the host country. If they do not succeed it is due to their own individual deficit. A growing body of qualitative research has looked at how sociopolitical forces outside the
classroom have impinged upon the students’ attitudes within the ESL classroom (Canagarajah, 1993). Other studies have looked at how the culture of classrooms and student communities are related to social conflict and political domination (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1977). Critical qualitative research in ESL that I have found particularly helpful are Auerbach and McGrail (1991), Duff (2002), and Shin (2009). Auerbach and McGrail (1991) conducted a student-centered, participatory ESL class with a mandate to focus on family literacy content. After questioning the social context of their study, they decided on a participatory literacy model which fosters the development of critical analysis and advocacy in order to deal with issues of schooling. Also, they decided to develop participatory classroom relationships as the basis for participation in the community. Duff (2002) triangulates her observations in her research on language practices in grade ten high school classrooms in Vancouver. By using more than one method (classroom observations and interviews), by varying the setting of data collection, and by comparing her classroom observations with curriculum guides, assignments, participants’ journals, she is able to add depth and validity to her study. Shin (2009) uses classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, bi-weekly written journals and focus group interviews to examine language learners’ identity and investment in a post-secondary Korean language classroom in Canada.

My goal in this doctoral dissertation was to conduct politically motivated qualitative research that goes beyond description. Although qualitative research has great potential for being critical, it also runs the risk of being reduced to mere techniques of observation and anecdotes and quotes from interviews. Prasad (2005) warns that when conducting social science research, it is important to fully understand the intellectual tradition and lineage that one’s
methodology is rooted in. Thus by doing so one’s methodology is not only techniques but also a lens which shapes our study and guides our inquiry.

**Semi-structured Interview**

Since I wished to gain insight into the consciousness of activist-learners as well as educators, I chose a method which allowed me to target certain areas that I wanted to explore but also gave me the freedom to digress and probe further. Therefore, I chose semi-structured interview as my mode of inquiry. I will begin with a brief introduction to the principles of the semi-structured interview as well as elaborate on how other ESL researchers have used this method in their studies.

In its most basic form, interviews are conversations coordinated by the interviewer to obtain desired information. The interviewer typically makes initial contact, schedules a meeting at the negotiated location, explains the procedures, and proceeds to ask questions. The interviewee or respondent provides answers. If the respondent asks questions, it is usually to ask for clarification. Commonly, the respondent’s role is to provide information from his or her pool of experiential knowledge. However, as straightforward as it seems, viewing individuals as holders of knowledge is indicative of an epistemological shift.

Securing information by asking ‘ordinary’ individuals as opposed to “informed” citizens is relatively new (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). The shift from using expert informants such as state officials and church ministers to questioning those individuals whose experiences were under consideration has led to what some theorists call “the democratization of opinion” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). For instance, perhaps if I had been doing this research 60 years ago, I would have gone to ESL professors, theorists, directors to learn about what ESL activist-learners have felt about the classes they have attended and what they may want to learn in future
ESL classes, rather than what I will be doing in this study which is going directly to the activist-learners and exploring their experiences and needs.

As with all methods, the interview has certain advantages and shortcomings. The interview will allow me to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable. I can explore perceptions and attitudes of ESL learners and educators regarding English learning and teaching. The semi-structured interview will allow me the freedom of pursuing information which I had not thought of before; thus making each interview unique and specific to each participant. One of the characteristics and indeed advantages of doing this type of research is that it is dynamic and open-ended; meaning research questions can be refined and revised as the study continues and new knowledge is uncovered.

There are potential drawbacks in conducting semi-structured interviews with ESL learners. Hall and Rist (1999) point to such shortcomings as “selective recall, self-delusion, perceptual distortions, memory loss from the respondent, and subjectivity in the researcher’s recording and interpreting of the data” (pp. 297-298). One obvious caveat is the ability of the participants to convey their message completely in English. Mackey and Gass (2005) refer to what they call the halo effect: interviewees pick up cues from the researcher and say what they believe the researcher wants them to say. Furthermore, there is also the concern of “cross-cultural pragmatic failure” during interviews with ESL learners when culturally inappropriate questions are asked or when culturally-rooted miscommunications occur (Mackey and Gass, p. 174).

One of the greatest weaknesses of this type of research according to Watson-Gege (1988) is the researcher’s reliance on a few anecdotes to support his/her initial theoretical point of view. This caveat can be addressed by what Mehan (1979) proposes as a set of
methodological guidelines for ethnographic research which he calls comprehensive data
treatment. Mehan asserts that analysis of all the materials or data collected must be done and any
illustrative examples presented must be the result of a systematic selection of representative
examples which reflect the central tendency of typical data.

To address some of these concerns, I have attended to some suggestions offered by
Mackey and Gass (2005). I encouraged open-ended discussions throughout all interviews. By
keeping silent or saying “anything else?” one can encourage a dialogue rather than accepting a
first answer as the interviewee’s final response (p. 174). By choosing to conduct the interview in
a place familiar to the interviewee, beginning with small talk, being sensitive and
accommodating to the fact that the respondents are not speaking in their mother tongue,
mirroring the interviewee’s responses by repeating them neutrally, placing key questions in the
middle of the interview, the researcher can mitigate some of the caveats of conducting a semi-
structured interview with ESL respondents. Moreover, I transcribed the interviews and returned
them to each participant giving him or her a chance to reflect on or alter their responses. This
allowed those participants who were more comfortable to express themselves in writing to do so
as well as giving each respondent further opportunity to reflect on their answers.

Methods and Procedures

The data for this research was gathered through semi-structured interviews and my own research
diary. Two groups of participants were sources of information in this study. One was ESL
educators who have a commitment to social justice and have taken a critical approach to TESL in
their classes. The other source was ESL learners who have been activists in their country of
origin or in Canada after immigrating. My wish is to learn what a class aimed at social
transformation would look like from the perspective of teachers and learners. I used the interviews at times to challenge the views of the participant because as Bertell Ollman (1987) states “consciousness studying can become an important part of consciousness raising” (p. 93). What better way to combine our abilities as scholars and activists? During the interviews I read quotes from radical educators and asked for the teachers’ reactions and thoughts. I showed textbooks which radicalize learning and problematize capitalism and typify consciousness-raising to seek participants’ thoughts.

I particularly wanted to investigate the conflicts, dilemmas, and barriers of doing critical work in ESL teaching as well as to share strategies, successes, and possibilities of this endeavour. (See appendix 3 for list of questions.) It was my hope that these interviews would generate recommendations for other radical educators. I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews. I then returned the transcriptions to each participant, giving him/her a chance to reflect further or alter their responses. I also interviewed ESL learners who have been active in social or political causes in their native country or in Canada. The focus of the interviews was on the learners’ experience with ESL classes in Canada, their perspective on language learning, social transformation, and activism. (See appendix 4 for list of questions.) These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by myself and then returned to each participant for further reflection and alteration. I kept a research diary in which I recorded my ongoing analysis. The purpose of the research diary was to keep a detailed record of my reflections and analysis.

**Recruitment and Criteria**

My goal in this qualitative study was to conduct semi-structured interviews with two sources of information regarding radical ESL learning and teaching. That is, I sought to interview English
language learners and educators who have an inclination towards social transformation. The first source of information was ESL learner-activists who met the following criteria:

- Someone who immigrated to Canada as an adult
- Someone who has been active in a social or political cause in their country of origin or someone who has a strong commitment to social justice or someone who had taken up a social or political cause in Canada after arriving
- Someone who is interested in being active in a social or political cause in Canada
- Someone who is a learner of English and has participated in one of the ESL classes available in Toronto

The other source of information was ESL teachers who met the following criteria:

- Someone who has more than 3 years of experience as an ESL professional
- Someone who has received formal training or is accredited as an ESL professional
- Someone who is currently active within the field of ESL either within a formal institution or at a grassroots community organization
- Someone with a commitment to social justice and social transformation (not all participants need to have this criterion).

I set out to recruit participants through putting up flyers and approaching potential participants whom I knew fit my recruitment criteria. As full-time faculty in the English Language Institute at Seneca College for over a decade, I knew many people within the ESL profession. Also, since the start of my PhD, I have attended and presented my PhD research at several conferences and have gathered a few names of ESL instructors who meet my criteria and may be interested in participating in this research. I contacted these people in person or by email to explain my PhD research and invite them to take part in the interviews. I also gave my contact
information to those parties and asked them to give my contact information to other ESL practitioners who may fit my criteria and would be interested in participating in this study.

**Conclusion**

In order to fully engage with my research questions and situate the reader in my theoretical framework and contextualize and make sense of my findings, I have organized the dissertation in the following order. In this introductory chapter, it has been my hope to present myself in a personal way to the reader as well as situate myself within the literature and debates. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, it is of utmost importance in my theoretical understanding of the present to comprehend how the present came to be. That is why in chapter two, I provide a historical overview of ESL teaching as a profession as well as review Canadian federally-funded ESL programs from 1947 to its present manifestation. Chapter three examines what is currently being theorized and practiced as critical ESL education. Although not always labelled as critical ESL, ESL education in relation with social justice, critical pedagogy, transformation, race, gender, and class have been theorized and in chapter three I will offer a comprehensive overview of these theorizations. Chapter four will include my theoretical framework with detailed explanations of dialectical conceptualization, ideology, theory of consciousness, and finally revolutionary and reproductive praxis. In chapter five, I offer my methodological approach to this study as well as introduce the participants of this research in detail. Also, in this chapter I will present the common themes and threads that emerged during data analysis as well as reflect upon the contradictory findings that rose. Chapter six will serve the dual purpose of presenting additional findings as well as investigating the field of TESL for ideological, reproductive practice. In the last chapter, chapter seven, I will present a theoretical discussion of ESL education as radical, revolutionary practice. I will conclude by offering
example classroom activities for a radical ESL lesson as well as offer final comments and suggestions for further research in the study of radical ESL education.
Chapter Two
ESL Education an Historical Overview

I recently returned from a TESOL (Teaching English to speakers of other languages) conference held in Portland, Oregon. This is the largest gathering of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) professionals and scholars in the world. Each day of the conference, a keynote speaker commenced the day with an address to a ‘room’ of 6000 attendees. Some quotes from these keynote speakers express the general climate of the largest gathering of ESL teachers in the world and by extension the field of TESL (teaching English as a second language) as a whole. Keynote speakers, Surin Pitsuwar and Deena Boraie, said, “English is the language of equality and opportunity”, “English is the language of good governance, it’s the social equalizer”, “go forth and transform the world by teaching English” and “you must unleash the power of this lingua franca”. Having studied the field of ESL education in relation to present-day empire building and examined its colonial legacy, I was perplexed and dismayed by such overt neoliberal preaching. However, as a critical scholar I must interrogate the present and find the root of these statements. Surely this mode of thinking about the English language and its dissemination has not emerged in a vacuum. There are historical roots as well as present day benefits.

In order to understand ESL education in a radical, dialectical way, I need to historicise the field of ESL education. That is, I need to see this historical moment that we live in as a result of certain historical pre-conditions. In order to understand the present, I need to understand the present as a historical moment in passing. For this reason, this chapter is dedicated to the historicization of the field of ESL education as a profession as well as an overview of federally funded ESL education in Canada from its inception to the present. The chapter ends with a
discussion of how the policies and pedagogies presented in the previous sections play out in the lives and experience of the participants of this study.

**The Politics and Pedagogy of Second Language Education**

The study of English Language Teaching (ELT) is placed within the field of applied linguistics. Applied linguistics is the study of language in relation to such practical issues as speech pathology, translation, and foreign language teaching and learning. An applied linguist uses information from linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and information theory to develop models of language use for the purpose of generating theory to be used in practical areas such as syllabus design, language planning, etc. (“Applied linguistics”, 2010). By placing ELT within the larger field of applied linguistics, we are missing the element of the role an ESL teacher is playing or could play in the larger society. By seeing English language teaching (ELT) as a linguistic activity, one has severed this very social act from its many social relations. This phenomenon has historical roots dating back to the early days that ELT was gaining professional and academic status.

Robert Phillipson traces the historical roots of English language teaching in his excellent book *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992). Although the considerable ELT experience of the 1800’s had produced several books and some material, there was no institutional base for the study of language learning and teaching until the late 1950’s with the establishment of the School of Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh University. The prospectus of this school states “the primary aim of the school is to provide a theoretical basis for the teaching of English as a foreign language within the wider framework of language teaching in general, which in turn is treated as
a branch of Applied Linguistics” (quoted in Phillipson 1991, p. 174). This statement clearly reflects the dominance of the field of linguistics in the first stage of ELT theory building. Furthermore, Phillipson’s research reveals that from very early on, the theoretical foundations of the field of ELT were laid in a post-colonial context with the British promoting English in the Third World. ELT was planting its academic institutional roots at the same time that the British were involved in educational planning for underdeveloped countries. The centre provided teacher training through the medium of English to the periphery secondary education institutions. This was happening at the same time that language teaching was inspired by the new professionalism in the field of applied linguistics (p. 183). At a key conference in 1961 in Makerere College, Uganda at the time when the British were involved in the educational planning of under-developed countries, British professors, directors from Universities of Edinburg, Leeds, and London along with representatives from 23 countries laid the theoretical underpinning of the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and ELT. It was in this conference that many of the basic principles of TESL were established, such as ‘English is best taught monolinually’, or ‘the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker’.

By dialectically looking at ESL teaching methods, one can see that these misconceptions lived on decades after the Makerere conference with SLA research as its engine. During the early years of theory-building, the central task of research in SLA was done by descriptive linguists who were concerned with providing descriptions of natural languages gathered from the natural speech of an adult native speaker. Not surprisingly, the second language teaching method of choice during this time was called the Direct Method. Also called the Natural Method, the Direct Method was developed in the early 1900s and contrasted traditional language teaching methods such as the Grammar Translation Method which focused on the grammar and
vocabulary of the mother tongue and target language for the purpose of translation, thus focusing on the written form of language. The Direct Method prohibited the use of the learner’s mother tongue in the class and all language teaching was done through the target language and main focus was on oral rather than written language. The native English speaker was thus viewed as the ideal linguistic model.

The Audio-lingual Method of second language teaching rose to prominence due to several circumstances in the field of science and world politics. One, the prominence of behaviourism in the field of psychology along with the continued relevance of structural linguistics gave rise to the Audio-lingual Method in second language teaching. Behaviourist psychologists were concerned with observable behaviours of humans and animals and maintained that through operant conditioning, behaviour could be controlled. Prominent behavioural psychologist, B.F. Skinner, also known as the father of operant conditioning, held that following a stimulus and response, there should be reinforcement and punishment in order to create behaviour change. Reinforcement would lead to repeating the behaviour whereas punishment, or negative reinforcement, would lead to the behaviour’s cessation. While Skinner’s early work included the study of rats and pigeons within the operant conditioning chamber, also called The Skinner Box, he later turned his attention and had great influence on the theorization of human verbal behaviour. In relation to learning, behaviourism held that a large amount of repetition followed by rewarding good behaviour and discouraging bad behaviour would lead to learning. With respect to language learning, the Audio-lingual Method held that language use is a type of behaviour. The language learner would stop the habits of his/her mother tongue and continue to use the habits of the target language. Accurate use of target language would be met with positive feedback or reinforcement while errors would be met with immediate correction.
Language teaching through this method included oral drills with rote repetition of the teacher who was the model native speaker. In cases where there was no access to a teacher who was a native speaker, recorded dialogues of native speakers would be played in classes. Language labs were set up in institutes that adopted this method so that learners could listen to and repeat recordings of native speakers in cubicles with headphones. Similar to the Direct Method, all instruction and interaction in this method was done in the target language and although correct grammar was expected, no explicit grammar instruction occurred. Learners were expected to ‘acquire’ grammar rules from the pool of correct sentences they heard and repeated, very much like the child learning the mother tongue. Second, the outbreak of World War II was key in the popularity of the Audio-lingual method. WWII had caused a large number of American servicemen to be posted in various parts of the world in need of basic oral skills. The Audio-lingual Method was well suited for teaching en masse and yielded very good results when practiced with WWII service people. Unsurprisingly, it was also called at the time The Army Method. Although faced with criticism later on mainly by prominent linguist Noam Chomsky, elements of the Audio-lingual method continue to be used in language institutes and schools. Repetition and drills are common and popular facets of many a language classrooms.

While earlier initiatives of ELT involved Britain in the colonies, the period during and after World War II was an important era for ESL teaching. Several phenomena were happening simultaneously. The United States’ significance on the world stage was increasing; the work of Charles C. Fries of the University of Michigan rose to prominence; the British were involved in teaching English in the colonies using a rigid Grammar-Translation Method; the attainment of independence by most of the remaining colonial territories between 1960 and 1965 are important moments in ELT history. During WWII, there was a small boom in the United States ELT
community with interest around the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). The program had introduced a new approach to teaching English consistent with the work of Fries which would later develop into the Audio-lingual method. Consistent with future occurrences, what became popular in the United States would later become popular in the United Kingdom.

The United States and the United Kingdom have been long time partners in promoting ‘world’ English (Phillipson 1992). Prime minister Churchill declared in the House of Commons on 24 August 1941: “... the British Empire and the United States who, fortunately for the progress of mankind, happen to speak the same language and very largely think the same thoughts ...” (Morton cited in Phillipson 2008). This language was used to spread “the same thoughts” through colonization across the British Empire. American presidents have mimicked the same sentiments: “We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language” (Roosevelt, 1919 cited in Phillipson 2009); “The whole world should adopt the American system. The American system can survive in America only if it becomes a world system” (Truman, 1947 cited in Phillipson). More recently, on official trips to India and China, then Prime Minister of England, Gordon Brown stated one of his goals being to make English “the world’s common language of choice” (cited in Phillipson 2009) which according to The Sun “could add a staggering 50 billion pounds a year to the UK economy by 2010” (Pascoe-Watson 2009).

The late 1950’s brought a new wave of linguists, most prominently Noam Chomsky, who questioned structural linguistics as well as behaviourist psychology. Very briefly, these linguists questioned structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology based on the creativity of language use. If language is acquired through conditioning with rote repetition and drills, then how can
we create new sentences and communicate in utterances that we have never before expressed or heard? Instead of seeing language learning as patterns etched by habit, the mind came to be known as a mechanism destined to learn language and all it needed was an appropriate environment to do its work. “Humans were predestined to acquire language just as birds were pre-destined to learn how to fly” (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). These assertions along with the demise of behaviourism created a climate of post-behaviourist eclecticism which claimed that learning was the outcome of cognitive processes triggered by input and sustained by motivation. If this is the case, then what kind of input is the right kind of input? Two scholars attempted to answer this question. The first, S.D. Krashen, an American applied linguist, claimed that we needed graded comprehensible input (1985). The second N.S. Prabhu, in South India, claimed that comprehension of input is important but what is essential for learning to occur is the completion of a communicative task (1987). At the same time, Swain’s Output Theory (1985) gained prominence also. Briefly, Output Theory claims that the act of producing language, as we do in speaking and writing, contributes to learning a language if done under certain circumstances. That is, comprehensible input is not enough. Meaning, listening or reading material (comprehensible input) is not adequate for learning a language. The act of producing language (output) as one does in speaking and writing is necessary. The learner first notices a gap between what she wants to say and what she can say. She then utters something with the language that she does know making a tacit hypothesis about the language she has used. The interlocutor’s feedback enables the learner to reprocess the initial hypothesis. Learners then reflect on this interaction making the output crucial in the internalization of linguistic knowledge. A new wave of second language teaching methods called Communicative Teaching Methods along with a sea of material was developed in the decades to follow. However, in order to see
this emergence within the aforementioned complex web of relations, I must also investigate what else was going on politically and socially at the time.

There were major political and social precursors when Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) gained prominence in the 1980’s first in Europe and later in the United States. The creation of the European Common Market created vast migration within Europe with large populations in need of foreign language learning. Furthermore, globalization instigated transnational migration with rising migration from outside OECD countries to OECD countries. The number of international students in the U.S. and U.K. increased by 50% from 2000 to 2005 as the United States and the United Kingdom each increased their international student population by 120,000. This increased demand caused by the migration of people led second language teachers and writers to change their methods from the time-consuming, accuracy-obsessed methods of the past to more fluency based, mother tongue friendly methods with more immediate pay offs. Where in the older methods accurate utterances were demanded; the new communicative methods desired fluency. Instead of teacher-centred classrooms, there was a shift toward student-centred pedagogies with pair and group work activities. Whereas a student may have passively learned the language for a period of time before producing language, CLT encouraged active learning where communication became the means to learning. Mistakes were seen as legitimate development in the language acquisition process and use of mother tongue in the language classroom was seen with a friendlier eye.

With the advancement of globalization, not only was there migration of people but also there was movement of corporations and capital. With the movement of trans-national corporations, large numbers of learners had to learn the language of corporations without ever leaving or intending to leave their country of origin. In response to these growing demands, the
second language teaching community made great changes. This put new demands on the second language teaching workforce. Primarily, it changed what was meant by ‘knowing a language’. Competence was viewed as communicative competence (Hymes, 1992) where knowing the linguistic structures of a language was no longer enough. Learners had to know the appropriate social situations to use structures. Categories such as grammar and vocabulary were changed in curricula to notions and functions. Notions are real life situations in which people communicate and functions are specific aims at communication. For example, in such an ESL class, the teacher may choose the real life situation of making a purchase in a shop. In this case, the notion would be shopping and the function would be asking for another size. To reiterate, a notion is a particular situation in which people communicate, and a function is a specific purpose for a person to communicate. For instance the notion of being lost requires many language functions such as asking for directions, requesting help, etc. Also, with large numbers of international students paying exorbitant international student fees, the desire to keep students satisfied grew. Many language teaching methods focused on learners’ needs and learner-centred curricula. William Glasser’s (1998) “Choice Theory” rose to prominence with the claim that by giving students the individual freedom to choose material and course work we are empowering them and promoting democracy. Choice theory posits that curriculum should be in the learners’ hands and they should decide what and how much to learn. This theory greatly helped to promote the primacy of the student. Since funding was based on student enrolment and retention, and students were paying high tuitions, institutions scrambled to make students happy.

Because many of these international students ended up in community colleges, this movement greatly altered the face of community college mission and strategy. In a qualitative, multi-case study examining change in seven colleges in the U.S. and Canada, Levin (2001)
found that community colleges had adapted to the global economy with missions concerned with the requirements of the private sector and the economy. Although the rhetoric of college presidents, board members, and administrators did not reflect it, community colleges in this study had embraced “a liberal technological philosophy of education” (p. 9) while other members such as faculty and support staff had “adopted the norms of the global economy” (p. 9). These norms assume an alignment between the free market and global competition and democracy and global economic and social benefits. The ELT community has responded to the student-as-client climate by celebrating student-centred pedagogy and promoting one-month long ESL teacher training programs in which trainees learn transmission skills and different ways to create a lively, communicative class from pre-made lessons.

**Federal Government of Canada and ESL Education: A Historical Overview**

The year 1947 was an important year in Canada. Post-World War II nation-building had led to several changes in immigration and citizenship policies. The citizenship act was passed as well as a new immigration act, and for the first time federally-funded English as a Second Language (ESL) classes were offered throughout Canada. On May 1, 1947, Prime Minister Mackenzie King issued a statement that Canada would build its population by immigration; however he lamented the scarcity that transportation by steamship allowed. This scarcity justified a selection process which would allow the ‘desirable’ immigrants to enter. Mackenzie stated that “Canada is perfectly within her right in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens” (Canada House of Commons Debate, 1947). The desirable citizens were unsurprisingly white.

---

6 [http://www.groupon.com/deals/tesol-express-7-memphis](http://www.groupon.com/deals/tesol-express-7-memphis) The 160-hour TEFL online course enables learners to receive a TEFL qualification (accredited by ACCREDITAT) for $69.

The 160-hour TEFL online course enables learners to receive a TEFL qualification (accredited by ACCREDITAT) for $69.
Europeans. Ciccarelli states of this citizenship policy, “The whiteness of Canada and the dominance of Anglo-Canadian culture would be preserved” (1997, p. 31). Non-Anglo-Canadian immigrants were expected to take the ESL/citizenship classes. It is within this context that federally-funded ESL classes were founded in Canada. The federal government has since funded ESL classes in Canada for over sixty years.

Cleghorn (2000) offers two purposes for federally-funded language instruction over the past decades: one is preparation for citizenship and the other is preparation for the labour market. Initially, ESL was offered to new immigrants as citizenship training whereas the booming economy of 1960’s changed the purpose of federal ESL classes to employment. The notion that citizenship would be taught in language classes has been around since the early 20th century. Anderson (1918) and Fitzpatrick (1919) use overtly assimilationist language to encourage immigrants to conform to Canadian ‘values’. Of the task of assimilating a large group of diverse people, Fitzpatrick states, “The children in the public schools of today will be the fathers and mothers of the next generation, and it is essential that the former be given an insight into our Canadian life and ideals, so that they in turn may impart these to their offspring” (1919, p. 238). The focus of ESL classes altered in 1965 from citizenship preparation to labour market preparation. This decision made by the federal government is indicative of economic interest in immigration, settlement, and language instruction.

**Federally Funded ESL Classes in Canada**

Federally-funded ESL classes emerged in 1947 within a political climate of post-war nation-building. Policy makers had a very particular vision of the white Anglo nation they desired to build and ESL classes were one space to promote this vision. These classes were offered
following heated arguments in the House of Commons with some members of parliament supporting selective immigration with overt racist discourse, such as Mr Reid: “too many people had come to Canada who insisted carrying on as they did in the country they left, speaking their languages and living in separate communities. This had been detrimental to national unity” (House of Commons Debates April 27, 1944 quoted in Ciccarelli, 1997). On another side of this debate, other MPs saw citizenship education as the solution to the problem of unity rather than selective immigration. These MPs advocated “teaching the best, and not the worst of our history, and the end of “harping” on old grievances. Old conflicts and ideas, stated Mrs. Nielson, worked against national unity” (House of Commons Debates April 27, 1944 quoted in Ciccarelli, 1997).

Although the 1867 British North America Act recognized the English and the French as Canada’s “two founding peoples”, Canada’s post-war immigration policy was implemented in a way to promote its Anglophone population. The selected newcomers gravitated towards Anglo culture with only 20 percent of immigrants arriving in the 1950’s settling in Quebec (Cleghorn, 2000). Nor did the citizenship act cut ties with Britain; British citizens in Canada enjoyed privileges not available to other immigrants. British nationals could vote in Canada and hold office, while non-British nationals had to give up their homeland nationality in order to become Canadian citizens and gain the right to vote. The ESL/citizenship classes were compulsory for all immigrants with the exception of those who had emigrated from Britain. The stakes were high in these ESL/ citizenship classes as any immigrant who did not gain an adequate knowledge of English was denied Canadian citizenship.

The focus of these compulsory ESL/ citizenship classes was to transfer the “values and attitudes” of Canadian life. Ciccarelli asks “did immigrants give up their identities, culture, values, norms and language upon becoming Canadian citizens?” (1997, p. 33). My answer is
that the framework for teaching English as a second language in the early days of federally-funded ESL classes was founded on acculturation and dispossession of one’s language and culture. The immigrant’s native language and culture was seen as the problem to be fixed. The aim of these classes was, as Frideres (2002) put it, “to transform immigrants into Canadians.” Robert Phillipson (1992) calls this monolingualism one of the basic tenets of ELT profession and in fact calls it a fallacy that the field of ELT is founded on and reminiscent of colonial tradition. Teaching English monolingualy “was the natural expression of power relations in the colonial period” (Phillipson, 1992, p. 187). This monolingual legacy lives on to this day in ESL teaching methods.

Since the focus of the federal English as a Second Language classes was initially assimilation and citizenship, the classes were funded and supervised by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. This focus changed over the next decade as the booming economy required a large population of labour, and with this change, financial responsibility for these classes expanded to other federal departments. In 1965, language instruction for immigrants became the responsibility of the Department of Manpower and Immigration as the emphasis of government-run language programs became employment. The Canadian Job Strategy (CJS) offered language training only to newcomers who were likely to enter the labour market (Haque & Cray, 2007). Newcomers who did not join the paid labour force were not eligible for these language training classes. These programs viewed men as the main breadwinner of the household and not surprisingly, the programs were offered to more men than women.

Under the conservative government of Brian Mulroney, Barbara McDougall as minister of Employment and Immigration introduced the first ever long term immigration plan. As part of this plan a Federal Integration Policy was created which included a new federal ESL policy.
This immigration plan was initially prompted by a 1989 report by the Department of Health and Welfare which reported on the economic and demographic needs of the nation (Ciccarelli, 1997). This report predicted Canada’s 2086 population to be at 25 million, the same as its 1986 population. The report also stressed the economic contribution of immigrants as well as how their average income as well as their education level was higher than the national average. It was clear that Canada needed more immigrants. As a result, McDougall supported the increase of immigration and also introduced strategies that would accommodate the integration of immigrants into Canadian society. Integration was defined as “finding a place in Canadian society, about a sense of belonging, and about assuming the rights and responsibilities of being Canadian” (Canada, Ministry of Employment and Immigration).7

The Federal Integration Strategy followed which provided for a new federal ESL policy. This new policy would “grant a range of more flexible options to a greater number of learners regardless of their labour market needs” (New Immigrant Training Policy, p. 1-2). The federal government encouraged a variety of program models and stressed learners’ needs to ensure broader enrolment. As a result, more women participate in the LINC program than previous federally-funded ESL classes. “Different forms of training responsive to client needs - full-time, part-time, classroom-based, workplace-based, or neighbourhood-based training - will be identified locally” (Government of Canada, 1991b, p. 5). It was within this context that the LINC program was introduced.

---

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)

LINC is the current manifestation of federally-funded English as a second language program for newcomers to Canada. It was initiated in 1992 by the government of Canada and provides language instruction to eligible adults in English or French “to facilitate their social, cultural, and economic integration into Canada” (LINC Curriculum Guidelines). Eligible adult learners are considered permanent residents of Canada, conventional refugees, or people whose application for landed immigrant status has been approved and is in process. Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, and temporary residents are not eligible for LINC classes. “Training will normally be offered during an immigrant’s first year in Canada and will place greater emphasis on introducing newcomers to shared Canadian values, rights and responsibilities” (Government of Canada, 1991b, p.3). After proving eligibility, the learner is assessed using a placement test administered at a local YMCA. The assessment test takes between 1.5 to 3 hours depending on the learner’s language proficiency and the learner is evaluated on the four skill areas – reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Speaking and listening are tested by interview and a paper test is administered to test reading and writing.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) lay out learning objectives and assessment indicators. The CLB are used as a national standard for both planning curricula and assessing and placing learners. The CLB include a number of descriptive statements of tasks that the learner can successfully complete in English, called competencies. In other words, the CLB provide a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency (rather than linguistic accuracy) in ESL; this scale is referred to as benchmarks. There are 12 benchmarks and each benchmark is divided into three stages: Stage I is Basic Proficiency, Stage II is Intermediate Proficiency, and Stage III is Advanced Proficiency. Each benchmark is then described by “performance
descriptors”; that is what language tasks the learner can perform such as participate in meetings or interviews. For example, the following is the performance descriptor of Benchmark 5: 1) Learner demonstrates initial ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks. 2) Can effectively convey an idea, opinion, feeling or experience in a single paragraph. 3) Can write short letters and notes on a familiar topic. 4) Can complete extended application forms. 5) Can take simple dictation with occasional repetitions at a slow to normal rate of speech. 6) Can reproduce in writing simple information received orally or visually. 7) Can write down everyday phone messages. 8) Can complete a short routine report (usually on a form) on a familiar topic. The 12 benchmarks are aligned with the 7 levels of LINC classes. For example, the above mentioned CLB 5 corresponds with LINC level 4.

Once the learner’s LINC level is determined, the assessment agency refers the learner to a LINC location for instruction. One level takes approximately 8 weeks although the length of the level is up to the discretion of the instructor. A full time class is 5 days a week from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and a part time class is typically two evenings from 6:30 to 9:00.

The CLB is used as a curriculum tool in that they offer content ideas, sample tasks and learning outcomes by using themes. For example, LINC 5–7 offers 12 themes along with 20 units which allow learners to utilize language in communicative situations. For instance, within the theme of Business, the unit on telephone calls in LINC 7 teaches students how to apologize to an angry customer. The lesson offers tips on how to respond to customer complaints on the telephone. Among these tips are “always respond to a complaint in a polite and professional manner (even if the customer is not behaving politely)” (LINC 5-7 Classroom Activities Volume 2).
Several documents have been published to enhance the understanding of the Benchmarks and LINC policies. These are Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB 2000; Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000) a set of 12 benchmarks which lay out objectives and indicators for each level, Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: A Guide to Implementation (Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis, & Pidlaski, 2001), and LINC Curriculum Guidelines: Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (Hajer, Robinson, & Witol, 2002). The latter two documents translate the benchmarks into teaching approaches, themes, and give suggestions for in-class activities.

The theoretical framework of the LINC programs is based on the theory of communicative competence. This theory holds that five areas of communication (competencies) must be achieved by the learner in order to be proficient in the second language. These competencies are linguistic, discourse, functional, socio-cultural, and strategic. Linguistic competence requires accuracy in grammar, structure, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. Discourse competence requires meaningful and coherent oral and written discourse. Functional competence is the ability to understand the function (or purpose) of an utterance or written text both at the macro level (such as persuasion) or at the micro level (such as apologizing). Socio-cultural competence involves understanding the social conventions at play during language use such as politeness and appropriacy. Strategic competence is the ability to apply verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to enhance the quality of the communication such as asking for clarification or paraphrasing. The CLB competencies are repeated in different contexts and themes within one LINC level as well as several LINC levels in what is called the spiralling approach to language instruction.

Other approaches to language instruction used in the LINC classes are the learner-centred approach and the task-based approach. The learner-centred approach involves learners being
actively involved in the direction of the program by providing input on content, activities and materials (Curriculum Guidelines). This involvement requires initial and ongoing needs assessments as well as feedback to ensure that “course content is meaningful and relevant to their everyday lives and long-term goals” (Curriculum Guidelines, p. 5). Furthermore, the task-based approach to language instruction involves learners performing language tasks (such as being on the phone with an angry customer) similar to those in the real world. The tasks involve interaction among students and are aimed to link classroom interaction to real-world communication. The language tasks covered in each LINC level also correspond to the CLB competencies.

With the inception of LINC in 1992, the main focus of government-funded language classes has been language instruction for the purpose of integration. The original LINC policy of 1991 states “the basic ability to communicate in one of Canada's official languages is often the essential first step towards successful integration” (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1991 p. 1). Derwing and Thomson (2005) believe that one of LINC’s purposes is to promote citizenship concepts in the ESL classroom. They assert “The intent of the LINC policy was for language teachers to promote the development of citizenship values” (p. 44). Thus, some theorists have focused on what comprises Canadian cultural values and how these values should be taught (Fleming, 2003; James, 2000) while others have criticized the superficial coverage of citizenship facts in the ESL classroom (Derwing & Thomson, 2005).

The advent of citizenship concepts taught in language classes has been greatly criticized. Derwing and Thomson (2005) argue that such concepts are best taught after immigrants have been in the country for at least three years whereas under LINC newcomers are expected to enter language training as soon as they arrive in Canada. By incorporating values, rights, and
responsibilities into the language curriculum, “the ESL community is doing citizenship education in LINC” (Derwing and Thomson, 2005). This advent coupled with changes in the citizenship process, such as multiple choice citizenship tests, lack of financial support for citizenship programs, have lead to a general decline in the state of citizenship education in Canada.

Another major change that appeared with the arrival of LINC was the rise of new providers in addition to the traditional institutional deliverers of ESL programs. “Suppliers could include local school boards, provinces, voluntary groups, commercial training institutes, and universities. Televised training, home study and other distance education models will also be explored” (Government of Canada, 1991b, p. 5). While some have deemed the opening of LINC to commercial enterprises as innovative and flexible, others have greatly criticised it (Cleghorn, 2000; Sauve, 1996). These critics state that this change is motivated by the desire to save money and has resulted in “a watering down of both the quality of programs and the professionalism of the field” (Derwing & Thomson, 2005, p. 46). In fact, Derwing & Thomson have found that LINC teachers in the new programs have in many instances been paid less than those teachers in previous ESL institutions and that several new enterprises are offering federally-funded ESL classes despite the lack of qualified instructors (p. 47).

Khalideen (1998) has studied several LINC programs in Edmonton from the learners’ perspective. She investigated whether students feel in control of the content and whether the learners feel that their needs are being met as the LINC policies claim. From the interviews on her participants she found a very superficial level of involvement of learners as partners in the learning process. Khalideen states “involving learners ... in partnership in the classroom is a
facade, a kind of 'cover-up' to make transparent the notion of learners' involvement” (p. 92).

Khalideen places much blame on teachers as opposed to the conditions that the program brings about. Of learners’ perspective on teachers, she states:

“Learners speak about their fears of meeting with the teacher for the first time or being scared about hurting the teachers’ feelings by speaking out on issues which concern them. They also tell about teachers not taking kindly to their constant questioning in class, particularly questions related to controversial issues. Teachers seem to want to exercise a firm control over learning activities. This could be a reason for not asking learners about their needs as the classes progress” (p. 97).

The LINC program has also been studied from the perspective of teachers. In a study of 25 LINC teachers at various LINC centres, Haque and Cray (2007) found many debilitating constraints imposed on LINC teachers. These constraints include isolation, lack of job security, lack of professional development, underfunded programs, continuous intake of students, low wages, and problems with professional accreditation. As the federal government has opened LINC programs to different suppliers, LINC is now being offered in different spaces, some not suitable for instruction. As a result, Haque and Cray found LINC teachers felt isolated from the rest of the teaching community and at times had to accommodate for the inadequate facilities and lack of resources themselves. One teacher in their study stated, “I was going my god ... I’ve got six years of post-secondary education ... I’m sitting in a gym in the dark with three students” (p. 638).

Teachers have also complained about the Canadian Language Benchmarks being difficult to understand, interpret, and implement (Haque & Cray, 2007). Teachers are expected to use the themes, skills, and grammar points indicated in the benchmarks. They also have to report student progress based on the benchmarks. The teachers interviewed by Haque and Cray reported that the benchmarks were an ever-present reality, a set of reference points that teachers were expected to acknowledge” (p. 637). This is clearly at conflict with the learner-centred,
needs-based approach indicated in LINC policy. The LINC Curriculum Guidelines (Hajer, Robinson, & Witol, 2002) states that ongoing needs assessment is required in order to ensure that course content is both meaningful and relevant to learners’ everyday lives (Curriculum Guidelines, p. 5). How are benchmarks indicated by ESL theorists in the year 2000 mindful of all learners’ needs more than a decade later? How can a program that claims to be learner-centred and needs-based follow benchmarks as its pre-determined curriculum?

The LINC program’s flexibility and broad scope of enrolment also translate into deficient teaching conditions on the ground. One main characteristic of LINC classes is the multi-level classroom along with continuous intake of students (Cray, 1997; Haque & Cray, 2007). This imposes great hardship on teachers as they must plan lessons for different levels in each session. “I have three levels of students, so quite often I will do 3 sets of materials for this class or two activities. When you look at the preparation time, I probably earn below minimum wage” (LINC teacher quoted in Haque & Cray 2007, p. 639).

In an institutional ethnography of a LINC program in Toronto, Cleghorn (2000) explores the institutional and social practices that shape the social relations of the program. Cleghorn also studies classroom interactions to look at how difference is constructed in a way to preserve and reproduce Anglo-Canadian dominance. To Cleghorn, the LINC program is a form of education where a certain relation to language and culture is explicitly being taught. Policies and practices within the program are governed by the overarching mandate that Canadian values and beliefs must be taught through the English language. Cleghorn refers to incidents in the LINC classroom as examples of students’ relation to language and culture in ways that both accommodate and resist it (p. 107).
The LINC program was faced with negative reception upon its inception from ESL teaching associations, community groups, and grassroots organizations. These groups expressed outrage at not being consulted. For instance, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) expressed resentment at not being invited to discuss the problems of ESL programming (Ciccarelli, 1997, p. 70). The main concern of these organizations was that LINC was not addressing the problems of previous federally-funded ESL programs. For example, critiques claimed that eligibility to attend free ESL classes should not be limited to the first years of arrival in Canada; this prohibits those immigrants who have postponed language learning for financial or family reasons. Also, the assessment process as well as its tool came under attack. The A-LINC, LINC’s assessment test, was criticized for being culturally biased and test locations were not accessible to many immigrants. Furthermore, the 600 hours of language instruction as permitted by LINC was deemed insufficient for language proficiency.

These criticisms prompted stakeholders to come up with solutions to some of the above-mentioned problems. For example, a more culturally neutral assessment test was created. OCASI presented the Manager of the LINC Delivery Unit in Metro Toronto with a list of recommendations to improve the program; the top recommendation being that community and state stakeholders be consulted in the future.

Ciccarelli (1997) considers this problem-solving approach to LINC patchwork, temporary, and unable to solve issues. For example, she reminds us that the 1981 report submitted to the federal government by TESL Canada stating the problems and recommendations of ESL in Canada are very similar to the report that OCASI submitted in 1992. Clearly, a deeper look into the essence of the program is needed.
Ciccarelli (1997) examines the connection of all federally funded ESL classes since 1947, including LINC, to citizenship policy and federal nation-building. She argues that the federal government has used covert racist discourse to apply racist policies to Canadian nation-building and the ESL classroom has been one space where dominance of white Anglo-Canadian ideology is reproduced. The main purpose of these classes has been to “Anglicize or Canadianize” the immigrant population. The problems persist because critics fail to connect ESL, Federal Integration Policy, and immigration policy. If they did, Cicceralli asserts, they would have to examine the connection between the education of the “Other” and Canadian nation building. They would also have to connect selective immigration policies with assimilationist policies in schools. They would have to relate federally funded ESL programs to the ‘Canadianization’ of the “Other”. “Critics would have been prompted to question the rhetorical arguments used by political elites to legitimate these interconnections” (p. 74).

Reflection and Analysis

The essence of the initial purposes of federally funded ESL classes continues to this day. ESL professionals are serving the dual purpose of providing citizenship education as well as preparing newcomers for the labour market. Carpenter (2011) refers to “the citizen frenzy” in education theory which she traces back to the rejection of liberal individualism in works such as Habits of the Heart (1985) and Strong Democracy (1984). However, the citizenship education offered in ESL classes today is reminiscent of Canada as a benevolent haven for newcomers.

Learner-activists are quite aware and weary of this. Belma, to whom the reader will be introduced to in detail in chapter four, speaks of her dismay of the constant topic given to her in her ESL classes: “how to be a good Canadian.” The topic “embarrassed” her when the teacher
taught the ways of life of Canadian, what Canadians do and how Canadians act. Whenever students wanted to make connections between their native African or Middle Eastern countries and Canada, the teacher would say, “Okay, right now you're here; you are safe.” Belma saw this mode of teaching as very “imposing”. She says what it really conveys is a message of “just delete your past … everything is different here.”

My approach to understanding the vast literature on policy and pedagogy of TESL has been to dynamically and dialectically find the relationships that bind individual experience, consciousness, and larger institutional processes. Dialectical conceptualization, the theory of consciousness, and praxis allow one to see the relations between thoughts and actions not only in individuals but as social forms of consciousness. They urge me to ask the question, “How is this person thinking about second language education in order to be teaching in this way?” In the following chapter, I will explore the current debates within critical ESL education theory in relation to race, gender, and class. I will also examine the spread of the English language through forces of globalization and imperialism as well as search the role the ESL teaching industry plays in these forces and processes.
Chapter Three: 
Critical Debates in Language Learning Literature

Critical scholars have theorized language learning in relation to gender, race, and class. Also, there are critical theorists who view the spread of English related to the imperial project as teachers spread the language of empire as well as its religion and culture. Given the historical and dialectical lens of this study, it is impossible to see the English language let alone ESL education without a consideration for processes of colonization, capitalism’s advancement, and imperialism. It is equally inconceivable to see ESL education severed from relations of race, gender, and class. In this chapter, I provide an overview of critical theorization in the field of English language teaching (ELT). I also refer to critical ESL classroom practice i.e. what is being done in classes. I also explore Linguistic Imperialism (Philipson, 1992) and the historical roots of the dominance of English as the “world language” at this moment in history. It is also intriguing to see how the spread of English parallels the spread of Christianity as well as the growth of the American empire. Finally, I include a section of current work being done in the field of English language teaching that is critical and aim for action and social justice.

By including separate sections on race, gender, and class in conjunction with language learning, I am not insinuating that these are disconnected categories. It is for the purpose of analysis that I have included separated sections for these relations that are intrinsically connected. Ibrahim’s study is a good example of the interconnectedness of racial and gender identity construction in second language acquisition (1999). In this study, French-speaking African immigrant boys “became black” through identifying with the Black American pop culture through rap and hip hop music. The immigrant girls from Africa however viewed the rap music as sexist and used a different kind of black pop music that was softer and more romantic...
as a language learning tool. This is a clear example of the relations of gender and race at play during language learning.

I acknowledge the ties that bind relations of gender, race, and class along with ethnicity, age, sexuality have been used as tools of marginalization and disempowerment. And I acknowledge the multiple social locations that a person occupies. I have separated the sections merely as a way of presenting research and reviewing literature in these categories in a comprehensive way. I am aware that language learning and race, gender, and class overlap in many ways.

The attention to gender, race, and class in SLA research in general is light. When race, gender, and class are mentioned in introductory books on SLA and teacher training texts, they are usually conceptualized as issues of learner variables. For instance, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) report on factors which could influence success in language learning and among age, aptitude, motivation, personality, learning strategies, gender is also mentioned as one of the factors. Gass and Selinker (2001), another introductory text on SLA, does not even mention gender, race, and class but lumps them together as “non-language influences”. However, researchers interested in the sociocultural aspects of SLA have incorporated gender, race, and class into their analysis. Mitchell and Myles (1998) conceptualize the learner as “a social being” and are concerned with socially-constructed elements such as race, gender, and class in the learner’s identity. Peirce (1995) also calls for issues of race, gender, and class and their interconnectedness to become an integral focus of inquiry within SLA research.
Race, Racism, and Language Education

Teachers of English as a Second Language are generally professionals who work with people of diverse background and ethnicity. This makes discussion of racism in “a nice field like TESOL” (Kubota, 2002) uncomfortable for some. However, in my experience as an ESL teacher, I find that the willingness to work with diverse populations does not make one immune to racism. In fact, if one sees oneself as superior due to one’s language capital or consciously or unconsciously creates a space within the ESL classroom where continued subjugation of immigrant population is reproduced, then that willingness does not mean absence of racism. Nor can we as TESOL professionals avoid the responsibility to examine our field for racism in both its knowledge pool and its practice. Ladson-Billing states that exposing racism is both an uncomfortable and an unpopular position especially when many believe that they are “permanent residents in a nice field like education” (1999, p. 27).

In the broad field of education, critical multiculturalism, critical race theory, and Whiteness studies have critiqued the liberal understanding of racism. In liberal theory, racism is conceptualized as isolated visible acts committed by individuals. That is, racism is understood as overt acts or behaviour conducted by individuals. Institutionalized and structural racism which systematically privileges one race over another is not considered nor questioned. Critical scholarship not only rejects and denies individual bigotry but goes beyond to also relate it to systemic and institutional sources. Critical scholars of education reveal and problematize institutionalized inequalities and injustices that affect teaching and learning (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May, 1999).

Critical scholarship has criticized school settings for various aspects including race and racism (McLaren, 1994, 2006; Giroux, 2009, 2010). Scholars have problematized how
textbooks and teaching material represent racial groups. The commercialization, privatization and market considerations in educational settings that undermine civic and critical learning needed for a just future has been pointed to (Giroux, 2010). “The issue of how identities, values, and desires are shaped in the classroom are the grounds of politics” (Giroux, 2010). Pedagogy and curriculum are examined to reveal aspects of how they provide and deny access to different groups by setting norms and restrictions. Issues of inclusivity have been documented as studies reveal Asian-Americans facing discriminatory employment practices in the academy and as a result being under-represented in university faculties (Nakanishi, 1993). In sum, to understand racism only as individual acts of bigotry misses the institutionalized, social complexity of racism in the larger society (Kubota, 2002).

The color-blind liberal discourse of equality, meritocracy, and individualism holds that all are equal and success or failure is caused by the individual’s effort or deficit. This discourse coupled with race-based explanations of success or failure (focusing on factors such as learning styles) and pluralist notions of multiculturalism maintains whiteness as the norm reinforces and maintains institutionalized racism while all the while seeming benevolent and progressive. The field of TESL is not immune to this seemingly progressive liberal discourse.

Auerbach (1995), Auerbach and Burgess (1985), and Canagarajah (1999) have indicated that ESL curriculum, textbooks, and materials often have hidden agendas of assimilation to White culture. These theorists have also pointed out the racial stereotypes present in ESL material. How ‘other’ cultures are portrayed in ESL textbooks and publications has been the focus of some studies (Benesch, 1999; Spack, 1997; Stapleton, 2001; Zamel, 1997).

The native speaker construction in relation to whiteness, forces non-native English teachers of color to face challenges that their white colleagues do not face. Walelign’s (1986)
“Non-Native Speakers Need Not Apply” documented some of the discrimination that non-native speakers of English face when applying to teach ESL. It is this “birthright mentality” (p. 40) which feeds into the “native speaker fallacy” which insinuates that anyone who can speak a language can teach it. Furthermore, as the teacher is positioned as White, “an implicit juxtaposition is made between the powerful (White) ESL teacher and the powerless (mainly non-White) minority student” (Amin 1999).

Epistemological racism is another issue that must be considered by critical scholarship. Epistemological racism has been defined as the creation and reinforcement of research methodologies that are based on the social history and culture of the dominant race (Scheurich 1997). Canagarajah (1996) exposes the challenges faced by scholars of the South who are marginalized and excluded from the academic publishing process. As possible solutions to epistemological racism, Kubota suggests a counterhegemonic use of dominant discourse. As an example he points to Said’s influential work on Orientalism which exposed Western power over the East by using French philosophy as its analytical tools. A more interesting suggestion by Kubota is the creation of an entirely new epistemology arising from the worldview of the marginalized.

The above account shows how complex and deeply rooted race and racism is in all areas of social life including teaching and learning ESL. Furthermore, the age of post-modernism of celebrating diversity and respecting diverse opinions without totalizing them has further obscured racism and its effects. This discourse fails to recognize the privilege of social location. Kubota calls on applied linguists “to recognize that racism is woven into the very fabric of our institutions, the threads that we must work to make visible and unravel” (2002, p. 90).
Gender Relations and Language Education

SLA research is replete with articles and studies which explore gender and language in a way that investigates how men and women learn and use a second language differently in different settings. Sunderland (2000) synthesizes a large number of these publications which investigate gender differences with purely data-based approaches. I will not be including those studies in this review because I am not interested in gender as a learning variable. Nor am I interested in gender as a fixed and static notion of difference in language-related behaviours. Such studies ignore the social, cultural and situational contexts in which language is acquired and used. I am interested in unravelling and exposing how gender inequality is produced by unjust and unequal social relations; further I would like to explore the potential of the ESL classroom as a subaltern space to organize and take action against these unequal social relations. Therefore, in this section I will include studies on gender and language education which are not purely linguistic and those which are social and critical.

Compared to race and class, gender has been explored and theorized most in SLA research. Researchers have shown interest in gender in the field of second language writing (Belcher, 2001; Johnson, 1992; Bijami, Kashef, Khaksari, 2013; Kamari, Gorjian, Pazhakh, 2012; Kubota, 2003; Pavlenko, 2001), in composition writing (Jarratt & Worsham, 1998; Ritchie & Boardman 1999; Adeyami, 2008; Griva, Semoglou, Panteli, 2009) and in relation with age (Shakouri and Saligheh, 2012). Classroom practices which contribute to patriarchal, hierarchical, and dominating practices in society have also been identified and critiqued (Davies, 1989; Ellsworth, 1989; Gaskell, 1992; Cameron, 1997, 1998, 2005). Increasingly, publications are appearing which are considering how language education practices may be changed, developed, or abandoned in order to facilitate learning as well as social change. The reason for
this increased interest, Vandrick (1994) speculates, is a large number of women instructors teaching ESL in colleges coupled with literature influenced by feminism which lends itself well to reading and writing.

Whatever the reason, interest in the relationship of gender and language education has led to some fascinating theorization. For instance, Pavlenko (2004) urges us to look at the dual role in which gender influences language learning.

On the one hand, learners come into classrooms as individuals whose motivations, investments, choices, and options may be influenced by gender as a system of social relations and discursive practices. On the other hand, language classrooms introduce students to “imaginary worlds” of other languages where gender and sexuality may be constructed and performed differently than in their own culture (p. 55).

Pavlenko (2004) identifies three key areas in which gender issues and language learning has been researched: 1) gendered inequalities in access to resources (both material and symbolic), 2) gendered nature of linguistic interaction, and 3) sexual harassment as social practice. Firstly, a key finding in research about gendered inequalities in second language learning is that women, especially older immigrant women of low socioeconomic background, face social barriers and gatekeeping practices that limit their access to education and resources in their new setting (Corson, 2001; Heller, 1999, 2001; Kouritzin, 2000; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). This becomes particularly restricting when access to healthcare, employment, and education is through knowledge of the majority language.

Secondly, the gendered nature of linguistic interaction is studied with different perspectives. Some studies measure the differences between the amount and quality of talk between boys and girls and men and women (Sadker & Sadker, 1985). A second perspective explores classroom talk in more of a critical framework than that of time sharing. This perspective examines how class and gender mediate the learning experience. An example of this
type of study is Willett (1995) where in her exploration of an ESL classroom with young middle class girls and a working class boy, she found that learners whose values did not align with local ideologies (in this case a working class boy) were held back in the education system. These learners could possibly lose the desire to learn the new language or take part in passive resistance to classroom practices which could prove self-deprecating to their own success.

Thirdly, research on sexual harassment in language learning context has been done (Ehrlich, 2001; Polanyi, 1995; Siegal, 1996; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Polanyi (1995) studied the language outcomes of American male and female learners before and after their trip to Russia. Before the trip, both male and female learners scored similarly on the Russian Oral Proficiency test whereas upon their return, the males scored significantly higher. Polanyi links this differential achievement to sexual harassment experienced by the female learners noting that these women grew reluctant to interact with Russians as a result of sexual harassment. Talburt and Stewart (1999) study of a female African American student studying language in Spain points to the relation of gender and race in interaction. The learner found herself the subject of commentaries on her sexuality and her skin as she walked in the streets. This harassment provoked a negative reaction for the learner toward the Spanish language and its speakers which in turn affected the learner’s lack of desire to continue to learn the language.

Pavlenko’s handling of the issue of sexual harassment is problematic. As a way to counteract sexual harassment in language learning contexts, Pavlenko suggests “classroom discussions of competing conceptions of sexual harassment” as well as “to acknowledge cross-cultural differences in discourses of gender and sexuality, and “appropriate linguistic means of verbal self-defence”. Furthermore, she identifies the lack of knowledge of discourses of gender and sexuality as a possible cause of “miscommunication and negative attitudes toward the target
language”. Although it is important to acknowledge cross-cultural differences in gender, we must be conscious of not adopting a cultural relativism which recognizes difference but offers no critique of social relations which reproduce inequality. Also, it is important not to position Western female values as normative and desirable.

Another key feature of a critical feminist approach to language education has been inclusivity. Feminist approaches to foreign and second language learning have moved past mere including marginalized learners in the classroom. Previous studies which measured “time donation” have given way to more critical frameworks. Interesting work on critical consciousness-raising within the language classroom has been done (McMahill 1997, 2001; Frye, 1999). Although studies are done in various contexts, what are pedagogically common among them are personal narrative, sharing experiences, giving and receiving advice, and exploring differences and commonalities of religious background, nationality, and social class among the learners.

Furthermore, Kramsch and von Hoene (2001) explain a feminist pedagogy puts the subject in the center. “It appeals not only to the learner’s mind and behaviours, but to a subject’s emotions, body, and his or her social and political habitus” (p. 297). Feminist pedagogies do not ignore language, but they do not teach a predetermined curriculum either. Feminist pedagogies organize teaching around daily experiences of learners “while acknowledging their complex and gendered realities and multilingual lives” (Pavlenko 2004, p. 55).

An interesting and successful example of critical feminist pedagogy in the English classroom is that of Schenke (1996) and deserves elaboration here. In this study Schenke explores the students’ (mostly women) shared interest in soap operas in an advanced-level writing class in Canadian culture. Using feminist theory, Schenke starts from the premise that
students have come to class already knowing and that pleasure and desire are complex and important issues in the learners’ lives. The class started with a discussion of what personal histories are evoked from watching these soap operas. Then, the class read various feminist texts about femininity and pleasure in its original or paraphrased (by Schenke) form. The reading led to discussion and reflection on early moments of the formation of the group’s femininity. Next, the students were asked to watch and discuss an episode of their favourite soap and connect and record any memories evoked by this viewing. They then produced a written paper linking personal histories and the soap operas with analyses offered by the readings. The result Schenke states was not only “a remarkable set of writings in English, but they also allowed for the personal to be situated within and against the social organization of femininity through media practices and feminist theories of desire” (p. 157). The class then went on to envision what a non-sexist soap opera would look like and to help with that they watched a soap opera produced by the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation. This led to further reflection and discussion on the connection between antiracism and feminism. In fact, in this class feminist discourse itself became a site of inquiry and rather than treating feminism as a social issue or as “the tired treatment of gender and women’s lib in many of our ESL textbooks” (p. 156). “We were able, I think, to do the work of memory in a way that simultaneously historicised the present and politicized the personal” (p. 157).

**Class Relations and Language Education**

Compared to race and gender, literature on class relations with respect to language learning and language education is very small. Among the few scholars who have theorized second language learning and class, Kubota (2003) states that poststructuralist and constructivist approaches
explore how class gets constructed by social practices and discourses and how socioeconomic status positions one in learning a language. Furthermore, in relation to second language writing, Kubota warns of treating gender, race, and class with a ‘difference approach’. “Such an approach could (re)produce a fixed binary between male and female, middle-class and working-class, or white people and those of color, reinforcing a fixed knowledge of how and what a certain group of people write in a second language” (Kubota, 2003, p. 37). Instead Kubota urges that gender, class, and racial differences should be unpacked in relation to power and discourse. As a possible area of inquiry, Kubota (2003) suggests “how L2 writers with different socioeconomic status write differently in L2 with respect to process and product” (p. 41). Also, Wareing (1994) suggests a relational approach to research where differences in gender, race, and class are both investigated and critiqued “so that a positive new orientation is created for what has so far been the language of the marginalized” (Wareing quoted in Kubota 2003).

Other theorists are studying how class influences people’s learning experiences in mainstream education settings. Heath (1983) studied how white working-class residents and black working-class residents, living only a few miles apart in the United States, communicated differently with middle-class townspeople. Rose (1989) maps out his own struggle as the son of working class immigrant parents in remedial writing classes. In literacy studies, Gee (1996) points to a mismatch between social and linguistic conventions of marginalized groups and the mainstream society due to social practices in their families, and communities. This mismatch, Kubota believes, is likely to bring discomfort, struggle, or dilemma for learners of lower socioeconomic background and the examination of these struggles may prompt critique and political action. Canagarajah has studied the inequality in academic publishing. The economic
disparity between the center and the periphery scholars influences what gets published and whose ideas are disseminated (Canagarajah, 1996).

**Globalization, Empire, Migration, and English**

Forces of globalization, imperialism, and migration are intricately connected with the primacy of English as a global language. This phenomenon has placed the field of ELT at an interesting position. It is precisely because of globalization that large populations are learning English in say Indian call centres. To a liberal theorist, this could be seen as job creation in a developing country with the help of English language teaching. However, as employees are asked to change their names, emulate Western accents, hide their work location, learn Western lifestyles, we can see that along with their training, workers are also learning the “social and cultural messages of imperialism” (Mirchandani and Maitra 2007). At the same time, ELT is helping the trainees to engage in their own acculturation and mask their identities. I believe that this is a new phenomenon and specific to the era of globalization that large numbers of people are being Westernized, Americanized, and acculturated without leaving their countries. It is important for ELT professionals to realize this and not be overly concerned with the technicism of transferring minute linguistic features to un-gendered, unraced, un-classed learners in decontextualized laboratory situations. It is important for ELT professionals to view language learning as a social activity and the learner as a social being. We cannot sever the learner from his/her history and experiences any more than we can isolate learning into a list of skills. Just as knowledge must be contextualized and historicized, so too should the learners’ experiences be uncovered for their social relations. Experience is valuable learning content only when penetrated theoretically. Too often in the ESL classroom, the events that have brought the learner to that classroom are not taken into account while one-size-fits-all vocabulary and structure which has been pre-
determined and assumed necessary are taught. In order to better grasp the complex connection between globalization and the spread of English, I will first offer a brief overview of the literature of globalization.

Globalization is a highly contested term. Within academia the debates about globalization revolve around questions about its reality and significance. Held and McGrew (2007) argue that globalization elicits responses from the extreme right, ‘globaphobia’ to the ‘globaphilia’ of the neoliberals. Although this is a gross generalization, this lack of consensus is partly the reason why there is no agreed upon definition for the term. An explanation of the dimensions of globalization is more appropriate. Globalization comprises of four major dimensions: the economic, the social, the political and the cultural (Robertson and White 2007). Jarvis (2007) conceptualizes globalization as a process in which a technological-economic core advertises its products globally to generate a huge market. This core is protected by the political and military strength of the United States as well as through global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The global substructure exercises power over the superstructure (nation states, local governments, and individuals). Throughout this process, it is knowledge and technology that allows the production of consumer commodities and since knowledge and technology as well as capital is controlled by the United States political and military might, globalization is Americanization according to Jarvis. This process plays out in individuals’ lives as people are ‘required’ to move as ‘global nomads’ (Jordan and Duvell 2003) as “a response to or resistance against, global institutional transformations and the integration of the world economy” (Jordan and Duvell 2003, p. 63). Castles and Miller estimate that about 3% of the world’s population – about 200 million people – live outside their countries of birth.
Mass migration has thus become one of the tenets of the “new world disorder” (Anderson 2002) as the migrating workforce is ready to be utilized by the host country.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) uses historian, Robbie Robertson’s analysis to identify three waves of globalization which are associated with three phases of modern colonialism and imperialism.

The first wave of globalization started with Spain and Portugal seeking trade routes to China and India for resources. This first wave laid the foundation of European empires, modern global finance and trade, and new global systems of production. The second wave started in the 1800’s as a result of the industrial revolution. First Britain followed by Germany, Japan, and the United States increased productivity and profit and decreased cost by mechanization. However, “for the majority of the world’s peoples, globalization meant only one thing: colonialism” (Robertson, 2003: p. 131). The two world wars marked the beginning of the third wave of globalization with the two victors dividing the world into two ideological camps. In this stage colonization took a different appearance “hegemonic control without territorial possession” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: p. 3). Westernization and modernization became synonymous and the United States established the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank (known previously as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), and the World Trade Organization (previously called the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). These institutions helped bring American style free-market economy around the world which accelerated with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Thus, a historical review reveals that globalization and empire have always been interconnected while the two have led to migration.

Shibao Guo (2010) offers a comprehensive summary of transnational migration patterns within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Net migration from outside OECD countries to OECD countries is rising. “In terms of permanent
migration, from an average of 790 000 persons per year between 1956 and 1976, 1.24 million per year between 1977 and 1990, and 2.65 million per year from 1991 to 2003, numbers in 2006 reached four million” (Guo 2010, p. 154). Temporary migration in 2006 was 2.5 million. The number of international students increased by 50% from 2000 to 2005 as the United States and the United Kingdom each increased their international student population by 120 000. With the exception of Australia, immigrants, including highly qualified immigrants, earn less than native-borns of OECD countries. Furthermore, the over-representation of immigrants in manual labour as compared to office work is significant. These numbers and statistics of migration flows, taken within the context of globalization, help us better understand economic, political, and cultural changes. One of those changes is the learning of the host country’s language. It is within this context that I situate the learning of English as a second language (ESL).

As a result of transnational migration, globalization, and imperialism English is the most widely learned foreign language in the world (Phillipson 2009). This of course translates into big business for a burgeoning TESL industry. Gordon Brown in one of his first trips as prime minister to India and China stated one of his goals being to make English “the world’s common language of choice” (cited in Phillipson 2009) which according to The Sun “could add a staggering 50 billion pounds a year to the UK economy by 2010” (Pascoe-Watson 2009). The promotion of English, however, goes beyond dollar value and has historical, colonial roots. The United States and United Kingdom have been long time partners in promoting ‘world’ English (Phillipson 1992). Prime minister Churchill declared in the House of Commons on 24 August 1941: “… the British Empire and the United States who, fortunately for the progress of mankind, happen to speak the same language and very largely think the same thoughts …” (Morton cited in Phillipson 2008). This language was used to spread “the same thoughts”
through colonization across the British Empire. American presidents have mimicked the same sentiments: “We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language” (Roosevelt, 1919 cited in Phillipson 2009); “The whole world should adopt the American system. The American system can survive in America only if it becomes a world system”. (Truman, 1947 cited in Phillipson).

Expanding “the American system” or spreading “the same thoughts” has not been a peaceful process. The English language has been taken all over the world by educators and missionaries who have followed soldiers and occupiers. On the role of British education in India, Lord Macaulay in 1835 stated the desire to produce “a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect” (cited in Phillipson 2011). A twentieth century example of the violent spread of English is the Canadian residential schools where aboriginal children were separated from their families for the purpose of “killing the Indian in the child”. Children were punished, often abused, for not speaking English or for practicing their own faith; the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996 (Assembly of First Nations 2009).

Modern day, post-colonial linguistic invasion has taken the form of think tanks, conference subsidies, and scholarships. Saunders (1999) focuses on how Americans influenced scholars in Western Europe through conference subsidies and publications. Major conferences in the 1950’s and 1960’s strengthened Anglo-American collaboration in teaching English with key contributors of the time urging that teaching English as a foreign language is apolitical but can make the world a better place (Richards 1968). Moreover, Cecil Rhodes who held the superiority of the Anglo race set up the Rhodes scholarship to fund scholars who would spread
British influence when they left Oxford University; to date there have been roughly 7000 Rhodes scholars.

Despite the evidence of the historical roots of the domination of English, there are those scholars who have turned a blind eye and claim the current state of English as a world language occurred serendipitously. For instance, Crystal (1997) states that the English language happened to be “in the right place at the right time” (p. 110). Kaplan (2001) calls the rise of English as a world language “the outcome of the coincidence of accidental forces” (p. 19). Van Parijs (2004), a political scientist, also states the dominance of the English language is due to “no conspiracy by the Brits, let alone the Americans, but the spontaneous outcome of a huge set of decentralised decisions, mainly by non-Anglophones, about which language to learn and which language to use” (p. 124). These theorists are detaching this moment in the life of the English language from its historical roots. Also, they are conceptualizing language as merely a tool for communication and fail to realize its connection to identity and power, thus detaching language from politics. By failing to make these connections, these theorists are reinforcing the hegemonic ideology that dominance happens by chance.

This presents an ethical dilemma for TESL scholars: Do our activities, as researchers or educators, contribute to the advancement of linguistic imperialism, neoliberal policies and capitalist economy? Are we greasing the wheels of U.S. corporate, global expansion? Are we post-colonial missionaries?

Language teaching has been associated with missionary work since its early stages. Mission work has involved the promotion of colonial language and terminating non-Christian practices (Errington, 2001; Ferguson, 1982; Noll, 2002). More recently, connections between American neo-imperialism, evangelical Christianity, and English language teaching have been
made by critical ELT theorists (Johnston & Varghese, 2006; Crooks, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). There is a parallel between the spread of Christianity, especially evangelical Christianity, and global growth of US power. The number of Christians in the world has grown from 1.2 billion in 1970 to 2 billion in 2000 (The Economist, 2001). Furthermore, 60% of this number now lives in the developing world compared to 15% in 1900 (Johnston and Varghese, 2006). As the majority of mission work worldwide is carried out by missionaries from U.S.-based evangelical churches, this increase in number has unsurprisingly been in non-traditional sects of Christianity such as Assemblies of God, and a Pentecostalist group while the number of Protestant and Catholics has steadily decreased (The Economist, 2001). The growth in the number of missionaries also parallels US imperial growth as evangelical missionary efforts have focused on regions of particular strategic importance to US global politics such as Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East (Crooks, 2003).

Some evangelical Christian organizations even have ties with the CIA despite a 1976 declaration to cease direct cooperation between the CIA and missionary work (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). Diamond (1989) lists connections between many Christian organizations and the CIA. As an example, Diamond records the expulsion of a Wycliffe Bible Translation Summer Institute of Linguistics missionary group by the Mexican president in 1983. This institute was funded by the State Department under the pretense of International Development. The evangelical Christian project very much depends on English teachers to fulfill its means. Crooks’ (n.d.) and Pennycook’s and Coutand-Marin’s (2003) review of evangelical materials revealed that English teaching is an important platform for missionary work. For example, Tennant (2002), a writer for an evangelical website, states, “Start an evangelical church in Poland, and no one will come. Start an English school and you’ll make many friends” (Cited in
Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). Vision International Alliance addresses the importance of English teaching as “The demand [for native speakers of English to teach English] enables English teachers to enter countries that would otherwise be closed to Christians, interact intimately with the locals and witness Christ’s grace and love through lifestyle evangelism” (Cited in Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003).

Many countries do not grant missionary visas. In such cases missionaries apply for visas under the title of English teachers (Diamond, 1989). For example, the director of the largest Christian group focusing solely on converting Muslims called Frontiers explains the importance of having a non-religious explanation for being present in Muslim countries. “I could look someone in the eye and say, “I am an English teacher, I have a degree, and I’m here to teach” (cited in Yeoman, 2002). It is important to point out that most evangelical organizations do not have overtly Christian names such as Vision International Alliance, Frontiers, Interserve, Educational Services International, CB International. However, all the websites announce the use of ELT for missionary purposes.

Because it is important for native speakers to become trained in teaching, several institutions offer ELT education for missionary teachers. For instance, King’s College offers a nine-month program which qualifies English teachers for Missionary purpose for the price of $15000 (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). Also, Wheaton College, Illinois offers courses on ‘using the Bible in EFL teaching’ and how to communicate the Gospel in another culture. Despite some evident connections between the roles of English language teaching (ELT), globalization, migration, and imperialism, some of which stated above, there are those within the TESL field who promote the myth of teaching English as an apolitical act. In fact, although the majority of learning English as a second or foreign language is happening due to forces of
globalization and migration, the majority of research in the field of SLA and ELT is being done in ESL classrooms and at times on privileged learners. Some researchers point to this incongruence as a lack of relevance of SLA research for teachers (Clarke 1994, Crookes 1997). Lourdes Ortega (2005), however, views this lack of relevance as an ethical challenge and asks, “Why are certain populations prominent in our research while others are invisible?” (p. 433).

What does this say about the theoretical foundations of a field when the majority of its empirical research has been conducted on “populations of adult, literate, college-educated language students be they domestic foreign language students and international English as second language students in North American universities, or English as a foreign language students abroad” (Ortega 2005, p. 433). Where are the language learning problems and experiences of marginalized groups? Ortega (2005) urges that the neglect of ‘certain’ L2 populations from SLA research has ideological roots with ethical consequences. She calls on second language acquisition (SLA) researchers to not only be concerned with theoretical and methodological frameworks but also reflect on the moral-political purposes that guide their research (p. 438).

SLA research ought not be judged solely by methodological rigour, but also by its potential for positive impact on societal and educational problems. Ortega claims that by engaging with the ethical values of research, we could potentially transform SLA theories and research practices. She goes on to envision a “socially responsible, politically self-reflective, and epistemologically diverse field of instructed SLA that generates research inspired by societal needs” (p. 439).

In fact, what Ortega warns as the danger of a solely methodological focus in SLA research, has been traced historically by Phillipson (1991) to the creation of ELT as a profession. Although the considerable ELT experience of the 1800’s had produced several books and some material, there was no institutional base for the study of language learning and teaching until the late
1950’s with the establishment of the School of Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh University. The prospectus of this school states “the primary aim of the school is to provide a theoretical basis for the teaching of English as a foreign language within the wider framework of language teaching in general, which in turn is treated as a branch of Applied Linguistics” (quoted in Phillipson 1991, p. 174). This statement clearly reflects the dominance of the field of linguistics in the first stage of ELT theory building. Language was viewed as solely a tool of communication and the English teacher’s role was to transmit the instruments of communication. The geographical, political, and educational conditions in which English was being taught was not considered or discussed. This vacuum exists to this day.

The dominance of linguistics in the field of English language teaching (ELT) has led to another prominent theme which Ortega (2005) calls “the crisis of the native speaker as a model and norm for L2 learning” (p. 428). Here, Ortega is referring to studies that hold the native speaker as both the target and model for L2 learning. Using an ethical lens, Ortega calls the construction of nativeness harmful “because it capitalizes on notions of otherness and incompetence and in so doing renders inadequate entire communities of speakers, as well as much of the language teaching force in any country” (p. 432). It appears that the field of ELT is representing non-native speakers of English as defective speakers and thus perpetuating the myth of linguistic supremacy. Furthermore, by holding nativeness as the goal of language acquisition, failure becomes inevitable. There are ample studies that show that although one can become fluent in another language, one can never achieve native pronunciation past a critical age.

Phillipson (1991) points to the origins of the “crisis of the native speaker” using a Centre/Periphery analysis. ELT was planting its academic institutional roots at the same time that the British were involved in educational planning for underdeveloped countries. The Centre
provided teacher training through the medium of English to Periphery secondary education institutions. This was happening at the same time that language teaching was inspired by the new professionalism in the field of applied linguistics (p. 183). A key conference, the Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language, held in Makerere, Uganda in 1961 brought together representatives from 23 countries that were thought to need ELT and support from Britain. Also, British directors and professors from universities of Edinburgh, London, and Leeds were present. This conference established many of the influential beliefs within the field of ELT to this date. Two of the key tenets that were formulated were: English is best taught mono-lingualy; and the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker. Phillipson calls these tenets “the monolingual fallacy” and “the native speaker fallacy” (p. 185) and it seems what was formulated in 1961 continues to this day to what Ortega in 2005 calls “the crisis of the native speaker”.

**Critical Approaches to Teaching ESL**

Pennycook (1999) identifies three unifying themes that constitute a critical approach to TESL. He calls them 1) the domain or area of interest; 2) a transformative pedagogy; 3) a self-reflexive stance on critical theory. Firstly, the critical domain necessary to develop a critical approach to ELT aims to critique the ways in which social formations such as gender and race are linked to power and inequality. Secondly, a means of transformation and envisioning possibilities of change must be included in the transformative pedagogy going beyond an awareness of issues. Finally, a critical approach to TESL must be grounded in critical theory that problematizes assumptions and ‘official’ accounts of how things came to be the way they are.
Several educators are currently applying critical approaches to ELT. They go beyond what Pennycook calls, pessimistically preaching about what is wrong with the world and towards ways to suggest avenues for change. In other words, their approach to teaching ESL is not at the level of content, i.e. bringing thought-provoking readings to class. Fairclough (1992) has developed a notion of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) as a necessary component of social change. Proponents of CLA (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 2014; Kress, 1989; Mey, 1985; Alim, 2010) hold that social aspects of language, in particular the relation of language and power, must be dealt with in language education curricula.

Although educators and theorists concede that an awareness of issues is an essential first step, I believe in taking caution against a top-down attempt to get people to become aware of oppression. Pennycook calls it a “preacherly modernist-emancipatory pedagogy” and warns that teachers, students, and readers reject it. Students’ resistance to critical pedagogy has been documented. Ball and Lai (2006) write about students’ resistance to transformative political pedagogy as they attempt to develop a place-based pedagogy for the arts and humanities. Bohmer and Briggs (1991) write about the white, middle-class students who have difficulty accepting or understanding the existence of oppression in their introductory social psychology course. Although neither of these examples are from the language learning class, my own experience as an ESL teacher is replete with failed attempts to ‘bring awareness to students’. Further to my own experience, as a woman of color from a repressive Middle Eastern country, I can recall my own frustration when people try to convince me of my oppression. Resistance and resentment is sure to follow. I believe that critical work in the ESL class must not replicate the power practices of ‘the benevolent’.
Several practitioners have critiqued solely discussing social issues in the language learning classroom. Although discussing social issues in the classroom adds a critical dimension, it must not be confused with a critical approach to TESL. Classrooms that operate on a set of “tired” social issues are limited (Pennycook, 1999). Schenke has pointed to the “tired treatment of gender and women’s lib in many of our ESL textbooks” (1996, p. 156). Benesch (1999) reports that in classroom discussions, the teacher’s interventions are what carry the discussion, and from my own experience, I have seen that at times students resist and resent the classroom time being used as an opportunity for teachers to voice what they see as ‘personal opinions’. Furthermore, Pennycook claims that the whole notion of discussing issues such as homophobia and racism lies in the rationalist approach to education. Transformation requires more than a rationalist explanation of what is wrong with homophobia and racism per say. A critical approach to education must be able to connect with students at what Pennycook calls “the level of desire and investment” (1999, p. 340). By this, he means that people invest in particular discourses because “they conform to the shape of our desires”. Thus, a mere rational understanding of issues will not lead to change. In fact, we can see that mainstream ESL textbooks have included content such as the environment, women’s rights, identity and difference, and other progressive issues. However, unless issues of gender, race, class, sexuality form the basis of curriculum, vision, and pedagogy, these issues will turn into mere content rather than an attitude, a way of thinking, being, and learning.

Arleen Schenke has challenged herself as an educator by incorporating complex issues in feminist theory such as desire and pleasure in an advanced ESL writing class (1996). The result is that feminism and anti-racism become a way of thinking, teaching, and learning. Schenke’s students had expressed an interest in watching soap operas (1996). The course “might have been
easy”, a discussion of how soap operas are patriarchal fantasies that produce a false consciousness in women. However, Schenke’s students, along with watching soap operas, read and reflected on selections of feminist and anti-racist readings (some paraphrased by the instructor). They were then asked to record moments when their femininity had been formed. They were also asked to record connections and memories evoked by watching the soap opera. Finally, the students produced a paper linking their personal histories to the viewings with references to analyses from the readings. The process yielded “a remarkable set of writings in English” which situated the personal within the larger social organization of femininity. Further discussions on what a feminist soap opera would look like lead to a viewing of a soap opera produced by the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation. “Through our subsequent reflection on the parallels between antiracist and feminist media productions, we were able, I think, to do the work of memory in a way that simultaneously historicized the present and politicized the personal” (p. 157).

Schenke (1996) suggests what she calls a “practice in historical engagement” in relation to feminist/anti-racist language education. She proposes a focus on histories of cultures that students bring with them in relation to English culture. The classroom then becomes a space where participants investigate how they have come to be as they are, and how people’s lives, including their own, have been structured, organized, and shaped. The remembering of histories requires “memory work” which is not just sharing personal experiences in the classroom but “a way of investigating how and what we choose to remember; how these choices are socially, politically, and linguistically informed; and how we might remember differently” (p. 156). Conceptualized as such, anti-racism is not simply one more issue in the table of contents; it is the very core of the teaching/learning experience. Here, learning cannot be measured through
mastery and accuracy of language use, but through unpredictable and unmeasurable changes in desire, relationship to one’s history, and being. This conceptualization can have great influence on TESOL training and theorization. For instance, the much referenced native speaker/non-native speaker construction would then be understood within a post-colonial context. An English classroom in post-invasion Baghdad would be understood within the context of imperialism. A study on a Hong Kong English program would be analyzed against a background of colonial relations (Lin, 1999).

Rivera (1999) is a very good example of an ESL class enriched by feminist and critical pedagogy. Both the curriculum and the pedagogy build on the existing strengths, survival skills, and linguistic and cultural resources of the working class immigrant Latina women in the program. Therefore, the classes are conducted in both English and Spanish enabling the learner to relate their personal experiences. The classes help the women to make the connection between their inability to read and their gender and socioeconomic status. Students become partners in the learning process by conducting research in their communities on topics that interest them, such as Latino immigration and the right to vote. Many former students return as instructors as the program continues.

Participatory and dialogic approaches have yielded very creative and interesting activities. Frye (1999) and Rivera (1999) explore ESL programs that use collaborative research projects on local issues to raise awareness as well as be used as language learning practice. Ullman (1999) traces the development of an ESL curriculum in which learners and teachers create a textbook on immigrant rights. In the process, learners’ deep understanding of issues as well as language learning occurs. Furthermore, Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) use diary writing to encourage learners to reflect on their histories and social locations as non-native
speakers. Benesch (1999) seeks to develop “a dialogic relationship” with her students as they discuss and problematize norms and assumptions in the English for Academic Purpose (EAP) classroom.

What all the above examples have in common is that the curriculum is in the hands of the learner. The text is the learners’ world and as learners analyze their world, they “learn to read the word”. Critical awareness occurs and language learning is a by-product. This is not to be equated with the liberal notion of sharing power with the students or student-centered approaches. Participatory education must not be allowed to slide into an apolitical notion of power-sharing in the classroom. “Critical work that is reduced to democracy in the classroom becomes elided too easily with so called student-centred approaches to teaching or even so-called communicative or task-based approaches” (Pennycook 1999: p. 338). No matter how pedagogically valuable these approaches may be, we must not confuse their novelty with a critical element. As Pennycook firmly asserts, “a critical approach to TESL is more than arranging the chairs in a circle and discussing social issues” (1999: p. 338). Another common theme among the above examples is that they all hold that the initial step in the process of change is an awareness of issues that need to be changed. However, there is ample critique of solely discussing the issues. Furthermore, (and this is where I depart from other critical educators and take a radical stance) I believe that the ESL class can be a space where organizing for action can take place. That is, I believe that the element of action must be built into the curriculum. In the following section, I will introduce the Problem-Posing Approach to teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) which incorporates elements of listening, dialogue, and action.
Critical TESL: Who is teaching what?

A criticism of critical TESL has been the disconnect between theorists and practitioners. The issue begs the question, “How does one operationalize these grand theoretical schools of thought in the classroom?” While it is not my desire to provide a one-size-fits-all blueprint for all critical work in the ESL classroom, I believe it is very helpful to see what other critical ESL educators are doing in their classes. It is up to the creativity and personal experiences of the group as well as the social and political events at the time of the class to see what the class will look like. In this section I briefly mention several ESL activities which I find useful, but I explain one activity by Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004) in great depth as it is a notable example of my vision of critical ESL. In choosing activities for this section, I was interested in finding ESL activities which aim at transformation, not inclusion. I am not interested in actions that attempt to bring the newcomer population from the periphery into the centre. These actions do not disrupt the social order which keeps certain populations in the margins. I am interested in actions which transform the order of things. Therefore, I am interested in classroom activities which promote a mode of thinking that allows this kind of action to emerge. While the lesson plans are not transferrable prototypes, there are common elements in all activities that I have chosen. That is they are all looking at an issue dialectically (even though they do not say so) while also working on language learning; they all include personal experience but link that experience to social structures. In short they all encompass the in separate unity of theory and practice.

Problem-posing Education

The problem-posing approach to education was inspired by the work of Paulo Freire in literacy programs for slum dwellers of Brazil. Freire’s central premise is that education is never neutral
and the purpose of education is human liberation. Learners bring with them cultural resources and identities, as well as experiences of discrimination, oppression, resistance and survival. Education either reinforces the social forces which instigate discrimination and oppression and help to keep them passive or facilitates to challenge those forces to analyze the root causes of their experiences to effect change. “People reflect upon themselves and their condition in the world – the world in which and with which they find themselves … to the extent that they are more conscientizised, they will insert themselves as subjects into their own history” (Freire, 1971). Therefore, Freire’s approach aims for an alternative relation to the learner and to knowledge. The learner is not an object of education – “an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher” (Freire, 1970). Learners enter the process of learning not for acquiring facts but for co-creating their knowledge and reality in exchange with others.

To apply this approach to second language education, a dialogical approach is taken where the goal of dialogue is radical thinking and action (praxis). Here radical thinking starts with perceiving the root causes of one’s place in society and goes on to analyzing our social interactions within our socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical contexts. However, this process continues towards actions which make people gain control of their lives by understanding the barriers as well as the support for action toward change. The attempt to overcome the barriers becomes the focus of praxis. Knowledge is created through this dialectical interaction between reflection and action of the group. Unlike other approaches to second language education, the content and structure of learning is not pre-determined. The curriculum is situated within the reality of the learners lives while all the time remembering that these lives are situated within a larger historical, political, social context. Students’ concerns, problems, strengths is penetrated theoretically to understand the root causes while envisioning and
discussing alternate ways of dealing with those problems and concerns. By going through this process, one is on the path to conscientization or critical consciousness. The action stemming from such a consciousness is what Paula Allman calls Revolutionary Social Transformation (to be further discuss and elaborated in chapter 4).

Freire’s much cited notion of conscientization is the cornerstone of work done by many ESL educators practicing a problem-posing approach. The notion of conscientization or critical consciousness is grounded in Marxist critical theory and focuses on understanding and exposing social and political contradictions. Once contradictions are exposed and deeply understood, critical consciousness advocates taking action against oppressive elements. Nina Wallerstein and Elsa Auerbach (2004) have implemented Freire’s notion of critical consciousness and problem-posing methods to literacy into language education which I find very useful and comprehensive. They have created a student book called Problem-Posing at Work: English for action as well as a comprehensive guide for educators that explores and theorizes critical consciousness, its philosophy, and strategies for classroom implementation called Problem-Posing at Work: Popular Educator’s Guide.

Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004) have developed a cyclical conceptualization of learning into a language teaching/learning methodology. Their methodology entails a cyclical model of listening, dialogue, and action: “listening (investigation of the issues or generative themes in the community), dialogue (promoting critical discussion through various strategies including codes or triggers), and action (strategizing the changes students envision following their reflection)” (p. 13).

Several practitioners have used the problem-posing spiral to explore social issues and promote critical consciousness (Vella 1989, Zerke 1997, Barndt 1989). For example, Burke et
al. (2002) suggest a four-step dialogue which first starts with the learners’ experience and knowledge (asking what happened; how did you feel? What did you do?). The next step entails identifying patterns and themes among learners (Who else had experienced this situation? Who reacted differently?). Then, strategizing and planning for action is next (How can we apply what we’ve learned? What changes can you aim for? Who are your allies? What would you do differently?). Finally, discussing new information and theory linked to what learners know (what does this new information mean in light of your personal story? What are the key concepts and ideas that link all these experiences? How does this analysis shape your understanding?) (p. 142).

In fact, problem-posing approaches to learning have many similarities as they explore different levels of thinking and questioning. They all have a description of a problem which is either seen in a picture handout or written dialogue. There is also a problem-definition component where participants are challenged to think about what is really happening here. The problem is then personalized as larger issues are linked to problems or issues on the ground in everyday lives. Also, all practitioners include an analysis of social context to discuss what the root causes of the issue are. And finally, they all include a component on developing a strategy for action or evaluating action alternatives. Throughout these processes, several methods and techniques are used: written dialogues, role plays, case studies, life stories, realia such as newspaper articles, school bulletins, welfare forms, union contracts, ..., visual images such as photographs, collages, puppets, photo-documentaries or photo-stories done by learners. Other methods of social analysis and action planning are “force-field analysis” (Wallerstein and Auerbach 2004), participatory research, and “immigrant participatory arts” (Moriarty 2004). Grammar and vocabulary exercises are embedded within these activities. In *English for Action*,

88
Wallerstein and Auerbach, provide grammar work which is contextualized within the various issues of discussion. However, they heed the call “we hope educators will continue to creatively address student needs for grammar” (p. 56). Also, regarding the issues of native language in the classroom, they suggest that rather than the teacher ‘allowing’ or ‘forbidding’ native language use, “the question can become the focus of dialogue and critical analysis” (p. 56). Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004) have developed this cyclical conceptualization of learning into a language teaching/learning methodology which channels Freire’s work on critical literacy. Their methodology entails a cyclical model of listening, dialogue, and action: “listening (investigation the issues or generative themes of the community), dialogue (promoting critical discussion through various strategies including codes or triggers), and action (strategizing the changes students envision following their reflection)” (p. 13).

Listening

A common misconception regarding the problem-posing approach to language teaching is that methods or techniques are not important but in fact methods and techniques are seen as tools that serve the objectives of “the cultural plan” (Freire, 1978). For example, as one of the initial steps to the learning process the educator is to identify “generative themes”, common concerns among students to be analyzed and discussed. This requires a thematic investigation of the learners’ reality. Like anthropologists, some educator/researchers have studied communities of learners to uncover themes that ‘generate’ the most discussion. Others have produced in-class exercises to produce the generative themes. One such exercise is called the River of Life (Feldblum et.al, 1994) where students produce a drawing of their life as a river with all its barriers (dams), waterfalls, calm pools, and rapids. Whether the drawing is then shared in pairs, small groups or
whole group discussion, the aim is to generate common strengths and barriers that have sustained and hindered them during their lives. Other techniques to uncover generative themes is “a problem map” (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004) or a team effort on both the part of educators and learners for conscious out-of-class listening.

In fact, in *English for Action*, each unit includes an exercise in which learners investigate for themes at their workplace through research tools such as observation, interviews, and document analysis. These participatory research strategies allow learners to become co-investigators in their learning, generate themes for further exploration, and use English grammar and vocabulary in a context that is self-generated and meaningful to them.

**Dialogue**

Once themes are uncovered, educators then work to create a concrete visual representation of these generative themes. These visual representations can be photographs, drawings, dialogues, skits, songs which in Freirian terminology is called ‘codifications’ or ‘codes’. The purpose of the codification is to allow the learners to step back from their lives and observe it from a distance in order to reflect on their place within a situation. The code is presented to learners as a phenomenon that needs to be interpreted - an issue to be analyzed. An effective code is immediately recognizable and open-ended and unresolved. Written codes should be kept brief with appropriate vocabulary and grammar. The educators initial questioning of the code reveals the learners’ unanalyzed, spontaneous perception of that situation. However, more open-ended questioning and discussion encourages a deeper analysis of the ‘codified reality’ and possibilities for action. This process of reconsidering previous understanding in Freirian terminology is called ‘decoding’ or ‘decodification’.
Wallerstein & Auerbach (2004) have used a five-step questioning strategy which moves the discussion from a concrete level to an analytical one. Learners are asked to 1: describe what they see, 2: define the problem, 3: share similar experiences from their own lives, 4: question why there is a problem, 5: strategize what they can do about the problem. For an example of a written dialogue as code and strategic questioning after, refer to appendix 2.

**Action**

Action is a step in the learning cycle which leads to further reflection. Planning for action stems from understanding root causes of issues and leads to negotiating, writing, presenting to groups, developing campaigns. In an ESL class, students have a safe environment to experiment with these actions. The ESL class can serve as a community of support where learners test and communicate new ideas. Students can practice taking action outside of class by in-class role plays or writing activities such as filing a complaint or literacy activities such as reading a contract. Language learning here is seen as a means to take action, not an end in itself. Whatever the action, students learn through experience of the action to transform reality. In the case of new immigrants, this is an ESL class that goes beyond inclusivity; it is an ESL class that encourages newcomers to enter the relations of their new setting while transforming those relations. This ESL class encourages the learners to envision new possibilities in the new land and build on their lives that have brought them to that class in the first place. This way, it connects old knowledge to new knowledge and relates old learning to new learning.

In their excellent book *Problem-posing at work: English for action*, Wallerstein and Auerbach include 30 lessons all related to the topic of work and immigrants. Example lesson

Lesson 4, ‘Coming to North America’, is a very good example of how a seemingly personal decision to immigrate to North America is handled dialectically in an ESL lesson:

1. Students begin by drawing a timeline of their life journey from when they were born to when they arrived in a North America city and share their timelines with a partner.

2. Students make a class chart of learners life journeys which depicts name of learner, country of origin, year of departure, reason for leaving, and reason for choosing the city or country that they did. A sentence making activity which focuses on the use of the past tense is also included here.

3. Students read a short excerpt about the reason a Korean immigrant left Korea and answer discussion questions. The reading included reasons such as Nike’s quest for cheap labour.

4. Students create a class chart which shows how jobs have changed in their countries in the past 10 years. An activity on making sentences which include there is/are/was/were is included here.

5. The class makes a timeline on a long strip of paper which goes around the wall of the classroom. The timeline is divided in decades and on the top of the decade students write important dates and events in their country or the world and on the bottom they write important dates or events in their lives and their families’ lives.

6. In this section, students read an interview with the director of an organization that helps immigrants and refugees. The director explains the reasons why immigrants and refugees who come to her organization have left their countries. In order to do so, she gives a brief and
simple explanation of structural adjustments and the World Bank’s and the IMF’s roles. In order to prepare students for this reading, there is a lesson on reading strategies such as predicting the content after reading the first paragraph, skipping words, using dictionaries, etc.

7. The next section in this lesson is titled, ‘Digging Deeper: Globalization’. Students read a chart titled Globalization. This chart shows a linear cause and effect movement from the top, “Big financial institutions like the World Bank, IMF, WTO are more powerful than national governments” to on the ground effects like “There is increased migration between countries as conditions get worse”. Students are then asked to find one example from the chart pertaining to their country. Then they are asked to make a group story about their personal experiences with globalization.

8. The next activity is writing and sending a class letter to a local newspaper explaining why many immigrants and refugees come to North America.

9. The students reflect on their work in this lesson by discussing a set of questions which aims at the usefulness of the information they learned in the lesson.

10. Finally, in a journal writing activity students write or tell their own story of immigrating.

This lesson is a very good example of my conceptualization of critical ESL. It relates personal experience with social structures and institutional policy. It looks at the present as a historical continuum. It promotes a mode of thinking which is transferrable to other issues. In short, it is dialectical.

Reflection and Discussion

This dialogic, collaborative way of teaching is used by Cecilia, an ESL teacher participant in this study. Cecilia is the head of a teacher training center in a South American university where they
train local ESL teachers. She and her colleagues have created an innovative approach to ESL teacher training in which both trainees and trainers use the first four to six four-hour class sessions to discuss what should be taught in the program. This process does not end at merely writing down a list. The trainers raise questions and challenge the teacher-trainees about the reasons why a topic should be included. At times even issues such why are their students learning English or why English is so powerful in their South American country comes up.

“What we were trying to do as tutors was to be aware ourselves that our practices were related to a certain system of beliefs; that they were not neutral”. Once there was a woman, a teacher-trainee, who would delay consensus and oppose ideas to the dismay of the group. Although some advocated taking her out of the group or transferring her to a more traditional program, Cecilia insisted the woman stay and continue to voice her opinions and making change within the group. She says, “That was part of being critical, as well; being able to use antagonism productively; being able to understand, or try to, at least, understand what she was trying to say and turn that into something that helped us move and question our own practices.” Larger issues of the schools and education system are also linked to the teacher-trainee’s personal encounters.

During the process of negotiating the syllabus, teacher-trainees are asked to name their “problems” in their current schools.

My concern is that dialogic, collaborative teaching can easily be turned into mere sharing of opinion albeit in respectful ways. Sharing ideas, conducting discussion and dialogue, negotiating content and syllabi should not be an end in themselves. These activities are the means with which a radical study group communicates. The end is to penetrate social phenomena and issues to uncover their underlying social relations. We can collaborate to find the historical emergence of phenomena, other simultaneously occurring events, and the surface
appearance of social issues in daily lives. Even then, this is not solely for the purpose of intellectual exercise; it is so that within the radical study group, members can envision change in deeper layers of social phenomena. They can role play, discuss, write and produce language of social transformation. Dialogue and collaboration do not in themselves have inherent critical qualities. However, they have the potential to be used towards gaining radical consciousness. In the following chapter, I will explain in detail my theoretical conceptualization, revolutionary social transformation. I am convinced that ESL education has great potential for promoting a mode of thinking necessary for conscious action for social change. The following chapter will provide the theoretical underpinnings of such an endeavour.

Chapter Four
Theory: Revolutionary Social Transformation

The Blind Men and the Elephant

*There was a great city in the country of Ghur, in which all the people were blind. A certain king passed by that place, bringing his army and pitching his camp on the plain. He had a large and magnificent elephant to minister to his pomp and excite awe, and to attack in battle.*

*A desire arose among the people to see this monstrous elephant, and a number of the blind, like fools, visited it, every one running in his haste to find out its shape and form.*

*They came, and being without the sight of their eyes groped about it with their hands; each of them by touching one member obtained a notion of some one part; each one got a conception of an impossible object, and fully believed his fancy true. When they returned to the people of the city, the others gathered round them, all expectant, so misguided and deluded were they. They asked about the appearance and shape of the elephant, and what they told all listened to.*

*One asked him whose hand had come upon its ear about the elephant; he said, "It is a huge and formidable object, broad and rough and spreading, like a carpet."

*And he whose hand had come upon its trunk said, "I have found out about it; it is straight and hollow in the middle like a pipe, a terrible thing and an instrument of destruction."
And he who had felt the thick hard legs of the elephant said, "As I have it in mind, its form is straight like a planed pillar."

Everyone had seen some one of its parts, and all had seen it wrongly. No mind knew the whole. Knowledge is never the companion of the blind. All, like fools deceived, fancied absurdities.

(Ancient Persian poem by Sanai translated by J. Stephenson)

Introduction

As I was conducting this qualitative study, listening to what my data was telling me was very important and perhaps the most enjoyable and rewarding stage of this qualitative research. However, in order to see the social world unfold before me, I needed a theory of the wider setting in which ESL is being taught and learned. This theory underpins my philosophy of education; in short, it is the lens with which I see the broad picture in which ESL is being taught and learned. It is this theory that initially guides me to see what to describe and why I should describe it. It is also this theory which moves me from mere description to analysis. Without this theory, my research would be, at best, an interesting picture of an aspect of our society at this given time. However, it would be useless beyond this specific case and time. Without theory, my study would be completely ineffective in understanding the social world and its complex social relations.

I am interested in revolutionary social transformation which relates to revolutionary/transformative praxis (Allman, 1999). The possibility of revolutionary/transformative praxis opens up opportunities to radical education as well as radical ESL education. Paula Allman distinguishes revolutionary praxis from reproductive/limited praxis (1999, 2007). Reproductive/limited praxis serves to reproduce the world as it is. It emerges from a mode of thinking that is partial and fragmented, or as will be explained later in this chapter as
ideological. This is a mode of thinking that is prevalent in a capitalist society because we see, focus on, and experience results of what were actually relations that happened in different spaces and times. Once we have grasped reality as such, our actions, however well-meaning they may be, also become partial, fragmented, and ideological, or what Allman calls reproductive/limited. However, we are not helpless, agent-less beings destined to think ideologically and act reproductively. The possibility of dialectical thinking and revolutionary praxis opens up massive opportunity for agency within education as well as other areas of our lives.

Dialectical thinking is a mode of thinking that is relational, historical, and visionary. Relational thinking is a mode of understanding the social world as a complex web of related phenomena. For example, looking at ESL education relationally, I would see how it is related to immigration policy, citizenship, the labour market, and so on. I would also investigate the appearance of ESL education as a profession historically and find what else was happening in the world when the field was developing. A visionary mode of thinking forces us to see the present as a moment in passing and seen as such the future is no longer pre-determined and we are all agents of change. It is important to pause here and contemplate on the last few words “we are all agents of change.” This means teachers and learners alike. Radical education, as I conceptualize it, is not the transmission of radical ideas and content from teacher to learner. It is a space to practice a mode of thinking which is antithetical to our (teachers’ and learners’) usual mode of thinking. The action that arises from this mode of thinking is what is referred to as revolutionary/transformative praxis. It is action that is grounded on understanding the essence of a phenomenon. This is a project of humanization for all humanity; it does not exclude categories such as learners.
In this chapter, I will explain the ontology and epistemology of critical theory and explain how a critical lens will redirect qualitative research. To elaborate further, I will explain Marx’s theory of consciousness, dialectical conceptualization, and a negative concept of ideology.

What contrasts Marx from other theorists who write on consciousness is Marx’s assertion that ideas and beliefs arise from relations between people and from relations between people and their material world. That is, our consciousness and the real world (the material world created by human beings and the natural world together) are not separate “things”; they should be understood as a relation. We experience these relations in daily life; thus, our consciousness is actively produced within our historically specific experience of our social, material, and natural existence. Therefore, according to Marx the key to understanding people’s consciousness at any given time is to study real people and their activity, but especially the activity which produces and reproduces their material existence. “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce” (Marx & Engels, 1846, p. 37, emphasis in original). For example, the relations of feudalism and capitalism are the actual lived relations within which people produce and reproduce their material existence. According to Marx, so far people have not chosen and planned these relations but have accepted as natural and inevitable those relations which they have been born into. This is a revolutionary vision of human society; it is revolutionary because it shows how human conscious activity has become ‘unfree’ (Marx, 1963, Part III; 1867; Marx and Engels, 1846 cited in Allman, 1999) and how humanization involves engaging in self and social transformation. This has enormous potential for radical education as it places self and social change in relationship with consciousness and learning. Meaning that in order to envision and indeed act towards social change, one needs education. As I have mentioned before, by
education I do not mean the accumulation of facts. This accumulative endeavour has no potential for radical social change unless there is analysis of facts. It is the tools of analysis that I am concerned with in this study, a mode of thinking: relational thinking.

Before moving on further, it is necessary to discuss Marx’s dialectical conceptualization as it is integral to a more complex understanding of relational thinking. There are two different ways of thinking about relations: the nature of a relation is either external or internal. Conceptualizing an external relation involves understanding the relation between two distinct categories and focusing on the outcome of that interaction. For example, the external relations between human behavior and the environment which has resulted in the environmental degradation would be the focus of external relations conceptualization. Internal relations are more complex as it involves understanding the nature of relations between entities which are mental categories. Here the entities are dependent on each other and one exists because of the other and they shape and reshape each other. Also, one of the entities is in the position of advantage and of preserving the relation and one in the position of destroying the relation. Marx referred to the relation between labour and capital as having an internal dialectical relation. Below I will refer to an inner relation in the educational context such as our relation to knowledge and teachers’ and learners’ relation to authority.

In Marx’s conceptualization of materialism, there is no separation between consciousness and human reality/practice. That is, social consciousness i.e. our knowledge of the world (epistemology) is not separate from our social being (ontology). In other words, Marx demonstrated the inner dialectical relationship between epistemology and ontology. To ignore this inseparable unity would mean to see as abstract structures what is, in fact, a relation. Marx called this abstraction one of the basic tenets of consciousness within capitalism.
One of the problems with bourgeois thought (the consciousness within capitalist social formation) is the focus on the result of a relation rather than on the relation itself. Because we experience the components of that which is interrelated in a different time and a different space within capitalism, Marx believed that there is a tendency within capitalism toward ideological thinking processes such as abstraction, separation, and partial focusing. It is difficult to see the relational nature of reality because we experience what is in fact internally related opposites of a dialectical contradiction in different spaces and times. That is we tend to think that objects have intrinsic attributes and our consciousness sees as separate entities or things what in reality only results from a relation between people. This becomes fertile ground for ideological thinking. For Marx, and in this study, ideology does not mean a system of ideas. Marx viewed ideology as a negative concept – a form of thinking about and explaining reality which is fragmented but appears coherent and valid. To Marx, ideas and discourses that explain reality in a fragmented way masks the contradictions of capitalism. That is, a partial and fragmented view of reality which appears real because it seems to coincide with our experience of reality. It is focusing attention on a piece of reality or experience without noticing how that piece is related to the whole. Ideological thinking arises from people’s experience within reproductive praxis, and reproductive praxis also gives rise to ideological thinking. To apply this to my own research, I looked at the arguments regarding ‘linguistic capital’. Linguistic capital is a concept which claims that language becomes linguistic capital when it awards its users with social distinction and material and symbolic profit; those who do not possess this linguistic capital will be excluded and marginalized. Meaning that social exclusion, lack of credentials, and underemployment of immigrant populations are results of their individual deficits such as ‘language barriers’. The emerging understanding thus becomes that these contradictions within
society can be rectified by distributing linguistic capital. To the extant that social exclusion, lack of credentials, and underemployment are results of relations, the focus should be the relation itself. And it is by negating the relation that the results are changed. Focusing on the result of a relation rather than the relation itself leads to fragmented or partial consciousness which is fertile ground for ideological thinking and practice prevalent in capitalist social formation. Another more personal example occurred at a recent CASAE conference where I presented a paper on the role of English and the TESL industry in post-invasion Iraq and post-colonial India in upholding the primacy of English and English speaking countries. My presentation included what I thought was a solid case for shedding light on the ties that bind the TESL industry and imperial expansion. At the end of my presentation, during discussion period, I was questioned about my problematization of Iraqis and Indian call centre workers adopting English accents and culture. The basis for this questioning as one of the attendees asserted was that she too had recently started taking Arabic courses at an Ontario university. Just as Iraqis and Indians are learning English, white, English-speaking Canadians are learning Arabic and these two are the same and there’s no need to make an issue of it. Focusing on solely the act of learning a language and ignoring the historical context and other simultaneously occurring relations is a clear example of ideological thinking. The action that emerges from such thinking will not lead to social transformation. We can learn all the Arabic we want in Ontario. The ESL teacher in Iraq can use Fox news and American sitcoms\(^8\) as authentic samples of the English language in class because the latest research says students learn better when exposed to authentic (made for native speakers) language. These actions will serve to reinforce further their original partial, fragmented, ideological mode of thinking and reproduce existing relations.

This ideological ontology is extremely problematic for research also because it leaves unexplored the relations that give rise to unequal social relations. What we end up observing is not the social world in itself but the social world exposed to our method of questioning. Rather than experience being the subject of inquiry, theories and concepts are explored and discussed and altered. Structures and systems are then theorized as dictators of human will; structure is pitted against agency. The result is a method of inquiry that separates experience and material reality rather than situating experiences within their social relations. The action which arises from such a perspective is what Paula Allman calls “limited/reproductive praxis” (1999) i.e. energy is directed at tackling the symptoms while leaving the causes intact. Allman asserts that what is needed is a shift to “revolutionary/transformative praxis” that is action which is aimed at penetrating a phenomenon to uncover the relation that made the result possible.

Making revolutionary/transformative praxis our goal has important implications for conducting research as well as radical education. For one, it places human experience at the center of inquiry. By doing so, the researcher is making the epistemological claim that knowledge lies with people and people construct their knowledge based on their experiences. However, an individual’s experience is not only a window into that person’s personal development but it also sheds light on the cultural and social context in which it is a part of. Thus, by understanding the particular, we are attempting to understand the general. But how do we go about understanding the social relations that the experience is a part of since we too are entrenched by ideological modes of inquiry? Dorothy Smith (2007) suggests that we make an ontological shift. This shift necessitates the researcher to work from understanding the social when observing the particular. The social world here is not understood as theories and concepts unrelated from people’s experiences. The social is seen as people’s relations as mediated by the
material world. This ontology urges the researcher to move away from mere description and interpretation and challenges him/her to begin from a deep and clear understanding of the social world. Thus, a critical ontology to qualitative research begins from theory and observation is guided by that theory. The individual – social divide is reconciled as inquiry places individual or small group practice within the larger social relations. Inquiry is aimed at revealing ideological practice as well as understanding underlying social relations.

**Critical Theory and Education**

Marx’s theory of knowledge and being has enormous consequences for education. Of radical educators who draw on Marx, I find Paulo Freire the most complete and comprehensive. I rely in this section on a Marxist reading of Paulo Freire as explained and interpreted by Paula Allman (1999, 2007).

The field of adult education is fertile ground for both limited/reproductive praxis and revolutionary/transformative praxis although the former is more prevalent. The vast majority of education practice and policy rely on a theory of knowledge that is static and unhistorical. That is once knowledge is derived at through observation it is then constant and trans-historical thus conceptualized as existing separately from the real world. When knowledge is conceptualized as such, one can only have an acquisitive relation to it not a critical one. Thus in terms of education then there are those who possess this knowledge (teachers) and those who desire it (students) making the role of the teacher the transmitter of this knowledge and the learner the acquirer. One’s pedagogy is either to didactically and deductively give the knowledge or as in more progressive approaches allow the learner to discover it. The ontology that follows from this epistemology is a theory of ‘being’ which makes one either a transmitter or acquirer of content and ‘becoming’ is a process of accumulation, either by the teacher accumulating transmission
skills or the learner acquisition skills to collect more knowledge. The praxis arising from these theories is limited and reproductive.

However, this is not to say that education is a separate sphere of human life; education and learning are an integral part of the process of ‘becoming’ i.e. the lifelong process of developing one’s consciousness. Marx’s thought allows us to see knowledge as constantly changing, never complete, and historically specific. Since there is constant tension and movement and change in the world we seek to know, knowledge and knowing too is in constant movement and change. Knowledge is constantly being scrutinized to make sense of the world and our existence and experience within it. Thus the acquisition of knowledge is only the beginning of the process of learning according to this epistemology. We test knowledge to transform ourselves within our immediate social relations with self-transformation and collective transformation having an inner dialectical relationship. Within this relationship to knowledge, ‘becoming’ is a process of transformation i.e. a process of humanization. Therefore, revolutionary praxis requires a shift in both teachers’ and learners’ relation to knowledge. One of the primary attempts at critical/revolutionary praxis is the altering of the teacher/learner dichotomy. This is not the same as the liberal notion of power sharing in the classroom. It involves a change in the relation of both teachers and learners to authority. When no one party is the holder of knowledge and willingness to question and scrutinize knowledge is displayed, overcoming the teacher/learner dichotomization is easier. Another more difficult dichotomy to overcome is that of the relation between extant knowledge and new knowledge. The learners constantly use extant knowledge to create new knowledge and understanding, and the new knowledge would be used to re-evaluate existing knowledge. This transforms the
teaching/learning project to one of a group research aimed at understanding the world. That is an understanding which would lead to changing the world.

**Critical Theory: What TESL Brings to the Table**

There are several arguments against ESL for the purpose of social change or social justice or ESL for anything other than securing employment. One is that the material taught in ESL classes must be representative of material that students will encounter in future ‘professional courses’ or jobs. Material that problematizes societal institutions and social relations are not typically such material. However, SLA research has long established that learning occurs best when the content is meaningful to the learners as opposed to abstract ideas with no relevance to the learner’s life experience. What is more meaningful than exploring one’s life experience in relation to social contradictions? Stephanie Vandrick defends her use of war-related literature in her advanced reading/writing class by stating that such literature “allows readers a powerful way to reflect on life and its most important themes and issues” (p. 522).

Another argument against radical ESL is aimed at all critical education. This has been an on-going criticism against ‘politicising’ the classroom. An example of such criticism is Stanley Fish’s *Save the World on Your Own Time*; the main argument of this book is summed up in its title. However, I reject the possibility of neutrality in education and by extension of course ESL education. Even a neutral stance in teaching is still taking a political side. Radical ESL teaching aimed at social transformation promotes a relational mode of thinking and begins by historicizing the present. To this end TESL has radical potential for several reasons.

1) Some ESL learners are the embodiment and personification of the contradictions of our time. Forces of globalization, imperialism, displacement have brought some of the students to our class. The ESL learner’s life experiences can be key resources not deficits in need of
improvement. Historically, ESL students have been objects of colonial and imperial power. To this end, as Allan Luke states, “the critical will be easier” (2004, p. 26).

2) The ESL classroom can be a place for fresh and “uncommon sense and insight” (Morgan & Vandrick, 2009). A newcomer’s eyes and ears could see and hear what those habituated and domesticated do not. If we are not doing critical work in the ESL classroom then we are domesticating ‘the Other’ into nation. If we are not entering the ESL classroom with political purpose, we are going in to justify the current social relations of power and continued subjugation of non-English speaking populations.

3) The ability or incapability of doing radical work in the ESL classroom sheds light on our curricula, academic institutions, and the profession. Brian Morgan suggests radical ESL educators can go beyond ‘what works’ and how to implement activities effectively by asking questions like: “Why and how did the syllabus get organized this way? What social values and whose interests are supported or excluded? What are the possibilities for critical work within the existing conditions of my employment?” (1998, p. 10). Historically, teaching ESL was a mixture of missionary work and orientalism, and currently, it is “a transnational service industry in the production of skilled human resources for economic globalization” (Luke 2004, p. 25). A dialectical, historical framework allows us to see this whereas an ideological, abstract, severed look would show us a partial view of one classroom and the practices within it.

4) The ESL classroom has the potential of revealing relations of racism and sexism as students enter “a social world where sophisticated forms of exclusion persist” (Morgan 1998, p. 13). ESL material has mostly focused on food, holidays, and Anglo-American values, but students are not only entering a new culture of lifestyles. They are also entering a new world of politics, employment, and power struggle. Discussing the barriers of entering this new world and
strategizing transformation of this new world in the classroom can illuminate many limitations in our society that reproduces the subordination of the ‘other’. Furthermore, the social relations within the ESL classroom can be a manifestation of broader social relations of white and non-white, cosmopolitan and diasporic subjects. In the Refugee Processing Center curricula, Tollefson (1986) found that students are to “find themselves fortunate to find minimum-wage employment, regardless of their previous education” (p. 656). Auerbach (1986) writes that competency-based adult ESL “socializes students for a limited range of working-class roles’ (p. 417) while teaching behaviours required in menial jobs. By critically examining ESL curricula we can see how our institutions are helping to create cheap labour, compliant workers, and passive citizens in the newly arrived citizens. In other words, we can see the role of the TESL industry in reproductive praxis.

5) To borrow from Freire, education is both political and ethical. Currently, work in teaching ESL is implicated by a pragmatic set of beliefs i.e. meeting the needs of the market by supplying compliant workers. This is highly unethical. A conscious response by radical educators of the field will prove how successful this unethical practice will be. Not offering alternatives to learners who have been earmarked for menial labour leaves them the only other alternative: compliance. To this end, the ESL classroom can be a place for revolutionary praxis.

6) Dialogue is one of the basic tenets of ESL teaching throughout its many methodological changes. Also, dialogue and dialogical teaching is core in critical education. Dialogue and dialogical teaching on its own is not radical. However, it is possible to adapt dialogue as a technique in mainstream ESL into conscious dialogue in relationship with action.

I am not claiming that by teaching radical ESL, we are no longer teaching mechanical elements of language use. Nor am I claiming that one should not learn a language for the
purpose of employment. What I am proposing is a paradigm shift from a linguistic, mechanistic focus to one that holds radical consciousness as its aim. Shifting the focus of the ESL classroom from the learner’s deficit (English language knowledge) to the learner’s strength (critical consciousness) can have intriguing results for both ESL learners and teacher-trainees. Moreover, shifting the aim of the ESL classroom from acquiring words and structures to promoting radical consciousness while acquiring words and structures can yield interesting results for citizenship and social change. We can aid ESL learners and ESL teacher-trainees to see the big picture, to see what their work entails, and who is benefitting from their work. I believe Lourdes Ortega’s call to ELT professionals to ask “who the beneficiaries of our research are” is very timely.

Within our current social relations, we experience parts of a whole at different spaces and times. This yields fragmented thinking much like the blind men deciphering parts of the elephant. This form of ideological thinking leads only to partial analyses and uncritical, piecemeal, reproductive action. Here, by ideological thinking, I am not referring to ideology as a system of ideas. Ideological thinking is a form of thinking which focuses on one part of a phenomenon and forms an analysis based on that one part as unrelated to the rest. Life within capitalist social relations breeds this form of thinking as we experience as objects what is in fact the result of human relations that have occurred at different times and spaces. The action that emerges from this mode of thinking is at best reformist or as Paula Allman calls it, reproductive. If we have any hope of social transformation, we must aim for revolutionary action. This action arises from conscious human beings who have the analytical tools to uncover relations. As radical educators and indeed as thinking human beings we must guide our hands all over the elephant’s body, find out what each part is doing, feel the texture of its skin, listen to its sounds, feel its temperature. Then we can return and focus on one part while having an understanding of
the whole. It is indeed this mode of thinking and analysis that I wish to promote in the radical ESL class in the hope that it will be internalized and used long after the class has ended.

This chapter presented the reader with my theoretical framework, Revolutionary Social Transformation. ESL education is fertile ground for both reproductive, ideological praxis as well as revolutionary praxis. It is my hope in this chapter and indeed in this dissertation to reveal the potential of ESL education for radical, revolutionary praxis. The ESL classroom has been a site of both reproductive and revolutionary praxis although the former has been more common. In this dissertation, I wish to lay the groundwork for ESL education for the latter. In the next chapter, I will present the reader with the data analysis of this study. I will introduce the research participants who so generously volunteered their time and ideas to me.
Chapter Five  
Research Participants: Voices amid Theory

In this chapter, I will present the common themes and reflect on the contradictions that emerged in the data. The voices of the research participants of this study help me do this. I conceptualize second language education as the theory of praxis i.e. a theory of the inseparable unity of thought and action. And as educators, we are either engaged in “critical/revolutionary praxis” or “uncritical/reproductive praxis” (Allman 2007, p. 34). That is not to say that we are either a critical/revolutionary educator or an uncritical/reproductive educator. I found in this study, that the same person could be active in both. One can be engaged in critical/revolutionary praxis while at times the same person can be actively working towards reproducing existing social relations. Social relations and institutional barriers are not in such a way that can easily and consistently disrupted and challenged. Throughout data analysis, I sought to uncover and identify instances of critical and uncritical praxis. I looked for conscious, revolutionary educational practices and spontaneous, ideological ones. However, I also found phenomena that I was not looking for but revealed themselves after the first couple of interviews and ran as a common thread thereafter throughout data collection.

By analyzing the data, I moved from describing what is the case to explaining why the case is as it is. For instance, the theme that teaching ESL (uncritically) “feels empty” revealed itself to me from early on and I continued to probe this theme in subsequent interviews. However, rather than merely reporting that several teachers admitted to the emptiness of the job, I sought to find what the underlying essence of this feeling during analysis. This is not to say that data analysis is all together a separate process in qualitative research. As I was collecting the data, analysis was simultaneously occurring. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) state “the qualitative researcher comes to the formal stage of data analysis having passed through much informal data
analysis” (p. 296). However, within this “formal stage” of analysis I looked for patterns and exceptions, themes and inconsistencies while all the time remembering that my goal here is not to verify any existing theory or hypothesis, but to create knowledge and discover concepts. A very useful quotation that can help me move from description to explanation is from Stauss and Corbin who suggest: a) Asking what is really going on here? b) Maintaining an attitude of skepticism toward any categories or hypotheses brought to or arising early in the research, and validating them repeatedly with data themselves (1990, p. 47).

As a large amount of data was produced from this study, I put order to the data without distorting it. I listened and re-listened to each interview. When themes began to emerge, I used the subsequent interviews to substantiate them. I used a research diary to help with my understanding and organizing of the data. I noted recurrent topics and themes from the interviews and also took notes before and after each interview. Before I would note my observation of the institution if I was meeting the participant at their place of employment and after each interview, I wrote my immediate thoughts afterwards. I repeatedly read these notes throughout the process of data collection and analysis. I broke the data into manageable pieces in order to identify units of meaning.

Over a period of 4 months, I conducted 13 semi-structured qualitative interviews with 7 ESL teachers and 6 ESL learner-activists. The interviews each took between one hour and forty-five minutes and two hours and fifteen minutes. Location of the interviews varied from private rooms at OISE to participants’ homes and places of work. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, returned to the participant for further reflection, and finally returned back to me. All participants in this study identify as being “critical” and “having a strong commitment to social justice.” Out of the 7 teacher participants, one was a man, and out of the 6 learner-activists, only
one was a man also. All interviews were conducted in English except for Simin’s which was conducted in her native tongue and later translated into English. The ESL teachers teach in different places such as community organizations, community colleges, universities and all with the exception of Cecilia are currently teaching in Canada. The teachers’ academic backgrounds vary. All teachers had or were in the process of completing a graduate degree, one in disability studies, two in adult education, one in applied linguistics, and three in second language education. The teachers have various mother tongues such as Chinese, Hebrew, Spanish, Greek, and Sinhalese. Although all teachers are of course very fluent in English, Dayani speaks with an accent of her mother tongue. Four of the learner-activists had been activists in their country of origin prior to arriving in Toronto. The remaining two were not activists prior to coming to Canada; however, one was currently active in AIDS awareness in Toronto and the other one had a strong commitment to social justice which he later revealed stems from converting to Christianity. In the following, I have used Jinjing’s transcripts among the teacher-participants and Simin’s transcripts among the learner-activist participants to elaborate more than the other participants. To this end, these participants’ accounts are italicized. Writing out the participants’ interviews in such a way was very beneficial to organizing and analyzing the data. I chose these two participants for more extensive writing because their interview yielded a very colourful vignette of social life. I have italicized their section to allow for a visual separation as the same length is not given to the other participants.

**ESL Teachers**

**Ya** is one of the most interesting people I have ever met. She spent three years between the age of 5 and 8 on a Kibbutz which “ruined” her for capitalism forever. Later as an adult, she saw
human rights injustices when she visited Israel and that has made her “even more left wing.” She has an undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology and a diploma in ceramics all from Canadian institutions. After learning that she cannot make a living as a ceramicist, she got a TESL certificate in order to teach English. She was surprised to learn that people actually came to Canada to learn English but after she had a homestay student from a private language school stay with her, she decided to get her TESL certification. She did her TESL certification at a Toronto institution in three intensive months. She recalls the institution to have “a sense of social justice.” After failing to get a position in LINC, she went back to school to do a bachelor of education. Although she is from a progressive family and has always been a critical thinker, her first encounter with critical ESL education was at a guest speaker’s talk during her bachelor of education. She still gets excited when she recalls the guest speaker “blowing her away.” She was, at the end of that talk, as she puts it “transformed” as she comes to the realization that “Oh, wow! We can teach something that we’ve always been taught in the same way … We can teach it in a different way that is actually teaching something else as well.” She currently teaches ESL at a government organization for newcomers and speaks with great passion about her students and classes. She is clearly very popular and well-liked by the students; she has won several organizational prizes for teaching. She goes to rallies and demonstrations and tells her students about them in case they would like to join. She spends many hours preparing for classes and creating material for her students because pre-planned lessons and material seem “empty” to her. She is currently in the process of doing a master’s degree in adult education in a Toronto university which she is clearly finding very rewarding.
Cecilia is the only participant who does not teach or live in Canada. She was a visiting professor at a Canadian university when I met her. She holds a master’s degree in teaching languages and a PhD in literary Education from a South American university. She is the head of a teacher training center in a South American university where they teach English to local ESL teachers. This center was being run in a “traditional” way, teaching what they assumed the learners needed to learn, until a group of graduate students began to do their thesis on their center. These graduate students brought “new light and new life” into the center and the professors’ and director’s perception of their activity there. As a faculty they began to question their previously taken for granted practices. This Cecilia remembers to be a very “complex” and “challenging” time and they even considered closing the center. Eventually, she and her colleagues made radical changes to the structure of their teacher education center. They created an innovative approach to ESL teacher training in which there was no pre-assigned textbook or syllabus. Both trainees and trainers use the first four to six four-hour class sessions to discuss what should be taught in the program. This process does not end at merely writing down a list. At first, trainees would “come up with empty formulaic lists” of was expected of them. However, the trainers raise questions about the reasons why a topic should be included. For example, the trainees would say “we want to learn the present perfect.” And the trainers would problematize this notion by questioning how the knowledge of the present perfect would help them use the English language it and how will knowledge of the present perfect effect their ESL teaching and the kind of teachers they will become. In general, these sessions were used to uncover and question uncritically held assumptions of what ESL learning should look like. “What we were trying to do as tutors was to be aware ourselves that our practices were related to a certain system of beliefs; that they were not neutral.”
**Dayani** is a teacher of ESL for whom English is a foreign language. She has an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in linguistics from her country of origin. She later gained another master’s degree in Canada after immigrating and is currently working on a PhD at a Canadian university. She completed a TESL certificate course after achieving her second master’s degree. In this course, the instructor would continuously tell her, “Dayani, you think in a high level, all that thinking is not needed in this class for teachers [trainees].” In the certification course, you could be very creative in your delivery of a lesson but “you don’t need deep thinking.” She is accredited by several TESL organizations around the world several of which are not recognized in Canada. She admits a partiality towards immigrant professionals and in fact, as part of her social justice oriented teaching, she displays to her students that “we’re in this together.” She shows her students that she is “one of them” and has experienced their challenges and has come out successful. She believes strongly in acknowledging the learners’ intelligence and that this is not necessarily the same as the learners’ English proficiency. Dayani reveals a strong commitment to social justice and “a fighting spirit” which she is not quite sure where it comes from, “perhaps my genes.” She will not “back down” or “lie low” if she believes her rights or someone else’s rights is being overlooked as she demonstrated in an incident with a LINC teacher with whom she was assigned to do her practicum. Dayani felt she was being unjustly treated and evaluated as a young woman of color by the older white European teacher. “I felt if this is happening to me, it must be happening to the students too.” She speaks in depth about the discrimination that she experienced during her practicum which caused her to take the issue to the supervisor of the center where she was teaching and make a complaint. Despite friends telling her not make her life “complicated”, she was adamant to make her trainer’s
discrimination known because she felt that “with all [my] education and all [my] knowledge, if I’m going to back off, what’s the point? Somebody has to fight for it.”

In Canada, in order to meet the criteria for TESL accreditation, Dayani has had to teach, volunteer, and observe ESL classes in LINC centres and other government run organizations. As a one-time university lecturer, she found the experience quite unpleasant; “I was taken as a layperson.” It was also very difficult for her to witness pedagogically unsound practice and not be able to say or do anything about it. One example was when the teacher used “lethargic”, “unchallenging” material in a class of “intelligent professionals”.

Prior to immigrating to Canada, she taught EAP in a university in her country of origin for ten years. Many of her students came from rural areas. She was a role model for her female students. She would tell them “when you finish your degrees, don’t get confined into teaching positions or becoming mothers or you can be mothers but you have to have all these, you know, you have to have a career.” She would challenge patriarchal practices in her classes; at times she would “take girls’ side during debates” and challenge male students in discussions on gender roles. In Canada, she plans to bring her ideas about equality and social justice to the ESL class in a different way. Here she will work on inclusion of accents in ESL material, the acknowledgement of different Englishes, and intercultural and multicultural material for ESL education. The biggest problem with the field of ESL education, Dayani believes, is the native speaker as model.

Mary has taught ESL in community colleges, community organizations, and independent schools in both Canada and abroad. Her parents are both from countries which have a history of oppression and resistance; they did not have access to education. Mary believes, “because I come from a family where English is my parents’ second languages and I know that they came from
countries where politically they were disempowered by English speakers, that’s really in the forefront of what I think about when I’m teaching.” This philosophy stems from her experiences both as a child and as an adult. She comes from a family who held a strong value on education. Raising their children in Canada, they placed great importance on Mary and her siblings getting the best education which for them meant sending their children to private schools and placing emphasis on higher education. She has an undergraduate degree in science, a TESL certificate, and a master’s degree in adult education all from Canadian academic institutions. She currently holds a leadership position in a Canadian academic institution. Her position is quite important and as a young woman, Mary “consistently” does not get taken seriously. She has strong ideas about social justice and whenever she tries to implement those ideas in her leadership role, her colleagues tell her, “Oh, you’re too naïve and young. You don't know. Just wait till you’ve been here a little bit longer.”

She has been involved with a project which provides care and aid for children in a refugee camp in the Middle East. She has “stepped back” from active organizing in the recent years because “with the Internet, you just don't know anymore where things are going and who’s watching you. It does make me a little bit nervous.” The reason there is less activism both in her life and in general is because “people are afraid.” Topics such as colonization, imperialism, role of the police are “considered taboo.”

She considers herself a critical thinker and educator because she does not focus solely on her job or her class. Mary has a relational analysis of the role that ESL education plays in the world and its ties to immigration policies and standards of living. She hopes that “Teaching English is no longer a colonial activity” but isn’t quite sure if that is true. She knows that “What we do in the classroom is connected to immigration rules, which is connected to political
situations in different countries, and how many people want to leave.” She has a strong philosophy of education with which she makes all her academic and pedagogical decisions. Meeting needs, respecting individuality of learners, access to education, awareness of the colonizing history of the English language, and awareness of the power structure within the classroom are elements of her philosophy of education. “Showing each of those people respect and meeting the individual needs that they have” is important to her. In her ESL teaching, creating a safe space for students to voice opinions is key. There have been instances where students share opinions such as “women should not be in the military because they are not capable.” Although Mary disagrees with these opinions, she is happy that the student felt he could express his thoughts in the class. When I probe further and assert that as educators we have a responsibility to inform that opinion and that teaching does not begin and end with voicing opinions, Mary states that the tolerance and ability to “be open to different opinions” is the necessary first step to re-evaluating one’s original opinion. Creating a safe space in the classroom, allowing freedom of speech, and accepting difference is how Mary believes she brings social justice to her teaching.

Mary struggles with comments that her colleagues make; she is quite aware that she is “different”. Other teachers at her place of employment sometimes use derogatory language to refer to students. In her attempts to challenge her students with deeply understanding an issue through text, her colleagues have made “very negative responses, like, “Well, they’re from x country, and they just can’t do that. They just never learned how to do that.” Comments about weak or “low” students need not be made in a pejorative way by teachers. Disparaging remarks about learners’ age or gender in relation to students’ learning ability bother Mary.
She believes strongly that the ESL class is a space to do “critical work”. She says, “Social tensions, maybe, and political tensions, historical tensions, already exist especially in an ESL classroom. So instead of maybe letting them—by “them,” I mean those tensions—just be there sitting around the class, maybe you just need to address them in a way that’s productive.” Having students share their opinions and be respectful in disagreement is at the forefront of her teaching. However, she laments that beyond that, “I don’t know what happens after that.”

Valerie has been teaching ESL for 35 years; “too long” she laughs. She has a master’s degree in second language education and has taught in different organizations and countries. During her undergraduate studies in political science and sociology, she was introduced to the ideas of Paolo Freire and took courses on class struggle and social hierarchies and felt that “it all tied in somehow”. However, the biggest influence in her life that has shaped her ideas about society and justice are her parents. Being “a child of immigrants” who had very little formal education and grew up poor, has played a determining role in her thinking. Her mother was not allowed to study beyond grade six even though she won a scholarship to continue in a neighbouring village. A sixth grade education was considered sufficient for a girl. As a young man, her father was poor and had little education and as a result, suffered significantly when war broke out in their country. He was forced to the frontlines because he only had a grade two education. “The boys who had some education were kept back in the offices.” Therefore, he saw a lot of violence and injustice which set him back even further when he returned from war. After his return, Valerie’s father read heavily and later when he had children, encouraged them to read about “social injustice, poverty, lack of education, we always discussed it. It was constant.” Her mother also would constantly tell her that without education, a woman has no power.
Valerie’s family immigrated to Canada when she was little and giving the children an education was number one on her parents’ agenda. Although Valerie’s parents considered themselves lucky to be able to raise their children in Canada, Valerie blames the ordeal of “going through the immigrant experience” on her parents’ lack of education. “Had they had an education, they would’ve lived well in their own country.” Valerie arrived in Canada with her family when she was in kindergarten. She knew no English and “they didn’t know what to do” with her and sat her with a “girl from Poland”. She still wonders why they did that. Her kindergarten report card, which she still has, says that she is “doomed for failure.” After school, she would go to the family business and her father would put “the little teacher” on his lap and ask her to tell him and her younger siblings what she had learned. By the time it was her brothers’ turn to go to school; they knew English and were not put “in a special group.”

Valerie’s mother was able to gain some autonomy in Canada. What helped her mother elevate in status compared to her peers in Canada was that she was adamant to learn English. Unlike other women her mother’s age who are from the same country of origin, Valerie’s mother learned to read and write in English. As a result, she was able to get her driver’s license which was at the time unheard of in her community. Within her small community in their Canadian city, there are women Valerie’s mom’s age who were not allowed to learn English by the men in their families. Consequently, they cannot communicate effectively outside of their linguistic group and at times even with their own grandchildren. Valerie sometimes reads books by Simone De Beauvoir to her mother and they have lively discussions about her mother’s views and the potential in her mother’s life if she had gotten an education. Her grandmother also continuously lamented over the fact that she could not read or write. She would say to her six
daughters, “Look at me. I’m just like a piece of useless wood. I have to listen to what the men in my family say. I have no voice. But you, you try to accomplish something more.”

Witnessing her parent’s struggles has shaped Valerie’s views about education and social justice. For Valerie access to education is at the core of her beliefs about social equality. She equates getting educated with having voice and being empowered. She says, “The only way a woman can get strength is voice and voice through education.”

Valerie’s goal after retirement is to return to her country of origin and teach English to the underprivileged in order to get them “out of the mess they’re in” that is “the cycle of poverty.” She believes that teaching English will give her students “a better standard of living.”

Critical thinking to Valerie is going “behind and below the surface” and not “accepting things as they are.” She begins the class with a warm-up. She puts a number on the board and asks the students to guess what the number represents. After they’ve finished guessing she tells them the answer which is at times, for example, the number of kids who go to school hungry in Toronto. She then continues with a reading on the topic and ends with a discussion in which she sometimes plays “the devil’s advocate” and challenges the students in class discussions. All this occurs of course “within the constraints of my textbook and how much time I have.”

Brad is the only male ESL teacher that I interviewed. His undergraduate degree is in musicology and his passion was music in the beginning. He got into TESL as a way to support himself while pursuing music and as a way to travel around the world. He pursued a master’s degree in Sociology of Education and was intrigued by the work of critical professors such as Roxanna Ng. With the birth of his first child, he knew that his vision of travelling the world and working on his music would not be realized. He then continued to achieve a PhD in curriculum,
learning and teaching. He now has a leadership position in a higher education institute in Canada and actively publishes on the topic of critical ESL education.

Brad, now a veteran ESL professional, recalls an exciting time during his graduate studies (in the late 1980’s) where there was a “revelation” and “collective epiphany” when he and his peers had been introduced to critical ESL education. The graduate students set up small study groups to discuss critical ESL, seminars to present critical material, and even organized a small critical conference. He simultaneously did ESL volunteer teaching at a community center which worked on immigrant women’s issues. This too was an enlightening experience as he became familiar with non-ESL teachers. “The people running the program were not language specialists. They were social workers, people involved in citizenship immigration. Refugee issues was their area.” Through these professionals, Brad was exposed to a different way of teaching; “Start with who are the students? What are their life experiences, organize language instruction around that, rather than something based on the latest research in SLA.” This volunteer position led to a job at another community organization which also became “a real eye opener.” The teachers in the new community organization were not academics; they had “community-oriented social justice approach to teaching… They would take students down to public places. They would get involved in rallies. They would talk to them about workers’ rights.” Brad recalls this period of time when the citizenship branch of TESL Ontario was producing “incredible documents” such as materials on landlord-tenant rights, active citizenship, workers’ rights, and violence against women. This all changed with the coming in power of Mike Harris as the leader of the Conservative Party of the provincial government of Ontario. With Mike Harris’s government, the move towards standardized teaching material and the creation of LINC in the federal government “a lot of really good teachers got out of the field.”
The community centers that Brad was involved in closed completely and the work that was being done in adult ESL “was not seen as a priority or even necessary”. Gone were the days of “language teaching being responsible to the whole person and not just the cognitive speaker, but actually the integration of the entire student.”

**Jinjing** is an experienced teacher of ESL and currently teaching in a reputable institution in Canada. She has a BA in philosophy and a Bachelor of Education and a Master’s degree in disability studies. She has certificates in Special Education and in TESL. All her degrees and certificates were acquired from Canadian universities. Her sense of social justice has been with her from childhood. Growing up in an African country, she was “bothered” by comments about the desirability of light skin color. She “was bothered” by injustice and inequality but assumed that they are a natural part of life. “There were people that lived on the street and people that did not live on the streets.” She watched as her uncle, a man of god, spoke disrespectfully to children of the poor. She noticed how members of her middle-class family would benevolently give food and clothes to the needy, but was irked that it was always stale food and torn clothes.

When she moved to Canada with her family in her pre-teen years, her position drastically changed. She was now the person on the fringes. She experienced brutal racism and bullying inside and outside school. These experiences have all shaped her thinking. “I really sympathize with the little man. The people on the fringes because I lived there for many years and I think I define myself that way till today. I think I never feel that I fully participate in whatever society or community I’m in. I always feel that I’m a little bit of little bit on the fringe.” Even now she laments the fact that she is “bothered” by the suffering in the world, “but this is probably as far as it goes.” In her quest to “build a career and life” she has lost meaning. She yearns “to participate in something meaningful” but has not been able to do so yet. Along with her life
experiences, her religion and religious beliefs have played an important role in shaping her ideas about social justice. She believes strongly in a loving god and she believes in the existence of evil. “I believe most governments are evil.” Her experiences of abuse, of not quite “feeling whole” have also shaped what she thinks of herself. Although she has created some of the most practical and radical teaching steps that I have come across during this study, she continuously tells me that she is not an intelligent person and that it is not her TESL education that is to blame for her previously uncritical manner of teaching; it was because she was not “swift enough” or “smart enough” to get the concepts. When I ask her what her understanding of doing critical work is, she begins with saying that she does not have enough faith in her intelligence to answer my question but then goes on to give a very deep, relational conceptualization of what it means to be critical. She says, that being critical is to see the world and say it doesn’t have to be this way and then go on to find the reason why the world is as it is in order to find “creative solutions” to affect change. But she goes on to say that she as a person must also look at the role that she plays from her social location and to understand her role in order to make change.

Although Jinjing’s ideas and view about human suffering and social justice have been with her from childhood, she did not know how nor have the tools to operationalize these ideas into her work as a teacher of ESL. In fact, she feels that her work as a teacher of the English language limits her. In her struggle to find “value” and “meaning” in the work that she does, she stumbled across a keynote speaker at a small conference that she attended several years ago. The keynote speaker’s talk resonated with Jinjing in a very profound way. “If she [the keynote] had spoken for hours, I would have listened to her.” The keynote speaker talked about consciousness-raising, the power of words and music, war and children and related these to education. When Jinjing walked out of that talk, her thoughts about her mode of teaching had changed. “It always
bothered me that my students are unaware of the suffering happening in the world.” Jinjing began doing research on human rights, youth and human rights. She was clear on what she did not want to do in her classes. She did not want to create lessons “on the big names, like Martin Luther King”. She wanted “ordinary human beings that are very young that are actually out there affecting change because I felt that this would be one way to attract the young students.” The conference and the speaker had a transformative effect on Jinjing. She came home and sat at the computer and created a project for her students to do.

Before this conference, she had made several attempts at bringing her ideas of social justice into her teaching. She would bring a newspaper article for reading and encourage discussion but it was not until this conference that she was able to create a framework to do with her classes. The keynote speaker said that we have a responsibility as educators and what Jinjing felt was that she was telling her that there was more she could do than the present perfect tense with her students.

Jinjing currently teaches in an adult education institution which has a strict curriculum which she finds quite limiting. She has learned to navigate the barriers and limitations by introducing a project into her teaching which takes little classroom time. The ESL books are all the same in essence; they all have a few readings, some vocabulary exercises before the readings, some comprehension and grammar exercises after the reading. What makes the books interesting or different from one another is the topic and theme of the readings. Jinjing believes that we could take ordinary topics that are currently being ‘covered’ in ESL textbooks and make them critical. “Why not instead of doing a unit on food where every teacher wants to shoot herself, do a unit on food and poverty and the distribution of food. Do it from a human interest perspective and what’s going on in the world when it comes to food and why do we have so many people
starving to death when we have all this technology that we have today.” Discussing culture is also very popular in ESL classes recently. We discuss customs and different cultural practices as a way of promoting tolerance and appreciation of diversity. We have lively talks in our classes about what the marriage customs of Iran are and then we compare them to how they are the same or different from those in Canada. Jinjing questions the value in this comparison. Instead she suggests, “Look at how marriage impacts society.” The topic of shopping can be made critical by bringing conscious consumption to the forefront by introducing fair-trade, “your role in the whole global thing that’s happening”. You can take the topic of jobs and make connections between employment and social justice. As ESL teachers we all introduce example sentences when we want to speak to a specific grammar point. Jinjing suggests making our example sentences provocative. When Jinjing teaches presentation skills, she demonstrates a presentation in front of her students. The topic of her model presentation is Obesity: A social justice issue. Her students are “shocked” to see her refer to obesity as a social justice issue, but she makes connections during her presentation of how obesity limits employment and the role of the food industry in the creation of obesity. She asks, “How has the food industry participated in this and then sits back and pokes fun at them [obese people] because they’re fat?” The times that she “sticks to the book” are the times that she calls herself “lazy”. Unless the topic is interesting to her, she does not put the effort into creating new material and making connections from the topic to daily life and creating a “critical lesson”. Feeling passionate about the topic is the most important criteria and those have been the best classes that she has conducted and gotten the students excited.

Another limiting aspect of teaching ESL in her institution is “these damn books that they force down my throat.” Some of the topics in ESL textbooks puzzle her for their lack of
importance and connection to everyday life. “There’s so much happening. Who cares about international spying? But that’s what’s selling.” Jinjing is confident that if she were to “be left alone”, and not constrained by the curriculum and textbooks, she could be teaching ESL from a human interest, social justice perspective one-hundred percent of the time.

Since she has made these changes in her teaching, she has had many successes. There have been students who have wanted to initially transfer out of her class because of timetable issues but when they learned that their required classroom project will be the one described by Jinjing have decided to stay and work out any scheduling issues. Several students have commented that “this was the best thing we’ve ever done in an ESL classroom.” One student once remarked that this is all very depressing to which Jinjing replied, “depressing isn’t necessarily bad.”

Jinjing has tremendous faith in the power of education and youth. She dreams of a day when young people wake up and see that there is an alternative and the world need not be this way. She says that she came to this realization later on in her life but she has one secret wish. That a student in her class will hear something as she did from that keynote speaker in the small conference that she attended only a few years ago. We end our interview with one advice for teachers who are interested in taking a critical approach to ESL teaching: “I think if you’re interested in taking a critical approach, you can take a critical approach. What’s stopping you? You just have to put the effort into it. Take the mundane crap that you’re using, being asked to use, and turn it into something critical.”
**Learner-activists**

**Charlotte** is a passionate speaker with fire in her eyes. During the first few minutes of our interview, she revealed to me the violent circumstances in which she was given AIDS during war in her native country. Whereas she was active in women’s rights prior to this event, after finding she has been infected with HIV AIDS, she felt she must break the silence of the violence that more than 200 000 women in her native country suffered during war. She began to work with an American group who had come to her country post-conflict to do research on women inflicted by HPV. She also gave talks at her local church about having and living with HIV AIDS. She would stand in front of the congregation to give information about HIV and AIDS but she would also end with her personal life. She would say “Look at me I am HIV positive. I can do everything. I can work. I can go to school.” She was then hired as a spokesperson by an international organization to give regular talks on “living positively” while having AIDS. Charlotte immigrated to Canada in 2006. She was immediately recruited as a research participant in studies related to living with AIDS and realized she needs to improve her English in order to better participate in focus group discussions. Because her English wasn’t very strong, she was not a head of a research project. She had to “give” her ideas and “they take the idea and it’s gone.”

She attended ESL classes for six months and says the classes were good but suggests that students should be divided into groups based on the reason they want to learn English. For example, one group of students want to learn English for running a business another for becoming politically active. In the political group, according to Charlotte, they can discuss vulnerability, colonization, poverty, stigma, discrimination, water, food because “all these things is come together.”
Since her arrival in Canada, her main area of action has been in AIDS awareness and prevention. She has been living in a Canadian city for eight years and has been actively involved in social life. She says “I’m not Canadian but Canadian, they are suffering a lot. Youths, especially youth.” She currently works at an organization that deals with the social and economic impact of those living with HIV/AIDS within the African Diaspora. However, she does not focus solely on Africans because AIDS does not see “you from this community you are white, you are black, you are green, you are yellow. No. You are young, you are old, you are female, you are male.” She gives talks on AIDS awareness and AIDS prevention but also speaks about her own personal life and how having AIDS has not diminished her self-worth. She gathers youth with AIDS to give talks on all she has achieved since her diagnosis. She displays herself as a strong role model of a woman with AIDS. She says that people can talk about AIDS in theory all they want but she goes to humanize AIDS to the audience. “To show people I’m Charlotte. The way they teach you HIV is me. I’m HIV positive woman but I’m a human being. I have human rights.” Another one of her goals when she gives talks is to prevent the spread of AIDS. She hopes that youth who hear her talks “don’t trust anyone to make sex, unprotected sex.” We end our interview with one advice that Charlotte gives me. That is, newcomers should learn about HIV/AIDS and its prevention in the ESL class.

Adanna is also involved in AIDS activism and relies on her French language background for advocacy. Adanna is a model Canadian immigrant. In 1997, she was a refugee claimant and a welfare recipient. Now Adanna holds a leadership position in a community organization, is a union steward, and a member of the liberal party.

Prior to arriving in Canada, she wasn’t an activist but would always raise her voice to speak against injustice in her surroundings. She was a middle child living without her father and
had to on many occasions speak out against people attempting to coerce her or her family. Later on, as an adult she joined her husband in 1997, who had left their country earlier, in Canada. She immediately went to government run ESL classes although as a refugee claimant she was not eligible to attend LINC. She speaks fondly of her teacher and her class. “I like my teacher; she was a very good for me.” She enjoyed the class trips very much with the highlight being going to Niagara Falls for the first time. After acquiring her refugee status, she was transferred to different full time classes (as a welfare recipient she was required to attend full time classes). In these new classes she was taught basic English for customer service. She was taught how to answer the telephone, leave messages, … “It still is ESL for new immigrant but … you can get at least a basic job at the entry level.”

Her career started after these classes. She was given her first field placement as a volunteer in an African community health organization. It was soon recognized that Adanna “is an asset” and upon the end of her three month placement, she was offered a position which paid minimum wage in the same organization. “That’s when I started to be an activist.” She speaks extensively about those days, late 1990’s, and the discrimination that people with AIDS faced. She once advocated for a woman who was HIV positive and had been admitted to a hospital for an illness. There was a sign in front of her door stating that there is an HIV positive woman in the room and hospital staff avoided going into her room; she was not fed for two days. Her position was a receptionist of an African community health organization, and everything passed by her first. “I was in the front line.” She frequently left her desk to see to complaints made by clients who had been discriminated against. Her supervisor was an understanding woman who encouraged Adanna’s advocacy and when a position became available made sure that Adanna got promoted.
Eventually this organization was shut down in 2008 because of funding restraints. She then pursued a diploma in social service work at a community college. She had to take one extra year to complete her diploma because she was required to take additional ESL classes. She speaks very highly of the college experience. She says the college needs students and whatever shortcoming one has the college works to overcome it; however, there are individual teachers who are frustrated by second language learners in their classes and treat them “unfairly.” As part of her program requirement, she was placed in the field. Being an experienced activist by that time, she was offended and perplexed by the lack of engagement of placement supervisors and teachers. They had her doing menial administrative work such as filing during the placement and had no interaction with her. Of the supervisors she had during her placement, she says “Maybe they have PhD, but they to interact with human beings, they don’t know.” After Adanna completed her degree, she decided to put her negative experience to good use. In the community organization where she currently works, Adanna created a program for which she recruits college students, “immigrants like me.” She makes sure the recruits have a fruitful experience; she does her own paperwork and does not give them dull office work. “Many people they don’t like to take a first year placement student. They like ones who has experience. I’m telling them, “No, it’s not fair. For somebody to get a second year experience, you need to have a first year. So what do you think if we don’t the first year a chance?”

**Belma** arrived in Canada about two years ago. Prior to her arrival, she has amassed a wealth of knowledge and experience in journalism, grassroots organizing, and field work. She has always been passionate about the political and social discrimination against her ethnic group in her country and began to work as a journalist writing about the human rights violations against this ethnic group. She was criticized by her comrades for not joining guerilla mountain
operations but she felt she “should do something in the city.” Her provocative articles led to several arrests until she finally decided the position was too dangerous to stay in. “I got fed up actually to work in a very insecure, very dangerous situation.” She then got a position with the UN as a human rights researcher to record human rights violations such as “rape in custody, burning villages, forced displacement, torture.” This too proved overwhelming after several years and she decided that the “best thing is going back to the education again.” So she left her country of origin for a few years to achieve a master’s degree in social work in a prominent European university. She speaks about this time with great fondness. “I was a ... human rights activist and women’s activist. I was so valuable actually. I didn’t feel before in my [own] community.” She finds it ironic that she had to leave her community and country to be valued like that. “Even with my poor English, they accepted me without TOEFL. They said, you are okay because your experience, your work experience, your activism, it’s more important for us.” During this master’s degree, she organized workshops, set up seminars and was quite active in her university. She was treated “like a queen” in this “very leftist”, “Marxist” department of the university. This time during her master’s degree really “fulfilled” her. Whereas before she was mainly involved with a leftist organization in her country, her eyes was now “opened”; “I saw ... racism, there is discrimination to ... to everything and at this time also, homosexuality and lesbian, gay.”

Upon her return to her country, she continued to work in UN human rights agencies, leading workshops to educate UN employees about policing voting polls, working in a women’s shelter, founding a refugee organization to build alliances between refugees in her country and other countries in the region. As life became more difficult for an activist of her ethnic and leftist political background, she left her country with her family to become refugees in Canada. This
bitter irony does not elude her. Having written documents and ran workshops on life as a refugee in her country, she thought she knew everything about the experience; she had no idea that “being a refugee, this is the most terrible thing in my life.”

In Canada, her choices for ESL classes as a refugee claimant were limited. She went to one class which was chaotic. The students were struggling with their own issues. “people are just coming without money with kids’ problem and no job, no future expectations, nothing.” And teachers were dealing with their own issues of teaching where there is continuous intake and varying English language competency. “The teacher was just coming, talking with us and I was just wasting my time, [I was thinking] why I’m here and I just stopped.” After one and a half months at this ESL class, she transferred to a community-based immigrant service agency. Here she was very excited to learn that they had a refugee settlement program and as someone who had decades of experience in working with refugee issues and UNHCR, they would be happy to use her. However, that was not the case. They had her filing papers in the office. She jokes, “This is important thing, filing, in this country?” But more seriously she says “they just … undermine you, they are just feeling you are small, you are just … You can’t do anything. You haven’t wings to fly …” Belma speaks very fondly of the individual teachers at this organization. It was clear that they are passionate about refugee issues and teaching in a centre which caters to refugees is more than a job; it is a political stance. The teachers regularly came to demonstrations for refugee rights with their students. They would always ask about the students’ process, hearing dates, whether they needed help with their forms. One teacher let Belma do a 30 minute presentation in class about refugee issues; this Belma recalls as the highlight of her ESL learning in Canada.
Feng is currently a student in a community college in Canada. Before moving to Canada in 2010, Feng lived and worked in several African countries for nine years. He does not identify himself as an activist but admits he has a strong commitment to social justice. When I urged to uncover his views about social justice and their origin, it became known that it was bible study that had changed him and his ideas about justice. He could not physically help “speechless people to find justice” because he was moving around too much. He regularly attends church and makes donations. “People think that as humans they can change the world. We got that from Chairman Mao … Now I try my best and leave the decision to the God. I will just fully accept the result. So that’s the change.” He speaks fondly about his American pastor who patiently read and taught him the New Testament and the Old Testament over a period of three years in English.

He speaks strongly about the media control in his country of origin. All newspapers and television is controlled by the state; this gets in the way of social justice. In order to fight for social justice, “you have to know what’s happening first.” And in a country where all media outlets are being controlled by the state, the only other option to fight, according to Feng, is through the formal justice system which itself is an arm of the state. “So pretty much, there’s no chance for the justice through the legal system.”

He has taken several ESL classes ranging from LINC to college English. The LINC classes did not necessarily help him as there are students with a variety of linguistic ability in the same class. Feng believes that an ESL class for newcomers should have a small number of students with similar goals and level. It should also instill social responsibility in the students. “Tell them in this country, we still have inequality problem, we still have human abuse, we still have women as a weaker party, vulnerable to the violence, we still have domestic violence. We
want you to do something for this. This country consists of 30 million and you’re a part of it. The social justice is not just for politicians.”

Kabira identifies herself as an activist. She came to Toronto about two years ago to join her husband who had immigrated earlier. Since her arrival in Toronto, she has been a participant in several research studies about political and social issues related to her country of origin. She is currently attending ESL classes full-time five days a week from morning to afternoon. She is very fond of these classes and says that she enjoys them very much. Other than taking part in focus groups and research studies, she has not been actively involved in a social or political movement.

Simin is a young woman in her twenties from a small town in the Middle East. Her father died in combat during a regional war and that brought a slew of problems for her mother being war widow with children in a small patriarchal town. Although the government had passed legislature to allow the thousands of war widows to keep their homes and children, social convention and laws did not allow Simin’s mother to keep her home or children. Simin’s mother was forced out and she and her two siblings were left with Simin’s paternal grandfather and although they were all promised that there would be visits, that never happened. “My grandfather would never allow his son’s children to visit their mother’s home where she was living with another man.” There were many attempts to marry Simin off in the years to come as her older sister was married when she was in grade nine. Pleas from her school principal and sheer luck (her suitor’s father had a sudden heart attack the day before asking for her hand) saved her from an early marriage. “It was a miracle. I often think about it; I would have still been in [that small town] now.” Upon finishing high school, she got into the university of the capital city.
and although her grandfather was opposed, she left to go to the big city to study anthropology. “I felt the answers to my questions were in the social sciences.”

In university, she was introduced to a world that was completely new to her. She began to quench her thirst for poetry and literature and came in contact with people of the like she had never known to exist. One night in her dormitory, a girl “who was from a progressive family” brought the first book that Simin had ever seen on the topic of feminism. It was a book about clichéd gendered stereotypes. Simin’s eyes still light up when she speaks of the time when she read this book. “It was as if I was waking up from sleep... Like I had known this but I hadn’t been aware of it.” Shortly after, a group of girls from her dorm decided to form a reading group. They would get together twice a week in one of the girls’ rooms and read and discuss feminist literature. Her thoughts and actions became much deeper when she began her master’s in the field of women’s studies. There she came in contact with experienced activists who were back at school studying women’s studies after having been active in journalism, environmental activism and feminist activism. She recalls passionately, one of her first attempts at organizing a feminist event in her university on the occasion of International Women’s Day on March 8th. She and a group of her friends used the university landscape to put up pictures and captions of women who were important to the women’s movement of her country. This event proved very successful and after, Simin and her friends ran monthly talks on women’s issues where they would put out flyers throughout the university inviting attendees. They read and discussed family law and violence against women. She recalls this period as the peak of her activism. “It had turned into something sacred, feminism. Even if we could make one person aware, that would make our day”.

136
As she gained more theoretical knowledge on women’s issues, her actions became more
subversive. Whereas before she was happy with holding an event on the university campus, she
was soon organizing events in the main squares of the city on important dates such as the
anniversary of rigged elections. She and her friends would sit on the streets to stop traffic. They
endured many beatings at the hands of the police. For these protests, she and her friends brought
extra clothes because the police would throw paint on them during their attacks in order to
identify them later when they were trying to get away through side streets.

It was in this environment that their campaign began demanding the abolition of
misogynistic laws within the constitution. Simin and her friends were active and present from
the campaign’s very inception. “During the campaign it was as if we were living together. We
were all volunteers; we had no money. We were very enthusiastic”. This was a campaign
modelled after a similar movement in Morocco.

Now a seasoned activist, Simin’s home became a place of weekly meetings and
workshops to train new recruits. Two facilitators would run each workshop and one person
would record all occurrences. “We wanted archives because this was an important historical
event that was taking place in the women’s movement.” Simin had very distinct opinions about
her mode of activism. For one, she believed that no funding should come from outside of the
country as such money “would corrupt.” She also had strong opinions against gender segregation
of their meetings and committees but had to bow to the will of the majority when they voted to
separate men and women. She was also the founder of a research centre where they ran AIDS,
vioence, and human rights workshops. That would only stay open for a year before the regime
closed it down calling them communists.
Several years passed as such and as repression grew, Simin who had by then married a prominent student activist was forced to leave her country for a neighbouring country. She had witnessed state violence very closely although she herself was never arrested. “We constantly got calls that one of us had been arrested. We had no peace in our lives. We were waiting every day. Around five in the morning some of our friends got arrested; police would burst into their homes. That was common practice; once you opened the door, they would come in with a camera. They would record it too”. The confusion she and her activist friends felt during this time of crackdown by the regime is clear. “Many of our locations were discovered. I still don’t know how. We wouldn’t talk on the phone or SMS, just by email. We at many times didn’t know where today’s meeting would be. That’s how it had gotten. We had gotten confused. Many left [our country]”.

She speaks with such nostalgia about the time when she was fully active in causes she believed in. “I’m telling you, I have an addiction to activism. It had given us an identity. We could define ourselves. We could have become much better. I have not given up. I believe those who are abroad can get stronger and return and do more work.”

Simin continued her activism during the two years she and her husband spent in the neighbouring country while awaiting their Canadian refugee status. She soon connected with local feminists, got a job at an NGO, organized a conference gathering Middle Eastern feminists from the region, and even did “online stuff” setting up Skype meeting that put feminists from U.S., Lebanon, and Europe who were anti-sanctions and anti-war in touch.

When I ask her about her life in Canada since her arrival in Toronto in 2012, she says there is not much to say. Any attempt she has made to get involved in women’s issues has either been met by indifference by the organization or dissatisfaction by her. As an experienced activist, Simin has very distinct thoughts on how advocacy and activism should be done. She has
gone to METRAC, The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence against Women and Children, to see how she could get involved and even went to one of their events. However, she did not like their methods. “They are very bourgeois. They have opening nights or cocktail parties. How can you work on violence against women in this way? I went one night and didn’t like it.” She got in touch AWID, Association for Women’s Rights in Development, and got nowhere. They did not engage with her and told her to look at their website. Her total encounter with them lasted ten minutes. She volunteers at CCVT, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, sometimes when they need an interpreter. She tried to connect with old friends and fellow activists who were studying in Toronto universities but they did not show much interest; she does not take this to heart. She says, “You know people’s problems are different here. It’s understandable. Here students enter a system where they are taken advantage of. Either financial problems or the stress of what you will do after graduating will get to you.”

One of the first things she did when she arrived in Toronto was to go to COSTI, an immigrant service agency in Toronto, which deals with education and settlement of newcomers. Through COSTI she went to an ESL class which “wasn’t bad.” She liked the field trips but as a whole she did not find the experience helpful. “As far as education goes, it didn’t have anything interesting for me ... it was a one-dimensional education system.” She recalls being asked to write about the positive aspects of living in Canada and she says to me “what am I supposed to write” having just recently arrived. After finishing a term she returned to COSTI and was referred to another ESL class and this second ESL class “was terrible”. The level of students’ English was all over the place; the teacher had no plan and just spent time joking and laughing with students. She spent one month there and then stopped going. “My intellectual / mental space is very different, strange. I think of activism, women’s issues, and discrimination... I can’t sit
around and talk about fashion. I have never done that.” In total since her arrival in Toronto in 2012, Simin has gone to class for ESL for 12 weeks. She is well aware of the importance of learning English. She says, “I have actually thought of this a lot. I need to sit and surgically examine this language problem and fix it. Because if I don’t, I know I will have many problems. I already do. I can foresee my defeat here before it actually happens. My situation is going to get worse than it is now.”

The last ESL class that Simin attended was 3 months before our interview. She is very much aware of her changing consciousness, its preconditions, and possible future outcomes. Their social assistance program has made her dependant on her husband; since he is a student, she has been deemed his dependant. She says,

“Every single day that I am here, I am becoming more and more dependent on my husband; that’s something I’ve always hated. Because of financial issues, the Canadian government gives the social welfare to the couple and because [my husband] is a student and I don’t work, mine has been cut. So I have become dependent on him. I can’t do everything I want to do because I am looking to his hand. Over time this will take its toll. I can see this happening more and more every day. I think to myself I should do this and that work because he is paying for me”.

Simin has so many ideas and so much to offer. When I ask her what she would be involved in if her English was better and she was more independent, she talks about building alliances with North American feminists, learning about reproductive rights, gathering feminists who are spread out, studying sexual harassment laws. She draws a very deep and critical analysis of her experience and relates it to her new setting. “I think unless people become familiar with local issues of their new setting, they cannot make a connection between their old activism and
the new place. The link has to be made. And unless you become familiar with the new place’s spaces, you can’t make connections.”

Simin is also very critical of the happy picture of Canada constantly painted in the ESL classes she attended. She has yet to experience this happy Canada. She says “the education system always says that everything is good. It doesn’t tell you that here you will have such stresses that you’ve never experienced before.” She is such a critical thinker that even seemingly every day activities like using your credit card or drinking coffee do not go unnoticed by her. She talks about how everyone encourages you to use credit cards in Canada but no one mentions the tragedy when you cannot pay your bill. Or she recalls reading a “stupid article” about how to socialize while drinking coffee and how great coffee is. She asks, “Then why is everyone trying to quit coffee?” She looks around her on the bus and sees everyone in their bubbles completely oblivious of their environment, totally engrossed in their technological devices.

At the end of our interview, as we are walking out the door together, she says to me “I should just sit home and cook my stew while my husband gets his PhD. At least then I’ll be Mrs PhD.” Although she laughs nervously as she says this, the pain behind her smile is evident to me and the fact that such a future could well be a possibility is heartbreaking.

**Common Themes and Threads**

My data revealed common themes and threads that ran through the interviews. I have organized them into 6 main categories which are 1) fear and pressure, 2) trust, 3) a feeling of emptiness in ESL work, 4) limitations and barriers, 5) dealing with ‘difficult topics’ in the classroom, and 6) the experience of racism and discrimination in Canada. The category of fear is expanded into two sub-themes which are the perception of activism as aggression and the pressure and constraints
placed on teachers by their institutions and curriculum. After identifying these common themes, I went on to find literature and theorization on them and interestingly, I found that common emotions such as fear and trust have been theorized and developed in relation to education. These theorizations illuminate my analysis further as well as shed new insight on the data. They also allow me to critique current theorization based on my theoretical inclination and population of participants.

**Fear and Pressure**

I think for me, it [radical teaching] is a little bit too scary. I think… I don't think I could keep this job if I did that … I think if I was still active, I think it could compromise, in a certain way, the diplomacy I bring to other roles, other professional roles.

Something about activism to me, although I completely believe in it, something about it feels aggressive to me… anything that’s aggressive, is I find it disrespectful.

One of the common themes that first emerged during the interviews was that of fear. For one, fear of being perceived as too critical. There is also fear of stirring up unwanted thoughts and emotions. One teacher-participant says, “A lot of teachers are afraid to touch those sensitive issues … they are worried that if they talk about the past, they are going to bring up something in that student, and then they don't know what to do.” Also, the fact that teachers do not “touch” anything political makes Belma ask me if ESL teachers are government officials and are afraid if someone complains about them. Ya summed up her feelings of fear of taking action in this quote that I find very pertinent: “I don’t know if I necessarily want to subvert my own job.” Mary’s department offers a course on Modern-day Slavery which Mary had to work hard to include in the curriculum. When I ask Mary why topics such as imperialism, history of colonization, role of RCMP or immigration policy are not mentioned in this course, she says that if these topics were discussed “it [the course] would’ve been met very differently even by students” and that the
topics are present just “not overtly.” When I insist why they cannot be discussed overtly, Mary says, “people are afraid.” She continues to say that also “people don’t care” but if you watch the news, “You see that people that do care are pushed aside, shot, thrown in prisons.”

The theme of fear is connected to the image of activism as aggression. There is the fear of appearing too angry, aggressive, and extremist. The idea of the activist as an angry, aggressive, extremist person was a common thread throughout the interviews. One teacher said she would rather be called a humanitarian than an activist. Cecilia sees activism as “meaning-making” and “people becoming agents of their own practices.” She is very much against the idea of activism as having “one specific agenda and fighting for this agenda and trying to convince people that that’s the agenda that should be implemented.”

Related to the theme of fear, but not as strong as fear, is that of pressure. Pressure from the institution and pressure to cover a curriculum or parts of the book. The textbook and curriculum are limiting the critical work that teachers can do. Jinjing frustratingly says, “these damn books that they force down my throat because if I’m going to make a student buy a book for 35, 40 bucks, I have to use it. If I don’t use it, they might complain.” One reason that Ya has been able to do more critical work is that she teaches the same group of students for one year as opposed to the two or four months that the other participants sometimes teach the same group. Also, in Ya’s program, there is no rigid oversight or certain material to be covered. She has a supervisor who is sympathetic to “doing critical stuff.” She has freedom; “there’s a greater feeling of freedom of what you can do, because no one is really breathing down your neck about these tests or things like that.” She is provided material which she may use but she doesn’t. About the material that has been created for ESL teachers to copy and use for every group of students, Ya says, “They’re just benign, like they’re banal. I think you’re supposed to create a
Canadian. I think you’re supposed to create a Canadian who knows about certain things, who knows what Canadian customs are and what small talk is and our concept of time. And I don’t think it’s in the curriculum to necessarily question that.” Ya has autonomy to not use the ready-made material provided for her and she creates her own material. For example, she says, “we just started this week talking about First Nation’s history. And that’s kind of my curriculum.” Jinjing, on the other hand, is teaching in an institution which limits her through the implementation of curriculum. She has many ideas and feels she can turn many themes that are currently being ‘covered’ in ESL books into critical lessons. She says “So why not instead of doing a unit on food where every teacher wants to shoot herself, do a unit on food and poverty and the distribution of food. Do it from a human interest perspective and what’s going on in the world when it comes to food and why do we have so many people starving to death when we have all this technology that we have today.”

In retrospect, I should not have been surprised to find the theme of fear so glaring and prevalent in a study that is exploring social change. After all, fear is an emotion elicited when one feels threatened, in which circumstance one expresses the emotion of fear by one of three ways: flight, fight, or paralysis (English & Stengel, 2010). Fear is unavoidable in relation to the political reality we live in; it is unavoidable when learning and intellectual growth is involved. Radical education inevitably provokes emotions as they interrupt students’ taken-for-granted ways of understanding and responding to the world; radical educators have a responsibility to attend critically and respond pedagogically to any resulting emotion felt by students so that ultimately productive action rather than fear results. Indeed, dominant relations of power are not easy to change and the realization of the all-encompassing power relations can indeed elicit fear.
to which one reacts by being paralyzed. Nonetheless, fear can be a useful pedagogical marker of places where learners need to grow.

My criteria in selecting participants for this study, as mentioned previously, has been teachers who identify as being critical educators and learners who have fought for social justice. These participants have already displayed radical ways of thinking. They are aware of relations and do deep social and political analyses. They are cognizant of the risks of doing radical work as they are very critical thinkers.

The creation of safe spaces in the classroom has been a response to the awareness of the presence of fear in an educational setting. That is a space safe from extrinsic threat such as teacher scolding or intrinsic threat such as learner insecurity. The field of ESL education has responded amply to the negative effects of fear in the ESL classroom. I remember a mentor telling me that the ESL student is like a turtle; at the first sign of a threat his head and limbs will go inside his shell and you won’t be able to teach him anything. Several ‘designer’ teaching methods have been developed with the classroom as a safe space as its core pedagogical value. Suggestopedia and Community Language Learning Method are two examples. Suggestopedia is a second language teaching method that purports tapping into the power of positive suggestion. Proponents of this method claim that Suggestopedia liberates the learner from “the preliminary negative concept regarding the difficulties in the process of learning” (Lozanov, 2006). Physical surroundings and atmosphere in classroom are the vital factors to make sure that "the students feel comfortable and confident" (Harmer, 2001) and various techniques, including art and music, are used by the trained teachers. Learners sit in comfortable armchairs as opposed to classroom chairs and lighting and décor are aimed at relaxing the learner. Another key element of Suggestopedia is the use of music during the presentation of new dialogues and readings; this
stage is called ‘concert reading’. As the teacher is reading a new piece, music, often classical music, is played with the teacher’s voice acting as a counterpoint to the music. The claim is that large chunks of the reading is internalized by the learners during the readings due both to the relaxed and receptive state of the learners and to the positive suggestion created by the music. The Community Language Learning Method is another method which emerged from the humanist approach to language learning. Developed by Charles Curran, an America Jesuit Priest, the method has been adapted to meet the specific anxieties that a language learner faces. The teacher here acts as a counselor and the learner a client. The client chooses the topics of discussion and in fact the entire syllabus and the teacher (who must be a native speaker in this method guides the language-counselling relationship from the client’s threatened inadequate state to increasingly independent language adequacy. The skills that this teacher/counsellor must possess are empathy, warmth, and understanding to ease the fear and anxiety related to learning a foreign language.

English and Stengel (2010) explore Dewey, Rousseau, and Freire’s work in the relationship between fear and learning. These theorists highlight the complexities of when fear initiates learning and when it hinders it. In Dewey’s view, interest and fear are the emotions most central to the process of learning. When growth does result, the feeling is best characterized as interest. When flight and paralysis are the result and growth is hindered, and what might have become interest has instead become fear. The educator’s task is to anticipate, recognize, and accept the discomfort the learner is experiencing and encourage the student to hold herself in suspense to find possibilities for new interest, thus altering fear to interest. Dewey even goes as far as to claim that by not naming the emotion ‘fear’, the teacher reduces its debilitating influence. Rousseau’s work sheds light on the relationship between fear, habit formation, and
children’s cognitive development. According to Rousseau the educator’s method is more one of allowing the child to explore and encounter difference and discomfort on his own. The educator’s task thus becomes one of provocateur, knowing when to stimulate fear in order to promote growth. For Freire, fear is an appropriate and predictable response to difficulty. It only becomes negative when one fails to conquer it and is thus paralyzed by it. In *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*, Freire underscored three components of a fearful situation: the subject who fears, the object that is feared, and “the fearful subject’s feeling of insecurity in facing the obstacle” (p. 50). Thus a cycle is reproduced by fear in the face of the perception of difficulty, which in turn impedes the initiation of the learning process. However, since the source of the problem is the individual’s lack of learning in the first place, then the solution is to engage in a process of learning. However, the needed learning process is hindered by fear, and so on. Freire breaks this cycle in two ways, by instigating “intellectual discipline” and by focusing on learning as social experience. In the process of studying a text, Freire states that we encounter pain, pleasure, victory, defeat, doubt, and happiness and it is only intellectual discipline that allows the learner to confront the difficulty rather than turn away in face of fear. By the same token, Freire rejects student-centred learning in which the syllabus is in the hands of the learner. Methods that rely solely on learner curiosity and interest to guide learning will eventually fall short as they lack the element of intellectual discipline needed to continue in face of difficulty. Intellectual discipline involves interaction between all those present, teachers and learners alike. The learner must seek the help of others thus incorporating the social dimension of learning to overcome fear. Therefore, what was once an object of fear, becomes an object of learning while engaged in social interaction. This insight can be
internalized and taken to situations outside of the specific learning environment by holding that fear need not paralyze us; it can be overcome.

Evidently, these theorists’ views on fear vary; however, what they all have in common is that none of them advocate comfort and safety as pedagogical goals. Of course an unsafe learning environment is undesirable and can impede learning. However, “a thoroughly safe space may be too safe for learning” (English and Stengel, 2010, p. 540). It is up to the creativity and attentiveness of the educator to realize and respond to learners’ interests and fears. The teacher can be conceptualized as provocateur and not as one of coddler or desensitizer. As my data showed, activist-learners wanted to talk about their pasts and turmoil and were irked when their teachers stirred the conversation away from it.

Interestingly, the theme of fear appeared in my data not in relation to learners’ fear, which is what the literature on fear is about, but to teachers’. The fear expressed by the ESL teacher participants were generally political. Progressive teachers work with the awareness of dominant powers and the subtle ways in which they work. This fear may be born of the mismatch between task and capability. The task being to provoke the learner’s critical consciousness while navigating through institutional and social barriers. As ESL teachers, we may be unsure of whether we possess the capability since these are not necessarily skills that we were taught in our training. Freire’s response to fear by teachers in the aptly titled Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those who dare to Teach is the same as that of fear by students: intellectual discipline. He states,

I do not need to hide my fears. But I must not allow my fears to immobilize me. If I am secure in my political dream, having tactics that may lessen my risk, I must go on with the fight. Hence, the need to be in control of my fear, to educate my fear, from which is finally born my courage. Thus I must neither, on the one hand, deny my fears nor, on the other, surrender myself to them. Instead I must control them, for it is in the very exercise of this control that my necessary courage is shared (p. 76).
This study has helped me realize that fear is not merely a survival instinct developed through natural selection to preserve the well-being of our species. Rather it is an inevitable feature of social interaction in today’s political climate. It is fascinating how an evolutionary mechanism, such fear, and all the behaviours associated with it have developed in the modern human being in non-life threatening situations. When fear is acknowledged and interrogated theoretically, its social and political nature is revealed. The examination of fear can shed light on our institutions and the social organization in which we are living. And our intellectual discipline can help us stay the course. Critical education can be about learning “the tactics that may lessen my risk”.

**Trust**

“You kind of test the waters first. I’m not going to say anything too pushy until I know kind of what side you’re on. But once I do, then I know I can say this.”

“I really feel like if you’re going to express your opinions, you really need to trust that the person you’re expressing them to, especially when it’s your teacher, that if you disagree with me, that’s okay. And to know me better.”

The theme of fear is also tied to another theme that revealed itself throughout the interviews: the theme of trust. Teachers repeatedly said that they need to develop trust before they can do anything “too critical” in class. Ya who is clearly very much liked by her students says that she needs to develop trust before she does any of her “critical stuff.” The first couple of months of classes she does “regular ESL” before she begins to do readings, listenings, writings on colonization, aboriginal history, discrimination and race. She understands the concept of trust from the students’ point of view and says, “because they don’t know me, and I really feel like if you’re going to express your opinions, you really need to trust that the person you’re expressing them to, especially when it’s your teacher, that if you disagree with me, that’s okay. And to
know me better, so these couple of months, we weren’t really doing much.” Students must know that they can question and critique the ideas of the teacher. Mary works hard to create a “safe space” for everyone in the class; she openly tells her students, “you can say what you want; I’m not going to judge you.” Ya talks about a time in her class when a Muslim student found out that she was Jewish; the student paused for a moment and said “hmm”. Ya understands this as an issue of trust as she thinks to herself, “Oh, you might feel uncomfortable with me if you know that I’m Jewish, because you’re not sure if I think things about you. You might wonder if I’m making stereotyped assumptions about you.” Ya has the time to allow trust to be established in her class “before this designation of religion” as she teaches the same group for one year. Ya also sees critical analysis, humility, and trust all intertwined. She says that it is impossible to have “a real critical analysis” without “a sense of humility, a sense of respect, and a sense of trust.” In Cecilia’s program, teacher-trainees are asked to name their “problems” in their current schools. This requires “a lot of trust” between the trainers and trainees to have dialogue about such issues. Students are asked to basically expose their work environment and speak about the problems that exist within the learning group. This clearly requires a lot of trust within the group. Belma, a learner-activist, spoke about fear in teachers several times during our interview. As I mentioned, she had said that most teachers continuously speak about what it means to be “a good Canadian” but if “the teacher trusts you, they criticize the curriculum.” I have already mentioned that Ya is clearly very well-liked by her students. This she allots to establishing trust. She says, “I think one of the things that helps me is that my students really like me, and that I’ll wait a really long time to make that sure we know each other and that there’s a lot of trust before this stuff is said, anything is said.”
There is substantial literature on the role of trust in the constitution of society. In essence, trust provides a way “of reducing people’s experience of risk and uncertainty by enabling those who trust to minimise doubts they might otherwise have in the trustworthiness of others” (Candlin & Crichton, 2013, p. 2). When people trust systems, they are in fact placing their trust in the experts associated with those systems. For instance, by immigrating to a new country, the newcomer is trusting the institutions of the new setting.

There has been some theoretical attention given to ‘trust’ in education literature, the most comprehensive of which I have found to be Kerekes et al. (2013). They conceptualize trust based on the assumption of human nature that fundamental values are shared. We trust “despite the risk of being tricked or misled” (p. 210). Kerekes et al. see trust as a psychological state in which one determines whether another individual is trustworthy based on past or possible future actions.

The connection between fear and trust has been documented and theorized. I have followed Luhmann (1995) on this connection. For Luhmann the solution of fear and risk in modernity is trust. Trust allows us to carry on as if social systems were more predictable than they actually are. In a world with less and less familiarity, people are required to act in a leap of faith (Giddens, 1991) if they are not to be overwhelmed by uncertainty. And indeed not only does the act of immigrating take a great leap of faith, but so does uttering words and sentences in a new language. Immigrating to a new country involves a leap of faith in the institutions of the new country; however, the necessary level of English required to access Canadian institutions limits newcomers from benefiting from such institutions (Ngo, 2002). As Roessingh (2006) asserts, “Immigrant students and their parents have few options but to trust, and the ESL teacher may be the front-line professional to whom they turn” (p. 570).
All professional interaction requires a degree of trust. However, for teachers, stakes could not be higher. In a student-teacher relationship, the trust of the student is not only placed on the individual teacher but on the profession of teaching and institutional order (Crichton, 2013). And all interaction will serve to confirm or reject this trust. I think all can agree that trust is incredibly difficult to regain.

I pause and reflect here. If trust is the answer to risk, what is the risk involved with doing critical work in the ESL classroom? Why have so many teachers explicitly stated that the establishment of trust is key? Where is this perception of fear and risk coming from? I remember many sleepless nights in Iran after saying something in my university class that could be interpreted as subversive because I feared the ‘morality police’ and their spies in the university. But surely in Canada that holds freedom of speech so dear, teachers should not be afraid of saying anything “too critical.” So why are they?

Teaching ESL feels “empty”

“Like the private language schools. It is very fun. It’s lots of fun. The students are really fun and young and full of youngness and drink a lot and go out and party. So you do a different kind of curriculum. And every now and then, I would maybe try -- I sort of had this feeling like, this just feels kind of empty.”

I was doing some supply work at a private school, which was not quite as empty as the private language schools, but almost a little bit more sad because you try and teach about social justice, but these are kids who don’t have any opportunity to actually know what poverty is or what -- danger to your life and the environment. You really encounter this sort of fluffy world of “save the trees” and “save the earth,” save this and save that.

There’s guilt with doing lessons that are meaningless

A part of me is very sad because I don’t feel that I’m doing anything of great value.

There is this kind of emptiness in the job that we do.
Actually being an ESL teacher, even though I really enjoy it, was very frustrating for me because I never felt that as a language teacher that you really have anything of value to offer other than language. Not ideas and not sitting there and critically looking at things that are really important to me. So actually being an ESL teacher was in many ways very frustrating because it made me feel that I am not doing anything of value.

I’m just bothered by it [injustice] but I don’t know how to begin to intervene. I wish I knew. It has always been a problem for me because I feel that ... the meaning of life for me is being able to participate in something meaningful. But I have not been able to find a means to do it.

Another theme that repeatedly was mentioned by the teacher-participants was the feeling of emptiness and “the work feels empty.” Jinjing revealed to me that the reason she does her human rights project with her students is her way of “infusing some meaning” into her job. She is struggling to find meaningfulness in her job and she continuously talks about how she always felt that as an English teacher, she had nothing to offer. Jinjing found the year that she spent doing her teacher training “a complete waste of my life.” She spent years trying to find “something meaningful” in her work and it wasn’t until years later that she acquired the framework to do it. Also, Ya speaks of herself and her critically-minded colleagues that there is a sense of guilt when what they do is “meaningless.” Ya’s first experience with ESL teaching was at a private language school which she recalls several times as a job that felt “empty.” She remembers a day in the private language school “talking about brands and about outsourcing and kind of bringing the question when you outsource, it makes it cheaper for the people buying the product, but what about the people making the product? And they’re just sort of like, “Hmm, we’re going to go drinking tonight!” Then, she substituted at a private school which she remembers to be “not as empty” but “sad” and “fluffy.” There she encountered “this sort of fluffy world of ‘save the trees’ and ‘save the earth’, save this and save that. I’m like, but what are you doing to save it?” She is critical of ready-made lessons used by LINC teachers such the
Canadian Benchmarks. They have lessons on going to the bank, or using an ATM machine. In short, they are being used to help in a quick integration of newcomers into Canadian society. Ya suggests that newcomers should have units on equality, human rights, justice.

This feeling of emptiness is shared by activist-learners also. Simin still rolls her eyes when she recalls her teacher asking the students to discuss the topic of fashion in a superficial way. Other than the time that a substitute teacher who was filling in for her regular teacher discussed the Quebec student unrest, Simin was unable to relate and engage with activities and topics in her ESL classes. Also, Belma’s criteria for naming her favourite teacher during her time in ESL is that the teacher gave Belma the floor to do a presentation to her class about refugee rights.

This feeling of guilt and emptiness arises of a contradiction between one’s strongly held beliefs and convictions and one’s actions or job. That is, thoughts and actions are at odds with each other. In other words, what this study revealed was the tension between the ideal and the material. There is contradiction between ideas of social justice, social change, and equality and what the teacher is able to actualize and what the activist-learner would like to engage in. In an internal dialectical relationship between thoughts and action, thoughts enrich action and through this process of action, our thoughts are further deepened and in turn our actions become more conscious. It is this movement within the internal relationship of thought and action that can be revolutionary/radical. This I had already mentioned in chapter four where I presented my theoretical conceptualization. What I had not until now realized was that this movement must be harmonious. That is, critical thought should beget radical action, and radical action must lead to further critical reflection. When critical thought exists in the absence of radical action or worse, when circumstances coerce us into reproductive action, it is no wonder that as Jinjing puts it, “I
felt I had nothing to offer.” I ask myself how long until this reproductive action generates uncritical thinking in a sort of ‘reverse transformation’?

Whether it was due to limitations and barriers placed by their institutions, curricula, or textbooks, when teacher-participants could not teach what they considered important, “the job felt empty.” Limitations such as ‘covering’ a certain number of chapters restricted the teachers from doing what they deemed valuable. This was magnified when the themes of the lessons was perceived as silly and trivial by the teachers and activist-learners. Jinjing wished she were “left alone” to do one-hundred percent social justice oriented ESL. When she has to teach a theme or part of a textbook which she herself is not interested in or excited about, she sees the same lack of interest in her students.

Moreover, in Cecilia’s program, where they taught ESL to teachers who would teach ESL, the trainees reported that they felt very inferior to teachers of other subjects in their schools. The trainees also felt “very insecure about their own knowledge” because they were working in an environment that suggested that “they are incompetent, both as users of English and as teachers.” As a result, the task of Cecilia and her colleagues became to “empower them” and “try to help them value and see their own knowledge as valuable knowledge.” This became a difficult task when they were trying to simultaneously get the trainees to also question their own knowledge. At times, Cecilia admits the result was “a complete disaster” and “teachers get hurt.” At other times, according to Cecilia, “they get empowered.”

**Limitations and Barriers**

“Our time is limited; we’re asked to do so much in a short time. We just think I don’t really give a s**t what you think just produce this comparative piece of writing where you’re going to write nonsense and I’ll mark it.”
Another theme that emerged throughout the data was the limiting impact that political and institutional forces had on teaching ESL. The teachers that I interviewed had a desire to teach more critical content. However, there were barriers to teaching in this way. At times these barriers were in the form of the textbook being upheld by a program coordinator. Maggie talks about “these damn books that they force down my throat.” This occurs within an academic climate in which a student is unabashedly referred to as the client and can and will quickly complain if not happy. Maggie says “if I’m going to make a student buy a book for 35, 40 bucks, I have to use it. If I don’t use it, they might complain.” There are topics in the books that Maggie must teach that are very irrelevant to what is “going on in life”, such as Ninjas. She would like to “stray away from the books” but this is not a decision she can make on her own. She would need to gain formal approval and she would like “to go get permission to do something different. But I don’t think I’ll be given that permission.” She is angry when she speaks about having to teach about ancient Ninjas and points to *The New Internationalist Magazine* that she has brought to our interview to show me and says “you can build an entire curriculum just on that magazine.”

Veteran ESL educator, Brad, was introduced to the reader earlier in this chapter. Initially when he began work in the field of ESL teaching he was very impressed by the community based social justice approach of ESL teachers in the centres where he taught. These were teachers who created material on landlord-tenant rights, informed students about local rallies, and spoke about active citizenship and violence against women to their students. There would be monthly newsletters with readings and activities about social issues for ESL students. There were conferences held in Toronto on social issues. Basically, “there was an innovative infrastructure for critical work here in Ontario that was really serving the needs of immigrants.” When Mike Harris’s government came into power, this kind of ESL education was no longer seen as a
priority. The federal government was also “moving towards consolidating costs.” LINC was created as well as a mass production of standardized material to ease teaching and training. Brad laments “So that was kind of a real disappointing time and a lot of really good teachers … got out of the field.”

This may appear to be a teacher issue; however, to critical thinkers such as some of the learner-activists that I interviewed these occurrences do not go unnoticed. Belma says, “but the thing is the policy. The government policy for ESL, it's getting worse. First, they are closing for immigrants, for refugees. They have no money and no one doesn't support them.” Belma also criticizes the lack of connection between different government agencies in order to deal with the whole person. The fact that the ESL classes are detached from social assistance agencies is very problematic for Belma. The money to go to ESL classes comes from the social assistance agencies; however, beyond that the two institutions have to connection. “The social assistance and the ESL classes, they have to be in contact, and they have to really think about their client together. They have to have a program together.” This lack of continuity and connection poses problems in the daily lives of those receiving social assistance and going to ESL classes.

We are conditioned to see phenomena through the lens of our daily experience. Seen through this lens most relationships are viewed at a local level. We forget that our local actions have been mediated by decisions, policies, etc. that were agreed upon and determined in other spaces and other times. We see ourselves acting individually but do not see how our actions have been contained. Political parties and governments play a role in the kind of ESL education offered in Ontario as well as the status of the students in our classes. Our daily experience is embroiled within a set of institutional relationships which in turn are implicated by an agenda set at a provincial and federal level. For example, we teach ESL in a certain way because we were
trained to do so and the institution or organization where we teach requires us to do so. If we did our TESL training in the 1960’s or 1970’s, we were taught to teach in the Audio-lingual method and if we received TESL training in the late 1980’s, we are well aware of the benefits of a communicative, student-centred class. However, how we teach and what we teach and for what purpose has been mediated in a different time and place. As Brad earlier in this chapter highlighted, political parties and governments play a role in the kind of ESL education offered in Ontario. As part of a national initiative to organize newcomer populations in a specific way for a specific purpose, ESL work has an important function. This aspect is never (to my knowledge) explored during our training. For a radical educator, it is important to identify these barriers and limitations and know their purpose. We must first know they are there and also know why they are there. It is this awareness that allows us to take conscious action.

“Difficult Topics”

“I usually handle those types of difficult topics … if you're going to express your opinion, you're going to do it in a respectful way. The only other requirement I make is you’re going to at least listen to what everyone else is going to say. And I think that’s where most people start, with critical analysis. You have to decide to be open to different opinions.”

“If I want to create a safe place for the students, then maybe not sharing [the teacher’s opinion] is the right way to go. But then sometimes there’s enough students asking me, I will say something and ask them to disagree with me, and then we’ll have a little chat about it. And I think, that way, I’m giving an example to them of how you can disagree on something and still talk about it.”

“… but I have to be careful. I don’t want to be too controversial. I'm from the old school so when we were in teacher training. Nothing about religion or sex or politics.”

“Know the composition of your class because if religion is a very serious thing for them you might want to tread away from that.”
Throughout the interviews it became evident that teachers handling of topics that could be construed as controversial or sensitive was to avoid them. Sex, religion, or politics was off limits even for teachers who ventured to subvert the traditional ESL class. Valerie, a teacher of ESL with decades of experience, says I have to be careful. I don’t want to be too controversial. I'm from the old school so when we were in teacher training, Nothing about religion or sex or politics.” Valerie also teaches TESL to trainees. To them she says, “Know the composition of your class because if religion is a very serious thing for them you might want to tread away from that.”

One reason for this was that the teachers were worried that these topics may arouse feelings or entice debates that the teachers would not know how to handle. It also became clear that teaching training had not prepared any of the teachers should such a situation arise and in fact their training had also encouraged the teachers to “tread away” from such sensitive issues. The way Mary handles the discussion of “difficult topics” is allow learners to express their ideas on the topics respectfully but not continue to probe or evaluate the ideas further after the student has expressed the idea. However, the learners I interviewed thirst for talking about “difficult topics.” Belma, long-time activist, is quite frustrated when her teachers start to suppress any serious discussion of their lives prior to coming to Canada. Several times Belma and her classmates had begun to discuss “difficult topics” and the teacher had quickly treaded away from the issue. Furthermore, the way the teacher treads away from the topic is also problematic. The teacher says, “Okay. Right now you're here. You are safe.” This constant reminder that “Canada is good ... Do you like Canada?” frustrates and embarrasses Belma. Once she turns the question around and asks the teacher, “Do you like Canada? Because I wonder if you ask me always.” Belma says, “the teachers doesn't want to touch what happened in [Belma’s country]. What
happened in one of Africa's country. They don't want to talk about it. ‘Okay. Right now you're here. You are safe.’

Ya is one teacher who does not shy away from topics that may make some uneasy. Although she says “there are people who come from Congo who are very attached to their Christianity. I’m certainly not going to challenge that.” She does challenge her student who rejects homosexuality based on her religion as something “wrong” and “not natural.” She first assures the student that “Nobody will ever pressure you to believe what you don’t want to believe.” However, she goes on to engage the group in a discussion about “So is it okay to bully somebody because they’re short? Is it okay to bully someone because she’s a girl? Is it okay to bully somebody because she has dark skin?” The group went on to establish that every person has value and a right to live with dignity in safety. And after that the discussion of sexual orientation became easier and more acceptable. Ya admits that “it actually ended up being a really good class.”

As I have already mentioned Ya is an exceptional teacher in an exceptional teaching and social location. Her unique position allows her “a greater feeling of freedom of what you can do, because no one is really breathing down your neck about these tests or things like that.” Her childhood growing up on a kibbutz with socialist parents definitely plays a role in her work and life. She spends hours preparing radical lessons and refuses to use the ready-made, photocopiable lessons available to her. Some of the activist-learners that I interviewed were not so fortunate to have a teacher who challenged them intellectually.

One learner-activist speaks about students constantly dropping out of the ESL classes because “It's not only about having a party in Halloween or Christmas, just the lottery for the gifts, the presents. This is not what the people wanted, the people expected.” Another learner-
activist, Sima, speaks about her ESL class that had no plan; the teacher “only laughed and goofed around and had no method.” She found this very problematic. “I can’t sit around and talk about fashion.” Sima’s undergraduate thesis was on the topic of sexual harassment and she wishes that the topic would at least be given some time in the classes. However, the topic that was constantly being discussed and written about was ‘being a Canadian’ and ‘the benefits of living in Canada.’ Sima says, “these things [critical topics] never get discussed in classes. It’s always ‘Canada is good. Everything here is good.’ That’s it. Okay we get it. It’s good. But that’s not enough.” Sima sees this as a systemic issue and not just a problem of one teacher. She says about ESL education, “It was a very one dimensional education system. For example, write about the positive aspects of living in Canada. What am I supposed to write?”

The Experience of Racism and Discrimination

Three ESL teachers, Dayani, Valerie, and Jinjing, expressed experiences of racism and discrimination during their time in Canada. Dayani speaks in depth about the discrimination that she experienced during her practicum which caused her to take the issue to the supervisor of the center where she was teaching and make a complaint. Despite friends telling her not make her life “complicated”, she was adamant to make her trainer’s discrimination known because she felt that “with all [my] education and all [my] knowledge, if I’m going to back off, what’s the point? Somebody has to fight for it.” Also, as Dayani was fulfilling her observation requirement at a LINC centre, she noticed how the teacher she was observing was discriminating against students of color. The discrimination was very subtle for example she would not acknowledge the answers of those students. The teacher herself was an immigrant of European decent.
As a newly trained ESL teacher several decades ago, Valerie worked with Vietnamese children in a school in a small town in Canada. The Vietnamese children were being bullied and harassed in school. For these children, it was not only learning English; “it was a question of survival” and how to “fight the racism they were facing.”

Jinjing was “physically abused and emotionally abused” when she moved to Canada in her pre-teen years in the 1980’s. She was neither white nor black; she did not speak English nor did she have any desire to learn to speak English. The fact that her teachers and other adults witnessed the abuse and said and did nothing added to her suffering and made her feel that she deserved the abuse. She was living a life of a middle class girl before living in Canada. She would see injustice and inequality around her and feel bad for those people. However, after immigrating, she then became “the person on the fringes.” She says,

“In Canada the prejudice and the abuse and the isolation that you feel, and the helplessness because you don’t really have a place to go to get help. You can’t articulate. I couldn’t articulate to anybody what was happening me. And the fact that teachers actually witnessed it and didn’t do anything, I processed this that this was a natural way to live… so you grow up with that feeling that you are never a whole. I’m going to start crying now!”

Belma and Charlotte, both activist-learners, referred to epistemological racism. During her time as United Nations researcher, before going to Europe for her Master’s degree, Belma felt her work as gatherer of information from the field was not valued. “I’m really good in field work and I can contact with everyone and I’m really relaxed.” She was the person that went into towns and villages, met with torture victims, and wrote their life stories but then she had to hand over her notes to someone else in the organization to write up and analyze. One of her superiors once told her “everybody doesn’t have to be educated. Don’t worry about it, you are really good at field work and I felt so bad.”
Charlotte also feels that she has so many ideas and she could write articles and present at conferences. However, because of her social location, she has to “give” her idea and others “go with it.” Academics who interview her as a research participant or as a member of focus groups end up reaping the benefits of her ideas. Both Charlotte and Belma feel alienated from their thoughts and ideas when they are published in another person’s name.

**Reflection on Differentiations**

There were also 4 differentiations or inconsistencies in the data; that is, there was a clear difference in thoughts and experiences of participants. For example, the learner-activists had contradictory experiences in their ESL classes; two learner-activists speak of their time in their ESL classes very negatively, “a waste of time” and two recall the ESL class and teacher as having a distinctive positive influence in their subsequent settlement process. There was also a disconnect between the way the teacher-participants thought about social justice and how they actually taught ESL with a social justice lens. Furthermore, teaching critically and being a critical thinker meant different things to different people. There was also a blurred line between critical and uncritical praxis in the teaching; that is the same person was both critical and uncritical at times.

These inconsistencies shaped and challenged my own assumptions about radical ESL education as well as my theoretical framework. They helped me understand that the different takes a person has of the same encounter. Although the differences confused me and delayed my writing process, they proved very helpful in the end to my overall mode of thinking. Previously, I would have dismissed ideas that were not ‘critical enough’ or did not dig deep to uncover social relations, deeming them as ‘superficial’. However, by discarding them, I too would not be
looking deep into the ruling social relations that gave rise to the thoughts and ideas in the first place. Therefore, encountering difference became the beginning of an intellectual exercise, the point of departure to reveal social relations that gave rise to the dissimilarity in the first place. I started to ask, how is this person thinking about ESL learning to be teaching in this way? Or how is this person conceptualizing social change in order to engage in activism the way they are?

**How was your class?**

One distinction was the experience of learner-activists in their ESL classes. Participants revealed feelings of “it was excellent” to “that was terrible.” Adanna has very fond memories of her ESL classes in Toronto when she first arrived. One of those memories which she describes as an important realization was when her ESL teacher scolded her for continuously saying “people from Canada.” Her teacher told her that this country belongs to everyone and that she too is Canadian and has rights just as anyone else. This experience had a profound impact on her and has influenced her activism since. She says that she learned that “Canada is a country for opportunity” and “When I say the opportunity, I don’t mean opportunity for job; for me opportunity for your right to express what you’re feeling.” Also, when Adanna speaks about the newcomer having equal rights, she says she means it as “you have the same right to protest.” Kabira also very much enjoys the classes she is currently enrolled in and speaks quite fondly of her teacher. She mainly enjoys the field trips that they go as a class as they have served as a way that she is becoming familiar with the city of Toronto. Feng speaks highly of the ESL classes that he went to in a community college. He says the instructors were knowledgeable and gave students assignments and returned them with corrections in a timely manner. However, all three, Adanna, Kabira, and Feng, were not activists prior to coming to Canada. Their thoughts and ideas about social change developed after arriving here and their activism has been shaped by
those thoughts. On the other hand, Belma and Simin who both complain about their negative experiences in their ESL classes were extremely politically active prior to coming to Canada and joining the ESL class. Of her ESL class, Simin says “The teacher was terrible. He only laughed and goofed around and had no method. We used to go with no plan. He just gave a topic for us to talk.” Belma is finally fed up with her teacher constantly telling her how great everything is here and she finally asks the teacher, “Do you like Canada? Do you like really? Because I wonder, if you ask me always.”

Also, the LINC classes have particular problems of their own. Belma, Simin, as well as Feng mention that LINC classes have a huge problem of different levels of students being in the same class. “There is a problem with the placement process”, Simin says. “The reality is that the instructor needs to balance the students’ language level in the class. So … some students really slowed down the class” Feng says. Belma was very unhappy with her first ESL class; if the teacher was good, the class would be “unbelievably crowded” with students of all levels and if the teacher was not so good, people were there “just to socialize.”

**Thoughts don’t become actions**

An important finding in this study was the disconnection between the teacher-participants’ thoughts about social justice and social change and their teaching in the ESL class. This was an important way in which my data challenged my theoretical framework. For data collection, I relied on participants’ self report rather than observing their classroom teaching. I had asked all teachers to share sample activities and ideas of ‘critical lessons’. I chose this method over classroom observation because the study revealed that critical lessons were not an everyday activity. In the case of Jinjing, it was an activity that students entirely prepared outside of class time. Curriculum and time restrictions did not allow for them. Teacher-participants’ ideas of
social transformation, social justice, and social consciousness come from religion (the belief that there is a loving god) for one person, witnessing overt stigmatization of poverty, the explicit sexism within the family, spending childhood years on a kibbutz, experiencing abuse in the Canadian education system as a child, political discussions in the family. The ideas of social justice and political and social thought pre-existed their TESL education and work. Not one of the participants in this study had gone into ESL teaching in order to effect change. When teacher-participants speak of social justice and social change, there is strong evidence of deep political consciousness; they connect relations and events that are happening in different spaces and at different times. For example, Ya has a relational analysis of colonization as she links aboriginal issues in Canada with the Palestinian question. She relates the history of colonization to present day advanced capitalism and her analysis of colonization makes her critical of capitalism. She finds the relation between environmental degradation and gender oppression. She says, “The locations around these fracking sites, there were these sort barracks where workers were staying. The incidence of violence against women and children has increased. And it’s sort of like there’s exploitation of the land and exploitation of women kind of together … There are so many things that are really just linked.”

Teacher-participants are also quite aware of the power that the English language has and how they are upholding that power. Mary is very much aware of the political nature of teaching English and the colonial history of the English language. She says, “when you’re teaching languages, specifically English, I believe you are… there is a sort of history of power related to teaching English, and I think because I come from a family where English is my parents’ second languages and I know that they came from countries where politically they were disempowered,
because they were colonized by English speakers. That’s really in the forefront of what I think about when I’m teaching.”

Cecilia still speaks with great passion about her PhD dissertation which was about how professors of English literature in her South American city were silencing different interpretations of English literature in a very “caring” and “affectionate” way. “It was like they put English literature on a pedestal and the discourses of literary criticism was superior to their own discourses as professors.” Discourses of literary criticism that had come from the global North was considered more valid and important than anyone else’s interpretation of the literature including the professors’ own. Interestingly, very few people saw this allotment of importance as oppressive. Cecilia’s focus was on the social practice of inferiority and superiority of knowledges.

Daya is very conscious of her changing social status with regards to English after moving to Canada. She says that in her country, English is an “elitist tool” and she would tell her students that English is a “piece of jewelry” and she taught them how to “polish this jewel.” But here in Toronto, “I don’t have any kind of right or power to teach them that jewelry … because I don’t have that kind of power because my accent is different because I’m not a native speaker.” Ya asks herself “why are people paying money to learn English? Why is it so powerful? What am I doing to uphold that? I’m definitely doing something to uphold that power. And I’m uncomfortable with that.” Mary links her work as an ESL educator to other events happening in the world as she says, “I like to convince myself that teaching English is no longer a colonial activity. But I’m not sure if that’s really true. So in that way, I think it’s connected to what’s happening in the world. What we do in the classroom is connected to immigration rules, which is connected to political situations in different countries, and how many
people want to leave.” All of this is evidence to me of the deep, dialectical, relational analysis that these teachers actively and consciously doing.

However, when the same person is applying that knowledge and understanding in the ESL class, they do so by “‘giving voice’, ‘validating’, and ‘empowering’ students. For instance, Cecilia is quite aware of the position of power which she holds. She has a PhD from a reputable university; she holds a leadership position; she is sent to Canada as visiting professor. These attributes give her a certain “aura”; they are bestowed on her. She says, “These structures of power are attributed to certain people; to certain knowledges. They are not inherent to them.” She occupies a position, she says, and value is placed on that position. Therefore, the task of being critical is to “empower” and “build confidence” in people in “other” (hierarchically lower) positions so that they can value their knowledge to ultimately “voice” their ideas and effect change.

Terms such as “voice” and “empowerment” have been appropriated and used in such a variety of ways that they have lost any radical potential that they may have had. The overuse of the term “empowerment” has altered its meaning from the emancipatory essence that radical educators such Paulo Freire (1973) had developed. All teacher-participants answered yes to the question of whether the ESL class is an appropriate place to do critical work for social justice; however, organizing, mobilizing, social justice, social change are taken up within the realm of inclusivity, participation and multiculturalism. Participation has been criticized as a tool for cooption and tokenism “that gives the appearance and sound of empowerment but in practice falls short” (Myers, 2007).

Mary says, “I feel like I bring social justice to the classroom by allowing freedom of speech. I think social justice can come through that, that exploration that comes from freedom of
speech, and accepting that people have different experiences”. Dayani puts chairs in a circle and has students debate a controversial topic (such as abortion). Prior to the debate, students are given a hand-out of polite ways to agree or disagree with another person’s opinion. Or another teacher says, “I will say something and ask them to disagree with me, and then we’ll have a little chat about it. And I think, that way, I’m giving an example to them of how you can disagree on something and still talk about it.” There is a belief that the classroom is a neutral space. The idea that the teacher should not have an agenda of her own prior to going to class is mentioned by several teacher participants.

The rhetoric of “voice” and “empowerment” is also picked up by Adanna, a learner-activist. As part of the change she has brought to her leadership position in the community organization she works at, she gives jobs to youth with AIDS. She is involved with many youth who were born with AIDS. These young people have “no self-esteem”; they “feel ashamed.” Adanna makes a point of hiring them for her organization. “Because it’s a paying job, they feel empowered, they feel freedom, they can get money.” She speaks of young people with AIDS who are “lazy” and “always sleeping, saying ‘I don’t want anyone to know about me.” With a job they gain confidence and learn that HIV does not mean they cannot accomplish anything. When I press to see how social change happens with this view, she stresses that knowing one’s rights is key. “The life changes when you stand up and say, “Hey, I’m here.”

This finding challenged my data in an important way. Within my theoretical framework, it is believed that there is a dialectical relationship between radical consciousness and revolutionary action. That is, radical consciousness begets revolutionary action and revolutionary action sharpens analysis and deepens radical consciousness. The participants in this study did not display this relationship. Radical consciousness existed in the absence of revolutionary action for
And for others, radical consciousness did not at all times lead to revolutionary action. Our actions within society and in the classroom are not autonomous. They are being mediated at various global, federal, institutional levels. We are not free to teach any content in any mode we desire nor has our teacher training prepared us for revolutionary praxis within the classroom. With this in mind, the extent of critical activity within our limitations remains within the realm of striving for individual success and inclusivity. Radical consciousness does not necessarily or automatically lead to revolutionary action.

What does ‘critical’ mean anyway?

Several teachers see critical work in the ESL classroom as allowing everyone to share their opinions without ever scrutinizing the opinion. One teacher-participant says, “The reason why I think that’s social justice is because you can’t have justice if you can’t be open about what you think and have a chance to explore what you think”. Being critical is being able to tolerantly and politely listen to others’ opinions. For teacher-participants with graduate degrees in TESL, the critical is more within the realm of language and linguistic choice. Dayani sees having different accents on audiotapes as an example of doing critical work. Cecilia and Brad see critical work in the ESL classroom and in teacher training within the realm of linguistic diversity. They advocate a conceptualization of English as a language that no longer belongs to one nation state but rather to the whole world. They believe that once teacher trainees conceptualize English in such a way, they are questioning the ownership of English and they are engaged in critical activity. Another example of critical activity that Brad gave me was showing a picture from a newspaper of about 1000 workers applying for about 80 positions in Toronto, and having students create newspaper headlines for this picture, then continuing to discuss how one student sees this picture as a
positive image and another as a negative image. Creating “critical language awareness” they discuss how choice of words in the headline can attach a positive or negative meaning to the picture. Another example is “having students think about grammar as having passive voice, taking the passive voice, taking away responsibility for the agent of the action, getting them thinking about that, so making grammar more responsive to its social affects.” Cecilia shows a picture of a train in what appears to be India with tens of people hanging from the outside. She then goes on to ask her students how they see this situation and examine where their interpretation of the situation comes from. When I ask her how this impacts the commute of the people dangling from the train, she answers that we should not assume that something unjust is happening here. “I look at that and I see danger, danger … And students would look at it, (and say) “Look. They are happy.” And, one student looked at and me and said, ‘I think this was taken in India. India is a very, very hot country. So people are much more comfortable outside the train than inside the train.’ Doesn’t that make sense as interpretation for that image? It does. It makes sense to me.” Being able to discuss these different interpretations of the picture tolerantly is the critical activity.

Dayani believes in sharing her own personal experience in class. She models herself as a successful immigrant woman in order to let her students know that they too can become successful if they work hard. She sees critical work as moving up Bloom’s taxonomy in order to do higher cognitive tasks. Her area of interest for making change and doing critical work is advocating for different accents in ESL textbooks. “Look at the multicultural policy in Canada, inclusion, so they talked about including everybody, the diversity so English has to be taught with that model in mind so I would bring different accents like Sri Lankan or Canadian, British or Australian, Indian or English. It’s all English’s because that’s what they hear in streets.”
In Cecilia’s program where they spend the first four to six sessions working with the teacher-trainees to create a syllabus, consensus is at times delayed and discussions get heated. Cecilia says, “That was part of being critical, as well; being able to use antagonism productively; being able to understand, or try to, at least, understand what she was trying to say and turn that into something that helped us move and question our own practices.”

Mary has a rigorous philosophy of education and “any time you actually use your philosophy of education to make good academic decisions in the classroom or outside of the classroom, you’re being a critical educator.” One part of her philosophy of education is also the validating the individual in her classes. She says, “The individual is very important when you’re teaching, but I worry that sometimes you can lose focus of that very easily… showing each of those people respect and meeting the individual needs that they have”. Also, providing a safe space for her students to share their opinions, no matter how unpopular that opinion may be, is very important to her. She recalls an incident where a student revealed his opinion that women should not be in the military; Mary disagreed with this opinion but allowed the student a safe space, without judgment, to voice this opinion. She remembers sharing this occurrence with her colleagues in the staff room and realizing that not all teachers would have given this student a chance to voice this opinion. They would have “shut it down” or felt “personally offended” by the comments of the student. She recalls this incident as a moment that she realized how differently she thought from her colleagues and it has also shaped her teaching philosophy in relation to social justice, “because you can’t have justice if you can’t be open about what you think and have a chance to explore what you think. And I like that that came into the class in a really safe way.” Included in her philosophy of education is an awareness of the power structure in the classroom; “you can’t pretend it’s not there”. Therefore, as the holder of power in the
classroom, and as someone who wants to create a safe space for students, she does not share her own opinions about any issue discussed.

**You can be both: Critical and uncritical**

Another interesting finding that I encountered was how the line between critical and uncritical praxis was not very clear. I mean, that at times the same person was involved in both. This finding also challenged my theoretical understanding in an important way. For instance, Ya brings her relational thinking about the world to her ESL classes. She will have activities on the theme of colonization where the class reads, discusses, and writes about colonizing nations, history of colonization, aboriginal people of Canada, residential schools, and students’ countries that have been colonized first. “I sort of test the waters first.” She also links aboriginal issues to environmental issues in her classes. “We’ve been talking about aboriginals on this land in class, kind of talking about what was the attitude of aboriginal peoples towards the land and what’s the attitude of our culture towards the land. And they know it. I guess what I’m hoping to present is, “Now, here’s some language you can use.” However, Ya also says that she doesn’t believe a teacher should have her own agenda even though she clearly is doing political work in her classes. She also does activities such as bringing real life success stories of a homeless person to class who through hard work has become very rich and successful in Canada. She does this to boost morale and encourage struggling students to work hard. When I ask her about ESL material upholding the image of Canada as the land of equal opportunity that if you work hard, you too can become rich, she says “yeah, I’m okay with that.”

Adanna, an activist-learner participant, also fluctuates between varying analyses. One time, she called the African representative of the United Nations to express her concerns about
her country being attacked by a neighbouring country. She asked the representative “Is it fair because we have the gold and diamond, do we want to have it? It is God who gave us so why do we have to suffer because we have the diamonds.” She continued to say that her country had been living with the neighbouring country for years but now “you are sending another country to attack our country because of it … please Madame, tell Obama, enough is enough.” About another issue, Adanna shows her devotion to the liberal party because of their francophone friendliness. In Adanna’s neighbourhood there had been some crimes and Adanna’s action against those crimes was to advocate for increasing the police state. She made sure cameras have been placed in several areas. She has other ideas such as creating after school programs for at risk youth but she is not bringing those ideas to her neighbourhood meetings now because there is currently an NDP member of parliament in her riding. She is waiting for the liberals to win back that seat before she puts forth her plans for change in her neighbourhood.

As mentioned, within my theoretical understanding, there is a binary division between reproductive praxis and revolutionary praxis. The former is the product of partial, ideological thinking whereas the latter is in relationship with critical, relational analysis. My data challenged this theoretical conceptualization. The participants of this study were not engaged in one OR the other modes of thinking and action. They were at times engaged in one and other times in another and at times in both simultaneously.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I introduced the research participants who had generously shared their thoughts and ideas with me. I also analyzed their interview transcripts after reading and re-reading them. I shared commonalities and differentiations within the data.
By looking at ESL education dialectically, it has become clear to me that the practice of ESL teaching has potential for both revolutionary praxis and reproductive praxis although the latter is the norm. Reproductive praxis is action that emerges from a partial, limited understanding of the social. By seeing one phenomenon as unrelated to other phenomena, our analysis is partial, limited, or what was referred to in Chapter four as ideological. The action that arises from such analysis tends to be reproductive; that is it reproduces existing relations. That is, even if an educational activity appears to be critical, such as a friendly congenial atmosphere where all parties discuss controversial topics respectfully, if analysis of the controversial topic is not done relationally, historically, and visionary, the essence of the topic is not grasped. Thus any action that emerges from that discussion is reproductive; it does not create real change. This reproductive action, although done by benevolent actors, does not produce change at the root or essence of phenomena.

Revolutionary praxis is action which emerges from understanding the essence of an issue. By dialectically examining social phenomena, we are exploring it relationally, historically, and visionary. That is, we are able to penetrate its essence and deeply explore how a social phenomenon came to be, what allows it to continue, how it shows up in peoples’ daily lives, and what actions are being taken or could be taken to resist and disrupt it. The practice of ESL education has both the potential for reproductive as well as revolutionary praxis. In the next chapter, I will investigate the field of ESL education for ideological practice. I will explore ESL education as reproductive praxis. I will draw on personal experience, literature, and my data to show the how the weight of the ESL industry is so enormous that even very critical thinkers such as the research participants of this study were at times coerced into teaching in a reproductive manner.
Chapter Six
Teaching ESL as Ideological Practice: Elements of Reproductive Praxis

As I was collecting my data, I was amazed at the depth of analysis of some participants. They were relating events that happened at different times and spaces. They could trace events that had happened decades earlier to current events, not in a cause and effect way but by finding the common root cause of events. I began to ask: What is the relationship between one’s material life and one’s political consciousness? How do the two get severed from one another? And once they do get disconnected, what consequences does that have? How do we participate in the reproduction of this type of consciousness? How do we perpetuate the disconnect between our material lives and our political consciousness? These questions are all reminiscent of what Paula Allman refers to as reproductive praxis (2001). As this study comes to a close, I have come to realize that these questions point to a deeper issue which is much larger than ESL education. It is related to our conceptualization of social change, activism, self and social transformation.

I have already established that teaching English as a second language is indeed a political act. ESL education with regards to its colonial history and at a time of advanced capitalism and American imperial expansion is not the depoliticized, linguistic activity posited by many theorists and practitioners of the field. In this chapter, I will explore reproductive, ideological material, practice, and theorization within ESL education. I will investigate the objectified consciousness that we, ESL educators, contend and interact with.

English-Only

Many times, the way that we teach ESL is not an issue of pedagogy; it is a political issue. The political agenda of many policies and actions may be obvious at a macro level; however, how
our actions reinforce these agendas at a micro level is less visible. ESL instruction is simultaneously a mirror of existing social relations as well as practice for future social relations. In this chapter, I show how taken-for-granted, common-sense practices of well meaning, social justice minded teachers serve to reinforce and reproduce existing relations of power. Although many such practices are justified pedagogically, they rest on uncritically accepted assumptions and serve political agendas.

I started teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) when I was nineteen years old. I had no training; I had never spoken for more than ten minutes in front of a group, let alone taught a class. However, I was what they called a native speaker. And in Tehran, that made me a valuable commodity and awarded me certain privileges. I was given my pick of teaching hours, was required no teaching certificate, and if I remember correctly a bit extra pay than the other ‘non-native’ teachers. At times I was whisked away to the language institute’s recording studio to speak into a microphone while technicians recorded my voice for cassettes to be played in classes; this was so that students repeated after ‘the native speaker’ on the cassette rather than their non-native teacher. It made me chuckle, at times with humility at times with pride, that groups of students would be repeating after me in language labs. I still tremble at the thought of my early attempts at teaching. However, after gaining some experience through trial and error, observing the other teachers, and taking teaching methodology classes (although not at all required), my eyes were opened to the logic and pedagogy of The Direct or Natural Method. It made perfect sense to me; since the child is the model language learner, learning his/her mother tongue perfectly, we must recreate the same language learning environment for all language learners. Thus, I insisted on ‘English Only’ in my classes and although I knew the mother tongue of all the students, Farsi, and I could have easily translated a word they didn’t know and saved
myself and everyone else the trouble, I insisted on acting out words, drawing, hopping, skipping, anything it took to explain the word in English only. I gained the praise of my colleagues by coming up with a ‘punishment’ plan that made any student who spoke Farsi pay a few rials (Iranian currency) and at the end of the semester, we used the money to buy refreshments for our class party. Later on, when I taught in Toronto and had a heterogeneous group of students from various language backgrounds, I ensured that the English only practice was upheld and during pair and group work I made sure that students from the same language background would not be in the same group. I continued to come up with creative ways of enforcing the English only rule never questioning its legitimacy. It had become common sense.

We, ESL teachers, have come to accept that English is the only language that should be heard or spoken in the ESL classroom. That the mother tongue should be avoided at all cost and English should be the only language used in the ESL classroom. This has become so common sense that we no longer even question the theoretical groundings of this practice. To examine the depth to which this basic tenet runs in the ideas and attitudes of ESL educators in the U.S., Elsa Auerbach conducted a survey at a TESOL conference asking the simple questions: “Do you believe that ESL students should be allowed to use their L1 in the ESL classroom?” (1993, p. 14). Only 20% answer yes; the remaining 80% answered no. They sometimes allowed the use of L1 but saw it as a “lapse”, “failures or aberrations, a cause for guilt” (p. 14). Of course, the rationale for this view is framed in pedagogical terms such as the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn it, or the more they hear English, they will internalize it and use English. However, by tracing the historical roots and situating this practice in its political framework, we can see that a seemingly benign, common sense practice such as English-only in the ESL classroom is in fact a political issue and not a pedagogical one.
This monolingual approach to teaching ESL was historically by no means the norm. The political power of certain ethnic groups along with the decentralized nature of public education allowed for bilingual education in U.S. schools in the 19th century. However, the early 20th century marked an increasingly xenophobic environment both in U.S. society as a whole and in the education sphere in particular. This was mainly due to the advent of World War I, the immigrations of Eastern Europeans, and the growing number of newly arrived immigrants in the labour movement. This prompted an Americanization movement with ESL instruction as an important vehicle. The Ford Motor company for example required employees to attend “Americanization classes” (Crawford, 1990, p. 155). Speaking good English was associated with being a good American and children internalized this by citing an oath:

I love the United States of America. I love my country’s flag. I love my country’s language. I promise that I will not dishonor my country’s speech by leaving off the last syllables of words. That I will say a good American “yes” and “no” in place of an Indian grunt “um-hum” or a foreign “ya’ or “yeh and nope.” (Robbins, 1918, p. 175, cited in Baron 1990, p. 155).

The Americanization movement of the early 20th century and the spread of ESL instruction went hand in hand. The Direct Method advocating the use of target language only gained prominence in ESL classrooms. Practical English approaches became popular with lessons on opening bank accounts, visiting the doctor, asking for directions. Group work was encouraged but teachers were warned not to allow “the formation of ‘national cliques’ which would delay the work of Americanization” (Goldberger cited in Baron, 1990, p. 160).

Along with teaching methods that aided the Americanization process went gate keeping practices to ensure that only native speakers of English could teach ESL. Speech tests were administered to potential teachers and those who failed were not licensed to teach ESL. Many states passed laws requiring teachers to be citizens (Auerbach, 1993). The native country of the
teacher became more important than the teacher’s training. As a result, the ESL teaching profession became the domain of monolingual English speakers untrained in ESL teaching methods and unempathetic to the challenges of non-English speaking immigrants (Baron, 1990).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the English language teaching (ELT) community was most influenced by British post-colonial policies in the developing world. In his excellent book, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Robert Phillipson notes five basic tenets of English language teaching which were articulated in a key conference in Makere University, Uganda in 1961. These five tenets are:

1. English is best taught monolingually.
2. The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
3. The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
4. The more English is taught, the better the results.
5. If other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop. (Phillipson, 1992, p. 185).

Although every one of these basic tenets has been challenged by research, they remain the unofficial doctrine of ELT work. Put differently, these foundational logics of ELT, have shaped our consciousness and become our interpretive framework. Rather than being offered as possible explanations, they are accepted as truths. These truths end up carrying out what Paula Allman calls reproductive praxis.

**A Happy Picture of Canada**

When Valerie taught English to a group of grade six aboriginal girls, their subject teacher, an older man, came to her to complain about how the girls were not speaking in class. He said, “Every Time I ask them a Question in Class, they bow their head. That's It. Are They Afraid of Me? Are They Embarrassed? I Can’t Figure out.” Being responsible for their communication in
English, Valerie was assigned to take each girl out of class to work on her English language skills. She approached the girls to see why they were not speaking with their teacher. The following is Valerie’s rendition of what transpired:

I asked them. “Your Teacher has asked me whether you have trouble understanding him. What was it? You don’t want to speak in Class? Because you know that in our Canadian System we have to have students participating and asking questions and answering.” And one girl said to me, “we are not allowed to speak.” I said “who doesn’t allow you to speak?” “Well whenever we’re together, it’s the Elders and the men.” They said we’re not allowed to express our views. And I said “Ahhh. But in school here, you can express your views all you want. And look at your teacher in the eyes.” And it worked. It was hard for them because he was male and older and a teacher. They weren't supposed to look at him in the eyes but they tried and eventually they did succeed. There’s your empowerment. That a woman can stand up to a man and express herself and not be afraid of the consequences.

ESL textbooks are replete with immigrant success stories. ESL textbooks represent Canada positively as a place where hard work and sacrifice will pay off. This serves to justify the period of exclusion and economic hardship that some newcomers experience. Since several teachers have mentioned that they must teach the textbook and follow the curriculum set by the textbook, it is not out of context to claim that many ESL teachers uphold the values put forth by the textbooks. As obligatory parts of the curriculum, they become authoritative, singular narratives. Ndura (2004) suggests that in ESL classrooms “instructional materials play the role of cultural mediators as they transmit overt and covert societal values, assumptions and images” (p. 143). And as Suaysuwan and Kapitzke (2005) claim, students not only teach language from textbooks, they also teach values, assumptions, and images. Auerbach (1986) also claims, textbooks used in competency-based adult ESL education often teach “language functions of subservience, such as apologizing and following orders” (p. 418). Canagarajah (1993) found traces of racism in an ESL textbook taught in Sri Lanka. The textbooks which he reviewed promoted consumerism while claiming to be neutral and value-free.
Textbooks describe a national story, stories of origins, heroes, and important dates. These stories are replete with inclusions and exclusions. There is an absence of counter-narratives, key places where the stories are edited, and selective remembering while all the time assuming an unbiased, nonpartisan stance. For example, by including a section of Canadian history with the conflict between the English and the French as the origin of the story of Canada, the entire history of aboriginal people is erased.

In his analysis of 40 immigrant experience stories in LINC textbooks, Gulliver (2012) found that the common theme among all immigrant success stories was that Canada will reward all immigrants who work tenaciously, have “good character”, and “feel grateful” (p. 733). He found five commonalities in the success stories. All stories include:

1. the immigrant’s country of origin and time and reason for departure. “Foreigners cannot own property there (Dubai). You cannot buy a house,’ says Jaura. ‘It was so nice to be in Canada and to be able to buy a home—it is good to have a home of your own’” (Zuern 2003, p. 35).

2. a period of emotional and/or financial struggle. “For two years, Margie and John worked at different factory jobs. They struggled with learning a new language and living in a new culture” (Zuern, 2003, p. 23).

3. a discussion of eventual success; “He came to Canada with only $108 in his pocket. His first Canadian home was a $10-a-week rooming house. Today, he is a wealthy real estate and hotel entrepreneur. He drives a Mercedes sedan and lives in a 16,500-square-foot mansion in Toronto’s exclusive Bridle Path neighbourhood” (Zuern 2005, p. 23).

4. the reasons and characteristics that made the immigrant successful. “When the recruiter asked about his Canadian experience, Jamil said, ‘Just give me a week to prove myself.”
I won’t hold you back. If I don’t do the job well, I’ll step out of it and go.’ He was hired on the spot’’ (Zuern, 2007, p. 57).

5. a direct or indirect quotation expressing the newcomer’s feeling of achievement and success. ‘‘When asked what she likes the most about Canada, Farah said, ‘Canada is a wonderful country; I am very grateful for the chance to bring up my daughter in peace. People can build their lives here’’’ (Cameron & Derwing, 2004, p. 126).

Gulliver (2012) also analysed immigrant failure stories. On the rare occasion when such stories were included the reasons for the failure was placed solely on the immigrant. It was attributes of the immigrant that caused the failure. For example, in one text the new immigrant hopes to ‘‘focus her energy on the positive things in life and have a positive attitude’’ like her mother, who, despite having given up a job as a university professor in China to work low-paying jobs in Canada ‘‘never expresses any sadness or complains about it’’ (Zuern 2005, p. 57 cited in Gulliver 2012). In a discussion with five successful immigrants the dilemma of why some immigrants do not succeed is questioned. All five agree ‘‘don’t associate with ‘whiners’—people with a negative outlook. Stay positive and don’t give up your dream’’ (Zuern, 2007, p. 49).

It is made clear to new immigrants in one of the first spaces in which they experience Canada, the LINC ESL classroom, that success and failure lies on their own shoulders. Being successful is within reach for everyone and lies in the attributes of the individual. These attributes include working diligently and not whining. Interestingly, both are attributes of a model capitalist worker. These so-called success stories are no longer individual stories, they serve to legitimate hardship and sacrifice both seen as very desirable characteristics. For this, first and foremost, the core task of radical ESL education is to focus on understanding and
problematizing capitalist social relations. Not only understanding capitalism as an abstract 

system severed from our daily lives, but we can attempt to situate ourselves and our students 

within this system in order to understand both the system and ourselves.

Radical ESL educators can disrupt this dominant narrative with the help of their students 

and a lot of extra time put into creating material. Ya is one such teacher who when going through 

the Canadian Language Benchmarks, large spiral books of ready-made readings and lessons for 

LINC teachers, came across material on Canadian history. She noticed that for level 1 and 2 

(lower level English learners) there is brief mention of aboriginal history. Then in level 3 

(intermediate level) the history continues with European settlers coming to the land. Levels 4 and 

5 go on to explain the coming together of provinces and the system of government in Canada.  “I 

had this feeling that was what happening was it was primitivizing, making primitive, this history. 

This history is primitive history, so we’ll put it in Level 1 and 2. This is beginning of 
civilization, so we’ll put it in Level 3 … And we don’t have to present anything really 
sophisticated about native people because they weren’t sophisticated. And it was really upsetting 
to me.” This prompted Ya to spend hours putting together material on aboriginal history and 

colonization. She gathered material from the internet, mainly native websites, because 

“government websites are useless” and rewrote and adapted them to suit the linguistic level of 

her students. These readings have started a range of interesting discussions in her class which 

started with questions such as “many countries were colonized by other countries, such as France 

and England and the Dutch. Was your country colonized? What countries do you know were 

colonized?” Following weeks of readings, dialogues, and class discussions, the questions now 

being posed are  “Does Canada even have the right to exist? Does a colonizing nation have a
right to take another land?” It is within this context that life in Canada, opportunities present in Canada, the need and desire to immigrate to Canada is being discussed.

“But remember, this type of thinking [critical thinking] is not taught in most countries the world.”

In a recent TESOL conference in Portland, Oregon, there was a presentation session on methods of instilling critical thinking skills in Chinese ESL learners. Briefly, the session was about how challenging this endeavor can be since our Chinese students have not had practice with being critical of text and evaluating and reiterating writers’ arguments. They have mainly been taught to memorize text, not evaluate it as opposed to Western students who have been taught these skills from an early age. At the end of the presentation, an attendee asked, ‘if the Chinese are incapable of critical thinking skills because they haven’t done it, then how do you explain that the two revolutions that occurred in the past century were in China?’

Teachers at times attempt to ‘be critical’ in the classroom once in a while and when it fails, they blame it on the culture that the students are from. Sentences like, “it’s their culture”; “they’ve never done this”; “this isn’t what they’re used to” are common after failed attempts by teachers to try to bring ‘enlightening’ articles and topics to classes. There are many underlying assumptions behind these sentences. Being critical has become synonymous with adhering to Western liberal values. As a result, in the end, learning English becomes synonymous with having voice and being empowered. As if what you end up saying in English is not the issue; just that you are speaking in English means that you are empowered.

I previously mentioned, in chapter one, that the notion of critical thinking in ESL education literature has been stripped of any political and radical potential. Within the literature of ESL education, critical thinking “includes some of the following components: (1) Looking at
information within its proper context; (2) Evaluating the logic and validity of an argument; (3) Recognizing assumptions that are not directly stated in the text; (4) Using language clearly and accurately” (Xu, 2013 p. 6). These four components are important and valid mental exercises; however, for one to be able to actually do any of them, one must be conscious of their own theoretical framework. In other words, we “evaluate the logic and validity of an argument” based on our theoretical lens. We cannot truly engage in any of these components without being deeply grounded in our theoretical understanding of the social world.

In other words, ESL teachers’ attempts to analyze provocative readings are bound to fail without the previous work of theoretical grounding. It is very disheartening to hear the blame being placed on the learners and their lack of previous exercise at critical thinking when it is all of us, teachers and students included, who lack the necessary theoretical understanding to penetrate the social and material world. It requires a mode of thinking that has never been taught to us; it is different from any form of analysis and thinking that we have done so far. And when this eventual failure does occur, we resort to epistemological racism. We blame the culture of the students for their deficiency. We claim that “In many western universities, educators usually view enlightenment and exploration of truth as their missions, so the cultivation of critical thinking ability of students is given enough attention. By contrast, English teaching in our university has paid too much attention to cultivating students' English language knowledge and skills, while the cultivation of students' critical thinking is far from satisfaction” (Xu, 2013, p. 7).

The current social structure we are currently living in is capitalist social relations. Thus any attempt to understand our social world must be aimed at penetrating, uncovering, unmasking, and confronting capitalist social relations. We must understand gender, racial, and class oppression as well as environmental degradation within the framework of understanding
capitalist social relations. For instance, by not understanding women’s oppression in light of capitalism’s systematic suppression of women, one would conclude that it is an undifferentiated group of men who are responsible. However, understanding women’s oppression relationally, we can see that women, in particular working class and women of color, are not kept in the margins by men but by the ruling class. The relations that reproduce gender oppression are inextricably related to capitalist social relations. Women’s oppression is needed to maximize capitalist domination.

This unmasking, understanding must lead to eventual confronting. Although the intellectual exercise of theoretically penetrating existing social relations is a worthwhile and illuminating endeavor, it must in the end lead to action, confrontation, and disruption. If not, the feared “from analysis to paralysis” (Mojab & Carpenter, ) could occur. An element of action and hope for change must be built into every radical lesson.

“But you’re in Canada now.”

Belma was “embarrassed” by her teacher constantly discussing the topic of ‘how to be a good Canadian’ in her class. Every time Belma or her classmates wanted to discuss issues from their country, they were interrupted by the teacher. What is expected of her here is “Just delete your past. Here is another country. You have new things. New regulations. Everything is different here … you are safe here.” At these people, she wants to shout: “People also bring something in all the classes, to share to show. Just I am here and I am someone. I am valuable. I have something in my country. I am well educated also. I have a background. I had a future. I had a family.”
The view that Canada is the safe haven that benevolently allows newcomers fleeing repressive pasts is not only reinforced by textbooks, it is also upheld by classroom teachers. Such a view diffuses any accumulated activist knowledge and deems it unnecessary once in Canada. It also insinuates that there are no political issues or oppressive relations in Canada. Activists’ prior knowledge is no longer needed because there is no reason to rebel here.

**Discourses of Voice and Empowerment**

Well-intentioned attempts by teachers to celebrate other, i.e. non-white, intellectual traditions, ideas and opinions can easily turn into “benign colonialism and false empathy” of the benevolent (Brookfield, 2003). Attempts to position divergent views alongside Eurocentric views have most often placed the divergent views into the ‘alternative’ category. Attempts to include non-white Eurocentric positions tend to exoticize the racially based traditions. In short, in order for there to be an alternative, one is assuming there is a center, a natural mainstream. This leads to what Marcuse (1965) calls repressive tolerance. Furthermore, the idea of giving voice breeds the notion that each of us has an individual voice which represents our individual identity. Although bell hooks acknowledges that the coming to voice is “an act of resistance . . . a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject” (hooks, 1989, p. 12), she announces that she is more interested in the collective voice, a voice “embodied collective reality past and present, family and community” (p. 31). Bell hooks continues to declare, “In a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal state where the mechanisms of co-optation are so advanced, much that is potentially radical is undermined, turned into a commodity” (hooks, 1989, p. 14). Teachers who identify themselves as being critical educators, and who have demonstrated a complex relational analysis, tend to use
dominant discourses which reinforce mainstream ways of knowing. In their eagerness to communicate their ideas, they are using language compatible with existing ways of knowing and describing and in turn reproducing these dominant ways of knowing. Within our existing social framework, this act will in turn reproduce domination.

The pursuit of ‘giving voice’ to our students has also led to another problematic notion within the practice of teaching ESL. That is the creation of safe space as a pedagogical goal in its own. To be sure, I am not advocating a space in which one is not secure in voicing one’s opinions. However, if we are to question all that we have up to now regarded as common sense and all that is being told to us is ‘the truth’, we are bound to feel discomfort. The proverbial stepping out of our comfort zone is a given. Radical pedagogy is bound to be frightening. This is why bell hooks asserts that the criterion of the classroom as a safe, comfortable, congenial environment is not necessarily positive and a good criterion where transformative education is concerned (hooks, 1994). Examining the self and the social in a new light will be challenging. However, examining one’s life experiences must not begin and end with the celebration of everyone’s stories and experiences. Uncritical sharing of opinions and untheorized personal anecdotes have no place in the radical classroom. Radical educators must link personal narratives to larger social structures in order to locate places where action for change can occur. Personal opinion must be scrutinized for its origins and personal disclosures must be placed within larger capitalist social relations.

Conclusion and Reflection

Even though the teachers in this study have deep, relational analyses of social phenomenon, their thoughts do not or cannot translate, in most instances, translate into action or teaching aimed at
interfering and disrupting the root of issues. Many factors contribute to action which reproduces our existing social relations. For one, what we teach and how we teach has been mediated and dictated at a global, federal, and institutional level. We are being constrained by curriculum, textbooks, and time limits. It appears that we have some freedom but our role as ESL teachers is not autonomous.

To argue that ESL teachers only teach ESL is an oversimplification of the ideological, reproductive task at hand. To complicate this act of teaching ESL, we must explore how ESL education operates within the larger social relations of capitalism, what forms of consciousness it promotes and how these forms of consciousness are at odds with our material reality.

As this study comes to a close, I reflect on the world that we live in. Although there are flashes of joy and happiness, there is rampant poverty, hunger, violence, and disease. Why do we think that these are conditions outside of us? That is, why do we think that this is being done to us and not by us? How did the material world and our consciousness get disconnected from one another? How are we participating in the reproduction of current social relations through our daily praxis? Allman (2001) suggests that when we “partake in the relations and conditions we find already existing in the world and assume these are natural and inevitable” (p. 167), we are reproducing the existing world with our praxis. I would argue that the invisibility of social relations and history as well as the separation of what is considered political and the material world are contributing factors in this reproduction also.

In order to maintain its reproductive, ideological force, several epistemological stands must be present within the ELT field. For one, social problems must be confined to their appearance. That is, struggle and hardship of immigrants of color must be seen as a natural hurdle on the way to prosperity. Furthermore, what is seen as prosperity must be viewed by way
of becoming a model capitalist worker. And the achievement gap between newcomers must be reduced to individual qualities of those who fail to prosper. Following these appearances, efforts must be made to alter individual behaviours that are not allowing some immigrants to succeed. That is effects of social relations must be tackled while the actual social relations are left untouched. All this is achieved while working from the premise that equality exists within the material reality of inequality. There must be complete erasure of any history of oppression in Canada. The reality of inequality in the daily lives of Canada’s working class poor, aboriginal communities, and marginalized communities of color must be deleted. The newcomer must believe that she has entered a nation of opportunity and equality, a utopia. All past has no relevance and should be deleted in hope of entering the market as a free wage worker. This epistemological stand makes service providers, in this case ESL professionals, what Sara Carpenter calls “managers of inequality” (2010, p. 253).

Being immersed in capitalist social relations and working within the premise of its logic, our work is bound to be reproductive. The dismantling of these relations is the work of revolutionary praxis. In the next concluding chapter, I will lay the foundational workings of radical, revolutionary praxis in ESL education.
Chapter Seven
Radical ESL Education: Revolutionary praxis

There is little threat from educational practice where ideas are examined and discussed but are ultimately separated from any action aimed at transformation. Critical moments in which ESL teachers are engaged in, some of which were mentioned in the preceding chapter, give a feel of important critical education practice. However, they should not be conflated with education praxis. That is, teaching moments void of an action orientation pose little threat to existing social relations and in the end serve as ideological, reproductive practice. Or worse can serve to make the task of transformation so enormous that they may result in hopelessness and lead one “from analysis to paralysis” (Mojab & Carpenter 2013).

There are educational practices that appear to be critical but at best do not lead to social transformation. In an effort to critique and discuss, consciousness development is reduced to skills development. And that is not skills of analysis but skills for discussion, such as tolerant disagreement and sharing of ideas. Consciousness is separated from material experience in the name of tolerance. In such an environment, we focus on results of social relations and not the actual relations that gave rise to the results. It is also customary within ‘progressives’ to focus on an ideal, future society and live, do and be as though by doing so we will bring about that society (Wilmot, 2011).

It appears that ESL education in Canada and elsewhere is a decentralized activity void of any state agenda. How can an army of individuals in “a nice field like TESL” (Kubota 2002, p. 84) act united as a state apparatus? We teach our classes without an understanding of how our work and daily activity is coordinated at a federal and provincial level. Much of this coordination is achieved through inclusion of research deemed worthy to appear in major conferences and journals. From a list of 42 areas of interest for paper proposals at the TESOL
conference, there is only one, ‘socio-political concerns’, which allows for research into the political nature of our work. The other 41 areas include ‘technology in education’, ‘video and digital media’, ‘workplace/business English’, and ‘vocabulary/lexicon’. These regulations, inclusions, and exclusions act together to restrict and narrow the field of ELT to a particular form in which participants act in specific and restricted ways. ELT work is limited by notions of what is permitted and what is prohibited. Although this permissibility and prohibition is vague and not at all clearly stated in any teaching handbook, this vagueness itself can be a source of drifting toward the apolitical. Teachers gravitate toward apolitical tasks aimed at linguistic and/or cultural transfer. When a teacher does venture out into the political, the task is usually taken up according to a pre-existing ideological understanding of a social problem.

It is my hope that radical ESL educators will uncover spaces and practices in which ESL education acts in alliance with imperialism and capitalism to bring about the conditions for the reproduction and perpetuation of the social relations of submission. I believe that with careful analysis of the practice and politics of ESL education, we are able to see how the practices and ideas of ESL education act in unison with capitalist and colonialist and its highest form, imperialist relations of dominance (Mojab, 2009). In this concluding chapter, I explore the radical, revolutionary potential in which ESL education could act.

In what follows, I will offer several ESL activities which exemplify radical lessons which aim to internalize relational thinking and teaching. I propose a method of teaching ESL which I call The Dialectical Teaching Method. This is a method that goes beyond content. The aim is impacting mode of thinking. It penetrates social phenomena dialectically. Students are guided to examine social phenomena relationally, historically, and with a vision of change. This is done in the hope that this mode of examination of phenomena is internalized and continued well after
and outside the ESL class. The two activities that follow are examples of what I envision a project or lesson delivered in the Dialectical Teaching Method to look like.

Jinjing, to whom the reader was introduced in the previous chapters, has developed several activities which, although she does not specifically refer to them as such, promote relational thinking. I will also present activities of my own which would span a five-week program. Although I have not yet practiced this lesson, it does encompass the components and the radical ESL lesson which I envision. That is, it takes a relational look at a social issue and builds an action plan for tackling the issue. In my vision of the radical ESL class, the intention is not to make the learner an ‘expert’ on one particular issue, no matter how important the subject. The issue in the radical classroom acts as a case study for developing a mode of thinking which can tackle all issues. The chapter and indeed the dissertation will end with suggestions for further research into the theorization and practice of radical ESL education.

**Radical Classroom for Radical Learners**

The group of teachers and learners that I interviewed alluded to four categories of ESL learners. It is important to note here that although it is useful to typify these categories, they are not meant as inanimate objects; they are meant to reveal the contradictory ways that ESL education acts as an apparatus of the state. One is the new immigrant who is earmarked for ESL/citizenship training within the LINC classes. This learner must be tenacious and flexible, the embodiment of the capitalist citizen. This group is learning English in a very unstable situation where there is continuous intake of learners and there are varying degrees of linguistic proficiency in each group making it impossible (or very difficult) for teachers to carry out any consistent, rigorous teaching activity. Lessons for this group vary from learning about Canadian holidays to how to
open a bank account to customer service training. This group is the subject of naturalization, integration, deskilling and reskilling. The classes are free or require a nominal fee and to some childcare and subway tokens are offered. The second group is the private language institute ESL learner/visitor who has conflated learning English as a second language with travel. This second group is learning ESL in a fun and creative environment. Lessons are comingled with music and weekly trips to pubs and downtown recreation centres are not rare. The third is the international college or university student paying exorbitant tuition fees. Here the tuition fees give an extra layer of urgency to the learning of English. There is usually a strict timeline in which students must finish their language requirements in order to be eligible to do what their original intention is which is enter a professional program at that college or university. This group of teachers have the most restrictions on them as they must follow a strict curriculum and record all evaluations which will result in a pass or fail of the student. The learners that I interviewed are a group of their own. They are radical thinkers who have ended up in Canada most probably as refugees who have fled their repressive regimes. Best characterized in Simin’s biography, this group thirsts for political discussion in the ESL classroom. They desire to pursue their social and political interests as they relate to their new home. They are eager to engage as critical citizens with issues of their new setting. They seek out institutions and organizations that interest them only to be told to “check out our website.”

The Dialectical Teaching Method that I propose in this final chapter stems from the desires of the activist-learners of this study. Furthermore, this method emerges from the expression of frustration by some teachers of this study for a need to do critical work in their classrooms. Throughout the interviews, the teacher-participants shared small activities that they do in classes which were helpful in creating the method which I am proposing. Jinjing was the
only teacher who showed me a comprehensive, step-by-step project. I think it would be helpful to share that project with the reader.

**Jinjing’s Activities**

It is in the vagueness of permissibility and prohibition that many teachers have been able to incorporate some critical activities and projects into their classes. Jinjing uses what is currently being done in all ESL textbooks: grammar, vocabulary, presentation skills, and has developed a project which goes beyond teaching skills; it aims at transforming the mode of thinking in the learners. Jinjing’s curriculum, although quite rigid, permits her to do one project with her students where she has some autonomy and can use her creativity in what she does. She has incorporated what is required in the curriculum into what she calls “The Human Rights Project.”

The process of working on this project goes on for about 5 weeks outside of class (as homework) and the end result is a presentation which students do in pairs and well as hand in several written material to the teacher. “I thought if I create a project that focuses on human rights or social justice then I can at least raise awareness using that as a tool since I can’t use up classroom time.”

First, students draw a picture of a human being on chart paper in groups. They are then given the task to brainstorm in their groups what people need to be truly human. The objective here is to get them to think about the very basics such as a job, safety, food, shelter, and education. In short, students uncover what one needs to live with dignity. She then directs them to a website called ‘Youth for Human Rights’ where they research (read, watch videos) and take notes on the 30 human rights that are on the site. By this time, students have some grasp of what are basic human rights, and what is dehumanizing. With this framework in mind they continue to
problematize today’s world. They look at social issues which plague today’s society. Students prepare for class presentations, and topics vary according to groups. One class may do presentations on linking a social issue to the previously discussed human rights. Examples of social issues are mining and child labour. Another class may be asked to do their presentations on a living, present-day activist again linking their activism to the preliminary work on human rights.

What is most important about this project is that students are given a list of questions to have with them during their research for the presentation. This list is not designed as a tool for accumulating more information about the topic; it goes beyond the level of content to get the student to think differently about the topic by finding the various relations that give rise to the issues, the history of the issue, how this issue is related to other issues, students’ previously held assumptions about the issue, and who is taking what action to intervene regarding this issue. Notice, this is not just learners doing a presentation on child labour. It is providing a framework first, which is human rights, humanization, and what is dehumanizing, then looking at a social issue with that framework, and the teacher’s mode of questioning is with the learners as they are doing their research to help them dig deeper. It is helping them to analyze and think about that issue to find what is happening in the whole that is making this issue crop up here and there in the particular daily lives of individuals. It is promoting the analytical tools, and a mode of thinking that helps learners see why this issue is happening. Eventually students will be able to look at all issues without the list of questions from the teacher. They have internalized this mode of analysis.

Jinjing has also found that unless a topic is personal, “has something to do with the students’ lives”, they will not engage. Currently, the topics being included in ESL textbooks are
interesting and can be taught critically. However, the way they are presented is light and problematic or as Jinjing puts it, “it’s the same crap regurgitated.” Jinjing quickly names a slew of topics that can all be taught from a human rights, social justice stance such as love and marriage, food, obesity, employment. These are currently topics that are included in most ESL textbooks. However, they are taken up in a very superficial way. The problem with many ESL textbooks is that topics are not dealt with in a deeply relational and dialectical way. Instead of “sitting around snickering” at how people in different cultures fall in love and get married, we should look at how marriage organizes society. We can look at the history of heterosexuality and its centricity and marriage as it relates to how we have socially organized ourselves.

Jinjing’s ideas reconfirm what I have always felt. It is not the content that is critical; it is the handling of the content, the analysis. By simply gathering information and statistics about an issue we are not studying its essence. We can read, listen, and discuss (all skills done in any ESL classroom) about how this issue shows up in people’s daily lives, what factors are allowing it to continue, and what avenues there are for intervention. For example, in order to show an example presentation, Jinjing does a presentation on obesity as a social issue in front of her class. Her students are always shocked by the claim that obesity is a social issue. Jinjing presents on the stigmatization of obese people, the fact that they are unable to get certain jobs because of their obesity, and what the role of the food industry has been. This social lens allows students to see obesity as a social justice issue and helps them (gives them a framework) to see all issues in a relational, dialectical, historical mode.

A Radical Class
The lessons in this class can make up a five-week program. The components in each program are: 1) identifying a social issue whether at a local or global level; 2) gathering information about
the issue; 3) finding relations; 4) recounting personal and secondary experience; 5) exploring existing avenues for action; 6) envisioning other avenues for action; 7) practicing action; 8) reflection. These are not necessarily sequential steps to be followed but components present in each lesson.

1) Identifying a local or global social issue. This is an important part of the lesson and must be done dialogically with input made from the entire group. Several sessions can be allotted to this step as it does set the stage for the remaining classes. Preliminary research and discussion is needed. Once each learner (individually or in pairs) choose the issue which they would like to continue working on, they must do a short presentation for the class to describe the issue and explain how it is in fact social and has importance.

2) Gathering information about the issue. Learners gather statistical and historical information regarding their issue. Academic skills that can be taught here are retrieving books and articles from library databases as well as evaluating these sources. Reading strategies, note-taking, paraphrasing, and citing must be worked on here also.

3) Finding relations. The teacher must give each student a list of questions once they have identified the issue that they will be working on. These questions are fashioned in such a way as to deepen the analysis. Example questions are: what are the historical reasons for this issue? And, what else is happening that is related to this issue? These questions will more or less be the same for every issue and every pair of students as they aim to show a relational mode of thinking.

4) Recounting personal and secondary experience. There will be several opportunities prior to the end of the lesson for students to speak and discuss personal experience as it relates to issues. The role of the teacher is important in these discussions. Firstly, it is crucial that
personal questions should not be asked; when a learner chooses to share personal experience or experience of others, it is welcomed. However, there must be a point behind sharing personal experience. That is, personal interjections in group discussions must have a theoretical purpose.

5) Exploring existing avenues for action. It is of utmost importance for an action component to be threaded through the radical lesson. Whether learners take action or not, it is crucial that avenues for resistance and change are researched and discussed. After all, the theoretical foundation for radical ESL education is ‘revolutionary social transformation’. Also, by not having an action component, we are left in despair, helpless at the enormity of the task. Research into existing network of progressive organizations and their work is important. Moreover, local activists can be guest speakers as student practice notetaking and listening activities. Reading and vocabulary can be enforced by reading simplified versions of tenant or worker rights laws. An excellent source for these readings is The New Internationalist magazine which has an easier English section.

http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/Main_Page

6) Envisioning other avenues for action. This component is aimed at drawing on the creativity of the learner as well as employ past action of the learners. The key is to explore other, not immediately within reach avenues for action and resistance.

7) Practicing action. Here we can employ everything we have always been doing in the ESL class, such as role play, example letters, and speeches to practice our vision of conscious action.
8) Reflection. This can be in form of an on-going journal in which learners write their thoughts as they dig deeper into the issue which they and their classmates are researching.

The end product of this lesson can be a presentation attended by local activists and other networks. It can also be a research paper.

Also, I would like to state that it is very important that the radical ESL classroom be named as such. Learners and teachers must knowingly engage in a class that they know will be political. I do not favour a radical element as an addition. Such notions will in the end be co-opted into a tired set of topics to be included in textbooks to give the illusion of criticality. The political nature of the classroom and the action orientation should not come as a surprise to learners. It should be openly communicated prior to the start of the class.

Areas for Further Research

ESL Education, the State, and Capitalism

When I started this research I had intended to create a theoretical foundation for the practice of radical ESL education. As I delved further into the study, I realized that this is impossible without an analysis of capitalism as it is the social organization in which we live in. Critical ESL theorists have made pertinent points and have revealed much about the ties that bind the English language and imperialism (Robertson, 1991; Canagarajah, 1993), as well as globalization (Block & Cameron, 2002; Kubota, 2002). These are important works and have illuminated much in this study. However, I find the recommendations made by this study are best defined by radical adult educators, Carpenter (2010, 2011) and Allman (1999, 2007) and more specifically what Mojab (2009) calls ‘learning by dispossession.’ Imperialism to me is not simply national expansionism
(which predates capitalism). And it is certainly not summarized within linguistic expansionism; doing so hides its cruelty. ‘Globalization’ within education has also been used euphemistically to refer to cultural change and expansion and resisting its forces is reduced to struggle within the realm of culture and language. I understand imperialism as the latest stage of capitalist development. In this stage, movement of capital drives all social relations, including ESL education. Further research is needed to focus on the link between ESL education and capitalism as a social organization. The absence of an analysis of capitalism or even mention of the word in ESL teaching literature and conferences is perplexing and telling. We need research which exposes and explains how ESL education is participating in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. By this, I am not advocating a mechanistic, economic, or ‘deterministic’ explanation of capitalism and ESL education’s role within it. I understand ESL learning as a complex phenomenon which encompasses several relations and processes within it. One of those processes is one which ‘dispossesses’ learners (and according to this study also teachers) from their material experience. That is, what people know because of their daily experience is delegitimized and replaced with the logic of capitalism. With regards to ESL education, it is a process in which the newcomer is programmed to delete the past and embrace the ethics of capitalism i.e. work hard, “don’t whine”, shop, do not rely on social help. Perhaps then we can address or simply understand the “emptiness” or alienation which several of the teachers in this study referred to. We may also understand the desire of several activist-learner participants to share their past experiences and use their activist knowledge and their frustration when prohibited.

Another area which is in need of further research is the role of the state in the ties that bind ESL education and reproduction of capitalism. We seem to forget that the legal status of
‘newcomer’, ‘refugee’, ‘immigrant’, ‘international student’ is established by the state. Also, the fact that the ESL class that the men and women in each of these legal categories are enrolled into is regulated by the state is obscured. ESL education must thus be theorized in relation to the state. Currently, the ESL class acts as a space which incorporates newcomers into a specific mode of living and thinking in this new setting. Further research is needed into how this phenomenon is impacted at the federal and provincial levels.

Curriculum Development: Creation of Radical Teaching Material

As I have previously stated, I view a relational mode of thinking to be radical. That is, what makes something radical is not in the content. For example, the gathering of statistics about poverty, racist and sexist encounters, although important, is not enough. It is in the analyzing of this content that one legitimizes a political stance or social organization.

Every morning as we page through or scroll down the newspaper, we read about the latest occurrences. In liberal democracies like Canada, content (for the most part) is not kept from us. We read about the cases of sexual assault in the streets of Toronto and a stoning of a woman in Iran. We read about the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh which led to the death of 1137 workers; then we read the quarterly earnings of Scotiabank were 2.4 billion dollars this quarter. The accumulation of this information does not make us intellectual thinkers; the understanding that these events are related does. Thus, the collection of information and content is only the point of departure for the thinker. An analysis which takes one to the essence of a phenomenon is next. This requires a mode of questioning and thinking that goes beyond content. This is particularly difficult for ESL teachers as we are so accustomed to asking questions which can easily be found in the text in order to ensure comprehension.
An area in great need of further attention is the development of in class material and textbooks for radical ESL education. We need actual material to be used in the class which is firmly grounded in radical ESL theory. Also, in both examples that I have offered above, the lessons and activities can be done in classes of upper intermediate and advanced English proficiency. There is a need to create material and activities to be done in the beginner radical classes as well.

**Last Look at Findings**

One important finding of this study is in relation with praxis, the dialectical interplay of thoughts and actions. During the interviews the teachers and learner-activists showed very deep, dialectical thinking about various issues. This is evident when one teacher relates Palestinian issues to aboriginal issues of Canada and relates environmental degradation to violence against women. It is also noticeable in several teachers’ understanding of the colonizing role that teaching ESL plays. One teacher says “why are people paying money to learn English? Why is it so powerful? What am I doing to uphold that? I’m definitely doing to uphold that power. And I’m uncomfortable with that.” Another teacher says, “when you’re teaching languages, specifically English, I believe you are… there is a sort of history of power related to teaching English.” This teacher has parents who are from countries who were “disempowered” because “they were colonized by English speakers.” And she continues to assert that this knowledge is at the forefront when she is teaching ESL. However, when we moved to action, (when the question was what is it you do in the ESL classroom to reflects these thoughts), the actions were in the majority of times what has been called reproductive praxis, reproducing existing relations. This was an important finding because we have up to now taken for granted that thoughts and actions are related, but what happens when thoughts do not or cannot turn into actions? A few of the
teacher participants in this study referred to a feeling of emptiness and guilt surrounding teaching lessons that are “meaningless.” Ya says, “There’s a kind of emptiness in the job that we do.” She also says, “There’s a guilt with doing lessons that are meaningless, that are blah blah blah.” Maggie continuously questions her role and says she has always felt that as an ESL teacher she has nothing to offer. She tries to find meaning in her work and is “bothered” by the suffering in the world and feels she cannot do anything about it. She says, “there is an emptiness in the job that we do.”

Thoughts were not turning into actions because of several of the themes that were introduced in chapter five. For example, fear is inhibiting teachers. That is fear of students complaining, fear of appearing too critical or aggressive, or fear of stirring something up in the student that could not be managed. In an atmosphere where the student is referred to as client, there is a lot of complaining about the service being provided to them. We must keep the client happy. One teacher, who teaches international students in such a climate, says that she cannot do critical work in the class because she has to cover the textbook, otherwise the students will complain. Mary who is in a leadership position says “something about activism seems aggressive” which is why she would rather be called a humanitarian than an activist.

Also, the theme of trust was relevant. In order to combat fear, you must establish trust. The teacher must not fear the student complaining and the student must trust that she can disagree and reveal thoughts to the class. However, establishing trust is not possible in an academic setting such as the LINC classes where there is continuous intake of students and learners of various linguistic skills are group together in a very problematic placement process. Trust can also not be established when teachers are under time constraints to ‘cover’ a certain number of unit of a textbook, or are under pressure to cover a packed curriculum that has been
handed down to them. Maggie who has an extremely deep understanding of her work and role in society finally succumbs and says “I don’t really give a shit what you think just produce this comparative piece of writing where you’re going to write nonsense and I’ll mark it.”

The theme of limitations and barriers also sheds light on how our role as a teacher of our class is not autonomous. It is quite obviously being managed at the institutional level with coordinators, curriculum, and textbooks as constraints. And it is not so obviously being mediated at a global, federal, and provincial level. One teacher talks about “these damn books that they force down my throat.” Maggie says that if they were to leave her alone, she could do 100% “social justice stuff” but of course she is not left alone. She is under enormous time limitation to teach a certain number of units of textbooks because if she does not students may complain.

At the same time, these themes of fear, trust, pressure, limitations and barriers do not go unnoticed by learner-activists. The learner-activists that I interviewed thirst for discussing their pasts and show their knowledge. Belma’s favourite session in an ESL classroom was when her teacher allowed her to do a presentation on refugee issues, her specialty prior to coming to Canada. Sima’s most interesting class was when a substitute teacher created a lesson around the Quebec student unrest. They are also quite aware of the pressures felt by the teachers. One learner-activist asks me, “I don't know ESL, are they government officer or something? If someone complains about them like she's doing some stuff, [not in the] the curriculum.”

Furthermore, this study revealed a relationship between reproductive praxis and revolutionary praxis. Radical consciousness and revolutionary praxis do not have a linear relationship to one another. That is, once one has gained radical consciousness, revolutionary praxis will not necessarily follow. Radical consciousness is not a state that one either resides in or not. A teacher who is engaged in revolutionary praxis will also undertake reproductive praxis.
A learner, such as Adanna, who has a deeply relational understanding of unrest in Africa, will also act not to help the at risk youth in her neighbourhood but to help a liberal candidate win a seat in her riding.

Limitations of Study

The decision to pursue my research questions by doing semi-structured interviews was not an easy one. I could have conducted an ESL class aimed at social transformation. I could have observed classroom teaching of teachers who identify as being critical educators. I am content with the final decision to execute interviews with teachers and learners. This method allowed me to gain insight into the field of ESL education through the lens of people who are committed to social transformation. However, with insight gained from this study, further research using a different design would be helpful. I believe this study has yielded a framework and teaching method in order for an ESL class aimed at social transformation to be conducted which goes beyond content.

Furthermore, my recruitment yielded a group of ESL teachers who have secure full time positions as my main criteria was someone who identified as being a critical educator and/or having a strong commitment to social justice. None of the teacher-participants in this study belong to the well-represented precariously employed population. Therefore, this research does not include the voices and specific distress that comes from the attempt of doing critical ESL work while being employed as sessional or contract faculty. Further research into the successes and barriers of this group of teachers while doing critical ESL teaching would be intriguing.

As for classroom observation, I am not certain whether it would be helpful. The teacher-participants of this study expressed that they sometimes go months without doing any “critical
stuff” while they are establishing trust. Others who do not have months and are under institutional constraints, assign out of class assignments and research projects which do not take up classroom time. It is also evident from this study that teachers are not engaged in critical/revolutionary praxis most of the time. Thus, although I think it would be interesting for further research to include classroom observation in the research design, I am doubtful as to the data it would yield.

**Final Comments and Closing**

I have argued that ESL education serves to reproduce existing relations of submission and dominance. This reproduction is achieved through several processes. For one, there is a belief that ‘expert knowledge,’ deemed worthy to appear in journals and conferences, is politically neutral. The ‘expert knowledge’ itself has been narrowed and limited through restricting gatekeeping practices. This reliance on ‘expert knowledge’ has also trickled down to ESL classroom material. The aim is at times, mechanistic and other times creative linguistic or cultural transfer of depoliticized subject matter. From this emerges a learning environment of controlled, tolerant discussion navigated away from controversy.\(^9\)

Another process by which ESL education loses its revolutionary potential is in our conceptualization of learning. Much of ESL education theorization has conceptualized learning as an abstract cognitive activity without tending to the social processes involved. There is some theorization on ESL learning as social practice which is important but not sufficient. That is, it does not reveal how the social practice of ESL education is involved in reproducing the relations of capitalism. I adopt the Marxist-feminist stance that learning is a historically specific social phenomenon which includes theorization of capitalist social relations (Mojab and Carpenter, \(^9\))

---

\(^9\) Some publishers provide a list of forbidden topics informally represented by the acronym PARSNIP (politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork) (Gray, 2002).
One of the things that drove this research was the need to create theory which would in turn lead to pedagogy in the radical ESL classroom. It has become evident to me throughout this study that this endeavour is impossible without an analysis of capitalism and imperialism. We need a clear understanding of the essence of the social relations of capitalism. We need to know how this social organization feeds on the continued subjugation of people of color. Although it appears that everyone is free to be making choices, immigrating and selling their labour to whom they wish, we must understand why migration to Western, English-speaking countries is occurring and how the state ensures that this migration translates into capital accumulation. In Canada, as in all capitalist societies, the state must intervene to maintain conditions of capital accumulation in all levels of social organizations. Using immigration to solve labour shortage issues has not been novel in Western liberal states; this has happened since 1945.

In Belgium, for example, over 61,500 Polish and Italian workers were recruited in 1946 and 1947 to work in the mining industry (Debband & Declerck, 1982: 13). In Britain, there were major shortages of labour in agriculture, mining, textile manufacture and the metal foundries, to which the state responded by recruitment from the refugee camps of Western Europe. Between 1946 and 1950, some 77,000 refugees were brought to Britain as European Volunteer Workers, and they were joined by around 88,000 members of the Polish armed forces already exiled in Britain and about 8,000 Ukrainian prisoners of war (Miles, 1986, p. 54).

This recruitment of labour from outside national boundaries has been called “the internationalization of the labour market” (Carchedi 1979, p. 38). It is within this context that we must place ESL education and its role. This will help us to understand the role that we as ESL educators are playing within the social relations of capitalism.

Furthermore, this study helped me to explore my related research questions. These questions, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, were: Is the ESL class a useful space for organizing and mobilizing for social change? And Is political engagement a motivating factor for learning English as a second language? I addressed these questions as such during the interviews:
Do you think the ESL class is an appropriate place to do critical work? And what are your thoughts about the relationship between ESL learning and activism? Mary’s reply (teacher) to the first question was “yes, because it’s already happening anyways.” She goes on to explain that we need to address the tensions and contradictions that exist in a productive way rather than letting them “sit around in the class.” I did not ask the question specifically using words such as organizing, mobilizing, and activism from all participants. However, I asked Mary whether she thought the ESL class was an appropriate space to organize and do activism after she vehemently supported doing critical work in the ESL class. To that question she replied, “I’m not sure... something about activism feels aggressive.” She went on to say that if such organizing could be done in a respectful way, then the answer would be yes. She says, “if we could do that in a way that was respectful to students and to the people in the classroom, then yes, I believe in it. I believe it’s a good place for activism.”

I asked Charlotte a very passionate ESL learner-activist what her thoughts regarding activism and the ESL class are. Since Charlotte’s current activism is related to AIDS awareness, she told me that she would like every ESL class to have an AIDS and HIV awareness component. She wished she could go to every ESL class in the city to speak to newcomers about AIDS. She tells me that if not prevented every 24 hours, one person is affected by AIDS and she would like to spread knowledge about prevention of AIDS as well as struggle against discrimination and stigmatization. When I asked learner-activist, Belma, what she thought of the relation between ESL learning and activism, she simply responded, “it goes together.”

I do not know whether or even how radical ESL education will lead to social transformation. I believe that a social movement is needed for social transformation at a grand scale. What I am certain of is that understanding how the social world actually works is important if we are to have such a hope. Focusing on ongoing social relations and our role
within them rather than the results of social relations is crucial. This understanding requires a mode of thinking which I have called dialectical or relational thinking. Furthermore, I have no desire nor do I think it possible to stop the spread of the English language. I am interested in ways in which the ESL classroom can be used to promote a consciousness that can lead to action which shapes our social organization in the interest of justice and equality. Which brings me to my next point: we must not shy away from using an analysis which encompasses capitalism in favour of euphemisms such as neoliberalism and globalization. We currently live in a world where three billion people live on less than $2 a day; 1.3 billion people live on less than $1 dollar a day; 70% of those living below the absolute poverty line are women; 1 billion people do not have access to clean water (Kim, Millen, Irwin, & Gershman, 2000). We are living in a world of poverty and environmental degradation. We cannot wait until capitalism collapses under the weight of its own contradictions, nor do we desire the end of our societies by some catastrophic events. We must start now from whatever social location we are, on the project of transformation before it is too late. TESL scholars are at a crucial intersection of an array of capitalist social relations. We can choose to engage in uncritical, reproductive praxis or we can challenge ourselves and our students to be involved in revolutionary social transformation. This study has been aimed at exploring the possibilities and barriers of the latter.
Works Cited


Fairclough, N. (1992). *Introduction*. In N. Fairclough (Ed.). Critical language awareness (pp. 1-
30). London: Longman.


Hall, A., & Rist, R. (1999). Integrating multiple qualitative research methods (or avoiding the precariousness of a one-legged stool). Psychology and Marketing, 16 (4), 291-304


Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participant. Sociol. Health Illn. 16, 103-121.


Appendix 1 – List of Abbreviations

CLB – Canadian Language Benchmarks

CLT – Communicative language teaching

EFL – English as a foreign language

ESL – English as a second language

ELT – English Language Teaching

ESOL – English for speakers of other languages

L1 – First language; mother tongue

L2 – Second language

LINC – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

TESL – Teaching English as second language

TESOL – Teaching English to speakers of other languages

SLA – Second Language Acquisition
Appendix 2 – Dialogue as Code

The following is taken from *Problem-posing at Work: Popular Educator’s Guide*, p. 39-40.

Roberto: The Health and Safety report is back.

Mary: What does it say?

Roberto: It says there is no problem. The new paint is safe.

Mary: How could that be true? We all got skin rashes when we started using it.

Roberto: The report says it’s safe.

Mary: So they think the problems are all in our imagination? We should know. We work here.

*Questions for discussion posed by educator:*

What is a Health and Safety report?

What health problem are the workers having? What do they think is causing it?

What does the Health and Safety report say?

What does Mary think about the report?

What do you think the employer will say to the workers about their skin rashes?

Do you know anyone who has been bothered by substances or conditions at work?

What happened?

Why do you think the report says there is no problem?

Who knows the most about health and safety at work? Who are the experts?

Who benefits from this report?

What do you think these workers should do? Why?
Appendix 3- Interview Questions for ESL Teachers

Demographic information:

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you taught English as a Second Language?
3. Where have you taught ESL?
4. Do you have any degrees or certificates in teaching ESL?

Process questions:

5. Explain why you have a commitment to social justice.
6. Have you been involved in resistance or activism?
7. How do you see your work as an ESL teacher related to social justice and activism?
8. How have you brought or tried to bring your ideas about social justice into your classroom teaching? What has worked? What hasn’t?
9. What has been your experience with trying to bring social justice ideas into the ESL class? How has it been received by students? Or by your institution?
10. Tell me about things you have done in class that has worked well.
11. What advice or suggestions do you have for other ESL teachers?
12. Do you have anything else you would like to share?
Appendix 4 - Interview Questions for ESL Learner/Activists

*Demographic information:*

1. What is your name?
2. When were you born?
3. What kind of social justice cause or issue were you involved in?
4. When did you come to Canada?
5. What was your English knowledge before coming to Canada?

*Process questions:*

6. Tell me about your experience of learning English in Canada:
   - Where did you study English in Canada?
   - How many hours a week?
   - What positive experiences did you have?
   - What challenges did you experience?
   - Can you tell me some of your most memorable experiences?
   - What activities did you enjoy the most?
   - What activities did you least enjoy?

7. What would you like to learn in an English class?
8. How would you like your English class to be?
9. How would you like to use your knowledge of English in Canada?
10. What kinds of activism will you be involved in, in the future?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
Appendix 5 - Letter of Information and Consent (Activist-Learners)

Dear __________ : 

My name is Bahar Biazar and I am a PhD student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD research project, *English as a Second Language for Transformation*. The primary focus of the project is to understand the relationship between learning English as a second language and social transformation.

I will be conducting open-ended interviews from April- August 2013. If you decide to participate in this study, I will meet with you for two individual interviews and one focus group interview with other ESL teachers. I will meet with you for 2-3 hours to ask you questions about your past involvement in social transformation and your thoughts about social justice. I will also ask questions about your experience in the ESL classes in Canada.

The focus group interview will be about 1.5 to 2 hours with other ESL learners who have been activists. I will ask the group questions about past ESL classes and your thoughts about learning ESL and social justice.

The interview times will be arranged at a time that is convenient for both of us. There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research. However, as a benefit of this research, you may have an opportunity to provide input of what an ESL class aimed at social transformation would look like.
Thank you for taking time to read this letter. I want you to know that your participation in the project is strictly voluntary and anonymous. You can decline to answer any of my questions during both the individual interviews and the focus group interview and stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time during the interview or data analysis process. Your responses, comments, name, and personal details will be kept confidential in any writings related to this research.

Both the individual and the focus group interviews will be audio taped and my thesis supervisor Dr. Shahrzad Mojab and I will have access to the audio recordings and transcripts. The hard copies of all of the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet and the electronic copies will be secured on a password protected computer. The audio recordings will be deleted after they have been transcribed and the encrypted transcripts will be destroyed after 3 years in the case of follow up studies. The information may be used for presentation and/or publication purposes. Once your interviews have been transcribed, I will send you a copy of the transcripts of the individual interviews. At that time you can make changes, add, or delete any part of your responses that you wish before returning the transcript to me.

In order to participate in the research project, I will be asking you to sign the consent form below which gives me permission to use the data that I collect from our interview as part of my thesis research (you can keep a copy of the letter and consent form for your own records). You are free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

Sincerely yours,

Bahar Biazar (PhD Candidate)
AECP OISE/UT, 252 Bloor Street West,
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6
Tel: 416-666-4802
Email: bahar.biazar@utoronto.ca
Professor Shahrzad Mojab, my thesis supervisor, can be contacted through the following:

AECP OISE/UT, 252 Bloor Street West,

Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6

Tel: 416-978-0829

Email: shahrzad.mojab@utoronto.ca

Sasmita Rajaratnam Research Ethics Coordinator of the Education Ethics Review Board can be contacted through the following:

UT - Office of Research Ethics

12 Queen’s Park Crescent West

McMurrich Building, 2nd floor,

Toronto, Ontario M5S 1S8

Tel: 416-978-2798

Email: sasmita.rajaratnam@utoronto.ca

I, ______________________________, have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature of

Research participant: ___________________________ Date: __________________

Signature of Witness: ___________________________ Date: __________________

☐ I would like to receive the transcript of our interview by email.

Email address: _________________________________________

☐ I would like to receive the transcript of our interview by post.

Mailing address: _________________________________________

227
Appendix 6 - Letter of Information and Consent (ESL Teachers)

Dear __________:

My name is Bahar Biazar and I am a PhD student in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD research project, *English as a Second Language for Transformation*. The primary focus of the project is to understand the relationship between learning English as a second language and social transformation.

I will be conducting open-ended interviews from April- August 2013. If you decide to participate in this study, I will meet with you for two individual interviews and one focus group interview. The individual interviews will be 2- 3 hours to ask you questions about your experience as an ESL educator and your thoughts about language learning and social transformation.

The focus group interview will be about 1.5 to 2 hours with other ESL teachers who are interested in social transformation and social justice. I will ask the group questions about past ESL classes and your thoughts about teaching ESL and its connections to social transformation and social justice.

The interview time will be arranged at a time that is convenient for both of us. There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research. However, as a benefit of this research, you may have an opportunity to provide input of what an ESL class aimed at social transformation would look like.
Thank you for taking time to read this letter. I want you to know that your participation in the project is strictly voluntary and anonymous. You can decline to answer any of my questions and stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time during the interview or data analysis process. Your responses, comments, name, personal details and institutional affiliations will be kept confidential in any writings related to this research.

Both the focus group interview and the individual interviews will be audio taped and only my thesis supervisor Dr. Shahrzad Mojab and I will have access to the audio recordings and transcripts. The hard copies of all of the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet and the electronic copies will be secured on a password protected computer. The audio recordings will be deleted after they have been transcribed and the encrypted transcripts will be destroyed after 3 years in the case of follow up studies. The information may be used for presentation and/or publication purposes. Once your individual interviews have been transcribed, I will send you a copy of the transcripts. At that time you can make changes, add, or delete any part of your responses that you wish before returning the transcript to me.

In order to participate in the research project, I will be asking you to sign the consent form below which gives me permission to use the data that I collect from our interview as part of my thesis research (you can keep a copy of the letter and consent form for your own records). You are free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

Sincerely yours,

Bahar Biazar (PhD Candidate)
AECP OISE/UT, 252 Bloor Street West,
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6
Tel: 416-666-4802
Email: baharbs@yahoo.ca

Professor Shahrzad Mojab, my thesis supervisor, can be contacted through the following:
I, ______________________________, have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature of
Research participant: _______________ Date: ________________

Signature of Witness: _______________ Date: ________________

☐ I would like to receive the transcript of our interview by email.

Email address: ______________________________

☐ I would like to receive the transcript of our interview by post.

Mailing address: ______________________________

________________________________________________________________________