Reading Between the Lines: Historical Fiction in Secondary School Classrooms

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Mariyah Zainab Hyder, April 2016
Abstract

This small-scale qualitative research study explores the role and use of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms. Data was collected for this study using purposeful sampling to recruit three Ontario teachers who had either personal or professional experience with historical fiction. Their insights and experiences were incorporated and analyzed alongside a literature review of existing research on historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool.

The responses from participants alongside the literature review have answered not only the overarching research question but have also shed light on how historical fiction can be used to enrich student understanding of historical themes and concepts, how historical fiction can be used to introduce new (and not normally addressed) perspectives to students, as well as how teachers and students might overcome the challenges they may face with regards to the use of historical fiction in classrooms. The evidence points toward there being more benefits than challenges to the use of historical fiction in the classroom. Even though there are and will be challenges to be faced, they are of the sort that can be overcome by good teaching practice and a sense of adventure for learning on the part of both students and teachers.

Key Words: historical fiction, interdisciplinary learning, multiple perspectives, alternative narratives
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On a professional note, I am indebted to all three of my research participants for taking the time out of their busy schedules to participate in my research study, and for providing valuable insights into the research topic via their teaching practice. By sharing their experiences, they offer the educational community an opportunity to understand what it means to use historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms, and have helped me to further develop my personal and professional understandings of the topic. This research paper exists thanks to my participants' contributions – for which I am extremely grateful.

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Chapter One – The Problem at Hand
“All good stories deserve embellishment.” - Gandalf the Grey

Introduction
Having always been a student with an unconventional thought process, the inspiration for this research paper did not come by way of any singular or multitude of experience(s) that left a strong impression on me. Rather, while sitting in class one day and realizing that my fellow classmates and I had to have selected a research topic and formulated a working research question by the end of the class, I panicked (à la Calvin and Hobbes). The ideas I had been thinking about began to scramble and jumble, and of the lot, I did not find any appealing enough to dedicate the next two years of my life. Thus, it was in that panic-induced frazzled state that, a bit like an epiphany or Harry Potter appearing before J.K. Rowling, a research topic and question popped in to my head. The topic? Historical Fiction. The question? What is the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms?

1. Research Interest
I begin my Master of Teaching Research Paper (MTRP) by identifying first and foremost my research topic and research question, and what historical fiction means to me. To reiterate, my research question is: what is the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms? Insights offered in response to this question are further nuanced by the following sub-questions: 1) How can historical fiction be used to enrich the historical thinking concepts for students? 2) How can historical fiction be used to introduce new (and not normally addressed) historical perspectives to students? 3) How might teachers and students overcome the

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challenges they may face with regards to the use of historical fiction in classrooms?

I define historical fiction as a piece of literature, most often in novel form, that uses literary techniques and rhetorical devices to present focused narratives of history that may or may not offer an alternative to traditional history as described in history textbooks. The idea of historical fiction and its role in the classroom was one that surprised me, and one that my fellow classmates and professors found intriguing. I only settled on the topic because I realized it combined two of my greatest passions: history and literature, and brought them directly into the space I will hope to occupy for the majority of my professional life: the classroom. Furthermore, I realized that, apart from bringing together my two greatest passions, the idea of historical fiction also brought forward and combined my knowledge and work in the disciplines of English and history during my undergraduate degree. Historical fiction, I realized, actually combined my passions with my educational background. I not only enjoy reading historical fiction as a leisurely activity, but I also enjoy understanding and assessing the literary and historical elements within historical fiction novels. I find that through their use of literary techniques and rhetorical devices, themes and concepts in history that are often presented in obfuscated terms in historiographical writings (like history textbooks) are much more crystallized and accessible in historical fiction. It is this realization about the relative ease by which historical fiction is able to convey its central points that really solidified my choice of it as a topic.

The topic of historical fiction also managed to assuage one of my concerns regarding my MTRP research topic and question. In the early stages of brainstorming potential topics and questions, the professor for the Research course had advised students with 'teachables' in history and English to beware of the possibility that they might want to change their topics and questions
once they started taking the course dedicated to their English teachable (the following year, after the history teachable), particularly if they had chosen a topic firmly entrenched in the discipline of history. In all fairness, this warning was one I took to heart because, as I stated above, history and literature are both my passions, and I have a background in both English and history as disciplines. However, with historical fiction, I realized that it was an interdisciplinary topic, meaning that I could assess its place in the classroom no matter if it was a history classroom or an English classroom. The very nature of historical fiction (it is literature with a historical focus) allows it to be used across disciplines, in particular the English and history disciplines.

I bring forth this interdisciplinary connection because I distinctly remember the novel I chose to study for my Gr. 12 English class's research paper. It was a novel, fitting the assignment requirements of being world literature, and focused on the narrative of a young boy. However, more than the literary techniques or rhetorical devices, I found myself focusing on the heavy influence of history on the story than anything else. The novel was set in India a few years after the 1984 Bhopal disaster, when the Union Carbide pesticide plant exploded. In keeping with the assignment's requirements to analyze the novel through a literary theory, I chose to study both the literary nature of the book and its historical influence through the theory of Marxism with a touch of Post-Colonialism. It is unfortunate that, even though this was a university oriented course, the teacher did not highlight the potential for students to consider their world literature novels as an experience in interdisciplinary learning, and see if they could trace the historical narrative within the literary narrative. Overall though, this experience solidified for me more than anything the accessibility and utility of fiction to be used across disciplines to teach both literature, history, and the themes and concepts that are common to both.
1.1 Background of Researcher

To situate myself within this research paper as the researcher and the voice through which this research paper will be written and read, I would like to speak a little about who I am, and what has brought me to this stage in my life.

I am a 20-something, female, teacher candidate. I am Canadian, born and raised, and my ethno-cultural background is Indian, specifically from Hyderabad, the capital of one of India's southern states. In terms of religious affiliations, I am a practising Muslim. I have already mentioned above that two of my passions are literature and history, and have been since I was a child. I identify all these factors about myself because they inform who I am and how I interpret my surroundings to a large extent, and also why the topic of historical fiction is of such interest to me.

In being a female, Muslim, Canadian-Indian, I have identified 4 different ways in which I perceive the world around me, and the 4 potentially different perspectives I can maintain about any one topic. Not to sound like a narcissist, but rather as someone looking in on herself, I find this ability fascinating. It amazes me that I can have and maintain at one time 4 potentially complementary or antagonistic ideas and perspectives. These perspectives of course, did not occur of their own will, but were perspectives that I have heard about, read about, and chosen to accept as my own. I list and make a point of this ability because I feel it is necessary to be able to understand multiple perspectives in a dynamic world.

As for how these perspectives influence my interest in literature and history? It is because the religio-cultural backgrounds I come from emphasize and place importance on literature and history. I grew up in a household that emphasized both, and where it was considered odd if you
did not have an interest in or at least a general understanding of both. To highlight specific examples of how I came to acquire the multiple perspectives I enjoy having, I will relate a few short anecdotes. The first, is the emphasis my religion places on literature and history. One has to have literacy skills if one is going to be able to read and understand the metaphorical and historical contexts of Islam's holy book, the Qur'an. Also, Islam places an importance on history through the Hadith narratives, which are the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)\(^2\), and the way to validate these narratives is often to trace their history through their sources, essentially looking at to whom was it related and then to whom did she relate it, and so on and so forth. The second is my cultural background's emphasis on history. Where my family is from (Hyderabad) was at many times over the course of history under the rule of different royal parties (Qutb Shah dynasties, the Mughal Asif Jah dynasties, and finally the Nizams of Hyderabad), and has always maintained a religious and cultural milieu. During the latter rule of the Nizams, Hyderabad also became a princely state during British rule. As a Canadian, I may not have had family here since the birth of Canada as a nation, however, I have had family here since the Immigration Act of 1978. As a female, I hold a unique perspective regarding each of the aforementioned religio-cultural institutions and my place in them as a woman. What I have learned from holding all of these multiple perspectives in my head is that they have also offered me an exclusive insight into the notion of multiple narratives; the idea that there can be more than one way to relate a history, whether it uses the same facts or not, with the difference being that of perspective. Indeed, it was a most fascinating experience watching these multiple perspectives and narratives interact while I was an undergraduate student in a Canadian history course and reading about Canada's bid for independence from Britain alongside that of indigenous peoples in Canada, and the Indian Peace be upon him
Apart from these sources, another major way in which I further learned to appreciate multiple perspectives and narratives was, obviously, from reading books. These books gave me insights into a historical world that I would temporarily be able to access, and into which I could submerge myself. In terms of the historical fiction genre, the first novel which really struck a chord with me was Karleen Bradford's *The Nine Day's Queen*. I was in Gr. 6 when I stumbled across the novel in the classroom's small selection of books, and immediately I was swept away into a world to which I could never literally belong, but was able to figuratively submerge myself in and experience for the duration of my reading experience. It was amazing to me that history could be learned through such a visceral experience where I could not only assume a position alongside the historical characters, but also empathize with or rail against them. Of course, before this experience, it had never explicitly occurred to me that I could learn history through a semi-fictional story someone had spent time researching and crafting. Overall, reading the novel changed my perception of how I could learn history, and I spent much time re-visiting my abridged collection of classic literature to see what historical tidbits I could glean from them.

**1.2 Significance of Research Topic**

From my personal experience, whenever the subject of learning history in schools arises, former students, more often than not, highlight their interest and fascination in learning about the medieval and ancient worlds during history period back in Grades 4 to 5. This opinion is mine alone, but I suspect that the positive memory of these periods is because of the narrative manner in which these histories were taught. I vividly remember my course reader for the Ancient Roman
and Greek worlds, and reading with rapt attention how these people in the past had lived, and how their societies had been so similar and different to ours.

I feel it is the increasing lack of this narrative approach to history as the grade levels increase that pushes students away from the study and pursuit of learning history. Indeed, it seems almost as if the goal of high-school history in particular is to encourage rote memorization of dates, events, places, and people with a sidebar focus on the skills that can be attained from learning history, such as advanced literacy skills and critical thinking.

It is for these reasons above that I feel the role of historical fiction in secondary school classrooms is important to learning history. Primarily, through its literary form, it brings back that nostalgic memory of history being a story and a narrative, rather than a time-line of dates and facts. Historical fiction, while it narrows the timeline-like scope of learning about history by focusing on specific events and people, also widens the perspective of learning about the other histories of the period (apart from the dates and events), the human stories and the social and cultural histories they incorporate. It certainly also offers a much more all encompassing history in terms of what people ate, and did for leisure, and how they dressed. I feel that historical fiction really changes the cause-effect angle of history making it about the human decision making process and human relationships over the 'this event led to this event' attitude. It also emphasizes the different perspectives through its inclusion of all levels of people. Students can read a historical fiction novel about the Tudors, for example, but from the perspective of a serving girl, again showing historical fiction's accessibility in telling not only multiple narratives but also narratives from the perspectives of those most often left out of the traditional historical narrative.

Again, this opinion is my own entirely, but I cannot help but feel that children who are
exposed to learning history through a supplement to the textbook, such as historical fiction, are more likely to be able to develop those understandings of multiple narratives, and really looking at how narratives are chosen and moulded, and why certain narratives are weighted more in importance than others. In fact, I feel that once students understand the interdisciplinary link that historical fiction provides, the production of a historical fiction novel can be viewed in comparison to historiography, or the writing of history. Students will understand the process and realize that historical fiction as a piece of literary fiction, and history as a piece of historical literature share similar qualities in how they are written, particularly in terms of the plot or narrative that will run throughout the story and weave in other details such as setting and characters.

1.3 Methodology, Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

As to the methodological framework this research paper follows, it is a small scale qualitative research paper. Considering that there was limited options and time for finding research participants and interviewing them, I had to be selective in my research and data collection and choose only those participants whom I felt best answered my research question, whether positively or negatively.

In terms of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, I decided to look into one theoretical framework, and one quasi-conceptual framework. The theoretical framework is post-colonial theory, while the quasi-conceptual framework is that of counter-factual history and counter-factual narratives. I chose post-colonial theory because it really emphasizes looking into the histories of those who have been marginalized and silenced in the grand narratives of history during and after imperial and colonial rule. It focuses on anyone discriminated against under imperialism and colonialism, whether it was for their gender, race, or class. Its general
understanding can also be extended to include any group, person, or voice that has been left out of a grand narrative. Post-colonial theory is also a lens through which literary and historiographical texts can be interpreted and analyzed, which brings the focus and use of historical fiction directly into the English and history classrooms. As a theory and lens, post-colonialism directed me on how to focus on how to justify the inclusion of historical fiction in the classroom, making it a more practical approach to the topic than merely theoretical. As for the quasi-conceptual framework of counter-factual history and counter-factual narratives, I chose them because they bring to light the notion of alternative narratives. These are not narratives that offer an insight into what could have happened differently in history, rather they offer insights into how a current narrative could have been narrated differently, and considering why the version of it that exists is the one that is widely upheld and supported.

1.4 Limitations

The limitations that may have prevented me from carrying out this research paper have changed and varied from when I initially began my research. However, these were the factors I felt would influence and limit how I was able to conduct my research. I wondered primarily as to how many teachers actually used historical fiction within their classrooms, and whether they were using it within their history courses, or English courses. As this research question looked into the interdisciplinary appeal of historical fiction, I was as a researcher open to finding out how it was used in both courses. This flexibility opened more doors for me, in terms of finding teachers, but I still had slim pickings. Yet, while I had initially thought that I may or may not have had to focus on a grade level that had more potential to use historical fiction (either at the intermediate level, or senior level, high-school courses), my participants discussed its use across all grade-levels. Of
course, even though I did not immediately find teachers who were currently using historical fiction, I was open to interviewing those teachers who felt strongly about using or not using historical fiction within their classrooms, as I felt it would help me develop an understanding for their logic and reasoning. Finally, while I was concerned about the availability of the teachers I would chose to interview, it was not a limitation at all. In fact, all my participants were more flexible and accommodating in terms of when and where I could interview them.

1.5 Summary and Overview

As this chapter comes to a close, I would simply like to reiterate my position on the topic of historical fiction, and the question of historical fiction's role in secondary school classrooms. I am researching this topic from the lens of historical fiction's use as an interdisciplinary tool (particularly in English and History courses) to teach literary techniques and rhetorical devices, to teach the importance of multiple narratives, and to help students acquire and develop essential skills such as literary skills, critical thinking skills, oral speaking skills, and other skills and tools that will help them become engaged and active citizens both within their academic lives, and in the 'real' world.

The remaining chapters in this research paper are organized as follows: Chapter Two is a literature review, bringing together relevant existing literature on the topic of historical fiction, literary and historiographical writings, and post-colonial theory and counter-factual narratives as written by educators and researchers in the field. Chapter Three outlines necessary information regarding the data collection and analysis process, addressing topics like qualitative studies, sampling criteria, and ethical concerns of the study. Chapter Four presents the findings in response to the research question and sub-questions, synthesizing the insights of the participants
with the literature review to highlight either convergence or divergence of understandings on the research topic. Finally, Chapter Five details what implications these findings have for the broader research and educational community, and for my professional practice.
Chapter Two – To Read or Not to Read?

“...I prefer to read fiction for research rather than a factual textbook even if the latter is more accurate. I am a story lover.” - Richard Armitage

Introduction

In order to better understand the research that has been conducted, collected, analyzed, and assembled for this Literature Review, it is necessary to recall the research question which this research paper is addressing. The research question as formulated in Chapter 1 is as follows: What is the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary classrooms?

The research within the parameters of this Literature Review has been collected with a dual purpose. Firstly, in a preliminary fashion, to help inform the researcher’s understanding of the research topic, and also in an equally exploratory fashion, to begin answering the research question. Secondly, to assess what has already been written regarding the research topic by experts in the field, and to see whether the researcher (through the Master of Teaching Research Paper) will be able to contribute any new insights and data to this collection.

Of the literature collected, the concepts, theories, and arguments they offer are included below, and will be presented in a series of independent sections and relevant sub-sections as dictated by the overarching topics. These sections and sub-sections are as follows: 1. Topic: Historical Fiction 1.1 Definitions and Genres 1.2 The Case Against Historical Fiction 2. History and Literature 3. Topic: Concepts and Theories: 3.1 Post-Colonial Theory 3.2 Counter-Factual History 4. Summary

The sections and subsections above were all initially selected, and then validated for inclusion because of the varying insights they offered into the topic of historical fiction. In order to

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discuss the place of historical fiction in the classroom one must consider the ways in which
historical fiction as a topic affects and is affected by some of the concepts and theories that also
focus on education; as well as to further explain their connections to both help to inform the
research topic and to help begin to answer the research question.

1. Topic: Historical Fiction

The topic of this research paper, as indicated by the research question, is that of historical
fiction. In particular, the role of historical fiction within secondary school classrooms. Before
beginning to consider this statement as a whole, it is necessary to break it down to its core idea:
that of historical fiction. In researching and reviewing the available literature on 'historical fiction'
much of the literature began with an attempt to define historical fiction, before linking it to any
potential educational or entertainment purpose. Much of this discussion revolved around what
historical fiction is, and conversely what it is not, as well as the liminal space it navigates between
what are considered to be two related yet unrelated disciplines, History and Literature. From here,
the discussion further branches out, as concepts and theories relevant to both disciplines, while
still encompassing historical fiction, and related to education are brought into the fold.

1.1 Definitions and Genres

Of the literature consulted, many different sources attempted to define historical fiction. However, of the varying definitions, two were selected that, when combined, most accurately
define historical fiction in terms similar to that of the researcher. Both definitions were pulled from
monographs concerned with presenting comprehensive lists of legitimate historical fiction pieces
published thus far. The first definition is as follows: “'historical fiction' is defined as fictional works
(mainly novels) set before the middle of the last century, and ones in which the author is writing
from research rather than personal experience” (Johnson, 2005, p. 1). The second definition states: "If the setting is in a time earlier than that with which the reader is familiar, it is historical fiction” (Adamson, 1999, p. xi). The first definition on its own is contentious simply because it disallows fiction that was written during and specifically about a certain historical period, for example, novels by Jane Austen, social condition novels from the Victorian era, or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Johnson argues that novels such as these, particularly Austen and Fitzgerald's, are not historical fiction because then, by the same token, any book written during and contemporary to a certain time period can and will become historical fiction (2005, p. 1).

However, it seems that the distinction here is also between what is considered historical fiction, and what is considered literature. Normally, Austen and Fitzgerald's novels are studied in English classes through a literary lens, with the historical nature of the novels either appearing as an introductory preface to situate the plot or an explanatory footnote within the novels. This distinction speaks again to the liminal nature of historical fiction, and how it can be used to bridge the disciplines of history and Literature, which is a notion that will be discussed later within this Literature Review.

Coming back to the definition of historical literature, though, the two definitions provided above work better collaboratively, than independently, because each specifies an aspect that is integral to good historical fiction. Firstly, that the author of a piece of historical fiction should have a strong grasp of the history of the period the piece is discussing, with an emphasis on attaining this expertise through research; and secondly, that the work should be about a time period that, while physically inaccessible to the reader, is temporarily made accessible through engagement with the written word. When combined, these two definitions say that historical fiction should
make its emphasis historical accuracy with an ability to draw the reader in to a different historical period. If one abides with the general saying that entertainment (whether written, oral, or visual) is a commentary on the period within which it was created, then the suggestions that historical fiction can only be historical if written after that period are rendered moot. Of course, this perspective does not vouch for the quality of the work in question, merely its potential to be a form of historical fiction.

Having established a working definition of historical fiction, it is now possible to consider the nature of historical fiction and the genres it can and does associate with. These are important considerations as they once again help to attest to historical fiction's potential to be used across the history and Literature disciplines. As the name and definition suggests, historical fiction is about narrating the story of the past. Another way to understand what historical fiction is, is to understand what it is not. Historical fiction is not a textbook. It does not require its reader to “treat the study of history as a science,” or force the reader to act as an “outsider, looking in” so that they can “[offer] objective analysis ... to apply to events” (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343). Rather, historical fiction sees its role in presenting history as a synthesis, by which the reader is involved in an experience (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343). Indeed, historical fiction allows readers to “immerse themselves in the day-to-day lives and mindsets of people who lived in earlier eras” (Johnson, 2005, p. 5), and this immersion relies heavily on the ability of the historical fiction to be simultaneously entertaining and accurate. A printed world wherein the reader is “seduced into believing that the historical world an author creates is real” (Johnson, 2005, p. 5), precisely because the world has achieved a level of authenticity (as required by the definition of historical fiction) and appeal through its story.
This authenticity and appeal is presented and accessed by the author and reader through myriad different ways. These methods are what allow historical fiction to engage its readers' emotions, and thereby lend itself to the intensely emotional representation of history (again, different from the cut and dry version presented in a textbook). Some of these “appeal factors” that lure readers in are as follows: the time period, geographic setting, amount and type of historical content, level of realism, type of character (royalty, merchants, peasants), and subject and theme (colonialism, gender relations, role of religion) (Johnson, 2005, p. 6-8). Of course, it is readily apparent that all of these appeal factors are also related to the ways in which history is also divided and studied. However, there are also those appeal factors that speak more to the literary nature of historical fiction, factors such as: pacing, characterization (stereotypes or multifaceted), dialogue (modern colloquial or formal), and language (Johnson, 2005, p. 7-9). These appeal factors are heavily influenced by the specific or multiple blend of genres that are often appended to historical fiction. These include, but are not limited to “mystery, romance, fantasy, thrillers and suspense” (Johnson, 2005, p. 4). The flexibility of historical fiction to adapt and combine various genres along side its own demands and requirements for historical authenticity and themes is yet another reason why it is a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of historical fiction (which is the next section). However, these very same appeal factors, as well as historical fiction's emphasis on gradually entwining history into the story (Johnson, 2005, p. 5) is also seen as legitimizing arguments against historical fiction.

1.2 The Case Against Historical Fiction

Of the numerous articles lauding historical fiction and its potential uses in the classroom, there was also a singular article denouncing the very same uses of historical fiction, and it is only
fair to include a counter-argument. Author Toby Litt describes historical fiction as a “contract in bad-faith” (2008, p. 111) that is entered into between the author and reader both when the former begins to produce his piece, and again when it is consumed by the latter. The point of contention here is, in Litt's assumption, historical fiction's tendency to exploit the speculative nature of the past, while history, in a very scientific manner, asserts the truth no matter how dull (2008, p. 112). He emphasizes his argument by pointedly asking which history teacher one would trust to teach her child: one who knew nothing about a period but what he had learned through a historical fiction novel, or one who had read actual history textbooks? (2008, p. 112). However, Litt seems to be conflating the notion of using historical fiction as textbooks, rather than supplements to primary documents, history textbooks, and the teacher's lesson plans. The primary objection here is to historical fiction being “neither historical nor fictional” (2008, p. 113). In Litt's opinion, historical fiction is an oxymoron since the first part of it denotes the “element of facticity” or “what was,” while the latter part denotes “transcendence” or “what might have been of the world” (2008, p. 113). It is this constant tenuous struggle between fact and fiction, historical fact and assumption that Litt finds to be the undoing of historical fiction, and its inability to justify itself as a viable source for learning history. However, it is precisely this fallacy of historical fiction (as Litt would claim) that is actually its greatest strength. As has been stated and is further explored in the section below, historical fiction's literary nature, and its ability to absorb the reader into its story while still imparting historical facts is what makes it so accessible, and a potential resource for both improving and enriching students' understanding of history.

2. History and Literature

In Chapter 1 of this research paper, I highlighted that since I come from both a literary and
history educational background, I wanted to address the research topic and question from an interdisciplinary perspective. Whether that meant looking at historical fiction through a literary lens, or looking at literary texts through a historical lens, the focus was on interdisciplinary connections. Therefore, it was a (pleasant) surprise to find that there was already literature present on the concept of looking at historical fiction through a literary lens. The literature in this interdisciplinary area comes from both printed monographs and scholarly articles from online journals. In fact, this notion of connecting historical fiction to its literary equivalent stems directly from the two disciplines: firstly, through the very literary process of writing history, known as historiography, and secondly, from the literary novel's historical origins and attachment to the discipline of history.

Many of the interdisciplinary connections between history and literature stem from historical fiction's liminal role of being neither history nor fiction (Litt, 2008, p. 113), from the eighteenth century literary novelist's implicit insistence that their novels be “taken as authentic histories” that provide “a needed supplement to history” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 1), as well as from questions such as: “Is history fiction?” and conversely, “Is fiction history?” (Teo, 2011, p. 312). As Zimmerman notes in his monograph, early novels (like Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*) evoked a sense of the historiographical issue of “narration ... rooted in a narrator and a narrative method and not in an ineluctable series of past events that somehow make their appearance in the narrative” (1996, p. 2). Having read Richardson's *Pamela* during a course on the 'Early Modern Novel in Context' in my undergrad career, I agree with this comparison – there was much intense discussion surrounding how Pamela narrated and wrote her story. More often than not, these early novels made problematic the role of a narrative voice both within the novel (and by
extension in historical narratives) by introducing the overarching notion of an editor who 
objectively and impartially addresses the narrative put forth by an author, acting as the judge to 
the author's position as the Crown. These novels addressed the issues of observation over 
experience in narratives, and history, historically, as a discipline was forced to “confront the 
problem ... that valorized witnessing and distrusted testimony” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 3). 
Connections can be made here to the analytical nature of textbooks, as opposed to the 
questionable synthetic nature of historical fiction (as Litt would see it). Yet, there are those who 
would say that in comparing the manner in which ancient and modern history were and are 
written, the former is worthy of preference because of the “greater emotive power of the 
historians” as they recall history (as cited in Zimmerman, 1996, p. 22), while the latter historians do 
not express similar emotions because they are too busy playing the critic, whose primary duty is to 
compose logical deductions and calculation of probabilities (as cited in Zimmerman, 1996, p. 22- 
23).

Indeed, one could argue that those who continue to see history as an “'objective', 
'scientific' or 'verifiably true' rendering of the past” are, in short, deluding themselves (Teo, 2011, p. 
301). Such advocates for the empirical nature of history will find that history simply is not empirical 
because of its literary nature (Teo, 2011, p. 301). Indeed, what follows next is an explanation of the 
age old saying that history can be broken down and understood as being 'his story' because of its 
inherent dependance on sources that are inevitably fallible if one sets out to prove their complete 
and utter authenticity and veracity. Instead, historians rely on a past that is fragmentary in its 
narratives and imperfectly remembered in sources, which they then transform (or plot) into a 
coherent narrative that is nevertheless influenced by their own biases and ideological purposes.
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(Teo, 2011, p. 301). Therefore, to connect these conclusions to the interdisciplinary nature of literature and history, one will find that “fiction and history are both narratives of the past,” wherein the former is “quasi-historical” and the latter is “quasi-fictional” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 5). These notions essentially mean that history, whether from the lens of historical fiction or not, is inevitably similar to fiction in the way it is written by the historian. Both historians and authors choose to narrate a certain plot that focuses primarily on a certain aspect of a story (character, setting, themes) while integrating the other aspects to a lesser, secondary degree. In order to tell that story however, whether of a person, a place, or a thing, they inevitably must pick and choose what details adhere to and support the overarching topic, and what details, while relevant, must be left out because they divert attention from the overarching topic. These are important considerations, and ones that will be addressed when speaking of counter-factual history.

The view of history and literature being inextricably linked as disciplines is further emphasized through historical fiction's ability to blend the worlds of history and fiction. It does this in two ways, the first being how readers are encouraged to receive and interact with historical fiction. They are not encouraged to take an “efferent” stance, but rather an “aesthetic” stance (Nawrot, 1996, p. 344). The former term denotes reading historical fiction for the sake of gaining information, while the latter term denotes reading historical fiction for the sake of the story (Nawrot, 1996, p. 344). These terms are used to ensure that readers understand that historical fiction is literature that is historically focused, so it should be accessed as one would access any other form of literature (Nawrot, 1996, p. 344). This distinction between approaches is necessary because to read historical fiction for its facts discards the entire premise of historical fiction, one might as well read a history textbook instead. The second method is how historical fiction
navigates the two disciplinary worlds by its broad, impersonal focus on society at large, and it's narrow, personal focus on the individual. In fact, if one takes the following statement as an extended metaphor for the benefits of studying historical fiction, studying narrative fiction (similar to the eighteenth century novels listed above) alongside history is said to have a “meritorious rationale” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 12). When combined, narrative fiction and history both “emplot events” and “give them a narrative structure that orders and emphasizes narrated details in the interests of a larger conceptual unity” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 12), whereby both pieces (literary and historical) can be analyzed and understood in a similar manner, particularly when considering cause and effect scenarios (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 12).

Historical fiction works to synthesize historical events by making the human players (or characters) integral to an event the object, rather than vice-versa, which allows for an effect on literature that is considered to be of immense value (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343). This effect builds on the understanding of cause and effect, which allows readers to then extrapolate and consider the “human consequences of events” and the “implications of human behaviour” (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343). Indeed, if works of literature are meant to be a commentary on the societies that they represent then, by focusing that commentary instead on a historical society, historical fiction allows readers to engage and think critically with the text. They submerge themselves into the lives of characters living in a past society vastly (or generally) different from their own, and are therefore forced to consider the varying decisions and conflicting perspectives those characters present, whether the difference lies with the reader or the society that informs the reader.

Furthermore, in keeping with cause and effect, readers are able to see how the past influences the present, which influences the future (Nawrot, 1996, p. 344). The readers no longer look at
historical events as mere dominoes, with one event setting off the other without any apparent human action, but begin to consider and analyze how it is human interactions and decisions that influence historical events, and not vice versa. Thus, historical fiction allows for the reader to critically think about and make connections with historical societies, events, and figures while reading, helping them to understand that no moment occurs in isolation, as history is often studied, but rather is part of a continuous overarching narrative, no matter how temporal it may seem within a history class or even within a historical novel.

3. Topic: Concepts and Theories

Precisely because history and literature are linked through the manner in which they are written, and how this process and format informs and influences historical fiction, it only makes sense that historical fiction be understood and analyzed by the very same interdisciplinary concepts and theories that can be used to understand history and literature. The two concepts and theories are as follows: Post-Colonialism or Post-Colonial Theory, and Counter-Factual History. These two concepts and theories have been introduced for the following reasons: post-colonialism refers to studying the narratives of people who have formerly been under imperial and/or colonial rule, and have a post-colonial legacy left to share. Canada, before gaining its independence, was once a colony. Assessing Canadian history and literature through the lens of post-colonialism addresses not only Canada's traditional historical narrative, but also the narratives of those who have been silenced and marginalized within Canada's traditional historical narrative. As for Counter-Factual history, the focus is not so much on the question of 'what if this event had happened instead of this event?' but more 'what if this narrative had been the starting point for this event instead of this narrative?' This change of phrasing in the question explicitly states that
there are multiple narratives, and also implicitly applies that these narratives do not necessarily come from the traditional sources, but can come from those who have been silenced or marginalized. Again, focusing on the idea that there multiple ways to answer the question of 'what if?' but in a way that will ask 'what if this source had not been our primary source for this event?'

Apart from the primary concepts and theories, an additional section on the use of literary lenses and curriculum is included to reflect what

3.1 Post-Colonialism and Post-Colonial Theory

In researching about post-colonialism, the primary sources were online articles, and a monograph. As stated above, post-colonialism refers to studying the narratives of people who have formerly been under imperial and/or colonial rule, and have a post-colonial legacy left to share. Canada, before gaining its independence, was once a colony. Assessing Canadian history and literature through the lens of post-colonialism addresses not only Canada's traditional historical narrative, but also the narratives of those who have been silenced and marginalized within Canada's traditional historical narrative.

The questions asked regarding post-colonial theory are along the lines of: why does it unsettle people, and what does it hope to achieve? (Young, 2012, p. 19-20). The answer combines both questions, stating that post-colonial theory unsettles people (particularly certain academics who no longer what to discuss it) because it makes statements regarding the continued presence of poverty, inequality, exploitation, and lack of expression, all while working as a political project to “refashion the world from below” (Young, 2012, p. 19-20). This bottoms-up view of the world is to primarily “turn the power structures of the world upside down” and “reconstruct Western knowledge formations” (Young, 2012, p. 20). This aim of post-colonialism speaks strongly to what
historical fiction can, and sometimes does achieve. Historical fiction, by humanizing history through its focus on the human influence on historical events (as discussed above) allows the voices to be heard of those members of society who are often either silenced or marginalized by and within the overarching, traditional historical narrative. Post-colonial theory is strong in its commitment to an interrelated and heterogeneous collection of perspectives, concepts, and practices to inform its notions of “traditions of resistance” to imperialism and colonialism (Young, 2012, p. 20). Therefore, in using post-colonial theory in historical fiction and literature, whether as a lens projecting outward or allowing internal insights, one is able to hear the voices of the subaltern (Young, 2012, p. 23), whether they are the subaltern due to social, political, economic, and/or religious factors is not of primary importance, rather they are subaltern precisely because their story has been left out of the traditional historical narrative.

It makes sense to see why post-colonial theory can and is unsettling to some, as it forces those who interact with its findings (the voices of the isolated and marginalized) to critically engage with alternative narratives and perspectives of what are traditional, and probably uncontested versions of history. There is a definite sense of having to come to terms with and acknowledging the narratives these people present, which can be an intense experience, particularly in attempting to integrate their narratives into the traditional narratives. Definitely when speaking about notions of inclusivity within Canadian literature (historical or otherwise) there are those historians who would commit solely to a “traditional political and military history” and “a unifying historical narrative” (Wyile, 2007, p. 1), and others who would speak with scepticism about such “monolithic narratives” and instead argue for a more “pluralistic social history” (Wyile, 2007, p. 2). Indeed, these latter historians, in writing Canadian literature “focus on
public history” that is accessible within the unifying narrative of Canadian history, but with a perspective that explicitly involves and exposes “elements such as class, race, ethnicity, gender” and of course “post-colonial considerations” (Wyile, 2007, p. 4). In incorporating these elements alongside post-colonial considerations, these Canadian authors and historians have managed to create a dialogue that weaves in the narrative voices of those “whom the historical record has tended to exclude – women, the working class, and racial(ized) minorities” (Wyile, 2007, p. 4). Canadian history further factors into discussions about post-colonial theory in more than just this one way, as will be discussed.

Overall, the experiences of these silent, marginalized, subaltern people is slowly becoming one of historical agency as they shift from being the invisible to the visible (Young, 2012, p. 23). This shift is emerging from the understanding that the traditional narrative of history thus far, that of European expansion (Young, 2012, p. 23), is no longer the currency of the realm today. Histories of the world, and world literature, are slowly, and belatedly in Young’s opinion, freeing themselves from the Eurocentric paradigms that once contained them (2012, p. 23). Indeed, even within Canadian literature, there is an understanding that while the writers of European heritage dominate Canadian historical fiction, there is also a niche opening up for Canadian writers who are Native Canadians, or of Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, or African heritage (Wyile, 2007, p. 4). Similar to the shift in world literature, this shift in Canadian literature is driven by the recent acceptance into the literary scene and dominant narratives, again turning away from the narratives that are “preoccupied with the activities of white, upper-class English males” (Wyile, 2007, p. 12), and looking instead toward more diverse, inclusive narratives.

Overall, literature and historical fiction are a strong initial platform for the minorities who
have been silenced, marginalized, and made invisible to have their voice heard and become part of the unifying narrative and thus visible. Indeed, historical fiction offers a “multiplicity of viewpoints” that challenge the “singular, authoritative view of the past” by turning history into a complex encounter; one in which “multiple perspectives” come together with the “social, political, economic, and emotional texture of an era” (Wiyel, 2007, 18) to create a history that provokes dialogue, and subverts notions of what are acceptable and unacceptable historical narratives.

3.2 Counter-Factual History

Continuing from the last point above about acceptable and unacceptable historical narratives, one will find this division is one of the key understandings that counter-factual history attempts to address. To reiterate, the discussion here will not be so much about the question of 'what if this event had happened instead of this event?' but more 'what if this narrative had been the starting point for this event instead of this narrative?' (Mordhorst, 2008, p. 10) This change of phrasing in the question explicitly states that there are multiple narratives, and also implicitly implies that these narratives do not necessarily come from the traditional sources, but can come from those who have been silenced or marginalized. Again, focusing on the idea that there multiple ways to answer the question of 'what if?' but in a way that will ask 'what if this source had not been our primary source for this event?'

Of course, before discussing these ideas, it is necessary to define exactly what is counter-factual history. Counter-factual history, as suggested, looks at the “‘what if’ statement about the past” (Lebow, 2004, p. 26). The process involves “mutating” an event from the historical record to see if historians could make a “case for the present being in some way different” (Lebow, 2004, p.
The distinction between wildly speculating scenarios that could have gone differently, otherwise known as playing “parlor games” by certain historians (Lebow, 2004, p. 27), and good counter-factual history is that the latter teases out the unspoken assumptions “on which historical interpretations rest” (Lebow, 2004, p. 26). Counter-factual histories can also aid historians in analyzing and evaluating historical events by asking questions that look at the pros and cons of certain developments (Lebow, 2004, p. 26). However, the most important point to be made about counter-factual history is that it can be either good or bad, depending on whether it is relying on fact or imagination (Bunzl, 2004, p. 845). If it is good counter-factual history, then it is grounded in its reasoning, and if it is bad counter-factual history, then it is merely “unconstrained imagination” (Bunzl, 2004, p. 845). The key here is to address the plausibility of a counter-factual history – it seems that the more logical and plausible an argument for a counter-factual history is (based on evidence), the more likely it is to be considered good (Bunzl, 2004, p. 845).

Counter-factual history is also connected to historical fiction as both inform and are informed by literature. The latter is a hybrid genre, blurring the lines between fiction and reality, while the former is history being overwritten by an alternative version (Singles, 2011, p. 184). What is fascinating about the two forms is that each understands that history is bound by facts, and yet both forms play on the concept of facts by focusing instead on historiography, and how the writing about history is informed by the facts that are selected and then plotted. In looking at counter-factual history, it can sometimes also be the little events, or 'lesser' characters that count. It is here that its connection to historical fiction is made more explicit, because both forms attempt to “investigate why some narratives attain the status of the truth about the past and others are never told” (Mordhorst, 2008, p. 6). This investigation stems from a deliberate effort to
disprove traditional historical understandings that history writes itself; rather, historians participating in creating counter-factual history and narratives “highlight that historians are the creators of the narratives” (Mordhorst, 2008, p. 9) – an action and sentiment that hearkens back to the early literary novel's discussions surrounding the role of the narrator within a narrative. Additionally, the driving force behind counter-factual history and narratives is one of a shift in understanding from “history as reconstruction of the past to history as construction of a memory on behalf of the past” (Mordhorst, 2008, p. 10). This shift is profound because it emphasizes again that history will never be repeated or recreated in its exact entirety, nor will anyone ever witness it again to create a completely accurate representation of the past. History is and always will be a collection of impressions with few guarantees of absolute certainty. More than anything, this shift in thinking promotes the approach of alternative and multiple narratives as presented in historical fiction, since everyone maintains different perceptions, impressions, and memories of history.

### 3.3 Literary Lenses and Curriculum

The ability to read historical fiction through the lens of post-colonial theory or counter-factual history and narratives demonstrates the genre's flexibility in terms of subject matter (multiple and alternative narratives), and openness to diverse perspectives and interpretations. It also raises the possibility of being able to read traditional historiographical, and canonical literary texts through the same and other similar lenses. Using both historical fiction and the lenses alongside traditional and canonical literature not only helps to limit the “cultural production” of the “dominant group” via its “official narratives,” but also encourages “historical thinking” to “introduce other narratives that collide with the traditional history curriculum” (Salinas, 2012, p. 18), and by extension, English curriculum. Furthermore, the combined use of traditional sources,
Coaxing out and combining all these different sources and means of interpretation can seem like a difficult and convoluted process on its own, however, the use of literary lenses as a deliberate means to encourage various interpretations is a strong first step-forward. This notion stems directly from the question “can the lenses of literary theory be fruitfully applied to nonfiction as well as fiction?” and it’s straightforward response: “of course they can” (Appleman, 2014, p. Xii). Apart from post-colonialism and counter-factual history and narratives as frameworks, theories, and lenses from which to interpret traditional historical and canonical literary texts, there is also deconstruction theory (similar to post-modernism or post-structuralism), and new historicism. As explained by Deborah Appleman, the former theory and lens, similar to post-colonialism, seeks to challenge “the fixed meanings that have been assigned to canonical texts” (2014, p. 112) asserting that “texts reveal more than their authors are aware of” (2014, p. 113) since “meaning is a textual construction” (2014, p. 112) allowing for “plural responses” (2014, p. 118) when analyzing and interpreting fictional and non-fictional texts. This theory and lens speaks to the notion that there is no one authoritative and official version that only allows for one interpretation of history, but rather there is always an opening for multiple readings. New
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Historicism builds off this idea of multiple readings and plural responses, and links itself to the counter-factual history and narratives theory. The lens suggests providing “a different set of final causes” (Appleman, 2014, p. 107), or what can be interpreted as a different set of reasons for why a chosen historical or literary text is being read and analyzed. The lens requires that one constantly asks ‘why’ they are reading something, and to inform what purpose. Furthermore, use the lens explicitly addresses the interdisciplinary nature of historical and literary texts, stating that “works of literature [are] representations of historical events, especially when the literary works in question featured historical settings and situations” (Appleman, 2014, p. 99). As a result of this understanding, the “possibility of simultaneous and competing narratives is raised” (Appleman, 2014, p. 103), again emphasizing the changing nature of historical and literary interpretation of traditional narratives and canons.

Overall, no matter which of the above theories and lenses one uses to generate an understanding of the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool, they all address the notion of multiple and alternative narratives alongside the traditional historical texts and literary canons, and to understand this diversity is to realize that there is no one way of telling a story. This notion is only further emphasized when looking at the links between historiography and literature.

4. Summary

The sources from various monographs and online journal articles as collected, assembled, and analyzed in this literature review were brought together with the purpose of helping me see what literature and research had already been conducted regarding the research topic. The literature review also served the purpose of helping me achieve a preliminary understanding of the research topic, and an equally exploratory answer to the research question beyond my own
understandings and later on, those of my research participants. There is a good amount of literature available regarding my topic, as well as conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Overall, as was the intended purpose, I gained an understanding of existing ideas regarding my research topic in order to better prepare myself for the new insights my participants would add to the literature.

*
Chapter 3 – Method to the Madness

“Data! data! data! I can't make bricks without clay.” - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Introduction

This chapter comprises the third section of the Master of Teaching Research Paper (MTRP). It follows the previous two chapters which were dedicated to the introduction of the research topic and question, as well as its significance, and a review of the existing literature both related to the topic and theoretical frameworks for analysis. This chapter outlines the methodology, or ways in which I have collected and then analyzed data relevant to the research topic. It was the first step of converting the theoretical concepts of the previous two chapters into the practical data that will answer the research question and sub-questions.

To reiterate, the research topic is historical fiction, and the question is: what is the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms? In order to answer this question, the subsequent methodological processes will be adhered to and followed, and are further explained within the parameters of this chapter. These methodological processes are as follows: introducing and justifying the research approach and procedures, particularization of the instruments of data collection, discussing who the participants are alongside brief biographies of those selected, and how they were recruited (sampling criteria, and recruitment) and any ethical considerations that were taken into account. Once the aforementioned information has been detailed, the next methodological process addresses the analysis of the collected data, and finally the strengths and limitations of this methodology, as no process is infallible. The chapter concludes with a brief summary restating the key ideas.

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1. Research Approach and Procedures

The research and data conducted, collected, and analyzed for this MTRP fall within the relatively flexible parameters of a small-scale qualitative study, involving semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers. In order to best explain what a qualitative study is, it is helpful to state what it is not: a collection of statistics, or hard facts (such as yes, 55% of students surveyed find the subject of History to be horridly boring, and 35% of teachers asked agree that historical fiction is not a useful tool in secondary school classrooms). Such a study would instead be considered quantitative, as its first aim is to extract unambiguous facts that can be utilized quite separately from the individuals who provided the data in the first place. This diminishing of the individuality of the persons involved in the study is precisely what separates a qualitative study from a quantitative study.

Indeed, a qualitative study both values and revels in the experiences of both the researcher and the research participants, not just the isolated data that can be acquired by the former from the latter. In doing so, a qualitative study seeks to interpret the data by “situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the [researcher]” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). In addition, it emphasizes the “reflexivity” or voice and position of the researcher within and in relation to the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 45), as well as the “multiple perspectives ... and diverse views” that are accessible thanks to the differing meanings that participants give to the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Furthermore, a qualitative study focuses on acquiring a “holistic account” of the research, whereby it seeks to discover the “larger picture” by focusing on the interplay of factors, as opposed to the “cause-and-effect relationship among factors” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47), so that all who access the study are made aware of its role in the overall research diaspora, and not just as an
All of the aforementioned attributes of a qualitative study are exactly mirrored in what my MTRP is seeking to answer. Similar to how a qualitative study contextually situates the researcher, so too do history teachers seek to contextually place the narratives they offer to their students, whether historically or currently. Also, the significance of the research question (what is the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms?) is precisely to see how multiple perspectives and narratives may be used to tell the history of a single or series of events, just as a qualitative study relies on the narratives of its participants, not just the researcher’s, to offer insight into and an interpretation of the topic. Moreover, just as a qualitative study uses an holistic approach to capture the bigger picture, I too chose the topic of historical fiction to address the double focus on personalized and grand narratives, and how the former is able to mesh with and enhance the latter. Finally, it will be the contextualization of the interviews with relevant secondary school teachers alongside the literature review that will bring this research out of isolation and into the greater diaspora of similar research.

2. Instruments of Data Collection

Since this research paper was modelled on the requirements of a small-scale qualitative study, the primary manner of attaining relevant data was through the purposeful sampling of participants who met the sampling criteria, and were willing to share their experiences and insights in regards to the research problem. The only way to attain these insights was by conducting one-time interviews with the chosen research participants. These interviews followed the data collection process as outlined by John Creswell. Of the nine or so steps outlined by Creswell, the most relevant to my data collection process were the following: using a consent
form, identifying interviewees, type of interview, and recording procedures, and finally deciding on research questions (Creswell, 2013, p. 163-166).

The use of a consent form was to meet ethical guidelines for this study, and is discussed further under the ethical review procedures section – its purpose was essentially to ensure participants were aware of their rights as they participated in the study. As discussed later in the chapter too, I utilized purposeful sampling to identify and recruit those participant who best fit my sampling criteria. As for type of interview, I chose “one-on-one interviewing” (Creswell, 2013, p. 164) with all my participants in a location of their choice to ensure their comfort. With regards to recording procedures, I relied on my smartphone's voice-recorder as I did not have immediate access to any other audio-recording technology. However, I did not encounter any problems, and was able to hear everything my participants said clearly (and even what other people were saying in the background). Finally, for the research questions, I chose questions that were “open-ended, general, and focused on understanding [my] central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 163). These types of questions worked best for me because, again, my research question was open-ended as well – I wanted to find out what my participants felt about the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool, and what insights they had to offer on the topic based on their experiences. I was not looking for circumscribed answers, but rather honest insights that would inform me to at least three Ontario teachers' opinions regarding the research question.

3. Participants:

This section comprises the sampling criteria used to select participants, the sampling procedure used in their recruitment, and finally, brief biographies of the participants selected.
3.1 Sampling Criteria

The participants of this research study were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. The participant should be an experienced teacher with approximately 5 years of teaching experience.

2. The participants should have interdisciplinary backgrounds and/or experience, particularly in the disciplines of English and History.

3. Teachers who have experience teaching in predominantly multicultural classrooms.

4. Teachers who have personal or professional experience with historical fiction.

I sought to interview secondary school teachers who had been actively teaching in the field for at least 5 years. I have assigned this numerical value, because I feel 5 years is enough time to become accustomed to the routines of teaching, and moving away from being a novice, to becoming confident enough in one's abilities, to start experimenting, and actualizing one's own independent manner of teaching. Furthermore, I feel more confident in asking an established teacher to speak to the response of students to experimentation in the classroom (such as using historical fiction in the classroom), as opposed to a novice in the field (such as myself) who is still becoming accustomed to the general routine. Granted, time alone cannot dictate whether any experience is good or bad, yet it can still provide an inventory against which a teacher with years of experience can compare and cross-examine, unlike a novice who will only have a handful of experiences from which to draw.

I also specifically sought teachers with interdisciplinary backgrounds or experience, in particular with History and English. If they had experience in, or taught both, it was most ideal. However, if they were immersed in either discipline, but with general or specialized experience in
the Humanities (Anthropology, World Languages), their insight was still useful. My research question deliberately does not identify which kind of classroom (in terms of subject orientation) I would like to see historical fiction used in, simply because I feel it is an interdisciplinary tool. My ideal teachers to interview were those in both or either of the History and English disciplines as these are my chosen teaching subjects, as well as the subjects in which I would like to implement the use of historical fiction. More particularly, I wanted to see what similar or differing opinions teachers have on the research topic, and what I can learn from these variances.

Also, I wanted those teachers to participate who for most, if not all of their career, have been teaching in classes that feature students from multicultural backgrounds. This criteria was chosen under the assumption that teachers with multicultural classrooms would work to incorporate the varying experiences and knowledge bases of the students into the course work. This inclusion mirrors the potential use of historical fiction in classrooms, which is to see how multiple or alternative narratives can be used to enhance or supplement traditional narratives. Essentially, this means finding a way to include the experiences of multicultural students who may not necessarily identify with the Canadian historical narrative or identity. However, I was willing to compromise on this criteria: had I found teachers who had experience with a more unilateral or ethnically exclusive group of students, it would have been interesting to ask them how, why, and if they would include multiple alternative narratives alongside the traditional Canadian historical narrative. Again, this compromise is under the assumption that teachers in unilateral classrooms either do not feel the need to incorporate multiple or alternative narratives since the traditional narrative is accepted without challenge, or because they feel it necessary to share the experiences of Canadians who do not belong to same the ethno-cultural group as the students.
Lastly, I wanted to have those teachers participate who have had some experience with historical fiction whether personally (leisure reading) or professionally (use in the classroom). This experience built a necessary platform from which the teachers could extrapolate ideas regarding historical fiction. It would not have been ideal to interview teachers who had a vague or non-understanding about historical fiction, as my goal was first and foremost to establish what experienced teachers have to say regarding the research topic and question, and perhaps then branch to how the topic may be broached to teachers unfamiliar with or inexperienced in the historical fiction genre.

3.2 Sampling Procedures and Recruitment

The sampling procedure and recruitment process for this research study was fairly straightforward. As a pre-service teacher who has had the opportunity of undergoing practicum placements at various secondary schools as part of the Master of Teaching program, as well as volunteering in secondary classrooms while building up my experience credentials, I have managed to acquire and maintain a decent professional network. I relied upon these network connections in order to find suitable teachers as participants for this study. These teachers were invited to the study via email, and were informed of the research topic and question, as well as the sampling criteria for the study. They also received the consent form (Appendix A). Since I relied on my professional networks to recruit participants, I was already generally aware of which teachers would or would not meet my sampling criteria, hence I participated in what is known as “purposeful sampling” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Purposeful sampling entails selecting “individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Thus, because I knew
there were teachers in my professional network who had experience with historical fiction (professionally or personally) and who met the sampling criteria, I purposefully sought them out to participate in my research study. Purposeful sampling was useful not only in selecting my participants, but also in capitalizing on the limited time I had to recruit participants.

3.3 Participant Bios

1. Marian

Marian has 12 years of experience teaching in Ontario classrooms. She has taught English at all secondary grade-levels for most of her career thus far, and has only recently started teaching the Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology course to both university and college bound students. She has also recently started teaching Grade 10 Canadian History at the academic level. Marian answered the interview protocol designed for English teachers (Appendix B1).

2. Nancy

Nancy is a long-term occasional (LTO) teacher who has five years of experience teaching in Ontario classrooms. She is qualified to teach English, History, Special Ed, ESL, and e-Learning, but has only taught English thus far. She is also the Literacy lead at her school. Nancy answered the interview protocol designed for English teachers (Appendix B1).

3. Evelyn

Evelyn has 11 years of experience teaching in Ontario classrooms. She is qualified to teach French and History, and is currently teaching French. However, she has taught History for the majority of her teaching career thus far. She has also taught Civics,

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6 All participants have been assigned pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity.
4. Data Analysis

Upon completion of my interviews, or data collection, I initiated the series of steps that would inform my analysis of the data. To begin, I began by transcribing just my first interview, which was with Marian. This interview was the one with which, both coincidentally and conveniently, the other two interviews connected and shared similar insights – more so than with each other. Upon completing my transcription, I read through the interview three times. The first time I read through it was while re-listening to the audio-recording to see if I could notice where oral emphasis on words and phrases had not translated into my transcription. My second reading of the interview involved highlighting and bracketing key words and phrases that I felt began to get answer my research question and sub-questions directly. My final reading of the transcription was more to delete the parts of the interview that had not been highlighted and bracketed.

This final step condensed about ten pages of full transcription into approximately four pages of key words and phrases. I was beginning to see the transition of my interviews from being mere data to actual research findings. I went over these key words and phrases more minutely, hoping to condense them even further into 'codes'. To clarify, a “code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2008, p. 3) – basically, it removes superfluous words to get at the essence of an idea. This process resulted in a collection of 25 codes. Now that the key words and phrases had been condensed to their most narrow meaning, they had to be categorized into a broader collection of themes. The themes
would function as umbrella terms under which the codes would fit. The 25 codes were sorted under the following seven themes: interdisciplinary approach, frameworks/theoretical approaches, expectations, power, challenges/limitations, student skills, and teacher skills. Considering my research question sought answers about the potential role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in classrooms, it made sense that most of my codes would fit under the themes of interdisciplinary approach, and challenges/limitations.

I repeated the above process twice more with regard to my final two interviews. However, the coding and thematic sorting process was much more simplified considering I had already established which themes I would use, and only had to find the codes to fit. When it came to finally writing my researching findings (the next chapter), I printed, cut up, colour-coded, and paper-clipped together all the relevant keywords and phrases from each participant based on their relevant theme. These themes reflected the one-step forward and one-step backward process between theory and practical application that has been the entire basis of this research paper. Simply put, they reflected exactly what my participants' insights added to my literature review.

5. Ethical Review Procedures

In order to ensure that my research study was ethically sound in principle and practice, there were certain ethical review procedures to which I adhered. In particular, all participants were provided with a consent form (Appendix A) in which their rights of participation were outlined. These rights included the following: the participants were able to choose the time and location of the interview to ensure their comfort; the participants had the right to anonymity and were assigned pseudonyms, as well as having any identifying data removed from the study. The participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time after giving consent to
participate, and the right to decline answering any specific question. In order to avoid surprising
my participants during the actual interview, once they signed the letter of consent, I immediately
sent them the interview protocol so they could familiarize themselves with the questions.

Perhaps, most importantly, I ensured that the participants were aware that their decision
to take part in the study was completely voluntary, and under no circumstances were they to feel
obliged or coerced in to doing so. Participants were also assured of the security of all data
provided, which was enforced by having the data saved in a password-protected file folder that
was stored on a password-protected computer. Furthermore, participants were informed that the
audio-recording of their interviews would be destroyed after the five year period outlined in the
letter of consent. There were no perceived risks or benefits of the study to the participants,
however I encouraged their participation by stating that sharing their knowledge of, and
experience with historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool with the educational research diaspora
was a long term benefit to any who might happen upon the study.

Overall, the participants were teachers in secondary schools who met my sampling criteria,
and voluntarily consented to participate in the study with a clear understanding of both the
participant rights outlined in the letter of consent, and the purpose of the research study.

6. Methodological Limitations and Strengths

As with any research approach, there are strengths and limitations that both commend and
detract from the study. The greatest limitation for this study is not so much the approach itself,
but rather the time constraints that are borne of the demands of the Master of Teaching program.
The primary limitation that arises because of the time constrictions is: the inability to meet for a
second interview. However, the limitation is not so great that it cannot be remedied. A second
interview would have been interesting to take with the participants if only to see whether or not they would change their answers to certain questions given more time to think about their response, or if I had any follow-up questions and/or comments that arose from the first interview. However, I remedied this issue by sending the questions to my participants beforehand, so they could begin to mentally compose their answers. Also, writing transcripts of each new interview would not be feasible within the time-frame. As for secondary questions, I had to ensure that my questions were thorough and all-encompassing from the start, so I did not feel the need for a second interview anyway.

The primary strength of this study, for myself anyway, was the way it mirrored the way I saw historical fiction being used in the classroom: the way individuals and their experiences are emphasized in the bigger picture, just like historical fiction could present multiple narratives of individuals to enhance the overall understanding of an event. The point being to downplay the statistical nature of the data, and focus on the human aspect. However, these experiences were derived only from the insights with which my participants, all secondary-school educators, provided me, and did not include students. Students were not included in the study as they are considered vulnerable members of society, nor was I in direct contact with them in any setting. The study was conducted on a top-down level (teachers to students), rather than with a bottom-up focus (students to teachers). This absence is not a limitation per say, as this research study was quite exploratory in investigating how historical fiction may be used as an interdisciplinary tool, so insights from students may be seen as a next step for further research.

7. Summary

Overall, this chapter outlined the methodology, or ways in which I have collected and then
analyzed data relevant to the research topic. It was the first step in converting the theoretical concepts of the previous two chapters into the practical data that will answer the research question and sub-questions. Further purpose of this chapter was also to demonstrate that while I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants who met my sampling criteria, I was not looking for circumscribed answers, but rather I was seeking frank discussion of insights and experiences in response to open-ended questions as outlined in my interview protocol.
Chapter 4 – Data, Data, Data

“Never theorize before you have data. Invariably, you end up twisting facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.” - Sherlock Holmes

Preface

The format of this research paper thus far has been as follows: an introduction to the researcher (myself) and the research topic, a review of the existing literature on the research topic, as well as methodological frameworks to inform the analysis of collected data, and lastly the research methodology, or my process of collecting data to answer my research question. To reiterate, the research question is: what is the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms?

In attempting to answer this question, the process has not been linear. Indeed, unlike the Sherlock Holmes quote introducing this chapter, I have shown a complete disregard for not theorizing before collecting my data. Rather, it has been a process of one step forward and one step backward between theorizing, collecting data, and then blending the two to interpret the data. The literature review (chapter two) was written so well in advance of collecting the data that the sampling and participant recruiting procedure did not even exist, let alone the interview protocol and interview questions. Consequently, when the time came to create these very same documents, they were heavily informed by not only the theories and ideas collected in the literature review, but also by my own predictions and assumptions for what I was expecting (and maybe even hoping) to hear from my participants. However, as this chapter demonstrates, no matter how much one theorizes in advance, there will always be unexpected insights that will demand an alteration and adjustment of existing work and ideas. Thus is the nature of research.

Introduction

The research findings and analysis for this chapter were derived from three interviews conducted with consenting participants, followed by a connection to the literature that either affirmed or rejected, added to or detracted from previously researched ideas and concepts, and all with the researcher's (yours truly) comments and insights interwoven throughout to personalize and present an additional understanding of the findings and analysis. Organizing, assessing, and presenting the research findings was a threefold process, just as it was a threefold process creating the interview questions from which the data would stem. As Margaret Atwood once said: “the answers you get from literature depend on the questions you pose.”

In asking my questions, I was hoping to receive answers that would inform what I consider the three main components of a classroom setting: the role of the resource in use (historical fiction), the role and responsibility of the teacher in using that resource, and how the resource can inform student understanding of the course content. Upon establishing that these were the areas on which I wanted to focus, I began to break down my questions into sections of theory and experiential application of historical fiction in classrooms. The theoretical portion focused on my understanding of historical fiction as a genre that occupied the liminal space between informational and narrative literature, and its resulting merits. The experiential application focused on how teachers could or did actively implement historical fiction in classrooms, and to what result. Lastly, it was matter of seeing what answers my more theoretically framed questions yielded in light of teacher and student experiences.

These answers were then coded, or condensed to their most vital insights (a lengthy

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process which involved more cutting and colouring than I have done since elementary school).

Using my first interview as a template, I derived approximately seven overarching themes that were apparent throughout, whether explicitly or implicitly, and applied them to the remaining two interviews. In no particular order, these themes were: teacher skills, student skills, challenges/limitations, expectations, power (or lack of), frameworks/ theoretical approaches, and finally interdisciplinary approach. Since my research question itself focused on the interdisciplinary use of historical fiction, this theme was relevant in nearly all of the answers to my questions, from all participants. However, not all themes came through in answers to questions in predictable ways; rather, there were times where the resulting theme in an answer was wholly unexpected. Part of the difficulty in constructing a cohesive narrative and analysis of the research findings has been this unexpectedness, and the resulting interconnectedness of ideas that makes it difficult to speak of one theme without connecting it to another. Yet, there must be a method to the madness, and order created out of chaos, and the beginning is usually a good place to start. Thus, the chapter is divided into sections which help to transition the research findings from mere theory in order to ground them in actual practice. These sections are as follows: 1. Researcher's approach to historical fiction 1.1 Transitioning to Research Findings: Participants and their schools 2. Inter-disciplinary Approach to historical fiction (theory to practice) 2.1 Definitions and Disciplines 2.2 Writing and Reading: Literature and History 2.3 Making Connections: Being Human 2.4 Changing Perspectives 3. Application: Historical Fiction in the Classroom 3.1 Challenges of Historical Fiction in the Classroom 4. Expectations, Skills, and Challenges: Teachers and Students 5. Conclusion

1. Researcher's Approach to Historical Fiction

The researcher's approach to historical fiction is one that I have touched upon throughout
this small-scale qualitative study. To clarify, the approach was not drawn from any theory of historical fiction, but rather my own postulations and conclusions as to the role of historical fiction in classrooms. I was always fascinated with the idea of attaching emotions, dialogues, and storylines to the historical figures and events I learned about in school, even to those who were not explicitly mentioned. This fascination continued to expand until I was no longer just focused on adding details to enhance my understanding of a certain historical figure or event, but rather analyzing how perceptions of figures and events changed based on whose account I was reading, and also looking at whose voice did I hear or not hear, whose story did I read or not read? These questions (along with other non-scholarly influences) inspired in me a need to seek out as many different sources and variations of stories as I could of almost anything I read or watched (fiction or non-fiction). Eventually, all of these ideas were consolidated in a sense, when a student once asked me about the lack of representation of his ethnic and religious background in Canadian history, and why we never found ways to include it in our study. I thought to myself then, what better way to supplement student understanding of Canadian history than with historical fiction – a genre that was both informative and narrative.

1.1 Transitioning to Research Findings: Participants and their Schools

Bearing in mind the aforementioned question from a student, I crafted the first portion of my interview questions (see Appendix B1 and B2 – English & History)\(^9\) to gauge participants' responses about their school's diversity, and how that was reflected in their respective classroom settings. Establishing what the school population was like was essential to my research topic because a portion of my inquiry stemmed from seeing whether or not historical fiction could be

\(^9\) There were two sets of questions that varied in phrasing and question order depending on whether the participant was an English teacher or a History teacher.
used as a tool to promote the inclusivity of diverse student experiences into both the established literary canon and traditional historical narrative used in schools.

In asking my participants to describe their school and classroom make-up, I received answers as diverse as the populations they described, which was interesting considering two of my three participants were from the same school, but in different departments. The answers described not only the population make-up, but also touched on the themes of expectations and challenges/limitations. Participants Nancy and Evelyn described their school and classrooms as “pretty diverse” and “very diverse” respectively. Nancy spoke of how a public system naturally lent itself to having a broad diversity of students; an idea which speaks to an expectation that public school boards are diverse in the racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds they host. Yet, Marian spoke to this expectation in a manner which was not as positive. She commented on how “teachers everywhere should probably say their classrooms are diverse” and that she would “like to say” she had multicultural classrooms. Both her statements suggested that diversity is as much an ideal as it is actually present in schools and classrooms. In acknowledgement of this ideal, she and Evelyn (being from the same school) explained that while there was diversity, there was also a noticeable lack of a specific racial group: white, or Caucasian students. While speaking on a different note (the diminishing of diversity), Nancy noted how there are “pros and cons” to this trend. For my part, I see this absence as a challenge to diversity, because if there is one sort of 'ethical' sentiment I have always felt strongly about, it is that diversity, and the inclusion of diverse experiences should not come at the expense of any one group. Indeed, in my theoretical use for historical fiction in the classrooms, the goal has not been to prove that any one overarching historical narrative is false or unacceptable, but rather to demonstrate that historical fiction allows
for an inclusivity and diversity of narratives that are sometimes (more often than not) silenced and marginalized in the literary canon and traditional history textbooks.

2. Interdisciplinary Approach to Historical Fiction (Theory to Practice)

As mentioned above, transitioning from the theoretical notions of using historical fiction to its practical applications has been at the crux of this research paper. In keeping with the 'theory-to-practice' trend, the next set of interview questions directly mimicked the order of the literature review in Chapter 2, as follows: defining historical fiction, and looking at the overlap between the disciplines of history and English, and in conjunction historical narratives and literary narratives, to inform an interdisciplinary look at historical fiction. The interdisciplinary uses of historical fiction is an overarching theme that encompasses the finer details of, firstly and obviously, how the genre is defined and its fluidity between the English and history disciplines, the writing process of historiography and literature, its role alongside traditional, multiple, and alternative narratives and how it can be used to challenge perceptions.

2.1 Definitions and Disciplines

The first step to crafting this research paper as a whole was to break down the research question to its key components in order to find and/or create a working definition for the genre of historical fiction, as well create an understanding of how it promoted and was a tool for interdisciplinary learning between history and English. In my literature review, I drew upon two existing definitions and combined them to create what I felt was the most accurate and all-encompassing definition of historical fiction. To reiterate, my personal definition of historical fiction that informs this research paper is as follows: a piece of literature, most often in novel form, that uses literary techniques and rhetorical devices to present focused narratives of history that may or may not
offer an alternative to traditional history as described in history textbooks. I do not specify whether that piece of literature is one where the history has been researched by a modern author, or is contemporary to a particular historical time period (like Victorian social novels).

In order to gauge how my working definition compared with that of my participants, I asked them to define historical fiction for me. The answers I received were straightforward, but still left some room open for interpretation. Marian described it as “fiction that is inspired by history” whereas Nancy felt it was “rooted in a historical event or historical time period.” Their respective uses of the words 'inspired' and 'rooted' suggested interpretations of historical fiction in which the history was more a sidebar to the rest of the story, and another where history informed the driving force of the story. In reading a bit into their general definitions of historical fiction, it seemed both participants understood works in this genre to really be any piece of writing that had a suitable historical component that informed some part of its story. While a bit loose of a definition, it was certainly better than one that rigidly insists that historical fiction pieces had to be “set before the middle of the last century, and ones in which the author is writing from research rather than personal experience” (Johnson, 2005, p. 1). This definition was one with which I took issue early on (in my literature review) because it disallowed fictional, literary works that were written during and specifically about a certain historical period (like The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald). While I did not ask Evelyn to define historical fiction, her response to the next question (whether or not literary works are historical) fit part of my definition for historical fiction: that it can also be literature contemporary to its original publication period, and thus historical to modern readers. Overall, Evelyn felt literary works definitely were historical, particularly, in her opinion, when they were considered in their contemporary contexts.
Bearing in mind my own definition and uses of historical fiction, and curious to see how participants would respond to its interdisciplinary use, my follow up questions were to look at how literary narratives and historical narratives connected; specifically, are literary narratives historical (and vice-versa as asked to Evelyn above) and what made a narrative literature? These questions again stemmed from my literature review, in particular from the literary novel's historical origins and attachment to the discipline of history, such as the eighteenth century literary novelists' implicit insistence that their novels be “taken as authentic histories” that provide “a needed supplement to history” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 1), as well as from questions such as: “Is history fiction?” and conversely, “Is fiction history?” (Teo, 2011, p. 312). Both participants felt historical narratives were literature, based on their understandings of narratives and 'literature', Marian adding a resounding “absolutely” when asked. In regards to the next question, and in what I consider a humorous coincidence based on the tone of Marian (and her false British accent) and Nancy when answering this question, both questioned the use of the word literature – is it literature with a capital 'L' or just literature? And what import does the capitalization carry? Marian felt that any narrative considered literature went beyond being “just fiction” and “just a story,” and that the real marker of literature was its quality: the way the content or structure of the story helped it stand the test of time, and thus affected future generations. Nancy, for her part, was more specific not only in what made a narrative literature, but also in what made a narrative. Her emphasis was on “construction” or how a story was pieced together. All three participants were certain in their belief that historical fiction demonstrated “fiction and history are both narratives of the past,” wherein the former is “quasi-historical” and the latter is “quasi-fictional” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 5). However, the most important interdisciplinary link between history and
English (and thus the utility of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool) is the very literary process of writing history, also known as historiography.

### 2.2 Writing and Reading: Literature and History

Since many of my questions were borne out of the goal of aiming to assess the similarities and differences between historical narratives and literature, it made sense that the questions and their answers from participants eventually coincided, and that ideas from one response were either repeated, or said before even the relevant question was asked. In fact, even before I asked participants how historiography and narrative writing was similar, they had already begun to touch upon those ideas, branching out into the reading experience as well.

Indeed, Nancy's use of the word construction (or construct) was intriguing because it worked as an excellent and fascinating hybrid for the words content (con-) and structure (struct-)—words which Marian used as well when describing literary narratives; it combined not only the forms a narrative takes (oral or written, for example) but also its ability to encompass any type of communication or information around which a story-line is constructed. This combination is integral for reasons beyond the mere writing process, and is revisited later in this chapter under a different theme. Apart from both Nancy's and Marian's use of the words construct, content, and structure, they, along with Evelyn, also elaborated further on how exactly the writing process of narratives connected to literary and historical narratives being mutually inclusive, as well as the definition of historical fiction.

Historical fiction is not a textbook. It does not require its reader to “treat the study of history as a science,” or force the reader to act as an “outsider, looking in” so that they can “[offer] objective analysis ... to apply to events” (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343). This point of contrast was
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echoed strongly in my interviews, particularly in regards to the history textbooks that students use in classes. Marian, who recently started teaching History (though she answered the English-focused set of questions), spoke to the consistent “separation between ... textbook history” and “stories” even though, in her opinion there's still “overlap” between the two forms (as discussed above) because even though a textbook “looks nice with the bold headings, it's still a story.” Her emphasis in particular was on the tone of textbooks, especially as conveyed through structure and content. She felt that while the “chronological order” made sense there was a determined “inflexibility” to it that worked to distance students from its key ideas. This inflexibility, as Marian pointed out, caused by the publication date of “maybe 10 to 15 years ago,” affects not only what can be seen as outdated content, but more importantly the language, because “it's not their language” - or here meaning the youths for whom these textbooks are written, and who no longer speak, think, and comprehend in the manner in which the textbook is attempting to convey its story (and rightly so, perhaps). The outdated content and “stuffy” tone of textbooks was a notion also mentioned by Evelyn, if in slightly different terms. She spoke to the false understanding of how “history doesn't change” and in turn how it affects resource funding in school departments (essentially, money going to the science department while the history department is left bereft). In speaking about new textbooks, Marian observed that particularly in the social sciences, the tone of these new textbooks was “very conversational” and something that students found appealing – a direct contrast, of course, to history textbooks. Evelyn echoed this sentiment when she stated that it would be easier for students to emotionally connect with the narrative of a 15 year old girl from a story, than with, for example, William Lyon Mackenzie King from a textbook.

This insistence on the separation between analytical textbook history versus more emotive
literature and stories seems quite redundant given how closely historiography and the process of writing narrative literature mimic each other. Referring to Nancy's use of the word 'construct' it is important to realize even analytical historical narratives in history textbooks have been constructed in one way or another. Evelyn spoke about this construction explicitly, when she raised the point that even though history is written, with “certain indisputable facts” the “perception of history is constantly changing” meaning the manner in which even a history textbook is constructed (with its content and structure) is constantly changing. Furthermore, as Marian noted, narratives, whether literary or historical, serve the same purpose via the same method: they are both “a story that is taking someone somewhere”; to specify further, both literary and historical narratives attempt to “take people to a certain understanding of the world”. Indeed, when combined, narrative fiction and history both “emplot events” and “give them a narrative structure that orders and emphasizes narrated details in the interests of a larger conceptual unity” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 12), whereby both pieces (literary and historical) can be analyzed and understood in a similar manner, particularly when considering cause and effect scenarios (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 12).

This deliberate separation between the two intrinsically connected forms of narrative writing and historiography discredits what both should and do offer to their students: a glimpse into, and the ability to “understand a wider human experience” (Christensen, 2009, p. 7). Instead, it seems students “[get] lost in a narrow, fact finding game about the past” when learning history, and even with the study of literature, they end up focusing on the “minutiae of memorizing literary terms” (Christensen, 2009, p. 7). Of course, ideally, students should not be forced to learn in an either/or situation – what they draw from their explorations with history and literature
should be a synthesis of the two disciplines, and in particular, with clear connections offered with the human experience.

2.3 **Making Connections: Being Human**

In the nascent stages of formulating my interview questions, I had considered asking my participants whether or not the use of historical fiction was necessary – particularly in regards to its ability to represent alternative and multiple narratives – because I wondered: is not all history or literature a human experience from which all humans can draw parallels and to which they can connect? I was advised by my supervisor that this sentiment was one that would inevitably inform my participants' answers, implicitly or explicitly. As predicted, it became an explicit theme throughout the interviews.

Evelyn, when discussing the ability for students to identify better with the story of a 15 year old girl rather than William Lyon Mackenzie King from a textbook, said that this connection was possible because a narrative, or “fiction writing...,” “lends itself better to making deep emotional connections” and that while teenagers “don't always understand their emotions” they are definitely connected to them. Her response reflected different themes while also being a direct answer to the sub-question 'how can historical fiction be used as a means to enrich the historical thinking concepts for students?' Firstly, historical fiction, by allowing students to make emotional connections to the content they are learning, immediately makes relevant and current that same content, while emphasizing the historical concept of continuity and change (amongst others).

Secondly, historical fiction and narrative writing use a tone that is deliberately emotive and meant to either provoke or evoke a reaction, unlike textbooks which have a decidedly dissociative and academic tone. Thirdly, historical fiction is interdisciplinary in its very form, bridging the disciplines
of English and history, which (as discussed above) are intertwined in the manner in which they convey their narratives by plotting specific events and moments that are historical (contemporary to their period, or researched later), historically inspired, or completely fictional in nature. Finally, and of most importance to this section, is historical fiction's ability to synthesize historical events by making the human players (or characters) integral to the event the object, rather than vice-versa, which allows for an effect on literature that is considered to be of immense value (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343). This effect builds on the understanding of cause and effect, which allows readers to then extrapolate and consider the “human consequences of events” and the “implications of human behaviour” (Nawrot, 1996, p. 343) – particularly for high-school students who may be trying to figure out where they fit in the world. Indeed, properly used, historical fiction (alongside traditional historical and literary pieces) should prompt students to ask “what can we learn from literature and history that helps us understand the complex problems confronting us today?” (Christensen, 2009, p. 7).

Nancy explicitly discussed this specific use of historical fiction, and addressed how it helps students to make connections, “learn about being human” and how “humans have changed” or not. She extended the notion, saying how historical fiction works as a guide for “teens and the decision making process.” Marian took this idea a step further by saying that it would be helpful if these narratives were ones the students had “some familiarity with” and allowed them to “[trace] something that has some sort of connection to their own identity” - an important link to the next section on changing perspectives, but also intrinsically relevant as it would make easier the ability to read the world, and then read the word as Paulo Freire so eloquently wrote (1983, p. 6). I take Marian's meaning to be that it is always easier to find a foothold in new content if there is an
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Immediate link a student can grasp and connect to his own life – whether it is a tangible setting, a more abstract experience or sentiment, or a visceral connection to a character, but nevertheless something to which a student can respond and question and analyze. Simultaneously, I would say, it is necessary to be careful students are not limited only to the familiar, but learn how to make the unfamiliar familiar. Evelyn pointed out “people didn't always act and think in a way we do now” and sometimes that difference can be the key to, as Nancy stated, realizing that students can make connections between the world and the word even if it's an experience in a remote part of the world, or in another time period because “humans are humans” and “we all connect somehow.” If works of literature are meant to be a commentary on the societies that they represent then, by focusing that commentary instead on a historical society, historical fiction allows readers to engage and think critically with the text. They submerge themselves into the lives of characters living in a past society vastly (or generally) different from their own, and therefore may be forced to consider the varying decisions and conflicting perspectives those characters present, whether the difference lies with the reader or the society that informs the reader. Furthermore, in keeping with cause and effect, readers are able to see how the past influences the present, which influences the future (Nawrot, 1996, p. 344). The readers no longer look at historical events as mere dominoes, with one event setting off the other without any apparent human action, but begin to consider and analyze how human interactions and decisions influence historical events, and not vice versa. Thus, historical fiction allows for the reader to critically think about and make connections with historical societies, events, and figures while reading, helping them to understand that no moment occurs in isolation, as history is often taught, but rather is part of a continuous overarching narrative, no matter how temporal it may seem.
within a history class or even within a historical novel.

To take this idea of immersion, connection, and analysis a step further, Nancy noted, “historical fiction gives you a groundwork” that “narrative literature doesn’t” particularly in terms of “rights and wrongs in terms of dates and times” (or, put simply, a definite context). Thus, historical fiction across disciplines proves two different, yet mutual, purposes. In a history class where the emphasis is very much on accuracy, and exactness, and analysis without emotion, historical fiction provides the very necessary emotional link to ground the content within an overarching narrative of humanity. Conversely, in an English class, it is a challenge to further encourage this purely emotive thinking amongst students: firstly, because the language of literary texts is already heavily imbibed with emotion; and secondly, as Nancy was quick to point out, some students may (more often than not) take advantage of the lack of context, and decide they can say anything, that “anything can go” - basically, working under the misconception that because they are making personal connections they cannot be faulted, these students will claim that “English is bullshit, I can make any bullshit connection.” This very apt description of the teenage response to excessive emotional thinking is precisely why historical context and literary theory are so important to ground student interpretation and analysis.

2.4 Changing Perspectives

This section on changing perspectives is drawn from two distinct threads that informed both my literature review, and my interviews. Firstly, there is the need for alternative and multiple narratives alongside the traditional narrative of Canadian history, and for the inclusion of these same narratives within the traditional literary canon used in English classrooms so that both disciplines represent the diverse constitutions of modern classrooms. Secondly, my lens (and
framework') for the justification and interpretation of the use of historical fiction in classrooms and ideas surrounding its use, is post-colonial theory alongside counter-factual history as a quasi-lens and framework. Each participant had a professional understanding of both of these ideas, and spoke explicitly about them, particularly in relation to how they would benefit the students (hypothetically and practically), and their responses worked to answer the sub-question "how can historical fiction be used to introduce new (and not normally addressed) historical perspectives to students?" The answers from my participants boiled down to the essential understanding that simply including multiple and alternative narratives is not enough (as it would be mere tokenism); rather, it is a matter of asking "how is that inclusion going to be addressed, and why?"

I asked Evelyn about whether or not she saw Canadian history as a single, traditional narrative, and what she felt were some key facts about Canadian history that all students should know? Evelyn's response to the latter question, about how it is important to know the mood and priorities of the time, particularly in regards to “changing attitudes” towards “immigration, women, First Nations” and “colonial and imperial” factors fed into her answer for the former question, that “the traditional narrative really discounts and excludes a lot of groups ... many of whom are represented” in the student population. Of the groups mentioned, she finds that their contributions have not been “fully taken into account” within the traditional narrative, and that having “continuity” and a “story” and a “shared experience” cannot be to “the exclusion of everybody else.” In her opinion, using historical fiction alongside this traditional narrative (theoretically) has a threefold effect on the study of history in classrooms: firstly, it forces these alternative and multiple narratives that have been excluded to be integrated into the traditional narrative in more cohesive way than being mere “sidebar things”; secondly, it connects students
emotionally to the “human part of history” as opposed to just rote learning facts and figures; and
thirdly, it helps students learn the stories of marginalized people and groups.

This answer promulgates the benefits of using historical fiction in classrooms, as it also
connected directly to the aims of post-colonial theory and the post-colonial lens and how historical
fiction reflects these aims. Precisely because it makes statements regarding the continued
presence of poverty, inequality, exploitation, and stifled expression, all while working as a political
project to “refashion the world from below” (Young, 2012, p. 19-20) so as to “turn the power
structures of the world upside down” and “reconstruct Western knowledge formations” (Young,
2012, p. 20), reading historical fiction with a post-colonial lens helps to humanize history through
its focus on the human influence on historical events (as discussed above), and allows the voices
to be heard of those members of society who are often either silenced or marginalized by and
within the overarching, traditional historical narrative. This insistence on the multiplicity of
perspectives of course, also speaks to the emerging awareness that the history taught in
classrooms thus far, as Evelyn found, has been from the perspective of “white Canadians, white
Christian Canadians” and an overall “white man history.” The purpose is to demonstrate how a
traditional narrative, in its attempts to be singular, linear, and all-uniting selects and chooses those
voices that best represent its ideals, while silencing those that would disagree or challenge those
ideals.

Inherently it comes down to power. As Marian pointed out, there is a certain “level of
power” in “who gets to tell a story” because it is usually immediately understood whether or not a
story “agrees or disagrees with the mainstream version of whatever story is being told.” These
notions again legitimize the role of historical fiction since fiction can offer additional perspectives
that represent silenced voices, and can offer either direct contrast to the traditional narrative, or a reinterpretation of the traditional narrative – whatever the decision, it ensures that these moments of contrast become central discussion points, and raise important historical thinking questions like “how can we ever understand the past?” “how do we know what we know?” and “how do we decide what and whose story to tell?” (“The Historical Thinking Project”). In fact, when I asked my participants how they would then introduce the multiplicity of narratives and perspectives historical fiction provokes to their students, Marian emphasized that, in our current world, there is “no one answer to a question anymore” and that having students use Wikipedia or Google to look up “any kind of historical timeline” would only lead to search results of a “thousand different ones.” Indeed, this multiplicity of narratives speaks to two notions: one, that there are “different ways of telling history” as Marian pointed out, and two, there really is no such thing as “the timeline” - if anything, it is a timeline amongst many other possible timelines. This seemingly endless variation of historical possibilities may make difficult or alarming the prospect of integrating and synthesizing multiple and alternative narratives and perspectives into the traditional one, but I would say that a simple shift in mindset, as per the question asked by counter-factual history, is the first step to this process. The question is: what if this narrative had been the starting point for this event instead of that narrative? (Mordhorst, 2008, p. 10) It is a question that again highlights that there are sources and narratives outside of the traditionally accepted ones that offer differing and alternative insights. In fact, as the lens of new historicism suggests, “in order to contest this general narrative, counter-historians need first to provide a different set of final causes” (Appleman, 2015, p. 107), which means looking for and analyzing those causes that are hidden from view (“The Historical Thinking Project”).
The question of alternative narratives and perspectives, along with the power of who gets to tell a story is not only applicable to the discipline of history, but English as well. As mentioned above, both Nancy and Marian raised questions regarding what constitutes Literature as opposed to just literature and how, as Nancy in particular noted, we need to “broaden our understanding of what literature is” so as to include and “connect to cultures” that have not been viewed as creating or being a part of “capital L literature” and “noticed throughout history.” Indeed, this desire is not unique, for within the field of Canadian literature, there is an understanding that while the writers of European heritage dominate Canadian historical fiction, there is also a niche opening up for Canadian writers who are Indigenous Canadians, or of Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, or African heritage (Wyile, 2007, p. 4). Again, similar to the shift in the discipline of history, there is a deliberate turning away from the narratives that are “preoccupied with the activities of white, upper-class English males” (Wyile, 2007, p. 12), and looking instead toward more diverse, inclusive narratives.

The question of power is raised again, but in a manner that incorporates the lenses through which literature, and even history, can be read and interpreted. Marian and Nancy, both English teachers, raised what I see as the English discipline's equivalents of the post-colonial lens and theory – post-structuralism and post-modernism (though of course, post-colonialism is also a lens and theory through which literature can be read and interpreted). While Nancy spoke of post-modernism in regards to construction of a text, Marian spoke of post-structuralism as “scepticism.” To clarify, the scepticism is borne not out of a disregard for the lens and theory, but an understanding of what it offers: a means to “‘unravel’ the constructs that surround us” and to “[challenge] ... [the] high-school curriculum and the fixed meanings that have been assigned to
texts” (Appleman, 2015, p. 112). For Marian, post-structuralism is a means of understanding that “everything you read is biased” which in turn means that as pupils of history, and readers of literature, students need to be taught to be “critical of who's telling you to believe what.” Marian felt this awareness can be encouraged to further manifest by having students ask “who's taking me and why?” and more directly, “who wrote it? allowed this story to get out?” and “what details are being used in terms of facts?” These questions again mirror the questions asked by historical thinking concepts. Indeed, the purpose here is not to have students use either post-colonialism or post-structuralism to challenge one form of history or narrative only to unquestioningly accept another, but rather realize that multiple and alternative narratives are only the first steps to achieving a cohesive, informed understanding of history. In fact, the next step would be to analyze history, literature, and historical fiction through more perspectives. As Evelyn stated, “almost any perspective ... Marxist perspective, feminist perspective, post-modern perspective” can be used to analyze these forms and create diverse understandings, it is simply a matter of actually doing so in classrooms.

3. Application: Historical Fiction in the Classroom

The primary research question (what is the role of historical fiction as an inter-disciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms?) and subsequent interview questions were formulated based on two primary understandings: one, that there is no determined role for historical fiction in secondary school classrooms, and two, when historical fiction has been used in classrooms, it has been in a limited way. Therefore, much of the interviews focused on theorizing and conjecturing how historical fiction could be implemented in classrooms (as has been demonstrated above). However, as it happened, Nancy and Evelyn were able to share some insights regarding actual
practice and use of historical fiction in classrooms, whether encouraged by our interview or actual forethought.

Nancy in particular was spurred on by the questions of the interview, and mused at one point that “we teach a lot of historical fiction” in English classrooms, even if the works that are read are not explicitly “labelled as historical fiction.” In particular, she pointed to the Harper Lee novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*, often read in high-school English classes, which she felt “bridges on historical fiction” but how approaching it as and making explicit that it is historical fiction would help to lend itself better to “learning a little bit more about the history of things” especially “the racism of the time” and in turn be able to “make connections with today” which, in her opinion, would make the entire reading experience “much more rich.” The process she described sounds a bit like historical thinking turned into an infinity symbol – looking at how the past feeds into the present, and the present informs the future, only for humanity to constantly look to its past for answers. As sort of a precursor to actually using historical fiction across disciplines, I asked all my participants: whether or not teachers ever explicitly made the historical connection to literary texts (and vice versa)? Nancy, spoke to how her manner of making the connection is to address the “overarching big themes, like violence and negotiation, or peace, and connecting those” to the text and history. Marian, admitted that the connections are “not often” made though she does “talk a little bit about the context.” Evelyn, meanwhile, acknowledged that there is “a lot of crossover” and that it is a “sensibility and a skill” for both teachers and students to be able to make those connections. Essentially, all three teachers saw the merits of interdisciplinary thinking, but did not implement it regularly.

Another example Nancy provided of the application of historical fiction in classrooms, was
the current unit she was working on with her Grade 10 academic English students. The students were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and for the first time would be moving “cross-curricular” (or taking a more interdisciplinary approach) as they attempted to analyze and understand the text. Nancy spoke of how, the Grade 10 English class would be collaborating with the Grade 10 History students to complete a “culminating project together” that would hopefully blend the two disciplines together. I found this approach fascinating because in my own theoretical application of historical fiction, I had never considered the role of collaboration amongst teachers and classes of the two different disciplines; rather, I had always seen it as an individual undertaking by a single teacher in her respective classroom (perhaps an oversight by a pre-service teacher who will be teaching both disciplines). Though, overall, I am increasingly drawn to the idea of collaboration to help encourage and facilitate the different skills needed to make the application of historical fiction a success in classrooms. However, that is not to say that collaboration amongst teachers is necessarily always viewed in a positive light.

Both Nancy and Marian also spoke of how collaboration can manifest itself as an unwelcome challenge rather than a means to expand and explore different teaching material and techniques. Nancy spoke of “departments that are like you have to teach this” emphasizing an already established set of resources and materials in which teachers have little individual say – a situation which Marian had earlier referred to as “the pressure to teach the same text as other teachers.” It is understandable how such departments and situations can be seen as limiting and constricting to the individual growth and exploration of teachers in their respective disciplines, particularly for new teachers. However, it is really the lack of mutual discussion and decision-making that is the real limiting factor. If shared resources and texts are implemented in a manner
that allow teachers flexibility in how they are taught, and what the final products related to them are, I think it makes the difference between being pressured into, versus being open to, collaboration in a department. In fact, if used in the above manner, shared resources and texts can be a means of reducing the burden of navigating the 'openness' of the English curriculum, or escaping the content-based confines of the history curriculum.

Perhaps the most interesting application of historical fiction in classrooms spoken of was not through the traditional medium of print and text, but instead via films. Evelyn managed to do with historical films what I hoped and still hope to do with historical fiction novels in my own classroom (and now films too!). Her assignment was designed for her Grade 11 mixed-level World History class, the students of which would conduct an “analysis and critique of a historical film” and then present their findings to the class. Evelyn explained that films can be an “easier point of entry” for students who have “less of an aptitude” or “interest in reading” - an example of “differentiated instruction” for “multiple intelligences.” The objective of the assignment would be to assess how historically accurate the film was on a scale of pure entertainment to whatever level of educational value, for which the students would not only research the “actual historical period” but translate that information into “Venn-Diagrams” to make appropriate comparisons between the film and history. Another key part of the assignment was to have students assess the “social responsibility” of Hollywood in producing historical films, and whether there is any onus on the industry to “accurately display history, or is it just meant to be blockbuster entertainment?” Such questions definitely encourage students to think critically about the purpose and context of the films they watch.

In introducing the assignment to the students, Evelyn would model its basic components at
the start of the Ancient Greece unit; in particular, she would use the Trojan War as the primary event. Using the film *Troy* and Homer's account of the Trojan War, she would help them sketch the initial Venn-diagram to determine the primary differences. What I liked most about her approach was her acknowledgement of the fact that Homer's account, as a literary re-telling of a historical event, is “complicated in and of itself” since one does not know if it is “even accurate to begin with.” It raises questions of accuracy (what were Homer's sources? What did he change, and why?), context and purpose (why was Homer telling this story, and for whom?), and what its literary nature offers us as opposed to a textbook paragraph on the war (is Homer deliberately characterizing figures to evoke sympathy or revulsion?). In order to modify this assignment somewhat (whether for the film or for textural historical fiction), I would have students map out the main events of the Trojan War on a plot graph to see how they match up with literary and film conventions, and in doing so ask students to consider whether or not differing emphases on specific events or even the climax of the narrative force alternative readings of the event.

Overall, I quite like this assignment and the fluidity it offers in its uses, because apart from the actual research that helps the students learn the content of a specific period, it also encourages them, as Evelyn stated, to actively address context and look past their “modern lens” to consider and evaluate the “sentiments, philosophy of the past.” Furthermore, I think it could be taken a step further to have students answer questions such as: 'why do we change historical attitudes to suit our modern sensibilities?' And 'what do these changes mean for our understanding of change and continuity in the human race?' There are, of course, many ways to implement different assignments that would generate such questions and historical thinking, and this example is but one of what is currently in practice.
3.1 Challenges of Historical Fiction in the Classroom

Similar to Toby Litt's (2008) argument in chapter two that maligned the use of historical fiction in classrooms, there was also a single voice of caution (though infinitely more benign) amongst my participants. Evelyn, as someone who enjoys different forms of historical fiction in her leisure time, was well aware of the differing levels of quality one will find in fictional publications or films that are historically oriented, and said as much when she spoke of what she called “poor and bad historical fiction”. Indeed, this concern was the primary objection of Litt who described historical fiction as a “contract in bad-faith” (2008, p. 111) between the author and writer because of its tendency to exploit the speculative nature of the past (2008, p. 112), and it is this constant tenuous struggle between fact and fiction, historical fact and assumption that Litt finds to be the undoing of historical fiction. However, he did not seem to take into consideration the awareness teachers have of the tenuous position of historical fiction, particularly his specific concerns.

Indeed, Evelyn was quite explicit in her understanding of how works of historical fiction (and to an extent even secondary and tertiary sources of history) are mostly “conjecture” and “guesswork” that the “author is imagining might have happened” - particularly in regards to thoughts, feelings, emotions, and verbal interactions. In Evelyn's opinion, there are four main challenges for the use of historical fiction in classrooms: one, inaccurate ideas; two, questionable content; three, access for students; and four, selection of available historical fiction. The concern behind the first challenge is specifically directed towards what Evelyn calls “popular” examples of historical fiction (basically, historically situated television shows and movies). She feels that these pieces encourage or offer a “misunderstanding or oversimplification” of history, in particular, the “social structure, social hierarchy, how different groups related, [and] how men and women related” because they
neither account for nor alter their “modern lens” when presenting the narrative. Indeed, I can give a personal example of the sort of popular historical fiction to which Evelyn was referring. As a student teacher in a Grade 10 History class, the students highly recommended a period drama titled *Reign* – a show about the life of Mary Queen of Scots and her ladies in waiting. In watching it, I realized that apart from the names of the titular character, and a few other characters (like Francis, King of France and Mary's husband), the show was as liberal in its historical application as it was in its use of modern clothing, music, and ideas (in particular, the heavy feminist slant on how men and women interacted). There is a risk to students watching and enjoying such shows because they take them at face-value, with little to no consideration for lack of historical perspective and accuracy, and it hinders their ability to remove their modern perspective and biases when analyzing history. There were also parts of the show that fed into the second concern about historical fiction in classrooms: questionable content.

In making a comparison between textbook history and historical fiction, Evelyn pointed out that there usually is not any “objectionable or racy” content in history textbooks like “sex scenes or foul language” to worry about accidentally exposing to the students. Granted there can be a structured space created for the dialogue of such things (particularly if discussing societal attitudes towards sex and language), but on the whole it can be a tenuous space to navigate in terms of content in historical fiction texts or movies. It becomes a question of access to students – if one includes a piece of historical fiction, whether textual or visual, that contains objectionable content, will parents feel the need to control its access to their children? Granted, it is always possible to censor films, but not quite so easy to censor texts. Another question that arises in terms of access for students is where will they be able to purchase or borrow the assigned
historical fiction text from, if it's not available in class or online? As Evelyn noted, there is a “very good library system in Toronto” but there is concern of text availability, and how many copies are in circulation, and whether students have the financial resources to be able to purchase film or text if necessary. The final concern in regards to 'access' is whether or not the historical fiction text is on a reading level with which all students can engage, particularly considering the high “ESL populations” in classrooms. In order to meet these needs, most texts would have to be “high interest and low vocabulary” and, as Evelyn notes as a keen reader of historical fiction, there is only a “small pool” of such texts available for teachers and students.

The final challenge combines all of the above concerns: the actual selection of the historical fiction works. Not only does it have to be good historical fiction, with limited questionable content, but it must be accessible to students in terms of quality, content, availability, and reflection of overall class literacy levels. Even more importantly, however, as Evelyn notes, it must also “match up” with course and unit expectations. Is it a text that will address most if not all of the interdisciplinary thinking that goes along with reading historical fiction (historiography, historical thinking concepts, multiple and alternative narratives and perspectives, overarching themes and ideas, and general student accessibility)? This is the direct challenge impeding the application of historical fiction in classrooms, along with other challenges that are rooted more in teacher and student expectations and skills which comprise the final section of the findings from my interviews.

4. Expectations, Skills, and Challenges: Teachers and Students

This final section focuses on the expectations, skills, and challenges that teachers and students do, may, and will face in attempting to not only include historical fiction as an
interdisciplinary tool, but to make its use in classrooms successful. All three participants spoke of shared expectations, skills, and challenges, with a few variations based on their personal understandings of and experiences in their respective teaching careers, and their insights helped answer the final sub-question: how might teachers and students overcome the challenges they may face with regards to the use of historical fiction in classrooms? The first and foremost issue in this section is one that combines expectations, skills, and challenges: the issue of time and managing the curriculum.

All three participants, whether implicitly or explicitly, commented on the tenuous nature of expectations and power that governed their understanding of time (or lack thereof) and the curriculum. Marian, as my first interviewee, established pretty much all the main points of discussion on this issue. To begin, she spoke of time in the context of teachers who “lose their prep” because they are constantly “on-call” - a situation I have witnessed a handful of times during my placements. Nancy, too, admitted to a “lack of time” but in regards to whether or not she was able to slow down and have important conversations with her students, or even to emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of whatever text her class was reading. Evelyn commented on how it is a challenge in “finding time to incorporate” historical fiction in to the classroom because of the curriculum. Overall, participants' concerns about the lack of time to incorporate historical fiction in to the classroom either led to or stemmed from what they perceived as the challenges of the English and/or history curriculum.

Marian emphasized her two primary concerns with the curriculum: one, that it “keeps changing with every government” and two, that there is “no content that's prescribed in the Ontario curriculum.” There is no content prescribed within the English curriculum, whereas with
the history curriculum, Evelyn finds it to be “very dense” wherein teachers have to not only teach “for content” but also “cover for skills.” While Nancy agreed that “history is so content focused” she saw English as being both “open” and “skills focused.” As a pre-service teacher whose teachable subjects are both history and English, I can understand their opinions in regards to the curriculum and subject focus. However, I also have my own understandings to offer on the topic to encourage some reconsideration. I will not lie that the common concern in my teaching cohort amongst my peers has been regarding the vast amount of content to teach in history courses, and not having enough time to fit in anything else apart from the content. At the same time, in teaching courses like Grade 10 Canadian History (academic and applied), and Grade 11 World History (mixed-level), I came to realize that the curriculum is more of a guideline than actual code to be followed. What matters more is selecting specific content to integrate alongside the historical thinking concepts – indeed, for the Grade 11 course in particular, I remember specifically opening each lesson with a guiding question or prompt that the content for the day would assist the students in answering. Yet, it was also a slippery slope when, on certain days, it felt like it was so much easier to just teach content to the students rather than engage them with the content – however, these few lessons would definitely count amongst my examples of poor teaching practice.

The navigation of this slippery slope can occur in one of two ways: with good teacher practice (which will be discussed), the interdisciplinary links between history and English via historical fiction will not only become evident, they will become easier to implement through literary lenses and historical thinking. Conversely, because of what some teachers feel as the demands of the curriculum and lack of time, they will fall back on the current and unchallenged
application of content over skills in history, or skills over content in English. In regards to this latter practice, Marian and Nancy both explained its prevalence. In their opinion, this practice is in place primarily because of what they see as the aims of public high-schools in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), followed by how those aims translate into actual teacher practice in individual classrooms. Marian had already responded that interdisciplinary connections are not often made, and she later emphasized that this lack is due to the “focus on the curriculum and common objectives” and that maybe if teachers were in a “situation that’s not a public high-school in Ontario” implementation of interdisciplinary thought and practice could be “different.” Whether that means it would be actually implemented or easier to implement is not clear, but either option would be an improvement over the current situation. Nancy, also a teacher in the TDSB, seconded this focus on “skills based” learning in English classes within the board, to the extent that it questions if teachers should even use literature as a means to teach skills. It sounds bizarre – how does one teach English language skills (oral or written) without using the literature in which the language is grounded? While I do not have an answer for that question, Marian and Nancy both had answers for why this separation is emphasized: the Toronto District School Board's main means of organizing its learning structure is apparently by “applying Bloom's taxonomy” - again, as Marian pointed out, and Nancy seconded in their respective interviews. According to Marian, with the application of Bloom's taxonomy, and the bottom to top understanding of how skills develop, students in public high-schools are “still at the base” - the focus is still on “knowledge and understanding as opposed to analysis and all of the higher levels of thinking.” In Marian's opinion, the students are still at the base level which is “just understanding the story for the story” whereas the interdisciplinary thinking is happening at a higher level of thinking, something which
Nancy attested to when she said the board would call skills like “critical analyzing” “higher order thinking.” This division of skills also has the unfortunate effect of streaming students based on a false understanding of their skills where, Marian found, students in an “applied class” learn “just the skills” but students in a “university class” learn the skills with the intent to “understand the world better” - an unfortunate circumstance, since interdisciplinary education through historical fiction is meant to draw on the understandings and experiences of any student, while building their skill levels, instead of separating them based on those skill levels. Of course, there are more ways than one in which this scenario is carried out: acceptance of and application of Bloom's taxonomy to the curriculum are only the first steps, which then subsequently branch out in to how lesson plans are crafted and delivered (focusing on just content or just skills), and finally on how evaluations are created and assessed (using the achievement chart).

The question is how can teachers reverse the effects of Bloom's taxonomy to ensure that the use of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in classrooms is a success? In offering any resolution to the challenges teachers may face, it will all seem too easy, too casually phrased, and indeed, I would offer caution before believing any answer that fits either of those descriptions. However, in offering a solution based on the advice of my participants as well as how I see it reflected in my own teaching practice, I think the first step is to acknowledge that as easy as any answer seems, there will always be hard work involved in affecting any actual and positive change. Therefore, in organizing my participants’ suggestions in to a coherent response, I propose the following steps to successfully integrate historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool into secondary school classrooms: firstly, to approach it with an eye for the bigger picture; secondly, to understand the power the curriculum offers a teacher; and thirdly, to share that power with the
students, and let them have both build upon and further develop already existing skills.

There is already an obvious connection between the disciplines of history and English in the way they reflect one another in the various forms of their genre, and in their writing styles. As Marian pointed out, there is also a connection in “the critical thinking focus of both” disciplines. This focus brings to the forefront a teaching strategy and way of thinking about the disciplines that helps to emphasize interdisciplinary thinking while still encouraging and emphasizing the necessary content and skills. “Launching inquiry” (Gini-Newman, p. 3), or as Marian phrased it: asking the question of “why things happen” demands of any teacher in any course to understand that content and skills are only relevant and useful if they are prefaced by and underscore an active learning goal. Another way of understanding this strategy, as Nancy understood it, and the “connection between the history and the English” is to look at “overall ideas and overarching ideas” and “overarching big themes.” These are guided questions and prompts that encourage the development of what Marian sees as “skills in order to understand the world better” and also encourage what Nancy and Evelyn view to be “text to text, text to world, text to self connections” - all key ideas when understanding that the interdisciplinary connections in history and English are meant to help students read the word and the world (Freire, 1983, p. 6) while introducing them to narratives and perspectives that are not only reflective of their own experiences, but also to let them explore other points of view. Of course, as Nancy noted, these very same overarching ideas become overarching questions that translate well into evaluations, whereby students can apply their critical thinking and analysis skills across units to answer questions on topics that can be equally broad and focused, such as bias, character development, motivations, rise and fall of empires, etc. It is a matter of ensuring that these questions come first,
followed by the matching curriculum expectations, lesson plans, and resulting evaluations.

My participants found the curriculum both limiting in the amount of content and skills it detailed, and equally overwhelming in its simultaneous lack of and altogether too much content. What I offer as a counter-argument to these experiences that appear to limit a teacher's power in regards to interpreting and implementing the curriculum, is that the curriculum offers teachers more power than they think. In her understanding of the limitations of the curriculum, Marian spoke of how teachers have a “dream list of what they would teach” which would undoubtedly involve crafting what Linda Christensen calls a “curriculum from scratch that encompasses literature, history, and student lives” (2009, p. 9). However, taking an interdisciplinary approach may allow teachers to come closer to achieving their dream list in their already existing classrooms. As Marian pointed out, what is important in this implementation is that teachers self-assess their “comfort level.” Furthermore, Nancy suggested that teachers realize, ideally, that they should either be “confident in that background” or as Marian would add, at least “interested” in the new content or literature they would be introducing in their classrooms. When it comes to the successful use of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool, teachers have to focus not only on how they will integrate it into their lessons but, as Marian specified, how they will “teach historical fiction different” from the history or literature they have been teaching thus far. However, what makes its use different anyway is that teachers are able to choose the historical fiction they will want to use in their classrooms, since it will have to meet certain expectations in order to not be a challenge in the classroom.

Those challenges included, but were not limited to student engagement. A large part of teacher comfort in teaching historical fiction via an interdisciplinary framework is through positive
engagement, which can only come from sharing the power of choosing texts with students. This sentiment was one with which Evelyn concurred as she stated that when you “give choice” to students, the “more engaged students are.” Furthermore, Evelyn stated that there are students who “choose to read historical fiction” on their own time, a practice she has seen in her classes’ “silent period reading.” Indeed, in my own teaching placements, it has become evident to me that students are more engaged when they either feel they have a choice in choosing their own text, or the text at least reflects or offers a relevant connection in or to their lives. Marian further added to this notion when she admitted that in a “diverse class” it is difficult to assume a “collective or shared interest in historical fiction” but, at the same time, students could and would be engaged if any classroom reading was made “relevant to them.” In regards to the students who are in particular need of engaging and relevant literature, Nancy spoke of the relationship between “boys and reading” and how they “love non-fiction” but “revolt against fiction” illustrating the ways in which historical fiction can offer a groundwork and context that contrasts the perceived fanciful nature of literature on its own, particularly for teenage boys who want that focus on “facts and the realness” as Nancy noted, and appreciate the history that infuses the literature they read.

On a slightly different note, the challenge of student engagement is not just limited to the content and texts they engage with in a course. It extends to building a positive relationship with the teacher as well which can to a certain extent negate the effects of uncertainty and uncomfortableness in teaching unfamiliar content (historical fiction) in an unfamiliar manner (interdisciplinary thinking). Nancy offered advice on how teachers might handle introducing and maintaining a connection between themselves and their students so as to facilitate a classroom
atmosphere that thrives on the inquiry focus of interdisciplinary thinking. In order to encourage students to feel comfortable in making textual connections, there have to be, in Nancy’s opinion, teachers who create spaces that are “open to making those sorts of connections” by not only telling students that “it's okay to bring myself into this class, and to talk about what I think” but also to “share parts” of themselves in order to establish that reciprocal comfort. Nancy was adamant that “teachers have to set that foundation” of being able to make text to self, text to world, and text to text connections.

Teachers also have to relinquish control in the sense that they should have a “willingness” to admit that they are not always the sole givers of knowledge, but should offer students opportunities to “look it up together” as Nancy phrased it, whether that 'it' is a simple date or term, or a more complex idea about the mechanics of conflict and negotiation. Either way, this exploratory willingness on the part of the teacher not only acknowledges that students do have “research skills” which includes “academic skills” like “reading and writing” but that they also have “life skills” as Nancy as called them - the majority of which stem from their skills as visual learners (or most students, anyway). Marian agreed with this notion, as she noted that students are “constantly reading people” à la Freire, and that they are a “visual generation.” In fact, considering that teachers are being encouraged to incorporate more technology and media in to their classrooms, its only makes sense that they should see it as an opportunity to draw on a skill that their students already possess. Blending the skill of visualization with historical fiction and interdisciplinary thinking is the aspect of this combination that I most appreciate since it incorporates historical films and literary adaptations in to the mix. Indeed, as Nancy highlighted, the “reading skill is the same” even though “one is print and one is visual.” In having students
“imagine what life might have been like ... a hundred years ago” as Evelyn mentioned in order to help them better connect to “previous generations” it only makes sense to use immersion techniques that encourage both the students' ability to read media while extending that same visual skill to printed texts. Indeed, as Evelyn stated, it is an “opportunity to forge those connections” by building on student “strengths.” Overall, the important factor to consider in assessing the expectations, skills, and challenges that teachers and students alike must meet, develop, and face is that of good teacher practice and a willing attitude towards the difficulties they may face as historical fiction and interdisciplinary thinking is implemented in schools and classrooms.

5. Conclusion

The evidence points toward there being more benefits than challenges to the use of historical fiction in the classroom. Even though there are and will be challenges to be faced, they are of the sort that can be overcome by good teaching practice. The benefits of using historical fiction in secondary school classrooms stem primarily from historical fiction's liminal form: its written structure mimics the way in which both literary narratives and historiographical writings plot events making use of people as characters, and events as elements of the plot graph. This fluidity of form helps to ground and contextualize the more emotive aesthetic of literature in a specific place in history, while allowing readers of dissociative historical texts to make connections on a more personal, and emotional basis. Possibly its most important role in the classroom is its ability to present the perspectives and narratives of those who are most often silenced and marginalized within traditional literary canons and historical narratives. At the same time that the use of historical fiction offers an opportunity to represent the perspectives of minority student
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groups, it also allows students unfamiliar with these perspectives to connect with them on a
human level. Historical fiction is about humanizing history, particularly in terms of cause and effect
scenarios, where the people influencing, participating, and being acted upon by the event are
more important than the event itself. Of course, historical fiction works may have a more
academic approach as well: apart from the ways it can enrich the historical thinking concepts, and
introduce students to new perspectives and alternative and multiple narratives, it can also be
analyzed through various lenses and literary theories; again, emphasizing the numerous ways in
which a story can be told, and how new understandings can be elicited through these various
insights.

In regards to the challenges that may be faced in implementing historical fiction in their
classrooms, successful implementation comes down to assessing and understanding existing
expectations and skills for teachers and students alike. For teachers, it is a matter of making do
with what time they have (as time will always be a challenge, and not only in the teaching
profession), and changing their understanding of how the curriculum must inform their teaching
practice. A balance must be sought between content-driven and skills-driven teaching in the
history and English disciplines respectively, and a realization that launching inquiry is and should be
the primary focus of both disciplines. Teachers must seek to familiarize and establish a comfort-
level with interdisciplinary thinking, launching inquiry (the why question), and how both influence
the use of historical fiction in secondary school classrooms. This change in perspective also comes
with an acceptance and recognition of the skills that students bring in to the classroom. Teachers
need to realize that they must learn how to apply and expand upon the already existing skills of
students in order to help them gain new skills – particularly by capitalizing upon the strong media
and visual skills that students may bring to the classroom. All in all, the inclusion and implementation of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms is a continuous work in progress that raises questions regarding personal and professional implications for the teachers who choose to make use of it in their classrooms.

Discussion of these implications informs the next and final chapter of this research paper. The implications addressed affect not only my personal teaching practice, but also that of other teachers and the research conducted by the educational community at large. Additionally, the implications are followed up with recommendations for positive counter-action, and a suggestion of areas for further research.
Chapter 5 – The Final Problem
“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” - J. R. R. Tolkien

Introduction

In researching the role of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms, I relied upon the insights and experiences of three Ontario teachers within the Toronto District School Board alongside a review of existing relevant literature as the primary means of crafting the contents of this small-scale qualitative study. The responses from participants alongside the literature review have answered not only the overarching research question but have also shed light on how historical fiction can be used to enrich student understanding of historical themes and concepts, how historical fiction can be used to introduce new (and not normally addressed) perspectives to students, as well as how teachers and students might overcome the challenges they may face with regards to the use of historical fiction in classrooms. The responses diverged between both the theoretical and practical application of historical fiction in classrooms, but converged when addressing the central themes of teacher skills, student skills, challenges and/or limitations, expectations, power (or lack of), frameworks/theoretical approaches, and interdisciplinary approaches. The resulting implications are arranged within this chapter in the following order: 1. Overview of Chapter 4 – Findings 1.2 Implications

1.2.1 Implications for: Educational Research Community and Personal Practice 1.3 Recommendations and Areas for Further Research 1.4 Concluding Comments

1. Overview of Chapter 4 - Findings

The narrative of the research findings was created based on the integration of the central themes alongside the literature review in a manner that explicitly answered the research question

and sub-questions. In its compilation, two central understandings emerged regarding the use of historical fiction in classrooms and the challenges that may be faced by teachers in its implementation. Firstly, it was generally accepted that historical fiction's written structure allows it to be read and interpreted from both a literary and historical perspective while grounding the former perspective in a historical context, and encouraging a more emotive rendering of the latter perspective. Secondly, apart from offering a study of literary and historiographical writings, historical fiction also has the ability to introduce and help familiarize students with multiple and alternative narratives that are often excluded from traditional literary canons or historical narratives, like the perspectives of students from minoritized races in the classroom. Whatever the situation, historical fiction pushes an understanding of the human connection, particularly by emphasizing the human decision-making process in cause-and-effect scenarios, whether in literary or historical narratives. There is the added advantage that these perspectives can then be further analyzed through literary and historical lenses (including post-modernism and/or post-colonialism). Overall, the main advantage of historical fiction is its emphasis on the multiple and alternative ways to share narratives, and the advantages and disadvantages that can stem from such variety.

Of course, there are challenges and limitations when it comes to teachers actually implementing historical fiction in secondary school classrooms, despite the fact that historical fiction is an interdisciplinary tool due to its literary structure and historical content. These challenges and limitations stem from two connected concerns: one, the ever present question of 'is there enough time?' and two, 'are the final outcomes and goals of the curriculum being met and achieved?' In facing these limitations teachers are constantly balancing the time they have with the content-based and skills-driven focus of the history and English curriculum respectively. The
inclusion of historical fiction in classrooms, particularly as an interdisciplinary tool, means there has to be a reinterpretation of the curriculum, and ensuring that inquiry (the 'why' question) is an integral part of the process. Launching inquiry also requires teachers to revisit their understanding of the development of skills (basically, not enforcing Bloom's Taxonomy), and to accept the skills students bring in to the classroom (in particular, their strong media skills), aiming for further growth and development of new and existing skills. The changes are easier said than done, however, hence the understanding there are implications within the research findings that must be faced if teachers are ever to successfully implement historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool.

1.2 Implications

The implications that stem from the research findings are ones that require a new perspective regarding the manner in which not only the courses related to the discipline of History and English are taught, but also the steps teachers must take to familiarize themselves with this new method of thinking and teaching. The first of these implications is formulating a curriculum that is focused not only on content and skills, but that works across disciplines to launch inquiry, incorporate student experiences, and provide a holistic education guided by critical pedagogy. The second and third implications are slightly more connected to each other in so far as they revolve more firmly around teachers in their classrooms, than Ministry of Education or school-board workers who would compile the curriculum and policy documents (though of course, teachers have differing degrees of liberty to interpret the curriculum as they choose). The second implication focuses on teacher knowledge and how it will either encourage or impede teacher willingness to participate in a new method of teaching and exploring information and perspectives, particularly in regards to how they will emphasize the inclusion of historical fiction
and teach it differently than other resources and texts. The question here is: 'what will be done with historical fiction once it has introduced the multiple and alternative narratives that are needed alongside literary canons and traditional historical narratives?' However, there is also the question of collaboration, and whether or not it can be a means to teacher success in incorporating historical fiction and interdisciplinary thinking in their classrooms. The final implication focuses on the time (or lack of time) teachers have as they attempt to implement historical fiction in their classrooms. However, more than classroom or instructional time, it is the time teachers have outside of their 'more formal teacher duties' that is of relevance here. In particular, taking time to develop a curated list of historical fiction resources (whether textual or visual) that will support the aims of the outcomes based learning structure of Ontario schools, but also launch inquiry, incorporate multiple and alternative experiences, engage students, and encourage interdisciplinary thinking.

1.2.1 Implications for: Educational Research Community and Personal Practice

The implications listed above fall into the category of both broad (educational community at large) and narrow (personal practice) implications. I do not distinguish between them too firmly because ideas and concepts associated with either of these implications are not easily categorized between the two. This lack of easy categorization is further reflected in the disparity between theoretical and practical applications of content and skills that affects the top-down, or Ministry-to-classroom thinking that is currently practiced in Ontario schools. Rather, there is a need for a bottom-up or classroom-to-Ministry thinking that needs to be engaged in more often to remedy this disparity.

Linked to the bottom-up notion, it is also a matter of how I see myself as a researcher and a
teacher – the implications in my research findings affect both my interactions with peers (or the educational research community at large), and also my personal practice (I will inevitably attempt to incorporate my own advice and suggestions in to my classroom practice).

In regards to holistic education guided by critical pedagogy, I would simply like to revisit the words of my History curriculum professor on 'launching inquiry' (Gini-Newman, p. 3) and how the 'why' question has to be at the forefront of all teaching. His words emphasized the bottom-up learning model for me not only because it forced me to rethink my own learning experiences, particularly in my history and English classrooms, but also because it made me realize that there was no point in learning content and skills if there was no meaning beyond the school-driven outcomes. It was a matter of asking what application the content and skill will have in life beyond academia. These questions branch further into interdisciplinary thinking and how certain content and skills may appear to be subject or discipline specific, but can be applied across disciplines. The ability to connect content and skills across disciplines and also to life experiences to encourage “balance, inclusion, and connection[s]” (Miller, 1999, p. 46) is the goal of both holistic education and critical pedagogy, of which I would say my understanding of interdisciplinary thinking and learning is a direct off-shoot.

My participants spoke at length about historical fiction's ability to encourage the 'human connection' whether by shared experiences in a text that represent a student's lived experience, or by opening up a lived experience to students and making it a shared experience. Either way, the emphasis was on the idea that even without specific texts that were not normally part of any literary canon or traditional historical narrative (of which there is nonetheless a need), that “critical literacy theories and multicultural readings of canonical texts” could still help to fill that
gap, since there exists such a strong sense of shared human experience, particularly in the manner in which critical pedagogy views the curriculum (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, p. 51). The manner in which these multicultural readings may be achieved is emphasized within the holistic educational approach of 'balance, inclusion, and connection': firstly, to “balance learning and assessment” (Miller, 1999, p. 46) or as I would phrase it: to understand that you can only assess what you have taught, and thus need to ask why am I teaching this content and/or skill, and how does my assessment reflect that goal? Secondly, “to include students of diverse races and abilities” (Miller, 1999, p. 46). Historical fiction is a strong tool for inclusion precisely because it offers insights into those narratives and perspectives that are left out of mainstream narratives. Furthermore, it can be either textual or film, thus offering itself as a means of differentiated entry-points for similar content, but utilizing the same reading skills. Lastly, “connections among subjects can occur on different levels, for example, the teacher can link a novel to its historical time period” (Miller, 1999, p. 47).

Historical fiction (whether researched or contextual) is a means of interdisciplinary thinking, balance, inclusion, and connection by means of its form, structure, perspectives, and potential application in secondary school classrooms. Whether it be by way of interdisciplinary thinking and learning, critical pedagogy, or holistic education, teachers must make content and skills relevant to students by connecting them to their experiences and accept the skills students bring in to the classroom. Within the educational research community there is much to be said about the virtues of these different teaching methodologies, however, the implementation on a personal level (such as within my own classrooms within the near future) is the step I must explicitly take so as to practice what I preach.
This last sentiment of course leads in to the notion of teacher willingness to successfully incorporate historical fiction in to their classrooms. This willingness must stem from two fronts: firstly, the desire to learn about the lived experience students bring in to the classroom (whether religious, social, cultural, economic, or a combination of these and other factors), and work towards incorporating it in to classroom discussions, drawing connections between it and the content and skills being studied. Secondly, teachers must also be willing to explore and learn alongside students, understanding that they cannot possibly know everything, but making explicit that they are open to learning from students. These were sentiments expressed by participants. In particular, the comments focused on slowing down to have important conversations with students regarding the material they are reading, and realizing that it is necessary to take time to address student concerns about the content, and how they inform their lived and shared experiences. On a similar note, teachers also need to establish a shared space for mutual connections, wherein it is not only the students who are sharing and effectively exposing their sentiments, but having their openness reciprocated by their teacher who is also willing to share how the text connects to or has informed her lived and shared experiences.

These discussions, of course, come from the understanding that the teacher is comfortable, interested, and invested in the text, content, and skills that are being taught. However, if the teacher feels coerced in to teaching a text simply because the entire department is teaching it as part of common practice, it can be a limiting experience. Yet, based on my final practicum experience in a determinedly collaborative English department in which teachers taught the same text (per grade level), but shared or altered resources as per their understandings of the text and needs of the students in the classroom, collaboration can also be a liberating experience.
Collaboration is a notion I have become increasingly open to after the Professional Learning Community assignments I have undertaken as a Master of Teaching student. It is an enriching experience having the knowledge and expertise of an experienced teacher guide your lesson or unit plans, or an educative one through the well-meant meanderings of a group of teacher candidates as they navigate new materials and resources. Of my four teaching placements, the strongest and most successful ones have been the ones where teachers (either the associate teacher or other teachers within the department) have encouraged sharing of resources and collaboration in general – whether by physically exchanging documents, through consistent sustained conversation regarding successful implementation of resources, or through changes made to the material to suit different learning needs. Similar to historical fiction within collaboration there is no one way to teach a text, lesson, unit, or course. Again, as a broad implication, there is much written about the benefits of professional learning communities (and also their improper uses), and as a narrow personal implication, I too will try to build up rapport with current teacher-candidates and future colleagues when it comes to sharing and building upon resources.

The notion of sharing resources, leads to the final implication of time, lack of time, and (referring back to the Tolkien quote at the beginning of the chapter) what to do with the time that is given to teachers. When teachers are not participating in instructional duties in classrooms, they are spending time collecting and creating the resources that will inform their students' learning experiences. One of the earliest historical fiction resources I came across in pursuing this study was a collection of historical fiction organized according to various world locations and time-periods. Similar to what one participant described as a 'dream list' that all teachers have regarding
what they would like to teach, so too should there be a curated list of historical fiction texts that match the curriculum goals of various courses in the English and history disciplines. From the experience I have had with historical fiction in one practicum, this curated list was essentially a list of texts a teacher had previously read and deemed worthy of inclusion for her historical fiction assignment, or had allowed students to choose as long as they confirmed the work with her beforehand. The same might apply to historical fiction films and determining which ones are worthy of using in classrooms to have students watch and analyze. Of course, considering the concerns all the participants had regarding time (losing prep time, on-calls, etc.), it seems that summer is the only time to dedicate to compiling this curated list (Evelyn, Interview, October 8th, 2015). However, considering my pitch for collaboration, utilizing the list of a fellow teacher who has already started to create a collection that fits the courses they have taught (albeit maybe in the specific manner they have taught it) could be an excellent first step – bearing in mind that all the texts would have to be read by the teacher before they can be assigned. As a broad implication, it would be fascinating to have published lists of literary canons, historiographical writings, and historical fiction pieces that teachers have successfully used in their classrooms. As a personal implication, being a teacher I would like to (and have to) begin compiling my own list. Either way, it is all a work in progress, and no two lists will ever be the same.

1.3 Recommendations and Areas for Further Research

In this section, I offer two suggestions and one area for further research in response to the implications discussed. For teacher-candidates who will be heading out in to the educational field, hoping to gain teaching positions in various boards, and even for established teachers, I would recommend keeping in touch with and forming a collaborative community with fellow teachers
who either share and hold similar ideas and views regarding teaching, or offer new insights and constructive challenges regarding the teaching process. In relation to this recommendation, I would also suggest that teacher-candidates and established teachers continue to read and research on new ideas in the field – something which can be achieved either by keeping in touch with new or former colleagues, subscribing to educational papers, or simply spending time reading the publications that circulate in the teaching field. It is a matter of keeping connected to the new influx of ideas that are constantly being researched, circulated, proved or disproved. Just as teachers tell students there is an infinite number of things to learn, so too does the same notion apply to teachers and teaching pedagogy. As for areas of further research, I hope this paper becomes one amongst the many that already exist and will exist on the practical application of historical fiction as an interdisciplinary tool in secondary school classrooms. I feel that there is still much to be said on the topic, particularly in regards to a sustained study that follows the implementation of historical fiction in a secondary school classroom and involves not only the teacher perspective, but that of students too – the second, and probably most important piece of the study.

1.4 Concluding Comments

The facets of the teaching experience I would like teachers to embrace is their sense of adventure and willingness to explore new ideas and methods of teachings. While there is always room for change, it is never an easy undertaking – and so a positive attitude towards the ideas presented within this study and the associated teaching methodologies is a strong step forward. At the end of this study, I leave the reader with this quote from David Bowie:
“All art is unstable. Its meaning is not necessarily that implied by the author, there is no authoritative active voice. There are only multiple readings.”

*
References


whose-genius-defined-spirit-of-the-age-1.2493216


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Mariyah Hyder, and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the use of historical fiction in secondary school classrooms. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have at least 5 years of experience in the classroom, have a strong understanding of the Humanities, teach in multicultural classrooms, and have personal or professional experience with historical fiction. I am certain that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 60-90 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer, within a password-protected file folder, and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Arlo Kempf. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. A copy of the transcript will be shared with you to ensure accuracy. There are no known risks or benefits, however I would say that having this study be part of the general research diaspora would be a benefit to other researchers and your participation would only ensure this inclusion.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Mariyah Hyder
647-926-7095
mairyah.hyder@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Arlo Kempf
Contact Info: arlo.kempf@utoronto.ca
Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.
I have read the letter provided to me by Mariyah Hyder and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
Appendix B1 – Interview Questions: English

General Questions (Background Info + Classroom Setting)
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. How would you describe the racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious make-up of your classroom?

Questions related to Historical Fiction and Literature (Teacher Practice + Beliefs/Values + Influencing Factors)
1. How would you define historical fiction?
2. What makes a narrative literature?
3. Are historical narratives literature?
4. If yes, what is the common ground? (If no, can historical fiction fill the gap?)
5. How is reading literature like reading historical narratives, or vice versa?
6. Can historical fiction be used to make literature more personal for students (incorporating their experiences, or experiences they are familiar with, into the broader traditional canon)?
7. Do teachers who teach both/either English and/or History make explicit to students the transient nature of literature between the two disciplines?
8. How often, if at all, are Shakespeare's plays, classic authors, and international literature used to illustrate the accessibility of historical themes/rhetoric over time, similar to how they are often used in English classes to demonstrate the far-reaching merits of theme/rhetoric that are accessible across centuries and cultures? Why?
9. What are the transferable skills between the disciplines of English and History that would help students understand the uses of historical fiction?
10. How is writing narratives similar to writing history?
11. Do you/would you use excerpts or full works of historical fiction in your classroom?
12. What experiences informed/would inform your decision to use historical fiction in the classroom?
13. What steps do you/ would you take to introduce historical fiction to your students?
14. What does/might historical fiction offer as a genre that other genres do not/ may not?
15. How do your students normally respond to reading literature versus watching literature?
16. Does it seem students are more ready/ better prepared to “read” films/screen than books/words? Why?

Questions related to Next Steps for using Historical Fiction
1. What skills need to be developed to make the use of historical fiction in classrooms a success?
2. What can be gained from using historical fiction in classrooms?
3. What are some of the challenges that may be faced by teachers hoping to use historical fiction in their classrooms
4. How might these challenges be resolved?
Appendix B2 – Interview Questions: History

General Questions (Background Info + Classroom Setting)
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. How would you describe the racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious make-up of your classroom?

Questions related to Historical Fiction and Literature (Teacher Practice + Beliefs/Values + Influencing Factors)
1. Do you feel that there are certain facts about Canadian History that all students must know? Examples?
2. Do you then see history as being a single, traditional narrative?
3. Can that narrative be supplemented with alternative narratives via historical fiction?
4. Can historical fiction be used to make history more personal for students (incorporating their experiences, or experiences they are familiar with, into the broader traditional narrative?)
5. Do you/ would you use excerpts from or full works of historical fiction in your classrooms?
6. What experiences informed/ would inform your decision to use historical fiction in the classroom?
7. What steps do you/ would you take to introduce historical fiction to your students?
8. What does/might historical fiction offer as a genre that other genres do not/ may not?
9. How do your students normally respond to reading history versus watching history?
10. Does it seem students are more ready/ better prepared to “read” films/screen than books/words? Why?
11. Are literary narratives historical?
12. If yes, where do the two forms find common ground? (if not, can historical fiction fill the gap?)
13. How is reading historical narratives like reading literature, or vice versa?
14. How is writing stories similar to writing history?
15. Do teachers who teach both/either History and/or English make explicit to students the transient nature of literature between the two disciplines?
16. What are the transferable skills between the disciplines of History and English that would help students understand the uses of historical fiction?

Questions related to Next Steps for using Historical Fiction
1. What skills need to be developed to make the use of historical fiction in classrooms a success?
2. What can be gained from using historical fiction in classrooms?
3. What are some of the challenges that may be faced by teachers hoping to use historical fiction in their classrooms?
4. How might these challenges be resolved?