Decentralizing the Classics: A Case for Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Literature in High School English Classrooms

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

Despite improvements in the creation of more equitable and inclusive policies in education (Ministry of Education, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2007), racialized minority students continue to face challenges with regards to adequate representation and inclusion (Chenowith, 2014; Davidson, 2009; Sandhu, 2012; Sensoy & Parhar 2011;). In the case of English, a discipline that has historically privileged Eurocentric texts (Skerrett, 2010, p. 47), increasing policy demands, school budgets and prevailing attitudes towards what constitutes good literature has reduced motivation for “[shifting a] primarily Eurocentric curriculum” (p. 47) into that which is culturally relevant. The use of culturally relevant literature, coupled with critical literacy, has been proven to increase student engagement as well as affirm the cultural differences and identities of various students in the classroom. They not only foster “esteem for [a] diversity of cultures” (Bar, 1995, p. 9), but also, a greater appreciation for what these “cultures have to offer” (p. 4). How to tackle issues surrounding their availability and accessibility is explored through the experiences of high school English teachers already engaged in the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Key Words: High School English, English Canon, Culturally Relevant Literature, Critical Literacy
Acknowledgements

As I contemplate the end of my two year journey, I am reminded of the prophetic saying, “One who has not thanked the people has not thanked God”. It is through people that God perform miracles and I am humble enough to have experienced these miracles from people who have given me ample amounts of love and encouragement. I am thankful to my parents, Mahmoud (Adem) Said and Khadiga Abdelrhman for dedicating their time and effort to easing my hardships and pushing me beyond my own perceived limitations. I thank my teacher participants, whose experiences were invaluable to my research and finally, I thank my friends and family for their own going support as well as my professor and thesis advisor Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer, whose continued care and compassion for students like me have only helped me thrive. I thank her for her ongoing patience and hope that the fruits of my labour can reflect how far I have come in my journey as a teacher researcher in the Masters of Teaching program.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Context and Problem

The Ontario Ministry of Education recognized, more than twenty years ago, the need for cultural awareness, inclusion and representation in the pedagogical approaches and materials used to educate students from various ethnic, religious backgrounds and sexual orientations (Equity and Inclusive Education, 1993). Despite this, students from minority backgrounds continue to face challenges in the schooling system with regards to adequate representation and inclusion (Chenowith, 2014; Davidson, 2009; Sandhu, 2012; Sensoy & Parhar, 2011). The lack of recognition for non-white histories and the devaluation of minority experiences and knowledge’s has prompted educational scholars like George Die to propose alternate school systems and pedagogical approaches for racialized students marginalized by the current education system (Anderson, 2009). Non-white students rarely see themselves and their experiences reflected in the curriculum while those from dominant socio cultural groups i.e. white, middle class (Dei, James, Karumanchery, Wilson & Zine, 2000) are often centralized and normalized in the school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2013; Parhar and Sensoy, 2011).

Davidson (2009) writes,

While the curriculum in Ontario has been revised and adapted to address new concerns as they arise, lack of inclusion of the experiences and viewpoints of racial and ethnic minority groups has been the consistent subject of criticism from those who cite this as the main reason for the disengagement and poor results of some minority youth (p.2) Despite Canadian research, which continues to affirm the need for culturally relevant pedagogies in modern classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2013), “the English curriculum in Ontario is still situated within and structured according to dominant socio-cultural traditions”
By dominant socio-cultural traditions, Sandhu refers to socio-cultural narratives about the world that are mainly Eurocentric. Although the revised grades 9-10 English curriculum (2007) encourages the use of antidiscrimination education in literacy education, there is not enough emphasis on the need for anti-discrimination education in a curriculum that has historically been very white and very English (Colarusso, 2009; Nicol, 2008; Tice, 2006).

1.2 Research Purpose

Because of the breadth and depth…associated with a more inclusive curriculum…a more sophisticated knowledge base is required” (Rolheiser, Evans & Gambhir, 2011, p. 6). In order to meet the needs of students, teachers must be adaptive, culturally aware and sensitive to the many challenges of teaching students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Chenowith, 2014; Sandhu, 2012). Culturally relevant teaching, made popular by American pedagogical theorist Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings is a pedagogical framework that takes into consideration the cultural and diverse contexts in which learning takes place (Ladson-Billings, 2011). It is a way to show “concern” (Gay, 2000, p. xix) for students by centering “classroom instruction around multiethnic cultural forms of reference” (Gay, 2000, p. xix).

Unfortunately, however, many English teachers who try to work with the complexities of diversity and inclusion are often faced with many challenges (Balzer, 2006; Colarusso, 2009; Johnston, 1995; Skerrett; 2010). Aside from trying to navigate a “disciplinary tradition that privileged Eurocentric texts” (Skerrett, 2010, p. 47), English teachers are often inadequately prepared and lack proper funding and resources (Lopez, 2013; Johnston, 1995; Howard, 2006; Balzer, 2006; Rolheiser et al., 2011; Skerrett; 2010) to be comfortable enough to move beyond the use of more traditional English literature in the classroom.

The purpose of this research is to explore if and how a small sample of English teachers
are incorporating culturally relevant, diverse and inclusive literature in their grade 9 and 10 academic English high school classrooms. This small study, focusing on three teachers in multi-ethnic high schools in Southern Ontario will explore their experiences incorporating culturally relevant literature and the challenges that come with attempting to diversify their students’ reading materials. I will be exploring the kinds of resources and supports that these teachers may be accessing. I aim to share these findings with the larger education community and various school boards across Ontario as well as the ministry to provide some solutions on how teachers can successfully implement culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies in their instructional strategies for English.

1.3 Research Question

My research focuses on the ways in which a small sample of Ontario teachers are adopting diverse texts in favour of more canonical ones and the overall effects of these texts in the modern English classroom. Hence, my question: “What are the Effects of Authentic, Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Literature in Modern grades 9/10 English Classroom?” will allow me to explore the advantages and challenges associated with incorporating more diverse reading materials in the English classroom.

1.3.1 Subsidiary Questions

Some of the subsidiary questions to help center my topic are,

- What motivates teachers to incorporate culturally relevant literature in their classrooms?
- How are teachers incorporating culturally relevant texts and is their pedagogical method effective in keeping students engaged?
• What are the kinds of resources out there to help teachers incorporate culturally relevant literature in English classroom?

• How accessible are the kinds of information/resources that teachers can use while implementing culturally relevant literature in their English classes?

• What are some of the challenges associated with trying to incorporate culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

For the longest time, I “look[ed] at literature through a narrow evaluative lens” (Greenbaum, 1994) and bought into the idea that classical works of literature like *Hamlet* and *The Great Gatsby* must be read in order to set the foundation for one's understanding and appreciation of English literature. Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon* references canonical writers like Shakespeare, Dickens, Wordsworth, Austen and Yeats (Bloom, 1994) as major western writers and figureheads of the English literary tradition. As an English major, classical and Victorian literature dominated my first and second year courses. Courses like “South Asian literature” and/or “African literature” were option C courses that only made its way during my third year when all the foundational courses were taken. Reading various literary works by minority writers and aboriginal writers brought culture and knowledge of the world to me. Hence, I am a heavy proponent of emphasizing the importance of all works of literature including those by non-white and non-Eurocentric authors whose works only add to the complexity and richness of the English language.

1.5 Overview

I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview 3 Southern Ontario teachers about their instructional strategies for decentralizing the classics and
implementing culturally relevant literature in their English classrooms. In chapter one, I lay the foundation for my research by exploring the research context and problem followed by the purpose, the research question and finally, my own positionality. In chapter two, I look at historical teaching practices in English education and compare it against current scholarship on the use of culturally relevant and inclusive literature in English classrooms. Chapter three looks at the research design and the sampling process. My research findings are explored in chapter four and are discussed in light of the existing research on culturally relevant literature in English education. Implications of my findings are identified, in chapter five, for my own teacher identity and practice as well as the educational research community more broadly.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with a literature review on the study of English literature in the past followed by current pedagogical practices on the study of literature in education. Next, a review of the latest provincial policy documents on inclusion including the revised grade 9 and 10 Ontario English curriculum and the challenges associated with implementing culturally relevant and inclusive literature in the English classroom.

2.1 Historical Teaching Practices for English

This section outlines scholarly research on the nature of the English curriculum in the past. According to Brauer and Clark (2008), the “study of English…and literature, [was historically] based on class as well as gender” (p. 296). Hence, often what was considered good literature would have had more to do with the tastes of the upper class than with the complexity and uniqueness of the book itself.

2.1.1 Historical Teaching Texts: The English Canon

Historically, the study of literature in high school classrooms were often tied to the study of canonical print based texts (Brauer and Clark, 2008). The term *Canon* refers to texts that have traditionally been venerated and regarded as worthy of academic study (Nicol, 2008; Galloway, 1981), the kind of texts every well-read person should have supposedly read (Au, 2009; Leggo, 2001). These texts are not so randomly selected (Bloom, 1994) but are reflections of a very white and western (Tice, 2006) form of English literature.

2.1.2 “Teaching of the Old Standards” (Leggo, 2001): A Colonizing and Civilizing Force

“The study of English has always been a densely political and cultural phenomenon” (Ascherof, Grifiths & Tiffin, 2002, p.2). For Colarusso (2009) and Brauer and Clark (2008), it
has its roots in the values and cultural tastes of the “elite social class” (Colarusso, 2009, p. 41). Historically used as a civilizing and colonizing force (Colarusso, 2010; Johnston, 2001), canonical texts have been used “educate the common man in civilized English” (Johnston, 2001, par. 5), “improve morality and instill ethical and cultural history” (Brauer & Clark, 2008, p. 296). The use and reuse of canonical texts in modern English classrooms is what Colarusso (2009) and Johnston (2001) believe to be echoes of an English curriculum seeped in ideas about what good literature is (Au, 2009; Goldblatt, 1998) and what English teachers should teach (Goldblatt, 1998).

2.1.3 Old Habits Die Hard: The Canon in Recent Times

A survey of texts offered in Canadian high schools more than thirty years ago found that schools were heavily dependent on canonized English texts (Galloway, 1980). Twenty-five years later, there has been very little change to the reading lists (Balzer, 2006; Johnston, 2006; Skerrett, 2010; Tice, 2006). Majority of the authors are white males writing on Anglo-American or Western European experiences (Colarusso; 2009; Johnston, 2006; Skerrett, 2010; Tice, 2006). Colarusso (2009) writes,

Books on English department shelves in Canada, still tell the old story of a Western literary tradition, based on mostly British (e.g., Shakespeare, William Golding, John Wyndham, the Brontës) and American male White authors (e.g., Arthur Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams), with a little Canadian (e.g., Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findlay, Joy Kogawa), and some multicultural content (in short story and poetry anthologies, mainly), for good measure (p. 54).
Galloway (1981) writing in the early eighties, comments on the reluctance of Canadian English teachers to expand beyond the majority British, American and Canadian texts in the classroom. More then two decades later, teachers were still teaching the same canonized texts that had been around from the past (Johnston, 1995; Skerrett, 2010). In Edmonton, Alberta, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Romeo and Juliet* continues to be widely taught by a considerable margin (Mackey, Vermeer, Storie & DeBlois, 2012). A study conducted by Macket et al., (2012) titled, “The Constancy of the School “Canon”: A Survey of Texts Used in Grade 10 English Language Arts in 2006 and 1996” shows that not much has changed in the reading materials for high school students within that twenty year span.

Knowledge of the canon is not only an indication of cultural taste but also higher learning. In 1998, Goldbratt’s decision to introduce non-canonical literature to her gifted high school students was initially met with resistance. Many of her students believed that “their university education would be harmed by studying ‘primitive third world’ texts and that [authors like] Shakespeare, Dickens…or even Wordsworth” were more suitable for academic study (Goldbratt, 1998, p.72).

“Despite a more inclusive English curriculum, the hallmark tradition in secondary English education, particularly at the advanced levels, continues to be a Eurocentric and Anglo-centric curriculum” (Applebee, 1974 in Skerrett, 2010 p. 37). English teachers harken to “check off” (Nicol, 2008, p. 23) “higher status literature (Au, 2009, p. 2) in order to prepare high school students for post secondary study. Hence, “AP classes need to read the classics” (Au, 2009, p. 3). Meanwhile, “students in regular classes can read ‘thug literature’” (p.3), i.e. urban novels.

2.1.4 Shakespeare: A Legacy
Shakespeare, a major western writer, dramatist (Blade, 2011; Bloom, 1994) and figurehead of the English literary tradition predominates across grades and course syllabi in many Canadian high schools (Colarusso, 2009). Shakespeare’s plays are recognized globally (Colarusso, 2009) and studied in many universities and schools throughout Britain and the postcolonial world (Johnston, 2001) making him, perhaps the largest writer ever known (Bloom, 1994). Solomone and Davis (1997) write,

Of all the world's writers, none has received more attention than Shakespeare. Only the Bible is available in more languages. No other writer has had a larger body of critical works generated about his writings (p. xi).

Many schools in Ontario offer Shakespeare in high school and most students will remember studying at least one or two of his plays (Blade, 2011). This is “somewhat unsurprising […] given Canada’s historical relationship to Britain, which has colonized the literary imagination of much of the world” (Wilinsky, 1998 in Skerrett, 2010, p.36). The revised grades 9 and 10 English curriculum references Shakespeare approximately eight times (Ministry of Education, 2007). The recognition of a canonical English author like Shakespeare in the Ontario curriculum highlights its importance as a foundational literary text and his works studied in almost every high school in Ontario garners it central to the English literacy experience.

The belief in Shakespeare’s adaptability to all generations and cultural experiences (Gibson, 1998) is an example of how western narratives are heavily normalized and universalized. After all, “[his plays are] recognizable and familiar, if not in student’s real life experience, then in “felt” knowledge” (Gibson, 1998, p. 2). Gibson (1998) believes that “students of all ages can recognize and identify with such relationships” (p. 2) as Romeo and Juliet and A Mid Summer Night’s Dream etc. However, Gibson’s ability to identify with these experiences
may not be reciprocated by students from other cultures or other generations for that matter (Tatum, Wold & Piper, 2009). Enid Lee (in Au, 2009) writes,

> Often times, whatever is white is treated as normal. So when teachers choose literature that they say will deal with a universal theme, or story, like childhood…its basically white culture and civilizations. That culture is different from others, but it doesn’t get named as different. It gets named as normal (As cited in Au, 2009, p.10).

Because his works i.e. plays and sonnets explore complex ideas about human nature (Blade, 2011) and “feelings” (Gibson, 1998, p.2), “[studying] Shakespeare requires all kinds of knowledge,” argues Gibson (1998, p. 2) and therefore, it encourages students to develop what Blade (2011) calls “higher analytical skills” (p. 4). However, higher analytical skills are required for any kind of critical analysis of any literary and/or or non-literary text. For Au (2009), Morrison’s works is more complex than *The Canterbury Tales*” (p. 3). “Unique, powerful, dazzling in their own right” (Goldbratt, 1998, p. 72), the abundance of “fine English Literature” (Colarusso, 2010. p. 436) from “works that Black and other non-White authors have written” (p. 436), is a testament to their ability to write just as rich and complex texts as “any stodgy Britisher” (Goldbratt, 1998, p. 72).

### 2.2 Current Policies and Practices: Instructional Strategies for Student Success

Several changes have been made to previous ministry documents to address issues of marginalization, representation and inclusion in both schools and curriculums across Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education 2007, Ministry of Education 2013, Ministry of Education 2014). Current teacher practices are also explored in connection to revised ministry documents used to provide guiding frameworks and resources on addressing the various needs of diverse learners.

#### 2.2.1 Demographics of an Increasingly Diverse Canada
Canada’s changing demographics, according to Bélanger and Malenfant (2005) has been attributed to the growing visibility of non-white persons. In 2006, over five million people or 16% of Canada’s population belonged to a visible minority (Malenfant, Lebell & Martel, 2010, p.23) and by 2017, “Canada’s visible minority population could number between 6.3 million and 8.5 million in 2017” (Belanger and Malenfant, 2005, p. 19). Compared to the national average, Ontario has the largest number of visible minority persons and majority of them, are youth (Belanger & Melenfant, 2005). What implications then, do these statistics have on the kinds of literature worth reading, teaching and keeping? (Nicol, 2008)

2.2.2 Representation in Literature: Marginalizing Difference

Language is a fundamental element of identity and culture (Ministry of Education, 2007; Johnston, 2001; Leggo, 2001). The subject of English and by extension, literature, has always been about more than the acquisition of language and other rudimentary communication skills (Johnston, 2001; McLaren, 1998) but a significant means by which we acquire knowledge and culture (Brauer and Clark, 2008; Colarusso, 2010; Johnston, 2001). Leggo (2001) and Johnston (2001) attribute language to the development of identity as well as citizenship. We develop a sense of our own identity as well as the identities of others in the kinds of literature and media we expose ourselves to (Leggo 2001; Ministry of Education, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009). For much of the twentieth century, literature selected for the classroom was chosen from a list of works collectively known as the canon (Balzer, 2006). The kinds of literature studied in high school should begin to reflect a changing world, a changing Canada from the growing presence of multi-ethnic students in Ontario schools who can only identify so much with the historical and cultural experiences of authors from western, white and male perspectives.
MacLaren (1998) adopts Young’s (1992) definition of cultural imperialism and applies it to the various forms of oppression that exist for minority children in current systems of knowledge. Minority children tend to feel marginalized and silenced by the effect of the dominant culture’s experiences as the norm (Davidson, 2009). Adrienne Rich states,

When those who have the power to name and socially construct reality choose not to see you or here you, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing (as cited in Maher & Tetreault, 2001, p. 201).

The establishment of these experiences as the norm ends up “consciously or unconsciously” (Johnston, 2001) marginalizing and suppressing different and/or alternative experiences of the world (Johnston, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Extensive practices of Eurocentrism, for Dei et al. (2000) results in subtle and overt forms of oppression for those who cannot identify with the status quo. It either “erases the social, cultural, historical and political realities of non-white, non-western groups in society” (p. 171) or “positions them as different” (MacLaren, 1998, p. 20). Minority students unable to see themselves reflected in the curriculum experience feelings of erasure (Maher and Tetreault, 2001), from their inability to see their identities and realities reflected back at them i.e. the feeling of looking into a mirror and seeing nothing. As Canadian society continues to become more culturally diverse, schools must become instrumental in transforming, not reproducing a monolithic concept of society (Au, 2009; McLeod & Krugly-Smolska, 1997).

2.2.3 Provincial and National Policies on Inclusive Education

When the original Policy/Program Memorandum no. 119 was issued in 1993, it noted that a Eurocentric perspective in education had the effect of limiting the contributions of people from
a variety of different backgrounds and excluding the experiences, values, and viewpoints of members of racial and ethno cultural communities, as well as Aboriginal communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 11).

The right to be free from discrimination encompasses not only students’ right to education but the quality of their educational experience as well (Canada report for UNESCO, 2011). In 1993, the Policy Program Memorandum No. 119 for the Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity recognized that many of its policies, programs and educational structures privileged Eurocentric systems of knowing. This form of knowledge production often failed to take into account the viewpoints, needs and experiences of non-white and Aboriginal groups, resulting in systemic inequalities in the education system (Ministry of Education, 2014). Hence, the Policy Program Memorandum No. 119, released by the ministry of education in 2013 requires Ontario school systems to develop an equity and inclusive education policy (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 9) covering the prohibited grounds of discrimination from the Ontario Human rights code (Ministry of Education, 2013) to provide “equitable learning opportunities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 1) for all students in the Ontario education system. A reflection of this in the education system, according to the revised English curriculum (2007) looks like the creation of critical pedagogies that aimed at addressing issues of representation and inclusion.

2.3 Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Literature: Challenges and Solutions

2.3.2 Examples of Inclusive Texts: The Case For and Against Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature has several benefits, including students’ exposure to various cultures and experiences of the world (Koeller, 1996; Stevens, 2014). The revised Ontario English curriculum for grades 9 and 10 (2007) recognizes the need for diversity in the kinds of literature students are being exposed to. The study of literary works by and about First Nations and non-white authors whose knowledges and experiences have traditionally been marginalized (Louie, 2006; Johnston, 1995) will not only foster “esteem for [a] diversity of cultures” (Bar, 1995, p. 9), but also, a greater appreciation for what these “cultures have to offer” (p. 4).

Concerns and criticism of multicultural literature are many and can cause more harm than good. According to (Greenbaum, 1994; Jean Pierre & Nunes, 2011; Kirova, 2008) the selection of multicultural texts can end up romanticizing and oversimplifying minority cultures in the effort to celebrate their difference and variance. This consequence stems from a number of factors, of them, the selection of poorly written texts (Kirova, 2008) as tokenistic forms of multicultural appeasement and the study of these texts within Eurocentric knowledge frameworks. In the effort to appear diverse and inclusive, the inclusion of works by non-male, non-white non-heterosexual voices often end up reinforcing the dichotomy between us and them (Greenbaum, 1994).

Teacher attitudes towards multicultural education have also been criticised (Au, 2009) due to attempts to use multicultural literature solely as an entry point to reading “higher status” literature” (Au, 2009, p. 3). Au states,

Teachers use Tupac’s lyrics to move students to Shakespeare; students can unpack hip-hop lyrics as a way to learn literary language like stanza and rhyme, but they need to study Frost and Yeats to be considered well-read. [Hence, multicultural education] not only keeps
the Eurocentric canon of knowledge at the heart of real education, it also communicates to students the idea that the diversity of their identities, lives and communities does not really matter when it comes to learning (p. 3).

Kirova (2008) as well as Enid Lee (in Au, 2009) comment on the superficiality of the multicultural model in Canada. The celebration of language and culture “without focusing on what those expressions of culture mean; the values, the power relationships that shape the culture” (Lee in Au, 2009 p.10) only allow non-white non-western cultures to function marginal to the centralized and normalized Eurocentric culture very much present in much of our reading lists.

2.3.1 Culturally Relevant Teaching and Critical Literacy

According to Sandhu (2012), “it is not enough for the author to identify…as racialized [or] for there to be [non white] characters in texts” (p. 27). Multicultural texts need to combat debilitating ideas and stereotypes about racialized communities through alternative pedagogical frameworks in order to do justice to the complex identities and experiences of communities that have historically been marginalized.

The revised English curriculum (2007) highlights the importance of culturally relevant literature and the use of critical literacy to empower students by centralizing their voices in the classroom. Culturally relevant teaching, according to “Capacity Building Series”, takes into account, the intersection of race, gender, religion and sexuality in students’ multiple identities (Ministry of Education, 2013) and exposes them to narratives that reflect and/or speak to these experiences (Gay, 2002). This pedagogical approach also deals directly with controversy (Gay, 2002) and contextualizes issues of race, class, ethnicity and gender in a careful and respectful manner.
Critical Literacy, as defined in the revised English curriculum (2007) involves, among a few, the ability to detect and identify different perspectives, values and biases, read implicit and overt meanings, ask questions, challenge status quo and explore issues of power and justice in society (p. 34). Teachers understand that “all texts advance a particular point of view that must be recognized, questioned, assessed and evaluated” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). Critical literacy can be achieved with a pedagogical approach known as culturally relevant teaching or culturally responsive teaching. Students, in their exposure to a variety of culturally relevant texts can still be critical of how these texts narrate themselves and the pedagogical frameworks used to analyze them.

2.3.1 Challenges: Limited Resources, Access and Exposure

According to the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2008), “inclusive classrooms are one of the greatest challenges [teachers/educators] face” (p. 38). Although the province of Ontario is working towards the creation of spaces for non-white, non-western pedagogies and ways of knowing, there is still a ways to go. Balzer (2006), Johnston (1995) and Skerrett (2010) cite budget constraints as plausible causes for expanding the syllabus. Budget constraints force schools to recycle many of the same texts they have been using for two or more decades (Johnston 1995). Teachers hence, do not have a great deal of choice in the kinds of literature they teach and must select what is currently available in storeroom or on “an approved reading list” (Balzer, 2006, p. 55).

Budget constraints, however is not the sole inhibitor of new resource materials (Johnson, 1995; Lopez, 2013; Nicol, 2008). A number of authors cite teacher’s lack of cultural awareness by educators as major factors for little changes in our reading lists (Howard, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Nicol, 2008). Many teachers lack confidence and feel inadequately prepared to teach students
from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Howard, 2006; Johnston, 1995; Lopez, 2013). As Howard (2006) states, “we can’t teach what we don’t know” (p.1). Nicol (2008) offers several reasons as to why the canon permeates our modern day syllabi. Teachers often select texts that they are familiar with. Even texts that may not necessarily be canonical tend to speak of experiences that may not be relatable to adolescents today (Mackey et al., 2012; Nicol, 2008).

(Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2007) makes a compelling case on teacher and administrative diversity in Canada. Majority of teachers, the study noted, are not from minority backgrounds (Skerrett, 2009; Skerrett, 2010). Even in urban cities where the percentage of non-white teachers is much higher, their numbers still pale in comparison to the numbers of ethnically diverse students. Because representation has an impact on how students learn, (Ministry of Ontario, 2007), teachers from non-white backgrounds may have more reasons to expand on these readings lists and “deliver a culturally relevant pedagogy that makes use of subject content related to the life experiences and cultures of their students” (Ryan et al., 2007. p. 5) in an effort to offer their students more possibilities and opportunities for learning then they might have had.

2.4 Conclusion

This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to the importance of culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy in increasingly diverse classrooms. It also raises questions about access and exposure to these kinds of pedagogical practices, which points to the need for further research in the areas of resource and teacher supports in the areas of culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy and literature. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn about some of the unique ways individual teachers are implementing culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy through the use of culturally relevant literature so that I can share their
ideas and experiences with the larger education community. Inclusive literature will not only benefit minority students but students from the dominant culture as well (Davidson, 2009). Because of the greater likelihood of them to end up in positions of power and social responsibility (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999 as cited in Davidson, 2009, p. 2), culturally relevant and inclusive literature will only help them “better understand the perspectives of their peer but also to act as positive change-agents in the areas of diversity and tolerance a they move into the adult world” (Davidson, 2009, p. 2).
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological decisions related to my research study: the effects of culturally relevant and inclusive literature. I discuss in detail, my participant criteria, recruitment process and methods of data collection in order to explain the data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my research. I also highlight the limitations of my research methodology, with respect to a small sample size and qualitative approach (but also speak to its strengths) and conclude with a summary of key methodological decisions and rational for selecting them given my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The study was conducted using a qualitative research study approach, including a review of the existing literature (see chapter two) and purpose of the study (see chapter one). I conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with three intermediate high school grade 9 and 10 English teachers on their use of culturally relevant and inclusive literature.

“Qualitative study is[...] concerned with meaning and in particular, how people make sense of the world and how participants experience events from their perspective” (Griffin, 2004, p. 6). A qualitative research approach was most effective because it “allow[ed] for systematic, in-depth, holistic examinations” (Leko, 2014, p. 276) of my participants whose voices were at the forefront of my study (Leko, 2014). This research method allowed me to document, “in rich detailed accounts” (p. 276) my participants’ responses so as “to do justice to their perceptions and complexity of their interpretations (Atieno, 2009, p. 16) on the issue of culturally relevant literature and pedagogy.
While quantitative data typically consists of numbers, i.e. numerical data and a greater participation and/or randomized participant group, qualitative research requires more depth and reflection from a much smaller focus group. According to Patton (2002), qualitative methods “can tell the stories behind the numbers, capture unintended impacts and ripple effects, and illuminate dimensions of desires outcomes that are difficult to quantify” (p. 152). This was appropriate for me because “the purpose [was] to learn from the participants…the way they experienced” (Atieno, 2009, p. 16) the use of culturally relevant literature in their diverse classrooms, “the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret[ed] what they experience[d]” (Atieno, 2009, p. 16). Had I adopted a quantitative research approach, my time would have been spent gathering data on a larger participation group and my questions would’ve been less specific, less interactive, less direct and more survey-like when I could yield more fruitful results from a smaller, more concentrated participant group.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Recognized forms of data collection for qualitative research involves the use of “field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Researchers are expected to play a more active role in the data collection process by engaging in “specific areas [where]…people’s experiences and thoughts are sought” (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 110). I conducted individual in-depth interviews with my participants in a manner that facilitated critical discussions and reflections about the need for inclusion and representation in our pedagogical approaches used to teach English and the overall effectiveness of culturally relevant literature in English classrooms.

In a qualitative research study, semi-structured interviews are often the sole source of data researchers rely on (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Unlike structured
interviews, semi-structured interviews are less standardized and structured. However, “they are generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). My semi-structured interviews were organized around a set of pre-constructed questions which were open-ended and subject to slight changes during the interview process if I needed them to expand on an issue in more depth. The semi-structured interviews conducted with my research participants managed to produce “unanticipated findings” (Leko, 2014, p. 276) and suggested “avenues for further exploration” (p. 276).

3.3 Participants

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research relies primarily on participants whose experiences and ideas have the potential to offer much insight on a particular research topic. “One of the most important tasks in the study design phase is to identify appropriate participants” (Sargeant, 2012, par 6). Hence, I selected participants with proper care and consideration, taking into account their experiences as English teachers working with students from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

When selecting my participants, I took into account the following criteria.

(1) Currently teaching grade 9 and/or 10 high school English in southern Ontario schools with a high multi-ethnic population.

(2) Have a minimum of 5 years working in classrooms with students from diverse backgrounds.

(3) Are very familiar with the section titled “Antidiscrimination Education” found in the revised English curriculum for grades 9 and 10 and are known to have implemented parts, if not majority of its recommendations.
(4) Are recognized by their school for their use of culturally relevant pedagogy and literature.

I selected my participants from public school boards in southern Ontario because of its high multi-ethnic population (Belanger & Melenfant, 2005) where teachers, I believed, were more likely to work in neighbourhoods with high immigrant populations (Ryan et al., 2007). It was assumed that communities with diverse populations were more likely to be exposed to culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy than elsewhere in Ontario. My teacher participants, in advocating for culturally relevant pedagogy would be familiar with the section titled “Antidiscrimination Education” and therefore, could discuss the features of that section, i.e. benefits and challenges in relation to their own experiences.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

Unlike quantitative research, which relies on standardized procedures and random selection of participants, the selection process in qualitative research is more purposeful (Sargeant, 2012). My participants were selected based on their familiarity with the subject (Sargeant, 2012) because they best “inform[ed] [my] research questions and enhance[ed] [my] understanding” (Sargeant, 2012, par 6) of the research study. They contributed to discussions on the effects of culturally relevant literature and provided recommendations for better implementation across their respective school boards.

My sampling procedures varied, as there were several sampling forms I wished to undertake to secure the most suitable participants for my study. According to Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, (2015), qualitative research usually requires more than one methodological approach. Hence, I selected two sampling approaches that helped narrow down my sample size and ensure more qualified candidates for the interview process. I used a
combination of criterion sampling and convenience sampling. Criterion sampling identifies and selects participants that have experienced the same phenomenon or met the desired criterion of importance (Creswell, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). I selected criterion sampling because my individual participants needed to already be incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy in order to speak on its effects in the classroom. I also selected convenience sampling because my participants needed to be easily accessible to me (Palinkas et al., 2015) in order to conduct face-to-face interviews.

From these two sampling forms, I selected participants that I could realistically and logistically interview and who fit my criteria (see 3.3.1 sampling criteria). I also needed to be mindful that my sampling could change and that I needed to be flexible (Creswell, 2013, p. 126).

3.3.3 Participant Bios

The first teacher I interviewed was the head of his English department. He taught for ten years and was passionate about anti-racism education. His passion allowed him to incorporate culturally relevant and inclusive literature in his classrooms. Many of his students come from priority neighbourhoods and he saw culturally relevant literature as a way to keep them engaged and included in the curriculum.

The second teacher I interviewed was a high school English teacher who had been teaching English for 16 years. She enjoys introducing her students to more diverse material and ties to change up the reading lists frequently. She believes that culturally relevant texts keep students engaged and motivated because, in her experience, these texts have increased student participation in her class.

The last teacher interviewed taught at a multi-ethnic high school for ten years and taught from an anti-racist lens. He was passionate about encouraging his students to read and think
critically. Culturally relevant and inclusive literature was a resource he employed in order to accomplish these goals.

3.4 Data Analysis

After the interview process, the researcher is usually faced with “a mass of unwieldy tangled data” (Spencer, Richie & O’Connor, 2003, p. 214) to sort out in order to make meaning out of the transcription (Sargeant, 2012; Spencer & Richie & O’Connor, 2003). Qualitative data analysis involves making sense of the data (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 299) by “breaking [it] into units of meanings, topics or categories” (p. 299) to help organize and structure the data better. This can be done through the use of codes, which “break down data,” and sort text segments with similar content into appropriate categories. The method I chose to label, sort and synthesize my data was through deconstruction.

According to Sargeant (2012), deconstruction requires breaking down data into categories or codes that describe the content (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Sargeant 2012). Data collected from my interviews, which overlapped or contained similar content or themes were organized into categories. I also looked for discrepancies in the data, anything that might have challenged existing literature on culturally relevant and inclusive literature.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

According to Creswell (2007), researchers face many ethical issues during the data collection process and must take several measures to reduce potential harm to participants and the overall integrity of the research data. In this section, I elaborate on the ethical issues I took into consideration when conducting my interviews.

Effective qualitative research relies on trust, mutual respect and consideration for the safety and welfare of all participants. Hence, a safe environment had to be created and
maintained for both the comfort of my three teacher participants and myself. In qualitative research, the interview process “is usually equated with confidentiality, informed consent, and privacy” (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000, p. 94). All of my participants were informed about the nature of my study before the interview process and had to sign a consent form (see appendix A) to ensure “adequate communication of the intent of the investigation” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2007, p. 94). They also had to consent several times during the interview so that their consent was given throughout. Participants needed to know that they could disengage at any point during the interview and so, ongoing consent was crucial (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2007; Orb et al., 2000).

My focus on culturally relevant literature, namely its effectiveness, also paved the way for critical discussions about race, gender and class. Because some of my participants were actively engaged in social justice issues, our conversations about oppression, marginalization and erasure, if reported unprofessionally, could end up jeopardizing their professional or personal life (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2007). Hence, it was incumbent upon me to uphold interviewee confidentiality by protecting the anonymity of my informants (Creswell, 2007; Orb et al., 2000). I did this by assigning “aliases to individuals” (Creswell, 2007. p. 141) when reporting on my research findings.

In addition, I informed my interviewees about these essential considerations that I aimed to uphold:

- All participants will be assigned a pseudonym and they will be notified of their right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research study.
- Participants’ identities will remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools or students will be excluded.
• There are no known risks to participation in this study. Participants have the right to decline and withdraw from the interview process if they feel uncomfortable and/or triggered by any of the questions asked.

• All data (audio recordings) will be stored on my password-protected computer/laptop/phone and will be destroyed after 5 years.

• Participants will be asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Qualitative data, like all data collection methods have their strengths and their limitations. Qualitative data facilitates in-depth face-to-face interviews that provide further insight on the topic studied (Leko, 2014). The information I gained was rich and valuable about teacher practices in the English classroom. My small sample of teachers discussed how they incorporated culturally relevant literature, what they considered to be effective and authentic culturally relevant literature and how their students responded to the literature they introduced to the reading lists.

There were disadvantages when working with qualitative data. For one, my “findings [couldn’t] be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses [could]” (Atieno, 2009, p. 17). Because of the amount of preparation, (i.e. interview process, criteria sampling) and scope of the MTRP, I was neither able to randomize my participant sample nor increase the participation number. I could not interview administrators on
the issue of resource accessibility and availability nor ask students about their experiences with culturally relevant and diverse literature. I had to rely on the experiences of the teachers only.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed, in sufficient detail, the methodology adopted before, during and after the interview process. I outlined my research methodology, the nature of my interview process and the methods I used to analyze, organize and code my data. I conclude with the ethical issues as well as the strengths and limitations of my research study. In chapter four, I present my findings from the data collected and compare it to the existing literature (in chapter two).
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings from the interviews I conducted with three intermediate high school English teachers on the effects of culturally relevant literature in multi-ethnic high school English classrooms. I used the data from the interviews to try and answer my main research question: “What are the effects of culturally relevant, diverse and inclusive literature in the modern English classroom?” As well as my subsidiary questions (see chapter one). Four major themes emerged.

1. Reasons for diversifying English literature in the modern classroom
2. Shakespeare in the modern classroom
3. Teacher pedagogy and professional practice in the English classroom
4. Resource availability and accessibility for English teachers
5. Next Steps: Recommendations

Within these themes emerged subthemes that either highlighted my participants’ commonalities or explored their differences. Teacher participants discussed issues of engagement and representation with regards to culturally relevant and inclusive material, their own positionality as teachers and facilitators of a culturally relevant pedagogy, the role of the classics (i.e. Shakespeare) in the modern classroom and the challenges, if any, associated with trying to adopt a more diverse and inclusive reading list.

Teacher participants were given pseudonyms, Kofi, Aisha and Henry respectively. Their valuable input to the quality of this research paper highlights a growing need for more research in the areas of culturally relevant pedagogy and practice and culturally relevant resources for grades 9 and 10 English classrooms. Please note, the words *culturally relevant, diverse* and
inclusive were all used interchangeably by my participants and myself, during the interview process.

4.1 Reasons for Diversifying English Literature in the Modern Classroom

Teacher participants discussed various reasons why they chose to incorporate culturally relevant literature in their classrooms. There were a variety of personal and professional reasons. Classroom demographic and positive experiences were some of the reasons why my teacher participants strengthened their resolve to continue in their current practice.

4.1.1 Cultural Demographic of the Classroom

Brian (2006) argues that the literature studied in high school should reflect the growing diversity of the students in the classroom. According to Belanger and Melenfant (2005), Ontario has the largest number of visible minorities in Canada. The growing visibility of non-white persons can be seen in the cultural and ethnic demographic of the students in all my three participants’ classrooms. Kofi’s classroom consists of “50-60% [black students], 30%...South Asian and 10-12% …white”. In Aisha’s class of thirty, “…half of them are Caucasian and the other half would identify themselves as Black, Hispanic or Native” and Henry’s class consists of “55% Black with roots in either Africa or the Caribbean, 25% from the far east, 5% Turkish, 5% eastern European and one Yemeni student”. Chenowith (2014), Gay (2000) and Sandhu (2012) believe that student success requires teachers to be culturally aware and responsive to the needs of their students in the classroom. Henry believes that teachers should “read the class” and choose materials that will help develop and stimulate their minds. Aisha argues that students read best when engaged and Kofi’s students greatly inform his selection process. He states:

Well if I have a classroom of thirty and there are 29 Black students, I may [want to] use my professional judgment and find something that they maybe can relate to more or do things or
discuss things that speaks more to their lives…my hope would be that teachers would look around the room and look at the demographic of the students they have and try to teach to them and also discuss things with them like they do in the real world.

4.1.2 Engagement with the Literature and in the Classroom

According to Koeller (1996), diverse texts help students appreciate difference in “a world often stifling conformity” (par 10). Kofi’s use of culturally relevant texts “make a huge difference [with regards to student engagement]”. He states,

…the kids at the beginning of the school weren’t exactly into reading. It wasn’t what they wanted to do. [For example]… there was student in grade 10, he wasn’t really into plays [but] when we started *The Lion and the Jewel*, an African play, the fact that we were doing something completely different from what he was used to intrigued him…he made that clear…this was not something he’s ever done.

Students are also more likely to write about literature they enjoy (Koeller, 1996). Aisha’s “students [now] have something to write about, something to talk about, something to relate [to]…and they tend to, even days later, talk about what that character was about”. In Henry’s experience, “the response is positive [when] choosing diverse texts that have diverse settings”. When students are engaged, “they are likely to read for longer and read more complex texts and challenge themselves more if they are engaged with what they are reading” (Henry). Where lack of inclusivity is a primary reason for student disengagement among minority youth (Davison, 2009), teachers’ decisions to adopt more culturally relevant and inclusive practices can only increase student engagement and achievement.

4.1.3 High School and University Experiences in English Classrooms
More than thirty years ago, Galloway (1981) commented on the kinds of literature studied in Canadian high school English classrooms. They were mainly Eurocentric and reflected white, male and western experiences (Colarusso, 2009; Johnston, 2006; Skerrett, 2010; Tice, 2006). All three teacher participants had similar experiences with regards to their own English classes. Henry states,

I went to a high school with a highly Eurocentric curriculum that taught classics from the Canon: things like…Catcher in the Rye, To Kill a Mockingbird, Cry the Beloved Country, a lot of Shakespeare, Orwell’s 1984, Animal Farm, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness...

For Kofi and Henry, the study of English literature in high school was heavily canonized. The curriculum was indicative of a very Eurocentric form of English literature (Brauer & Clark, 2008; Sandhu, 2012; Tice, 2006). Kofi and Henry however, had varying attitudes towards these experiences. For example, Henry “…enjoyed English; it was [his] favourite class and [he] had good experiences in that class”. Kofi, on the other hand, disclosed two forms of isolation, the first being “…the only Black kid in English” and the second, a general lack of texts “that spoke to something [he] could identify [with]”. Kofi’s experiences are what Dei et al. (2000) considers to be a form of oppression for those who cannot identify with what they are learning (i.e. kinds of literature studied). A Eurocentric curriculum, “erases the social, cultural, historical and political realities of non-white, non-western groups in society” (Dei et al., 2000, p. 171) or “positions them as different” (MacLaren, 1998, p. 20). Although Aisha did not go to high school in Canada, the books she was assigned to read in university as an undergraduate in English literature “were Anglo Saxon literature and…were rarely even Canadian books, let alone books from diverse backgrounds. All the books [she] read were 18th century literature written by British authors or books by American authors”. Unlike Henry, both Kofi and Aisha expressed mild
forms of dissatisfaction with the kinds of literature studied. Any semblance of diverse literature for both Aisha and Kofi were select and small. In university, Kofi took a black history course where he read, for the first time, *The Autobiography of Malcom X* and Aisha was able to enrol in a Native literature course in her later years as an English undergraduate.

In an effort to “deliver a culturally relevant pedagogy that makes use of subject content related to the life experiences and cultures of their students” (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 5), teachers from non-white and minority backgrounds may find that their aim to expand on the reading material may stem from the need to offer their students more possibilities and opportunities for learning than they might not have had. According to both Kofi and Aisha, the lack of diverse literature studied in both high school and university prompted both to personalize the necessity of representation and diversity in the kinds of literature they currently expose their students to. For Kofi, “that fact that [he] is African, [makes] it…incumbent [upon him] to expose [his] students to a variety of texts”. Kofi’s exposure to African literature in university allowed him to consider the positive impact of these literary works on him and subsequently consider its impact on his students. He states,

I took an African lit course, there were so many books that [my professor] introduced me to, [and] I was like WOW…again going back to when I was in high school, we didn’t use these books and I just thought it would be fascinating to try and incorporate some of these books in my classroom.

Aisha’s personal experiences as a minority allows her to relate to kids from similar backgrounds by understanding the kinds of challenges they may face with respect to issues of inclusion and representation. “That’s why [she] is motivated to show these kids [that] there are there are other books” out there.
Henry’s reasons however, vary slightly from Kofi and Aisha. His own experiences in English class were generally positive. However, he “became keenly aware of the issues of diversity when [he] saw how a text could engage or alienate” a student. His travelling experience and keen interest in various cultures also prompted him to consider other cultures and voices in the curriculum.

4.1.4 Recognition and Appreciation for Minority Experiences and Knowledges

According to the Ministry of Education (2014), the original Policy/Program Memorandum no. 119, issued in 1993 noted that “a Eurocentric perspective in education had the effect of limiting the contributions of people from a variety of different backgrounds (p. 11). The use of culturally relevant literature, for both Kofi and Aisha does not only benefit minority students in the classroom but those who come from the dominant culture as well (Davidson, 2009). In Aisha’s experience, culturally relevant texts challenge stereotypes by humanizing and dignifying various cultural groups. Just recently, Aisha’s class read a book called Indian Horse by Richard Wagamese which allowed her class to have critical discussion about residential schools, mental health, alcoholism, the idea of otherness and the dangers of stereotypes. These ongoing critical discussions Aisha had with her students were not limited to First nations experiences but also about Islamophobia and Anti-blackness. The responses were positive. Aisha states,

I had two or three white kids coming up to me saying they didn’t really know this history at all and [a] couple kids asked me how come we don’t learn this in [our] history course so… I think it… actually benefit[s] them.

In having these discussions, Aisha asks them to think critically about difference. How something different is not necessarily “evil and negative but something [that can be] valuable”
(Aisha). Kofi, like Davidson (2009) argues that teachers need to “start showing the students in the classroom what people of the past from different demographics have done” (Kofi). He states,

You see different groups being recognized. Kids who are not black [can] say okay, this group has contributed things, as opposed to just, oh yeah, blacks…they haven’t really done anything.

By exposing students to alternative narratives about Black people or any other racialized group, Kofi not only aims to foster “esteem for [a] diversity of cultures” (Bar, 1995, p. 9), but also, a greater appreciation for what these “cultures have to offer” (p. 4). The experiences of both Kofi and Aisha indicate that there is benefit in culturally relevant and inclusive literature for both minority and non-minority students as they have the potential to recognize the contributions, knowledges and experiences of cultures often erased from the curriculum.

4.2 Shakespeare in the Modern Classroom

All three teacher participants discussed the role and impact of a major classical writer like Shakespeare in their current classrooms. Teachers also expanded on some of the potential effects of a curriculum centered on the classics.

4.2.1 The Role of Shakespeare in the Modern Classroom

Shakespeare, for many scholars (Blade, 2011; Bloom, 1994; Gibson, 1998; Johnston, 2001; Williams, 1974) is a major western writer and dramatist whose works have historically been central to the English high school curriculum (Colarusso, 2009; Skerrett, 2010). According to Blade (2011), many high schools in Ontario offer Shakespeare and many students will remember studying at least one or two of his plays. All three teacher participants have taught Shakespeare in their previous years. Their attitudes towards Shakespeare were generally positive. However, Kofi, Aisha and Henry cautioned against the centralization of Shakespeare and other
canonical texts over other more diverse forms of literature. For example, Kofi “would absolutely teach Shakespearean plays. Now where [he] would caution people is not to use Shakespearean plays as the only barometer to use for the classics. There are other classics out there that can be used…there are African writers, Asian writers [etc.]…” Aisha “can appreciate the [themes] present in classics like Shakespeare” but she argues, “[teachers] tend to believe [that] they are the only [plays] that tell a human story, [when they] have other texts from other cultures that tell a human story that would do much better…in helping our kids read more”. Aisha speaks to an issue that Lee (in Au, 2009) highlights concerning the centralization of Eurocentric texts. Lee (2009) argues that when teachers adopt canonical English literature and claim “[it] will deal with a universal theme, or story…it’s basically white culture and civilizations. [However], it doesn’t get named as different. It gets named as normal” (p. 10).

According to Aisha, “there’s something about Shakespeare that tells fifteen year olds that they are not smart enough to read”. She does not suggest complete removal of the classics but highlights the importance of meeting “[her] kids where they are and understand[ing] that [a] person learns best when they can relate to people that are teaching them and the material they use”. Hence, despite Gibson’s (1998) claim that “students of all ages can recognize and identify with Shakespeare” (p. 2), Aisha’s experiences remind us that Gibson’s views on the universality of Shakespeare and his plays may be limited when the ability to identify with his plays may not be reciprocated by students from other cultures or other generations for that matter.

Overall, Henry had the most favourable view of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, for Henry, “is a genius storyteller and [provides] a kind of cultural capital to students”. His works are foundational for many and “can be made relevant for all students” (Henry). Hence, “it has a place in the curriculum”. However, Henry suggests that it should not dominate the reading lists
for there are other classics like George Orwell’s *1984* which he argues, “still speaks to students very practically”, but he again cautions against its dominance as well.

4.2.2 The Cultural Impact of Shakespeare

According to Johnston (2001), the subject of English and by extension, literature has always been about more than the acquisition of rudimentary literacy skills like reading and writing but a significant source of culture and knowledge. For Henry, Shakespeare’s plays provide entry into mainstream culture. His legacy can be found in world cinema and other cultural artefacts of today. Like Gibson (1998), Shakespeare’s “plays are recognizable and familiar, if not in student’s real life experience, then in “felt” knowledge” (p. 2). Henry’s lack of criticism on Shakespeare distinguishes him from Kofi and Aisha who believe that there is a danger to teaching Shakespeare. “You see [Africans] being depicted as violent” (Kofi). “The only time [Jewish students] see themselves in those books is when they’re presented as greedy people, in the *Merchant of Venice* or a Black kid might see themselves in *Othello* as a violent [irrational] person or women as evil, [as in the case of] Lady Macbeth for example” (Aisha). Aisha and Kofi’s concerns speak to Lee’s (2009) views on how the global reach of Eurocentric canonical texts can end up reinforcing stereotypes about non-white and western peoples with often times, racist undertones.

4.2.3 Results of a Homogenized Reading List

Students from racialized communities continue to face challenges in the schooling system (Chenowith, 2014; Davidson, 2009; Sensoy & Parhar, 2011) with regards to adequate representation and inclusion. In 2010, the Toronto District School Board Achievement Gap Task Force recognized the need for “significant progress in improving educational outcomes for racialized groups in [their] schools” (McKell, 2010, p. 3). Issues of marginalization, erasure and
engagement are but some of what Kofi, Aisha and Henry recognize as possible consequences for the lack of diverse, culturally relevant and inclusive literature in the reading experiences of racialized students in high school. Henry states,

> On the issue of marginalization, a lot of kids, when you look at the texts... they use [in] the classroom, it doesn’t speak to them. Hence, some kids [don’t] go to class...they’re just not motivated...so there [isn’t] that yearning to get anything done.

The concept of marginalization, for Henry “is a complex one”. On the one hand, “If [he was] teaching the traditional Eurocentric cannon, of course kids would feel that [marginalized/erased]”. On the other hand,

> The purpose of why someone [reads], one reads to affirm who one is but also to see what other lives are like so it's not as if it's just a one way thing...there are lots of students at our school who get tired of reading another urban novel, they say yeah, yeah, I know that’s my life, I wanna read something else. So it’s that complex conversation. There is no one rule.

Getting kids to read is the main objective for Henry. Despite his interest in addressing the various kinds of literacy issues that students face (i.e. poor literacy skills) that do not “even get them to the point where they can actually make a decision about whether they are represented in the text that they are reading”, Aisha makes a connection between poor literacy skills and choice of text. She argues that “the system is not looking at the relationship between students struggling academically and the texts they read. If a student doesn’t want to read a particular novel, [teachers often think that] the novel is to difficult or...the student is being defiant”. What they don’t consider is whether or not “the student could pick a book that they could relate to on a personal level” (Aisha).

4.3 Teacher Pedagogy and Practice
According to the revised English curriculum, a rich variety of literary texts allows students to “make meaningful connections between themselves, what they encounter in texts and the world around them” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). In bridging the gap between literature and the larger society, teachers routinely engage their students in conversations about race, sex, discrimination, bias, point of view etc. During the interview process, teachers disclosed their selection process for the kinds of reading material appropriate for their pedagogical practice.

4.3.1 Selection Process

When it comes to choosing culturally relevant texts, all three teachers have varying selection processes that often overlap. Both Kofi and Henry rely on student voice at times by considering the kinds of literature their students recommend. Teachers are also encouraged to facilitate independent reading projects/book clubs rather than assigning the whole class a novel to read, where the chance of whole class engagement is less likely (Henry).

When selecting whole class novels, Kofi considers “pretty much all the books that [he] read while in the African literature course” or other literary works by some of the same authors he read. Aisha and Henry have more criteria-based selection processes. For Aisha, two conditions must be met. The first are curriculum objectives. “The curriculum does not tell you to use Shakespeare, the curriculum says, by the end of his year, students should be able to do ABC…so you can read any book…as long as you can cover that curriculum expectation”. The second is relevancy and content. Aisha “usually finds…stories that deal with women’s issues, racial issues, issues on religion, native issues” and stories that explore gender and sexual identity, a similar practice to Greenbaum’s (1994) strategy for text selection. Greenbaum (1994) suggests looking at women authors from various backgrounds, a small minority of canonical texts and authors
from visible minorities, be they cultural, racial or sexual. Henry “[looks] for diverse stories…stories that are representative…stories whose characters are full bodied, not two dimensional”. He states,

The reason we don’t use *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it’s a great book but there are no three dimensional characters. Calpurnica is wonderful as a character but she is not central to the story, every other Black person in the book is two dimensional so we don’t teach that cause its just – they don’t need to read about another white hero saving the Black people…they don’t need to hear that message and if they want to read that book, they can do it later.

Henry makes a compelling case that Greenbaum (1994) highlights when choosing diverse texts. Minorities “can be included while [still] exist[ing] in the margins” (G. Dei, seminar, March 27, 2017). Hence, narratives that include characters from ethnically diverse background must also be reflected in ways that are authentic and speak to their complex identities as human beings. Hence, Greenbaum (1994) and Kirova (2008) caution against tokenistic inclusions of diverse literature by “non white, non male, non heterosexual voices that serve mainly to reinforce the dichotomy between *us* and the *other*” (Greenbaum, 1994, p. 37-38).

Henry also considers reading level. “There is a complex process of finding texts that serve the literacy needs and the interests of these students”. Overall, he “is listening [to student’s opinions]…reading the reviews…going online…going to book fairs” etc.

4.3.2 Critical Literacy

All three teacher participants were familiar with critical literacy, as defined in the revised English curriculum (2007) and adopted a critical pedagogical approach, which allowed them to dissect the kinds of reading materials they routinely exposed their students to. With the help of critical literacy, Kofi and Henry are able to foster environments where students can be “honest
with themselves and their feelings” (Kofi). Henry uses critical literacy as a way to name issues and confront them directly. He employs transparency in order to help him achieve this, beginning with his own positionality. He states,

I certainly say there is a white guy in front of you teaching you today, middle class white guy. This is who I am and that means certain things and most of you are not white…etc.

Students hence, understand that he is not trying to present himself in a way that is disingenuous. His desire to build trust, a centerpiece to his teaching and learning philosophy, requires him to continue on this path so that he is able to have more honest and critical conversations about the kinds of texts his class reads.

Critical literacy, for Aisha is a pedagogical approach that needs to be taught to students. “Some students are not presented at a young age with the opportunity to look…with a critical eye at some of the shows they see, the movies they watch and the books they read”. Hence, Aisha often facilitates these discussions to help them think about ideas they may take for granted. For Kofi, “critical literacy is something imperative to look at because it allows students to be able to connect the outside world with the kinds of books they read”. Some of his class discussions involve issues about race and recently, cultural appropriation and police brutality. The reading of a culturally relevant text like Master Herald and the Boys for example, exposes his students to issues concerning black masculinity and racial segregation. In Master Herald and the Boys, the character Sam is an articulate Black man who teaches Hally, the son of his white employer, many things. Kofi deliberately selects this play in order to critique some of the ways in which Black males are often negatively portrayed in the media and in literature. “The Black person is usually subservient, they [are] spoken down to, not usually in a position of power, and…not usually very articulate” (Kofi). In Master Herald and the Boys, there’s “a white kid whose being
taught by this black person [whose intelligence] he highly respects” (Kofi). This is important because

As they get older, it’s imperative that [black students] see themselves as someone whose smart, cause far too often in education…these kids… thought of themselves as lesser. As they get older, they start to realize that there is nothing wrong with [them] being smart even though society or even teachers sometimes don’t expect much of [them] (Kofi).

Kofi’s use of critical literacy is similar to what the revised English curriculum aims to achieve. His selection of texts are a deliberate attempt to dignify his racialized students by developing, what the curriculum refers to as a positive sense of self (Ministry of Education, 2007) from exposure to texts that highlight the intellectual capabilities of Black men. In this manner, he continues to “hold positive and affirming views of…[his] students” and their potential for academic success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014 p. 4).

4.3.3 Teacher as Facilitator

The concept of teacher as facilitator is a theme found across all teacher participants’ pedagogical practices. Critical literacy, for Ladson Billings “is a pedagogy of opposition” (1995a, p. 160) because it encourages the dismantling of established traditions in English classrooms (Lopez, 2011. p. 78). “Teachers engaged in critical literacy serve less as instructors and more as facilitators of conversation” (Coffey, 2011, p. 2) so as to empower student voice and “offer students opportunity to actively construct knowledge…[and] interrogate social conditions through dialogue about issues significant to their lives” (p. 2). During critical readings of various texts, the teacher participants try, as best as possible, to adopt the role of facilitator so as to centralize student voice and ensure that their voices do not overstep the voices of the students in the classroom. While Aisha’s students frequently look to her to provide answers on
complicated issues, she continues to remain impartial but frequently reminds her students that “stories are not written in a vacuum…[but] based on somebody’s perceptions and cultural values and identity” (Aisha). In line with the ministry’s expectations surrounding critical readings of texts, Aisha asks her students to always consider the social, political, economic and cultural contexts of the author and the text.

According to the Ministry of Education (2007), it is expected that teachers “take into account, the potential negative impact of bias on students and use appropriate strategies to address student’s responses” (p. 34). Similarly, when it comes to sensitive and/or controversial issues, both Kofi and Henry often find themselves having to challenge or interject on viewpoints that they perceive to be problematic. For example, during a discussion about Walter Scott, a Black man whose death [by police] was captured on video, “students began to say, all cops are bad” (Kofi). However, Kofi “was trying to move them away from that generalization and say ‘listen, THIS cop was bad, cops are just like everybody else or any group of people in society. There [are] gonna be one or two bad people out of twenty.’ ” Generalizations don’t inform students of the real world (Kofi) and “God forbid, anything happens in the school, guess who the first person [to be called] will be, the POLICE” (Kofi). Henry is aware of his authority as a teacher. He states,

I am very aware of the power of my position […] Regardless of how nice or not nice I might be, I am in a power of position. I have power over their marks. I have power over their standing in the class, how they’re seen by their peers. I have all those powers and I name them at the same time.

However, the idea of staying neutral, “he can manage to a certain extent”. For Henry, “[his] questioning and point of view can serve a positive purpose in the classroom”. If, for
example “[a student has got] an idea that they’ve developed or they half heard an idea that is maybe half baked or not fully developed, or not knowing the historical context”, then Henry sees it fit to “call them out on that…and challenge [the student] on that issue”.

4.4 Resource Availability and Accessibility

Teachers elaborated on the availability or lack thereof resources that helped shaped their current teaching practices. Teacher rank, departmental support and school culture/values played a huge role in resource availability, accessibility and pedagogical implementation.

4.4.1 Supports

Concerning resources, Kofi and Henry suggest similar bookstores to frequent. Kofi “strongly advises going to “A Different Booklist” on Bathurst and Bloor. “They have a plethora of books that are diverse.” Kofi has been frequenting that store for the past five years and vows to replenish more books through them. Various workshops that Kofi attends also cite “A Different Booklist”. There, he was able to order *Master Herald and the Boys* and Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horsemen* for his senior students. For Henry, “two stores come to mind. They are, A different Booklist down on Bathurst [and] Another Story on Roncesvalles. He also finds himself relying on teacher librarians for guidance. “Teachers librarians go to a whole bunch of book fairs and online meetings about new books coming out all the time” (Henry). Henry also suggests browsing through “Goodreads, Amazon and Indigo and other websites like that…book review pages etc.” Aisha belongs to several writing groups “some of them online, some of them in person”. She usually “gets suggestions for new stories for young people through these group chats” and often browses the Internet to look for subject specific anthologies.

4.4.2 Challenges
According to the Council of Ministers of Education, “inclusive classrooms are one of the greatest challenges [teachers/educators] face” (CMEC, 2008, p. 38). Although the province of Ontario is dedicated to the creation of spaces for non-white, non-western pedagogies, there still lies room for improvement. Aisha lists several reasons why accessing resources and materials are challenging. Firstly, in order to prepare students for post secondary education (Applebee, 1974 in Skerrett, 2010; Au, 2009), English teachers harken to “check off” (Nicol, 2008, p. 23) classical texts like Shakespeare in order to prepare students for grade 11 university bound classes. Hence, “if [Aisha] doesn’t use Shakespeare, [she’s essentially] commit[ing] a sin, even if [she] could find something else that [could] cover the same thing as Shakespeare. It almost [feels] as if [she were] committing a crime if [she doesn’t reuse] the same Shakespearean plays”.

Aisha also cites time as a significant deterrent. She states,

If [teachers] are restricted in time or not motivated enough to really see a higher value in [purchasing new novels], it’s easier to just use the same novel. [Teacher’s] know [they’re] meeting the curriculum expectation and [they’re] spending…less time in the planning end of things.

Hence, “unless [Aisha] decides to use that [same] novel from thirty years prior”, she has “to create new lesson plans, ensure that [she] is meeting curriculum expectations, create her own assignments etc.” or “buy out of pocket” lesson plans from other teachers online. On the opposite side of the spectrum is Kofi. Kofi currently has no apparent challenges because “[he] is head of [his] department. “[He’s] the one deciding, [he’s] the one purchasing the books” (Kofi). Although Henry does not deny that “choosing literature is a piece of work”, he has a more positive outlook on the challenges of selecting more diverse literature. He states,
I think it's very engaging to try and find texts that are going to appeal to students, it’s a nice professional problem and I always look forward to trying to make finding the right text for the right moment.

For Henry and Kofi’, the culture and values of their respective high schools allow them to access the kinds of supports that Aisha’s school may be failing to provide. Henry’s “[board] was moving in the direction of cultural relevancy” and so, support may have been more accessible at his school than Aisha’s. It is important to consider thus, how culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies, if left to the discretion of individual schools or boards can on one hand, serve the unique needs of a school (Davidson, 2009), and on the other, create a situation where certain schools find themselves implementing it more than others, despite the need for culturally relevant and inclusive literature across all schools and English classrooms.

4.4.2.1 School Budgets

Balzer (2006), Johnston (1995) and Skerrett (2010) cite budget constraints as a reason why teachers fail to expand on the syllabus. Aisha, Kofi and Henry all critique this. For Kofi “[teachers are] not buying textbooks every year. Books are…like 10-15 dollars max. So…money isn’t a mitigating issue, or an issue where people would like to make it as such”. Instead, Kofi thinks “it’s a matter of people not wanting to get new things, as crazy as that sounds…it’s a matter of will. Do they have the will to make changes?” Aisha can see the validity in professing to have no money but still does not deem it a valid reason. “Shakespeare books get replaced” with better copies, (Aisha). “Out of the 10,000 dollars [Aisha’s department] got to spend, only 300 were spent on books that dealt with women’s issue, gender issues, issues on religion, racism, economic issue etc. It just wasn’t there”. Aisha believes that it is no economic barrier but a “socially created [one]” that makes it hard for teachers to take a chance on more diverse
literature. Henry argues that budgets are not a valid excuse. “Is there enough money?” he asks, “perhaps a little less than would be ideal but [Henry] thinks that [he] is given enough money to change things over and replace things and what not”. “We can work with the budget”, he concludes.

Therefore, it seems that further issues are at play. A number of authors cite teacher ignorance, indifference and/or the lack of cultural awareness by educators as major factor for little changes in our reading lists (Howard, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Nicol, 2008).

4.5 Next Steps

Teachers provided recommendations on how to tackle the issue of erasure and marginalization at the administrative and ministry level.

4.5.1 Ministry Involvement: Workshops and Teacher Supports

All of my teacher participants provided next steps on how to better equip teachers with essential resources and best pedagogical practices. Kofi believes that schools should provide mandatory teacher programs “not just for teachers but also for administrators”. “The admins pull pretty much all the power in the school, they set the directives for how the school will run…if more teachers had to take courses that dealt with social justice issues, [Kofi] thinks that the school system would be a much better place”. These courses will allow teachers to “come out of their own circle, their own bubble to understand that there are a lot of issues at play”. The ministry of Education, according to Kofi, should also provide resources on how to incorporate culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies, lesson plans and lists of possible reading materials for teachers to access. Aisha fears that “kids from [minority] backgrounds are not going anywhere” and thus, they need support. Schools need to invest in teacher programs that will help teachers become better listeners, better resources for their own students. Aisha does not know
“when [schools] will invest but they have to. If [schools] don’t invest today, [they’re] going to invest tomorrow”. “Teachers tend to think that [they are] highly enlightened individuals [and which often times allows them] to become complacent” (Henry). Hence, it makes sense, according to Henry, to suggest teacher programs as a viable resource to helping teachers expand on their pedagogical practice.

4.6 Conclusion

Overall, my teacher participants agreed on the positives of culturally relevant and inclusive literature. Aisha, Kofi and Henry were able to increase student engagement using a plethora of diverse reading material in the form of books, short stories, poetry and media literacy etc. All three participants employed critical literature as a pedagogical tool to connect the outside world with the kinds of issues explored in the literature. Although my participants were able to diversify the reading material [in varying degrees], all agreed that administration and school policy played a huge role in either supporting or hindering teachers from effective implementation of culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy. Kofi, Aisha and Henry all proposed additional supports in the form of teacher programs, workshops, pre service courses, books etc. and one participant even suggested that workshops be mandatory to help keep teachers updated on various resources to use in their classrooms.

In this study, I discussed the findings that attempt to explore the effects of culturally relevant, inclusive and diverse literature in today’s English classrooms and the kinds of resources teachers can access to help them incorporate it in their classrooms. The implications of my findings discussed in this chapter will be explored in chapter five.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the chapter

I begin by revisiting the purpose of my study, the effects of culturally relevant and inclusive literature in the modern English classroom i.e. the consequences, challenges and solutions to effective implementation. My research allowed me to explore issues of representation and inclusion as well as resource availability and accessibility. In this chapter, I provide an overview of key findings related to my research from chapter four and explore their significance in light of current existing research on culturally relevant literature. I then outline areas for further research and provide recommendations for the various implications identified for both myself as a teacher researcher and the greater education community.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

The key findings revealed positive consequences for both students and teachers. Institutional or collegial support for culturally relevant and inclusive literature varied depending on several factors: school policy and attitude, teacher knowledge and interest and resource availability and accessibility. All will be explored in further detail below.

Culturally relevant texts, in keeping with the literature and the revised English curriculum, did increase the attention span and engagement of students in the classroom. Teacher practices centered around two main decisions, one, the selection of culturally relevant, inclusive and authentic literature and second, the use of critical literacy as a tool for analyzing these texts. The careful selection of authentic texts exposed students to a variety of minority experiences that neither generalized nor tokenized minority experiences and identities. The presence of diverse texts, as some participants have noted, results in the recognition of non-white and non-western contributions to the production of knowledge, art and literature. Students from both minority and
majority backgrounds need to be exposed to narratives that humanize and dignify minority cultures in hopes that exposure to these cultures may begin to eliminate racial biases and limiting stereotypes in Canada and globally.

Teacher supports, either financially or collegially depended on school culture and/or board policy. Supports for all my teacher participants ranged from inadequate to resourceful. Often times, the position of individual teachers at the school did play a role in what they could request, in terms of resources and their overall power in departmental decision making. However, despite their position, all three teacher participants managed to include, in some form or another, culturally relevant material for study in English classrooms using a variety of different literary forms such as poems, short stories and online books.

**5.2 Implications**

There are several implications of this research study aimed at both teachers and the larger education community. My broad implications aim to highlight institutional issues with respect to my research study and its implications on individual teachers. It will greatly inform my future practice as a teacher in the classroom and the school community.

**5.2.1 Broad implications: The Educational Research Community**

Each year, schools must adapt to the realities of an increasingly diverse population and decreasing budgets (Balzer, 2006; Davidson, 2009; Johnston; 1995; Skerrett, 2010), all while delivering curriculum content of “the highest quality” (Davidson, 2009, p. 4). These growing demands, which the ministry aims to address (Ministry of Education, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2013, Ministry of Education, 2007), require fundamental shifts in hiring practices, educational frameworks and administrative school policies (Davidson, 2009). To address student achievement gaps (McKell, 2010), alienation and disengagement among racialized minority
students, Davidson (2009) proposes an “increase in racially diverse teaching staff” (p. 4) at the ground level and “anti racism advisors and consultants” at the higher level to help schools and teachers better implement “ethnoculturally equitable practices [in schools] and in the classroom” (p. 4).

While there is a growing visibility of racialized minority teachers (Davidson, 2009), educators are still overwhelmingly “of European ancestry” (Davidson, 2009, p. 5). According to Ianniciello (2014), “many of these teachers do not have an accurate understanding of the historical contexts of prejudice and racism in Canada” (p. 163). With an English curriculum “more discretionary in nature than mandatory or compulsory” (Davidson, 2009, p. 3), there will be differences in regards to how teachers and schools address these curriculum expectations. If they “do not understand their role in reproducing systemic inequalities by how they choose to teach and what they consider to be important, they may unknowingly “perpetuate these inconsistencies to the next generation of students” (p. 163). Examples of this are reflected in the centralization of classical Eurocentric texts like Shakespeare throughout high school, despite the growing need for a decentralized reading list.

The disproportionate number of white teachers, therefore, indicates a greater need for teacher supports through school and board specific professional development workshops, lesson plan templates for culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy, resource recommendations from the ministry and inter departmental collaboration centering on “culturally relevant and inclusive practices and techniques” (Davidson, 2009, p. 5) in the hopes that issues surrounding resource accessibility and increasing policy demands can be met.

5.2.2 Narrow Implications: My Professional Identity and Practice
The lack of diverse literature in the classroom may imply false conceptions of best practices for the English classroom, with regards to the reproduction of canonical texts (i.e. Shakespeare) and the greater need for exposure to alternative narratives. As one participant summarized, teachers need to keep reading, seek help from librarians, or engage in interdepartmental or inter collegial meetings, and attend workshops to help expand their knowledge and comfort level with culturally relevant and diverse materials. The process is long and arduous but rewarding. As a future teacher, I aim to diversify the kinds of materials I introduce to my classroom and have students suggests texts for study in the hopes of empowering them by providing a student voice in the overall decision making process. This, I believe will help keep them accountable and engaged with the literature.

I also aim to encourage my students to analyze canonical texts, if need be, through a critical social justice lens. This will allow my students to consider the limitations of these texts, the socio cultural context in which they were written and how impactful are in shaping our realities. I hope to engage my students to think critically about the world around them, “and speak out about issues that strongly affect them” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34).

Despite financial limitations, teachers need to understand the power they have over the kinds of materials they introduce to their students. Teacher participants alluded to the concept of teacher agency when they clarified, during the interviews, that the English curriculum did not command them to use any specific text in order to teach various literacy skills but instead left it up to the professional judgment and individual practice of teachers and schools. This implies that the justification for the lack of diverse texts, such as school budgets can be challenged when teacher agency is also at play. If teachers and school boards feel strongly about culturally relevant pedagogies or have been exposed to pre-service programs for culturally relevant and
inclusive pedagogies, there will more than likely adopt elements of these pedagogical approaches in the English classroom, or any other classroom for that matter. The implementation of culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies, if left to the discretion of individual schools and teachers, can on one hand, serve the unique needs of each school and, one the other hand, create a situation where certain schools will implement more than others (Davidson, 2009), as noted in chapter four.

5.3 Recommendations

Moving forward, teacher participants provided recommendations for how to teach classical texts in the modern English classroom, resource accessibility and availability, workshops, staff and school support. During the interview process, neither teacher participant wanted to discard canonical English texts. All of my teacher participants had positive views of the canon but were also critical of their influence and limitations. Each text had its own place, which all three teacher participants acknowledged and respected.

On the issue of workshops, some teacher participants believed that schools should provide mandatory teacher programs for both teachers and administrators so that both can impact the schools where they work. The ministry needs to invest in schools and schools need to invest in their teachers so that teachers can invest in their students. Teachers who try and incorporate culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy often do so in relation to resource availability and accessibility as well as school and staff support. Hence, increasing support in all of these areas should increase the chances of seeing these pedagogical approaches implemented in all subject areas, not only English.

5.4 Areas for Further Research
Due to the limitations of this research study, I was only able to interview three teachers. A larger study would have included the experiences of more teachers and greater insight into the issue at hand. Time was also another limitation. With only two years to my program, there were only so many teachers I could interview. Hence, I had to conclude my findings based on my three teacher participant’s responses and their own attitudes towards culturally relevant and inclusive literature. The use of critical literacy in the English classroom within marginalized communities can also be a potential field of research. In future, perhaps, there can be a student-centered research study of culturally relevant and inclusive literature so as to empower student voice, which can also inform teachers of some of the suggestions they might provide.

5.5 Conclusion

To retain the status quo is a form of neglect. When the needs of minority students in the classroom are not being addressed, there is a need for “significant progress in improving educational outcomes for racialized groups in [their] schools” (McKell, 2010, p. 3). As English becomes a universal language, so too must its ability to make spaces for the various cultures that are part of the global world. Part of goals of the revised grade 9 and 10 English curriculum is to bring the global into the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2007), which I argue is found in the diverse backgrounds of the students in the classroom, the community and the broader Canadian society. For a nation that prides itself on the diversity of its people, it is incumbent that it puts into place, resources that acknowledge this in the classroom. Culturally relevant and inclusive literature are but one of the tools needed to achieve this goal.
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Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date: April 13th, 2017

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Hagger Said 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 effects of culturally relevant literature in high school English classrooms. I am interested in interviewing a small sample of high school English teachers in Ontario who are effectively incorporating culturally relevant, diverse and inclusive literature in their English classrooms. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 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. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through 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. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer. 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 during the interview. 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. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.
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,

Hagger Said

Course Instructor’s Name: Rose Fine-Meyer
Contact Info: rose.fine.meyer@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 Hagger Said and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ___________________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol / Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about how you incorporate culturally relevant literature in the classroom for the purpose of shedding light on how teachers can better engage and enhance the literary experiences of their students. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions on your pedagogical practice, resource availability and accessibility, supports and challenges. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How long have you been a teacher?  1. b. How long have you been an English teacher?

   How long have you been teaching grade 9 and/or 10 English?

   Can you describe the ethnic makeup of your class as students’ self-identity?

2. Have you taken any pre-service university courses for anti-discrimination education? Anti-racism education? Culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies? and/or Social Justice Education?

3. How were your own experiences as a student in English class? What kinds of books did you read/were you assigned to read?

4. (If applicable) what are your experiences teaching students from ethnically diverse backgrounds?

5. What encouraged you to start diversifying the literature and making it more culturally relevant and/or inclusive?

6. What is your position on the classics i.e. Shakespeare and should they continue to dominate
the reading lists in English class?

7. What are your beliefs on pre-service courses for anti-discrimination, Anti-racism education? Culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogies? and/or Social Justice Education? Do you believe universities better prepare teachers for how to meet the needs of ethnically and religiously diverse students?

8. Does having more diverse literature positively impact the students in the classroom? Are students more attentive? Do they participate more? Are they more motivated to read and participate in discussions about the book?

9. Why do you think some teacher choose not to diversify the literature?

10. (If applicable) as a non-white teacher, are you more encouraged, motivated to expose your students to more diverse and inclusive literature?

13. Do you think students feel erased and/or marginalized when the novels they are accustomed to reading in English class read neither speak to nor reflect their experience?

14. How do you select the kinds of literature you introduce to the class? Are there any guidelines or criteria you have when you select them? Do you ask students to recommend you literature?

15. Are there any resources (in the form of bookstores or online resources) that you rely on to provide and/or recommend literature that is culturally relevant for high school students?

16. Are you familiar with ‘critical literacy’ and do you promote and/or engage in various forms of ‘critical literacy’ with your students?

17. Do you invite your students to have critical discussions about race, gender, multiculturalism, marginalization, erasure, bias, stereotypes, etc. that might arise from reading literature from and about marginalized groups, for example and how do you facilitate these discussions?

18. Do you remain neutral in discussions about sensitive topics that might arise from the kinds of literature your students read? Are you aware of the effects your input might have as the authority figure in the classroom?
19. Do you consistently switch up the literature from year to year? Are there any novels you keep?

20. Have you impacted or been impacted by any teachers who also incorporate and/or promote culturally relevant, diverse and/or inclusive literature?

21. How did you come to develop your teaching practice?

22. How challenging is selecting the kinds of books you want your students to read?

23. What supports and resources are available to you as a professional working in an ethnically diverse classroom?

24. What are some of the challenges you’ve faced and/or currently face incorporating culturally relevant literature?

25. What do you have to say for new teachers or teachers who want to incorporate more diverse literature but out of fear and/or ignorance cannot?

26. Should schools invest in teacher programs (and/or) request teachers to take anti-discrimination, anti-racism, and or culturally relevant and inclusive education workshops?

27. Should the Ontario ministry of education provide resources on how to incorporate culturally relevant literature or a list of good culturally relevant, diverse and inclusive literature for teachers to access?

28. Are limits to school budgets a valid reason for why the same books keep resurfacing in English classrooms?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.