Canadian Literature in Secondary English Classrooms:
Examining Identity, Multiculturalism, and Canada’s Colonialism

By
Daniela Comimso

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

A growing body of research demonstrates that texts used in Canadian English classes are not reflective of the identities and experiences of students. This research also points out that these texts perpetuate Eurocentric and Anglo-centric perspectives, thus maintaining colonialist ideologies. Through a thematic analysis of three semi-structured interviews, this qualitative research study explores how English teachers challenge commonly held understandings of the term “Canadian literature”, and how they attempt to incorporate multicultural and Indigenous texts in meaningful ways. They share their strategies on how they use these texts to nurture discussions that are relevant and engaging to students from diverse backgrounds. The data reveals that students are most engaged in literature when they see relevant connections between the literature and their own identities, lives, and experiences. Although teachers cite Canadian literature as being especially relevant for students, the data reveals that there are significant barriers to developing a rich and well-rounded Canadian literature curriculum. This study highlights the need for greater resources and training for teachers and administration, as well as a need to close the knowledge gaps that exist in decolonizing educational landscapes within Canada.

**Key words:** literature, multiculturalism, decolonization, Canada, identity
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1.0 Research Context

The immigrant experience, and all of the complexities that come with it, is a theme that recurs across a wide variety of Canadian texts. Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, which won Canada Reads in 2002 and was a 1987 finalist for the Governor General’s Award for fiction, is described by the CBC as being a text that has “come to define the city of Toronto in the 1920s and 1930s” and is a “stirring account of those who envisioned a better city, and the immigrants who physically built it” (CBC, 2014). Additionally, Wayson Choy’s 1995 book *The Jade Peony* is a coming-of-age tale that depicts the lives of three siblings growing up in Vancouver’s Chinatown during the Depression. The thematic undercurrent of the novel shows the collision of cultures that many immigrants experience when arriving in a new country, and the complexities of identity as they are experienced by second generation immigrants, who may often feel as though they belong to both cultures at once, and yet neither of them fully. This text won the Ontario Trillium Book Award and was a finalist in Canada Reads 2010 (CBC, 2014).

Such literary texts could be of value to the classroom because they portray themes, settings, and issues that are relevant to Canadian students, within the context of Canada. For example, reading about the development of Toronto during the 1920s could be particularly engaging for students in a Toronto classroom, who can recognize specific places identified in the text and thus relate to the setting in an authentic way. Similarly, students in a diverse urban classroom may feel more connected to a narrator who engages with the dynamics of multicultural tropes within the urban setting. Additionally, students in Vancouver who read *The Jade Peony* might experience an added layer of connection to the story due to the familiarity of the setting. Therefore, reading and exploring Canadian texts in the classroom could be an
exciting opportunity for students because they can engage with the texts in an authentic way due to their own knowledge and experiences.

Indeed, the value of engagement and familiarity is acknowledged in Ontario’s secondary English curriculum document when it states: “If [students] see themselves and others in the texts they study, they will be more engaged in learning and they will also come to appreciate the nature and value of a diverse, multicultural society” (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p.4). The association of multiculturalism with Canada is one that has been noted by many authors looking to dissect the nature of Canadian identity (Chorny, 1987; Harker, 1987a; Johnston, Bainbridge & Shariff, 2007). In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced a federal government policy of multiculturalism, which officially affirmed the rights of Aboriginal peoples and recognized the importance of valuing all Canadians, no matter their linguistic, ethnic, or religious background (Government of Canada, 2012). Harker (1987a) explains that this formal recognition of immigrants and their families living in Canada led to more widespread public consciousness that Canada is a multicultural and multilingual nation recognizing their educational, language, and cultural rights. In spite of this recognition, some have questioned whether multicultural perspectives have made their way into education in ways that are meaningful (Cherubini et al., 2010; Deer, 2008; Johnston et al., 2007). Therefore, books such as Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* and Choy’s *The Jade Peony* provide opportunities to take up diversity within the context of Canadian secondary schools, particularly in the multicultural context of Ontario English classrooms.

Although the Ontario English curriculum documents stress the importance of diversity in reading materials by acknowledging the need to read a variety of texts including Canadian ones, little is done to explicitly define Canadian literature as an integral component of the curriculum.
As a result, it is difficult to know the extent to which it is incorporated into the classroom in order to fulfill a specific Canadian literature requirement. For instance, though the curriculum documents state that students should be exposed to “materials that reflect the diversity of Canadian and world cultures, including those of Aboriginal peoples” (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 5), the specific expectations of the Grade 9 to 12 English courses are vague in terms of what materials to use, and how teachers might address that diversity through classroom content. On the other hand, the curriculum includes a Grade 11 Canadian Literature course that does explicitly address such themes and topics, and would expose students to literature written by Canadians about Canada. Yet, this course is offered as an elective and as a result may not appear on school course lists at all, thereby limiting student access to an English curriculum focused on Canadian texts and addressing content and themes related to life in Canada.

Literary activists have argued that the Ontario curriculum does not provide adequate coverage of Canadian literature and themes. This perspective has been present since the 1970s; Harker (1987a), Robinson (1987), and Lapointe (2013) point out that during this time schools began to reconsider their use of resources and books from other countries. In 1976, the Writers’ Trust of Canada commissioned a resource guide for teaching Canadian literature; this was intended to bridge the gap between students and the so-called canon, and was composed of works that provide “nation-wide talent and representation, and topics were similarly chosen to reflect national interests” (Lapointe, 2013). As a result, Canadian literature was brought into the classroom through the works of established fiction writers such as Robertson Davies, Sinclair Ross, and W.O. Mitchell, and poets such as Al Purdy and Dorothy Livesay (Harker, 1987a, p. 421). One argument for this reconsideration was that the inclusion of Canadian literature in the English curriculum had greater potential to connect students to the themes and issues related to
Canadian culture and society. On the other hand, some have hypothesized that teachers may struggle to find space for Canadian literature in the curriculum because of the wide variety of topics that teachers are required to cover (Chorny, 1987, p. 431). As a result, vague statements in the curriculum documents such as the expectation that students will read texts from “a variety of cultures” (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 102, 2007b, p. 184) may be interpreted differently by individual teachers and achieved through almost any text, leading some to use books that are Canadian, and others that are not.

1.1 Research Problem

In 2011, People for Education published a report that reveals there has been a “dramatic decline” in the percentage of Ontario students who express enjoyment in reading (Gallagher-Mackay & Kidder, 2011, p. 1). Using data collected by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), it was found that the percentage of students who reported that they “like to read” has declined from 65% in 1999 to 50% in 2011 (ibid). In a focus group discussion conducted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), participants acknowledged that a big factor in ensuring students are engaged in the reading process is the text’s overall relevance to their lives: “Fewer students today are reading for pleasure, even though daily reading for pleasure is associated with better performance in school and with adult reading proficiency. The challenge for parents and educators is to instill a sense of pleasure in reading by providing reading materials that students find interesting and relevant” (Gallagher-Mackay & Kidder, 2011, p. 3). Relevance, therefore, is seen as a crucial factor in keeping students interested and engaged in reading.

With these considerations in mind, this study explores how Canadian literature may be used to foster student engagement within Ontario English classrooms. Are students more
invested in reading, and more engaged in classroom discussions when they read and analyze texts that include characters, settings, and themes that are familiar to them? The study addresses this question by exploring teacher perspectives on student engagement and pedagogical strategies they use in their English classrooms. Finally, this study delves into the uses of Canadian literature in English classes by exploring when and how teachers use Canadian literature as a pedagogical tool.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

With this study, I am interested in learning how teachers may use Canadian literature as a way to connect to their students and to help the students feel more connected to texts in turn. With regard to People for Education’s finding that there is a decline in the percentage of students who express enjoyment in reading, I am interested in learning if students have more positive attitudes towards reading and taking up texts that are more closely related to their experiences in Canada. As an English teacher my goal would be to see students engaging with literature in ways that make them more aware of the context, experiences, and issues that are relevant across Canada.

With this study I will contribute to the knowledge about how English teachers incorporate pedagogical strategies and Canadian literature to engage their students. At the same time, I am interested in better understanding what is meant by the term “Canadian literature” and how it is defined, explored, and challenged in the classroom. Furthermore, I will learn about how pedagogy and Canadian literature may be used to fill in the gaps that exist when it comes to decolonizing English classrooms and incorporating multicultural and Indigenous perspectives in meaningful ways.
1.3 Research Questions

The key inquiry driving the study delves into how Canadian literature is used in Ontario English classrooms by exploring the following research questions: How is literature used to engage students in English class through reading and classroom discussions? How do teachers make decisions regarding text selection? How is Canadian identity defined in classrooms and do these definitions include room for Indigenous and/or multicultural narratives and perspectives?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

Having enjoyed English classes throughout my high school experience, I never gave much thought to the fact that there was this whole literary field called Canadian Literature that had so much to offer me as a reader. Margaret Atwood’s “Death By Landscape” had me both fascinated and surprised that there was a Canadian who was writing stories which we never had the chance to fully explore in class. Even when we did read Margaret Atwood, we did not get a chance to explore how her stories might relate to us as readers, as students, or as Canadians; nor did we think critically about the fact that there was only one short story by a Canadian author in our anthology and what this might say about Canada’s place in the so-called literary canon. In high school, therefore, I came to the conclusion that most books were written by American authors, and that Canadian literature was usually a more modern short story that we read quickly, almost as if in passing.

When I took my first Canadian Literature course in university, I was engaged by discussions of what it means to be Canadian and how that definition becomes complicated when considering multicultural and Indigenous perspectives. We also looked at literature that rejected the claim that Canadian culture is just an extension of American culture. As students, we were able to argue for the existence of a distinctly Canadian identity with its own variety of rich
literature, and this was exciting. Therefore, I acknowledge the fact that I do have a bias in favour of developing a discussion within English classrooms about the nature of Canadian identity, and using literature as a medium through which to introduce students to these topics.

As part of my pre-service teacher training, I took a graduate course called Introduction to Aboriginal Land-Centred Education. At the end of the course, I was invited to share a holistic account of my learning journey by analyzing all that I had learned through the lens of three themes: historical context, positionality, as well as decolonizing education and moving forward. First, I learned about the historical context of Indigenous peoples in Canada, an understanding that is fundamental in order to better understand the present, especially within educational contexts. Next, I learned about the importance of articulating and acknowledging my positionality, and what that means for me as an educator. My learning in this course required a constant reflection upon my own positionality: a reflexive understanding of my position within the colonialist system that inherently validates my experiences while oppressing and marginalizing those of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, my positionality requires that I acknowledge my privilege and complicity within this system. Finally, I learned how to move forward in the education system given all that I had learned. Though literal “decolonization” – repatriation of land and resources – is not possible for me to do as a sole teacher within the education system, I can approach my lessons with a critical awareness of how I, as a settler, benefit both directly and indirectly from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples and their land. Additionally, as an educator I can empower Indigenous ways-of-knowing by privileging and centering those epistemologies and narratives in my classroom. While doing so, I am committed to fostering that critical self-awareness among my students. Though this is not decolonization in the sense that it can bring about a repatriation of land and resources, it could
nonetheless work towards decolonizing educational landscapes in Canada. Therefore, with this learning at the forefront of my mind, I have undertaken this study with the hope of engaging with critical counter-narratives to Canadian literature and identity via Indigenous literatures.

1.5 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three secondary English teachers about the types of literature offered in their courses, and how they use literature to shape discussions about identity with their students. Specifically, the study explores how Canadian literature is used in Ontario English classrooms to engage students, and the types of conversations that emerge when analyzing these texts. I asked teachers about how they perceive student engagement with the literature they read and the types of discussions that they find meaningful. In chapter two I review the Ontario English curriculum documents, which determine the types of literature taught in class and the conversations that may develop around them. Additionally, in chapter two I discuss works that explore Indigenous identity and decolonizing theory and how this challenges widespread notions of Canadian literature and identity. I end chapter two with an exploration of the existing research about the use of Canadian literature within Ontario schools. Next, in chapter three I elaborate on the methodology and research design of this study. In chapter four I report the research findings and discuss their significance in relation to the existing research literature. Finally, in chapter five, I identify the implications of my research findings for my own teaching practice and for the broader scope of the education research community. I also articulate a series of questions raised by my research findings and suggest possible areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review literature in the areas of Canadian literary themes, decolonizing theory, and teacher practices related to English classrooms in Canada. More specifically I review scholarly work addressing the value of Canadian literature for the classroom and provide a discussion about its connection to Canadian society beyond the context of school.

I also discuss some of the critical themes that have emerged out of Canadian literature and consider the implications of those themes within the classroom setting. Next, I review research on decolonizing theory in order to show the importance of closing the knowledge gaps that exist in discussions about Canadian “multiculturalism”. More specifically, I do this by drawing upon Indigenous literature and perspectives, and show how the meaningful inclusion of these narratives within the classroom can facilitate greater understanding of their importance for the Canadian collective. Finally, I look at specific teacher practices regarding the use of Canadian literature in the classroom, and the challenges teachers face in challenging the traditional literary canon.

2.1 The Value of Canadian Literature

In a survey of 1010 teachers in Ontario, it was found that 96.8% of respondents stated they believe it is important to use Canadian literature in their teaching (Pantaleo, 2002, p. 223). When asked to expand upon these beliefs in the form of written comments, teachers stated that they think Canadian literature is important because it encourages cultural awareness while promoting and supporting Canadian authors and literature. The teachers also noted that they believed Canadian literature promotes national pride, counters American influences, and relates more to students because it reflects Canadian settings, language and geography (Pantaleo, 2002,
As a result of these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of including literature that reflects Canada’s diversity in educational settings. In this way, teachers may help students understand and appreciate their own individuality and their role within the Canadian collective (Pantaleo, 2002, p. 228).

Five years after this study, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a new secondary English curriculum. The curriculum states that students should be exposed to literary works from many genres, historical periods and cultures, and that represent “a wide range of perspectives that reflect the diversity of Canada and the world” (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 16; 2007b, p. 16). It further states that teachers should regularly provide reading materials that “reflect the diversity of Canadian and world cultures, including the cultures of Aboriginal peoples” (ibid). Therefore, it is widely agreed upon that Canadian literature is valuable to education because it can be used as a vehicle for teaching students about the value of multiculturalism, a quality that has been associated with Canadian culture since at least the 1970s.

2.1.1 Recurring themes: Settler stories and the cultural mosaic. In 1972, Canadian author Margaret Atwood published a revolutionary book entitled Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Her work marked the first time that an attempt was made to explicitly define Canadian literature and make it accessible to people other than academics and specialists in the field. Her key question was: what is Canadian about Canadian literature? (Atwood, 1972, pp. 6-7). While her original intention was to create an awareness of her question, the book provoked a great deal of controversy and discussion about how it unsettled widespread notions of Canadian identity. In the first year, the book sold ten times more copies than had been expected and became a Canadian literary sensation (Atwood, 1972, pp. xv-xvi). Atwood explains that the book’s success caused an uproar because at the time there was limited public awareness of
Canadian literature’s value for the literary scene and for education (Atwood, 1972, p. v). After the book’s success, Canadian literature and culture became popular topics of discussion as they became more saturated in the Canadian public consciousness. Furthermore, since its initial publication, *Survival* has continued to be read and taught, and to shape the way Canadians look at themselves (Atwood, 1972). The principal Canadian literary themes that the book identifies, and which have been written about by other academics since then, are settler colonialism and multiculturalism.

A central theme that recurs across a wide array of Canadian texts is the settler story. Atwood (1972) explores how this theme has been manifested in various Canadian poems, revealing that the settler story is almost always an account of the explorer’s first encounter with Indigenous groups, or the settler’s experiences with a hostile and disordered Canadian environment. Usually, the explorer is portrayed as a man who travels through an unknown territory for the first time without settling in it while settlers are depicted as attempting to make a place for themselves on the land (Atwood, 1971, p. 121). In either instance, the unknown Canadian territory is seen as a chaotic place that can only become a home through the imposition of Western values and systems: “[settlers] go to one hitherto uncleared part of it and attempt to change Nature’s order […] into the shape of human civilization: houses, fenced plots of ground with edible plants inside and weeds outside, roads; and, later… churches, jails, schools, hospitals and graveyards” (Atwood, 1972, p. 130). Such motifs raise an important issue in connection with the settler theme: Canadian settler figures see their activities as “the implementation of an order that is ‘right’”, rather than the construction of a new world build according to their own fancies (Atwood, 1972, p. 132). These discussions are valuable to the classroom because they expose students to Canada’s complicated history of settler colonialism and encourage them to think
critically about the impacts of settler colonialism in contemporary society. The impacts of settler colonialism and the area of Indigenous literature will be discussed further in the following sections.

A second central theme that recurs in Canadian literature is that of multiculturalism. Since Canada’s implementation of an official multicultural policy in 1971, Canada has promoted that policy as a tool that encourages inter-cultural dialogue, thus working towards eliminating racism and discrimination in Canada (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 76). An important part of this work towards eliminating racism and discrimination necessitates not only the affirming of the rights of Indigenous peoples, but also engaging with critical processes of reflexivity regarding our place on the land. While Canadian society rejected the melting pot mode of assimilation adopted by the United States in favour of the cultural mosaic, the integration of this model is not without its shortcomings (Bannerji, 2000, pp. 16-17). This mosaic metaphor for multiculturalism, which Bannerji (2000) refers to as an ideological affair (p. 27), means that Canada has resisted assimilationist models for developing nationhood in order to develop a more inclusive society that stands united despite cultural variance. However, this model is not as seamless as many may think.

The concept of assimilation operates as important thematic undercurrent for many works of literature. Atwood (1972) explains that both the United States and Canada have their own variations of what she calls the immigrant novel (p. 165). While in both novels there is a tension between competing cultural values with intergenerational conflicts arising from those tensions, the difference lies in the outcome of the plot. While the American immigrant novel requires that the protagonist erase all vestiges of their ethnic origin to take on a fully assimilated American identity, the Canadian immigrant novel does not (Atwood, 1972, p. 166). Taking up texts with
such themes could be useful to the classroom because they invite students to discuss and think critically about their own experiences with Canadian multiculturalism.

2.1.2 Indigenous education through Indigenous narratives. Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road* (2005) has been widely praised for being a moving account of World War I from a Canadian perspective, and for showing a valuable depiction of the Indigenous Canadian experience both in the war and at home (Penguin Random House, n.d.). Secondary English teachers could use this literature in their classrooms in a variety of different capacities, and for a number of purposes. In the first place, incorporating Indigenous perspectives and materials is a key component in meeting the requirements of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) Education framework, which was implemented in 2007 and which made Indigenous education a top priority for the province (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, & Method, 2013, p. 3). In the second place, Indigenous literature may provide opportunities for Indigenous students to connect to texts in deeper and more meaningful ways. At the same time, Indigenous literature also has vast potential to provide meaningful learning opportunities for non-Indigenous students and educators, thus addressing the knowledge gap that continues to exist. Thirdly, non-Indigenous students and educators could increase their understanding and awareness of the complex historical roots of Canada’s relations with Indigenous peoples and how they may be complicit in the contemporary shaping of those relations.

According to the Ministry’s FNMI policy, it is vital that all students and teachers have a greater knowledge of the “rich cultures and histories of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples” regardless of whether they are of Indigenous heritage or not (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 4). Unfortunately, it was found that many schools assume that they only need to provide Indigenous materials and education opportunities if they have a large number of Indigenous
students (ibid). The result is that 41% of secondary schools in Ontario provide no Indigenous education opportunities for students, 29% offer one or two opportunities, 20% offer between three and five, and only 10% offer more than five (ibid). Moreover, in a study of Indigenous content at Ontario’s faculties of education, concerns were raised about training for new teachers:

The most significant challenge confronting those working within teacher education programs is the prevailing and deeply embedded belief that Aboriginal Education is only important for those teacher candidates who intend to work within reserve communities. In 21 of the 23 interviews, course directors reported teacher candidates argue, if I’m not required to teach it, I don’t have to learn it; we don’t have Aboriginal students so it is not an issue; why do I need to know this if I’m never going to teach on a reserve; and I don’t have Aboriginal children in my classroom so therefore it is not important (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 5).

These findings are surprising given that the province-wide FNMI policy requires schools and educators to focus their efforts on Indigenous education. Such attitudes, along with the widespread lack of knowledge about Indigenous education among teachers, have been referred to as “the knowledge gap.” Gallagher-Mackay et al. (2013) point out that “[t]here is a widespread knowledge gap in most teachers’ and students’ understanding of the history of Aboriginal peoples, the impact of colonialism, and the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians” (p. 3).

Moreover, in discussing education and its impacts on Indigenous students, Deer (2008) explains that the current education system may not hold much value for some Indigenous Canadians because there has been and continues to be long-standing differences between what Indigenous Canadians find meaningful and what they are made to learn in school (p. 72). Others
have argued further that the contemporary education system in Canada has had a profound impact on Indigenous self-determination because it continues to impose mainstream values (Cherubini et al., 2010, p. 333). Such arguments echo Bannerji’s (2000) discussion about the enduring impacts of colonialism on Canadian culture and social institutions (p. 42). Indeed, it is important to recognize that long-standing education policies across Canada were designed to strip Indigenous students of their cultural identities (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 10). As a result, it is argued that educational policies continue to hold implicit colonialist agendas that impose mainstream content and values that do not connect to many people living in Canada, most particularly Canada’s Indigenous population.

A possible consequence of this disconnect may be discerned from what has been called “the achievement gap”. Additional findings from People for Education’s 2013 report show that there is a consistently large gap in EQAO test scores between Indigenous students and the provincial average (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, it was found that Indigenous students are significantly overrepresented in high school Applied courses: according to 2011-2012 data, 59% of Indigenous students are enrolled in applied courses, compared to the provincial average of 30% (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 9). The Ministry of Education has labeled these statistics as “the achievement gap” and this term refers to a persistent gap in achievement between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 8). People for Education argue that the so-called achievement gap is caused in part by the knowledge gap that exists among teachers in content and themes related to Indigenous education. In order to address this knowledge gap, they call for greater professional development training for teachers, a mandatory Indigenous education unit in pre-service teacher training, and for the province to provide greater Indigenous education opportunities that are integrated
throughout the curriculum (Gallagher-Mackay, 2013, p. 13). The possibilities of Indigenous literature to address the latter suggestion will be discussed in the following sections.

2.2 Decolonizing Canadian Literature

In a 2010 report on the Toronto District School Board’s Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Program, York University researcher Susan Dion stated that there is a need to “decolonize” schools in Canada (Dion, 2010; Gallagher-Mackay, 2013, p. 10). As discussed in the above section, a large part of that decolonization would require a filling in of the knowledge gap and addressing the colonialist curriculum that does not connect to many peoples living in Canada. However, decolonizing theorists Tuck and Yang (2012) caution that decolonization requires a more dedicated response from settlers than simply an acknowledgement of colonialist impositions on Indigenous peoples. In fact, it is difficult if not impossible to truly decolonize schools in Ontario if, as People for Education state, a significantly large knowledge gap exists among educators and non-Indigenous student populations across the province. In discussing multiculturalism and its implications for Indigenous populations, Deer (2008) argues that if the cultural mosaic model is to work, young people need to have a deeper understanding of Canada’s multiculturalism in order to encourage tolerance and harmony (p. 70). He argues further that some Indigenous students may feel disconnected from school curricula because there are significant differences between what Indigenous Canadians find meaningful and what they are made to learn in school (Deer, 2008, p. 72). On the other hand, one study has found that teachers are hesitant to incorporate diverse literature into their classrooms because there are many texts that portray stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples and other cultural groups, particularly among children’s picture books (Johnston et al., 2007). Therefore, while decolonization of the
school system appears necessary, there may also be a need to decolonize the English classroom more specifically.

2.2.1 Decolonizing theory. At its core, decolonizing theory is about the impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples. Decolonizing theory is not simply an opposition to or reaction against colonialism, but rather a way of purposefully centering and privileging Indigenous epistemologies. Furthermore, it problematizes multiculturalism by taking a critical eye to settler colonialism and settler moves to innocence. Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that decolonization requires the recognition and repatriation of land: “decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land relations and land have always been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically” (p. 7). Since settlers are not prepared to give up the land, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that settlers instead use the term “decolonization” as a metaphor, ultimately rendering it an empty term that overlooks what it is actually meant to do. As a result, settler colonial society attempts to “destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 9). Fuelling these behaviours is the misguided reasoning that if Indigenous groups are erased (in the sense that they have either been destroyed or assimilated into settler colonial society), then there will be no one to give control of the land over to. Indeed, in contrast to the controversial “one-drop rule” that fuelled racism in the United States, they explain that Indigenous people have been racialized in the opposite way: “Native Americans are constructed to become fewer in number and less Native, but never exactly white, over time” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 12). Furthermore, they argue, such racialization portrays contemporary Indigenous groups to be somehow less authentic or less Indigenous than previous generations in order to phase out Indigenous claims to land and to help solidify settler claims to
property (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 12). Thus, efforts to “erase the Native” are an attempt by settler colonial society to retain control over the land from which they reap many benefits and privileges.

Further complicating these colonial relations is the realization among settlers that they directly and indirectly benefit from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous people. In order to reconcile their guilt with their complicity, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that settlers employ various moves to innocence, which are strategies to remove blame and involvement for systems of oppression and domination (p. 9). They write: “Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10). As a result, moves to innocence are hollow, metaphorical attempts at decolonization because they only serve to benefit the settler.

The specific move to innocence strategy that is relevant to this study is called colonial equivocation. Tuck and Yang (2012) problematize the concept of multiculturalism by arguing that it homogenizes various experiences of oppression by referring to different groups as “colonized” without describing their relationship to colonialism (p. 17). For instance, they explain that people of colour who come or are brought into the settler colonial nation via immigration or slavery are not in the same position as Indigenous groups because the immigrant/slave is “invited to be a settler in some scenarios, given the appropriate investments in whiteness, or is made an illegal, criminal presence in other scenarios” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 18). Therefore, while people of colour have the possibility to become settlers in colonial society, Indigenous people can never be settlers in this land because it was theirs to begin with. In addition, anti-colonial critique emerges from the experiences of post-colonial subjects who seek
to subvert colonialism rather than undoing it; this framework celebrates the empowerment of post-colonial subjects who seize denied resources and privileges from the colonizers (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 19). However, Tuck and Yang (2012) point out that seeking stolen resources is entangled with settler colonialism because those resources belonged to Indigenous groups first, were then used to serve settlement purposes, and are impossible to seize control of without re-occupying indigenous lands (2012, p. 19). Therefore, decolonizing theory is very different than anti-colonial critique because decolonizing theory requires the recognition of the sovereign rights of Indigenous people to land claims. In the next section, I discuss ways that teachers can engage their students in critical discussions about decolonization and multiculturalism in Canada.

2.2.2 Moving towards decolonization in the English classroom. A study conducted in 2007 explored the potential of contemporary Canadian picture books to engage teachers and students in complex reflections of national identity, representation and diversity (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 75). The study was conducted over a three-year time period and involved English pre-service teachers from across five provinces in Canada (ibid). Though many of the participants began the study with an idealized view of Canadian multiculturalism, identity and Indigenous relations, they were invited to challenge those views by analyzing a range of contemporary Canadian picture books and discussing the implications of incorporating such books in the classroom.

Since the 1990s and moving into the start of the 21st century, illustrators of Canadian children’s books have increasingly focused on depicting an “idealized view of Canada as a symbol of multicultural harmony and tolerance towards a growing immigrant and Aboriginal population” (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 76). Participants in the study were asked to read some of these books and engage in small group discussions about how the words and images in the book
portrayed Canadian identity and whether these portrayals aligned with their own understanding of Canadian identity (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 77). Moreover, participants were asked to consider what criteria they would use in the thoughtful selection of literary texts and other curriculum materials in the classroom (ibid). At the beginning of the study, participants stated they thought of themselves as being open to diverse literary perspectives and interested in promoting social justice in their classroom by introducing a range of texts that address the varied backgrounds, perspectives and interests of their students (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 81). However, by engaging in critical conversations about how Canadian picture books perpetuate what the researchers refer to as the myth of benign multiculturalism, participants came to challenge their own perceptions of self and about Canadian diversity (Johnston et al., 2007, 79; 81).

Johnston et al. (2007) argue that Canadian picture books perpetuate the myth of a benign multiculturalism by employing idyllic and unrealistic representations of “the Other” in order to portray tolerance and harmony among the population (p. 79). For example, they state that many Canadian children’s books continue to present stereotypical images of diverse groups: “blacks as escaping slaves, Aboriginal Canadians wearing feathers and living in the wilderness, and […] depictions of outstanding Canadians who are likely included only because of their ‘difference’, for example, the first and only female prime minister” (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 79). As a result of such images, participants expressed concern about the possible dangers of having these books in the classroom because it may send inappropriate cultural messages to students that perpetuate racial stereotyping and “Othering” (ibid). Furthermore, when discussing the inclusion of more diverse reading materials in the classroom, participants expressed anxiety over the potential disapproval of parents and administrators, especially regarding texts that deal with sexual identity (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 80). Thus, the study found that for most participants,
multiculturalism and diversity in literature is still regarded as an add-on to curriculum planning rather than as an integral component of their teaching (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 81). Furthermore, even when participants supported the idea of broadening the literature canon of the school, most were reluctant to bring in texts that might create conflict with parents or administrators (ibid).

Yet, despite the complications that are raised by the picture books, a few participants demonstrated that they had moved beyond a fear of controversy about difference and were developing ways of reflecting on their processes of critical literacy. One participant noted their pedagogical responsibilities when selecting texts: “‘What should I look for? I will be biased because of my background, so I would like to know what I should look for that would tell me what is important to somebody else’s cultural viewpoint. What is important in this culture or ethnic background or religion … I’d want an idea from somebody else’s lens, somebody else’s view, what they consider is important’” (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 81). This shift in perspective and sense of pedagogical responsibility is important because it demonstrates the potential for educators to engage in more dialogic understandings of themselves and of Canadian multiculturalism. Such understandings are a crucial first step in attempting to decolonize the English classroom because they highlight critical literacy, asking questions about text selection and evaluation, and engaging in the reciprocal and collaborative process of learning with students.

2.3 Classroom Practices

This section reviews research studies that specifically address the use of Canadian texts in English classrooms. In 2002, Sylvia Pantaleo noted that literature is a way to socialize children and to help them understand their culture and the culture of others (p. 226). In this way, she describes literature as a powerful tool to communicate and broaden students’ understanding
of what is meant by culture, especially within a national context. This notion was also taken up by Bista (2012), who argues that authors who write about culture are taking on the role of a cultural messenger (p. 323). Though the possibilities of cultural communication via literature are exciting, Bista (2012) cautions that trouble occurs when the author portrays false information that indirectly results in the imposition of their own cultural beliefs and values about culture on the reader (p. 323). In striving to find texts that can facilitate authentic cultural messaging, she states that educators have a responsibility to evaluate the sources of their classroom texts for bias, stereotypes, and other types of false or misleading information (Bista, 2012, p. 320). As noted in an earlier section, it is with this type of critical awareness that educators can work towards decolonizing educational landscapes and engaging in teaching and learning that is culturally responsive and reflective.

To explore the use of literature as a cultural communicator within Canada, Pantaleo (2002) surveyed 1010 teachers across Ontario about how often they use Canadian literature in their teaching. The study provides a glimpse into the use of Canadian literature across subject areas such as English, Social Studies, Science, and Math, among others. The purpose of this study was to investigate how literature was being used in schools to support teaching and learning, with a specific emphasis on Canadian literature (Pantaleo, 2002, p. 213). Though nearly all participants indicated that they believe it is important to use Canadian literature in their teaching, their actual use of that literature in their classrooms was minimal (Pantaleo, 2002, p. 224).

More recently, Skerrett (2010) studied the reading lists of secondary English classes in Canada and compared them to reading lists in the United States. Her findings led her to argue that the secondary English curriculum is predominantly Euro and Anglo-centric, even in contexts
where student populations are considered to be diverse (Skerrett, 2010). Furthermore, while there were no Canadian texts on the reading list of the American school, there was a “remarkable preponderance” of American literature in the curriculum of Canadian schools (ibid). By contrast, Colarusso (2010) suggests that more diverse and contemporary works, and many of them written by Canadian authors, have been appearing on school reading lists in Canada. Yet, teachers working towards change appear to be facing other challenges and forms of resistance from unlikely sources. These studies will be detailed further in the following sections.

2.3.1 Canadian literature in the classroom. As noted above, studies have shown that teachers believe using Canadian literature in their teaching is very important. In her study, Pantaleo (2002) found that this belief was expressed by 96.8% of participants (p. 223). When asked to expand upon these beliefs in the form of written comments, teachers stated that they think Canadian literature is important because it encourages cultural awareness and promotes a sense of national identity. Furthermore, teachers felt Canadian literature is more relatable for students because it reflects settings, languages, and themes that are familiar to them (Pantaleo, 2002, pp. 223-224). Yet, despite those beliefs, the study found that many teachers do not use Canadian literature in their classroom. For example, teachers reported using Canadian literature “never” or “seldom” for the following genres: 16.9% for non-fiction, 22.5% for realistic fiction, 39.6% for fantasy, 23.5% for poetry, 42.2% for traditional literature (myths, folktales and legends), and 44.2% for historical fiction (Pantaleo, 2002, p. 224). After making note of the inconsistencies between participants’ beliefs about the value of Canadian literature and their actual use of that literature in their teaching, Pantaleo (2002) suggests some possible causes for that inconsistency and the implications of her findings for teachers. For instance, she suggests that knowledge gaps about Canadian literature, as well as “unwillingness” by some individual
teachers to seek out new material could explain the limited use of Canadian literature in the
classroom (p. 225). Additionally, she suggests that teachers need greater access to resources and
material about Canadian literature but that there is inadequate funding to facilitate such access.
Finally, she indicates that there are not enough professional development opportunities for
teachers to support them in learning about Canadian literature in greater depth (Pantaleo, 2002,

In 2010, Allison Skerrett built upon this work by studying the English reading lists in two
secondary schools that were described as serving diverse student populations – one in Canada
and the other in the United States. After analyzing the data, she found that while no Canadian
literature was studied at the school in the United States, American literature appeared more often
than Canadian literature on the reading lists at the Canadian school (Skerrett, 2010, p. 36). In
reporting her findings, she argues that the secondary English curriculum in Canada continues to
be Eurocentric and Anglo-centric and that this is especially the case with English courses in
Academic and University-level streams (Skerrett, 2010, pp. 48-51). She supports her claim by
referencing specific texts from different stream-level reading lists as well as teachers’ comments
on the literature and their students. For instance, she states that students in the Academic classes
were thought to perceive and appreciate the “aesthetic value of Eurocentric and Anglo-centric
literature” (Skerrett, 2010, p. 48). By contrast, while no Canadian texts appeared on the reading
lists of the Academic-level English classes, several appeared on Applied-level course lists. For
example, in place of the American-based To Kill A Mockingbird (Lee, 1960), which was studied
in Academic-level classes, students in the Applied stream studied one of two Canadian novels,
Dare (Farmer, 1979) and Crabbe’s Journey (Bell, 1987) (Skerrett, 2010, p. 52). Consequently,
she argues, the education system sets the standard for Academic and University level courses as Whitestream canonical texts of British, European, and American origin (Skerrett, 2010, p. 51).

This study supports the notion that the Canadian curriculum reinforces colonial perspectives, thereby continuing to silence the voices of diverse populations, most especially those of Indigenous peoples. More troubling still are the implications of this finding for English classrooms, where students are exposed to texts that convey particular forms of cultural messaging. If indeed the English curriculum is dominated by colonial texts of European, British, and American origin, then challenging those perspectives through the use of counter-narratives is all the more necessary.

2.3.2 The traditional canon and acts of resistance. A study conducted in the same year found that some teachers are taking strides to challenge the colonial curriculum in Canada (Colarusso, 2010). Colarusso (2010) explains that some English teachers are making efforts to redefine English as a subject that fosters inter-cultural dialogue, but to do this they must find ways of balancing common culture with inter-cultural learning (p. 435). According to her, “common culture” refers to the idea of a shared Canadian identity. This identity is made up of language, political and social values, the ideal of multiculturalism, and an inherited curriculum that includes all of the literary classics that have contributed to shaping Canadian society from its beginnings (Colarusso, 2010, pp. 436-437). Her study found that there were some innovative English teachers who were attempting to challenge the ideals that permeate the common culture by finding ways of diversifying school reading lists, and this included adding many Canadian texts to school reading lists (ibid).

However, these teachers are facing resistance to their efforts due to longstanding biases in favour of the traditional literary canon. For example, Colarusso (2010) identifies Paolo, a teacher
who speaks of the negative reaction he received from parents when he chose not to teach Shakespeare: “I think some parents believed I was denying their sons and daughters … the privilege to participate in Western culture” (p. 448). Therefore, despite efforts among teachers to make reading lists more diverse and applicable to their Canadian students, they continue to face a complex dilemma. On the one hand, teachers are faced with a curriculum marked by White colonial hegemony that often fails to engage the diverse student populations in Canada. On the other hand, innovative teachers are clashing with longstanding paradigms that have conditioned students, teachers, and parents to “equate traditional standards with superior ones, rather than questioning bias” (ibid).

2.4 Conclusion

This literature review has identified and analyzed the themes of multiculturalism and settler colonialism in Canadian literature. It has also identified the implications of these themes while highlighting the need to close the knowledge gaps that exist in engaging with decolonial critiques in classroom settings. In addition, I presented literature suggesting that engaging with those critiques in secondary English classrooms is critically important because it cultivates student engagement while educating them on important Canadian issues that are relevant to their lives and experiences. However, Johnston et al. (2007) found that pre-service English teachers were resistant to utilizing diverse materials out of fear that doing so would perpetuate stereotypical messaging about different cultural groups within Canada. Bista (2012) addresses such fears by providing English teachers with some strategies and also reminding them of their responsibility to evaluate the texts they bring into their class for potential bias, stereotypes, and misleading information.
I also reviewed research on decolonizing theory in order to show the importance of closing the knowledge gaps that exist in discussions about Canadian “multiculturalism”. More specifically, I did this by drawing upon Indigenous literature and perspectives, and demonstrated how the meaningful inclusion of these narratives within the classroom can facilitate greater understanding of their importance for the Canadian collective. Finally, I examined specific teacher practices regarding the use of Canadian literature in the classroom, and the challenges teachers face in challenging the traditional literary canon. In the next chapter, I review the research methodology of my qualitative study.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology used in this study. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments, before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. Next, I explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to this study. In relation to this, I identify a range of methodological limitations, however I also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approaches and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with three Ontario secondary English teachers. In the literature review, the most relevant existing research in the field of Canadian literature was examined. The literature review outlines the place of Canadian literature within the secondary English curriculum and provides a discussion about the question of Canadian identity that is expressed through literature in relation to the perception of Canadian multiculturalism. Finally, the literature review discusses the value and importance of providing critical counter-narratives to Canadian literature through the medium of Indigenous literature.

Given the types of questions guiding the study, qualitative research is the most appropriate methodological framework to use in guiding the inquiry. The goal of qualitative research is not to measure data and predict results, but rather to come to a deeper understanding of the aims, perspectives, and assumptions of participants while articulating the social context that breeds them (Hathaway, 1995, p. 542). Thus, qualitative research will allow me to come to a
deeper understanding of the motivations behind particular curriculum choices, as well as the types of conversations that they cultivate.

Throughout the past four decades, researchers have engaged in an on-going debate about the legitimacy of different research methods, leading to an ever-present disparity between qualitative and quantitative research (Hathaway, 1995, p. 537). The goal of quantitative research is to measure objects of interest with instruments, analyze data to determine if logical patterns exist, and to create theories in order to explain facts (Hathaway, 1995, p. 544). On the other hand, an important and distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is that its goal is to gain an in-depth, holistic perspective of groups of people, environments, and other phenomena by interacting closely with the people involved (Farber, 2006, p. 368). Therefore, while the paradigm underlying quantitative research is empiricism, the paradigm driving qualitative research is said to be more interpretive (Hathaway, 1995). Nonetheless, the value of qualitative research lies in its belief that knowledge comes from human experience (Hathaway, 1995, p. 544). Furthermore, though quantitative research strives for detachment and objectivity, Hathaway (1995) argues that it fails to acknowledge the philosophical grounds on which its approaches are based, and it is important for institutional researchers to be aware of the philosophical assumptions guiding their research (p. 540). Therefore, as stated by Farber (2006): “qualitative researchers deal with the fact that their own values cannot be kept out of the experience by admitting the value-laden nature of the experience [Creswell] and discussing their own biases and the implications for findings” (p. 368). Suitably, given my research purpose and questions, qualitative research methods will allow me to come to a deeper understanding of the values, perspectives and practices of secondary English teachers in Ontario, while discussing their implications for my own teaching practice.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

To gather the data for this research project I conducted informal, in-depth and face-to-face interviews with three secondary English teachers. In designing the research questions and undertaking these interviews, I used the semi-structured interview format identified by Creswell (1998).

Semi-structured interviews are the most widely used instrument of data collection in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), and provide the opportunity to better understand the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 1998). This format allows the interviewer to delve deeply into personal and social matters, gaining unique insights on an individual basis that are not possible with quantitative research or even with focus groups (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Further, semi-structured protocol allows for some flexibility in the way that questions are worded, thereby encouraging the flow of the interview because it does not require that a script be followed every time an interview is conducted. For example, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) state that as responses are given, the interviewer can in turn respond with prompts that repeat the words used by the participant. This process allows the interviewer to prompt the participant for further information without leading their responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). In addition, the interviewer can modify questions to keep the conversation fluid or ask follow-up questions to explore new or unforeseen responses offered by the participant more deeply. Therefore, semi-structured interview format is beneficial because it allows me to design and plan an interview that attends to the research focus and questions, while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to unanticipated areas.
I have organized my interview protocol (Appendix B) into four main sections, beginning with the participants’ background information, followed by questions about their perspectives on Canadian literature and other texts that they teach in their English classes. Next, I asked participants about their specific pedagogical strategies and experiences involving literature and student engagement, and concluded with questions regarding supports, challenges, and next steps for teachers. Examples of questions include:

1. What do you think influences the texts that are taught in English classes?
2. Have you ever taught works of Canadian literature? If so, how did you approach teaching it? Was it different than teaching other texts, and if so, how?

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria that I established for participant recruitment, and I discuss how teachers were recruited and selected for the study. I also include a section that introduces each of my participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. Due to the personal, in-depth nature of qualitative research, this study has a small, selective sample size. The following criteria was applied in the selection of participants:

1. Participants are English teachers in an Ontario secondary school.
2. Participants have some level of interest in Canadian literature.
3. Participants have at least three years of experience in the teaching profession.

The teachers chosen for interview are all secondary English teachers who teach in various schools across Toronto. Two of the three participants are head of the English department at their school. These qualifications were critical for the study because it ensured that participants were
able to speak directly to the core inquiry of the study, which investigates the texts that are taught in Ontario secondary English classrooms. The fact that all participants teach in various schools across Toronto is an added benefit, given that Toronto is a very diverse city and thus provides an authentic context for discussing multiculturalism and the associated issues.

Furthermore, the teachers chosen for interview had expressed varying degrees of interest in Canadian literature. Two of the participants expressed a moderate level of interest in Canadian literature and one of the participants had her Master of Arts in English and for her thesis had written about various themes commonly found in Canadian literature. For the purposes of this study, an expressed interest in Canadian literature by the participant was sufficient and no formal training was required. However, the third participant’s prior training in Canadian literature was an asset to the study because it provided a deeper level of understanding about Canadian literature and the possibilities for its use in the English classroom. Finally, participants chosen for the study were all experienced teachers with well over three years of teaching experience. Having several years of teaching experience was crucial to the study because it allowed participants to illustrate a more comprehensive account of their experiences with students in the classroom.

3.3.2 Recruitment procedures. Given the small-scale nature of the study and the methodological parameters within which the study was conducted, the sampling procedures relied on convenience sampling. Further, thanks to my program of study at OISE/UT, I am fully immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and mentors and therefore I was able to rely on existing contacts and networks to recruit participants.
3.3.3 Participant biographies. The first participant, Rachel, has been teaching for twenty-seven years in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. She is qualified to teach English and History, although she has been teaching English exclusively for over sixteen years at her current school. Rachel has her Master of Arts in English and her thesis topic discusses various themes that are common among works of Canadian literature. She is a self-described “huge proponent” of Canadian literature, and attempts to use it as often as she can in her English classrooms.

The second participant, Sarah, has been teaching for eleven years in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. She has recently become department head of English at her school and has taken on a number of roles in support of student literacy at the school. For instance, in addition to being the school’s literacy lead and organizing literacy activities in preparation for the OSSLT, she also teaches a number of remedial courses that focus explicitly on developing student literacy and competency in English. She also has a great deal of interest in supporting twenty-first century competencies such as collaboration and inquiry-based learning, and she designs innovative assignments that foster these skills in her classroom. Sarah has a great deal of interest in bringing Canadian literature into her classroom and discussing diversity and identity with her students.

The final participant, Michelle, is also the department head of English at her school and has been teaching for eighteen years. Her academic background includes a degree in linguistics with an added focus on social sciences and the history of language. She expresses interest in bringing Canadian literature to the classroom, and her school has a rather extensive resource list in support of this aim in contrast to the schools that other participants teach at. Michelle also expresses enjoyment in bringing Indigenous literatures into her classroom and engaging students
in critical discussions about Indigenous issues in Canada. As department head, she is responsible for ensuring that teachers are meeting the Indigenous education requirements set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and she is very open to changing school reading lists in accordance with student needs and interest.

3.4 Data Analysis

All data collected from the interview process was first transcribed and then coded according to the coding process described by Maykut & Morehouse (1994), Creswell (1997) and Saldaña (2009). Saldaña (2009) states that a code in qualitative inquiry is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of [data]” (p. 3). Thus, when looking for codes, researchers highlight words or phrases that capture the essence of a particular section of data, looking for patterns among codes after going through several waves of coding. Once the data has reached a point of saturation, the coded data is then grouped according to similar “units of meaning”, or ideas, into broader categories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 134). As suggested by Saldaña (2009), in order to ensure that the data was deeply reflected upon and analyzed, I went through additional rounds of categorization in order to refine the codes and their corresponding categories (p. 10). Finally, using the research questions as an interpretive tool, I analyzed the codes for implicit meaning and formulated them into overarching concepts and themes.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

The Master of Teaching program at OISE requires that the following ethical review procedures be followed. Each of the three teachers interviewed signed a letter of consent (Appendix A) that confirmed their awareness of their right to withdraw from the study at any
point. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified expectations of participation, which comprised one 45-60 minute audio-recorded interview. At the beginning of the interview, I reminded each participant that they were not required to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. I also reminded them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished.

The participants were told that the full transcripts obtained from the study would only be seen by my research course instructor and myself and that the voice recordings would be destroyed after five years. They were also informed that all data will be stored on my password-protected laptop and that the data obtained from these interviews may subsequently be used in future publications and/or conference presentations. In the consent letter, I informed participants that they will be referred to by a pseudonym and no identifying characteristics will be described. I also let them know that I would utilize generalized background information to differentiate the participants from each other. I also assured them that any quotations taken from the interview for use in this project, publication or presentation would remain anonymous through the use of a pseudonym.

Here, I would like to confirm that there were no foreseeable risks for the three teachers to participate in this study. While there were no immediate benefits to them, the information they shared during this study has been used to inform my own teaching practice and has the potential to inform the practice of other teachers and students, as well as policy and curriculum development.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The most significant limitations to this study arose due to the sample size, which was limited due to the Master of Teaching program’s ethics protocols. Due to this limitation, the data
is not be generalizable to the larger population and may be subject to regional specificity. As a result, the data may not speak to a broader national picture or to all teaching contexts. Another methodological parameter was that only teachers were eligible to be interviewed, which provides only one set of perspectives. For instance, data may have been more generalizable to the population if a large-scale survey had been conducted, and richer data may have been gathered through the incorporation of student perspectives and experiences.

Nonetheless, the purpose of qualitative research is less about generalizing to the larger population and drawing conclusions than it is about understanding the lived experiences of those involved in the study. By interviewing a small sample of teachers, this study allowed me to hear from each of them individually and in much greater depth than a survey could have allowed. In doing so, this study gained specific insights that validated teacher’s voices and experiences regarding the Ontario secondary English curriculum, the possibilities for Canadian and Indigenous literatures, and multicultural and Indigenous voices in the classroom.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology chosen for this study. I began with a discussion of the research approach and procedure, explaining the merits of qualitative research and providing a justification for choosing it as the method for this study. Additionally, I highlighted some of the major ways that qualitative research approaches differ from those of quantitative research. I then described the instruments of data collection and identified semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data. I spoke to the benefits of semi-structured interviews for qualitative research and explored the value that the data gathered from the interviews would add to this study. I then listed the criteria that would be applied when selecting interview subjects and identified the participants of the study, providing brief introductions for
those selected. Additionally I described recruitment procedures, which involved convenient sampling. This method of participant recruitment was chosen in order to maximize the depth of data obtained as well as to satisfy the parameters of the study, which allowed for three to four participants. I then described how I will analyze the data, which will involve an examination of individual interviews before looking for common themes and recurring patterns across the data. I also considered ethical issues such as consent, risks of participation, right to withdraw, and data storage, and acknowledged the ways that these potential issues were recognized and minimized. Lastly, I discussed the methodological limitations of the study, such as the limitations caused by sample size, while also highlighting the strengths, such as the rich and idiosyncratic nature of data. In the next chapter, I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

With this qualitative study, I investigate how teachers use Canadian literature as a way to connect to their students and to help the students feel more connected to texts in turn. Furthermore, this study explores teacher perspectives on student attitudes towards reading and taking up texts that are more closely related to their experiences in Canada, as well as specific practices they use in engaging their students in English class. Thus, the purpose of the study is to contribute to the knowledge about how English teachers incorporate pedagogical strategies and Canadian and Indigenous literatures to engage their students. Further, this study explores how such tools may be used to fill in the gaps that exist when it comes to engaging with diverse perspectives and narratives in meaningful ways. The intention of this study is not to conflate multicultural and Indigenous perspectives by claiming that they are one and the same. Nor does this study suggest a conclusive definition of the nature of Canadian identity. Rather, my intention with this study is to illustrate the value of Canadian literature to the secondary English curriculum by elucidating the conversations that the literature inspires and which students may find especially engaging. Finally, this study provides a discussion about the ways that Indigenous literature can be used to take classroom conversations further by using it as a counter-narrative to Canadian literature in English classrooms. In this chapter, I present the research findings of the study.

The data for this study was obtained through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with three experienced English teachers in Ontario. All three interviews were first transcribed and then coded numerous times. Next, the coded data was analyzed and organized into categories, which were then synthesized into overarching themes. This chapter has been
organized according to the three themes that I extrapolated from the data: Identifying as Canadian, Engaging Students in Literature, and Barriers to Developing a Rich Canadian Literature Curriculum.

The interview participants have been given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. Rachel, Sarah, and Michelle are experienced English teachers who work in various schools across Toronto. All three participants were recruited based on convenience sampling. Due to the nature of my program at OISE/UT, I belong to a community of teacher colleagues and professional educators and thus was able to use existing contacts to recruit participants for the study.

The research findings provide a rich discussion about the ways in which Canadian literature is used to engage students in English classrooms, while exploring the barriers that exist in attempting to establish a rich Canadian literature curriculum. In addition, the discussion provides key insights into the complexities of arriving at a resolute definition of Canadian identity due to the tensions between multicultural and de-colonial perspectives. Nonetheless, the chapter provides a hopeful suggestion for how such crucial discussions, which are both essential and valuable to have with students, can be brought into English classrooms across the province.

4.1 Engaging Students in Literature

The findings presented in this section answers the research question: How is literature used to engage students in English class through reading and classroom discussions? In order to address this question, I asked participants to share specific strategies that they use in their classroom to get students engaged in reading and discussing texts. Additionally, I asked participants to describe the qualities that they look for in a text when deciding to include it on their reading list, as well as the factors that they consider in making that choice. The data from
the interviews reveal that relevance to student lives and the teacher’s passion for the texts used in class are key factors in ensuring that students find value and excitement in what they read in English class. Moreover, participants stress the importance of adapting reading lists to ensure that the texts being studied will appeal to the students in the class. The following sections investigate these components of the interviews in greater detail.

4.1.1 Establishing relevant connections. When I asked participants to describe the qualities of a text that are most effective in engaging students in reading, relevance was frequently emphasized first on their list. After synthesizing the data from all three interviews, “relevance” refers to the connections that students see between their lives and experiences and the story they are reading. Relevance is also listed as a Specific Expectation in the Grade 11 English curriculum: “extend understanding of texts … by making appropriate and increasingly rich connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them” (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 47). Participants also listed the familiarity of the setting as an especially strong source of relevance for students.

Rachel advocated for the unique ability of Canadian literature to provide the most relevant reading experience for students because it speaks to themes that students care about within a context that is familiar to them, adding extra layers of relevance and meaning: “teenagers can read a book, an American author’s book, about the struggles of a teenager, but a Canadian author can do it within the context of places that are familiar to them, so I think that’s really important”. Additionally, participants stated that students find the age of the protagonist, the theme of human nature or the universal human condition, as well as the experience of being an immigrant in a new place to be especially relevant.
When taking up Canadian texts, Sarah indicated that the immigrant experience is an especially engaging topic for students and that these classroom discussions naturally evolve into a conversation about “Canadian identity and what it feels like to be an immigrant to a new country and being different from others, and not really feeling that you belong”. Similar comments were made by other participants, who indicated that the diverse student population and the strong association of Canada with multiculturalism meant that such discussions were always particularly engaging for students, who felt direct connections to the story and characters in the texts they read. Finally, Sarah added that students particularly appreciated reading and discussing “anything that really relates to them and [that] they can see their place in”. This comment recalls the section of the English curriculum documents, which states that students will be more engaged in learning if they see themselves and others in the texts they study (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 4). Indeed, Sarah indicated that when texts are very far removed from student experiences, they have a difficult time engaging with the literature in ways that are meaningful: “within our school we have a very diverse demographic and studying, like, the old White dead guys doesn’t appeal to all these kids … Shakespeare doesn’t really work all the time”.

Nonetheless, in instances where reading such texts is unavoidable, participants shared the strategies that they use in order to connect their students to the literature. Both Rachel and Sarah stated that they use pre-reading activities that delve into the themes of a given text and make that text applicable in a modern context that relates to student experiences. For Rachel, this involved speaking to the various issues that are elucidated through literature, such as the immigrant experience, prejudice, discrimination, life in an urban context, and sexual abuse. Additional strategies included asking students an open-ended question related to a theme and using a
continuum-style debate to address that question before reading, and then revisiting that question after reading to see if student responses have changed, and to what extent. For example, before reading *The Great Gatsby*, Sarah asks her students whether they believe it is possible to atone for past mistakes. After reading the novel, she asks this question again to see if student responses have changed as a result of textual analysis.

Sarah added that her pre-reading activities involve bringing up modern day issues that relate to the text they are reading to help students see how something written many years ago could still be relevant to a modern audience: “books that, even though they might be hundreds of years old, they still speak to the students today, and we can still critically analyze them”. This particular strategy of speaking to the enduring issues elucidated in the literature and connecting it to the present could serve as a useful tool through which to help students better understand historical and contemporary issues in Canada.

4.1.2 Adapting to students. In order to address the research question, I asked teachers to explain the factors that influence their choice in text selection. Participants indicated that although their choice is limited to the supply of class sets that the school possesses, they consider the unique interests of their students when deciding which of those texts to use in specific classes. Sarah stated: “within each of our courses, um, the books are prescribed but there’s choice … so there is choice within each course but we are limited with the books that we have”. The example she gave was for Grade 9 English, which offers a choice between Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* for the Elizabethan play unit. The choice between the prescribed options often depends on individual classes and the teacher’s ability to choose a text that will speak to the majority of the students in the class. For instance, Sarah stated that she considers the balance of genders, the cultural make-up of the class, the student needs,
and the overarching theme of the course when making text choices. This adaptability is important since every class will be unique based on the individual students within it.

The balance of genders was a factor that multiple participants indicated they consider when choosing texts for their class. For example, Sarah stated that if her class has mostly female students she is more likely to choose a text with a female protagonist in the hopes that this will appeal to the majority of students in the room. In addition, Michelle affirmed that the balance of genders is a consideration that many teachers bear in mind when planning the overarching theme of their courses. For example, she described the actions that one of her colleagues made when he noticed that the majority of students in his Grade 12 English class were males and that they were interested in a particular genre: “he started with short stories – and he’s noticing that the boys are really into horror and graphic stories so he’s decided … for [his] novel [he’s] going to do a horror novel”.

Finally, participants stated that they consider the cultural make-up of the class as an important factor in determining text choices. Michelle stated: “what if I have let’s say … half of them are Chinese international students, then maybe I should choose something that will engage them”. Building upon this example, in chapter one I referenced a book written by Chinese-Canadian author Wayson Choy called *The Jade Peony* that could be used in such a situation to specifically engage the group of students that Michelle describes. The book has a coming-of-age theme and provides a poignant account of three Chinese-Canadian siblings growing up in Vancouver’s Chinatown while they deal with the complex and shifting nature of their identity and experiences within that context. As previously discussed, teachers acknowledge that while texts with a coming-of-age theme are engaging for students due to the connection between the
theme and their own coming-of-age experiences, a Canadian text with such a theme provides an added layer of connection due to the familiarity of the setting.

**4.1.3 Teachers’ passion for texts used in class.** Additional factors that play a key role in getting students engaged in literature stem from the depth of the teacher’s own knowledge and excitement – or passion – about that literature. In Sarah’s case, that passion translated through her own lived experiences, which directly connected to the texts being taken up in class. She stated: “in terms of my own comfort level if I’m teaching a Canadian author I can speak to um, what was going on in the author’s world when he or she wrote … whereas with other authors it’s research I’ve done – it’s not as organic”. Thus, Sarah finds that speaking to her own lived experiences, which is especially pertinent when taking up Canadian texts, allows her knowledge and excitement for the literature to come through more clearly. As a result her students respond positively to that passion, which is demonstrated in an increased level of engagement in the class. Michelle also discussed the correlation between student engagement and the teacher’s passion for literature, stating that student engagement is “directly proportionate” to her own level of knowledge and excitement in the reading material: “what engages them the most – and that would probably be, just the, it comes with experience and it comes with … your own level of excitement”.

In addition, my interview with Rachel illustrated that some teachers share their passion for literature in ways that go beyond the class time, and that this is also a source of engagement for students. Rachel revealed that she is very passionate about Canadian literature and therefore tries to expose her students to as much of it as she can; sometimes this involves suggesting a reading list that students can refer to outside of class time. She stated: “I’m a huge proponent for Canadian literature in the classroom. So I try to push that a lot. So wherever it fits in thematically
– for example, the ISU. A huge chunk of the reading list that I give them is CanLit”’. Thus, Rachel’s passion for Canadian literature enables her to provide additional opportunities for her students to be exposed to that literature, such as providing reading lists and assignments that are outside the scope of the curriculum and class time. This demonstrates that a teacher who has a clear passion for particular areas of literature can use their passion in ways that foster meaningful and purposeful engagement with the literature both inside and outside of class time.

4.2 Identifying as Canadian

The data in this section answers the fundamental research question: How is Canadian identity defined in classrooms and do these definitions include room for Indigenous and/or multicultural narratives and perspectives?

4.2.1 Complex and shifting identities. In order to address the research question, I asked teachers whether their students show interest in discussing Canadian identity and experiences in the classroom and to explain the nature of those discussions to me. All interview participants acknowledged that the student populations at their various schools are becoming increasingly diverse in correlation with Toronto’s constantly evolving demographic. As a result of this diversity, the participants indicated that classroom discussions about what it means to be Canadian are often a source of very lively conversation that can last for an entire seventy-five minute period. One of the interview participants, Sarah, stated that when discussing the Canadian experience in class, students often consider their cultural background as the primary determinant of their identity, even if they were born in Canada:

I always start any Canadian text by saying, ‘Why do we ask each other in Canada: what are you?’ [Be]cause the kids here ask that all the time … very few students and, maybe
even staff members, identify as being Canadian. Even though when I go on to ask the 
class, majority of them are born here and they're Canadian citizens. In probing Sarah to explain how she addresses the question of Canadian identity in class, she stated that she emphasizes the idea of simply “identifying as Canadian” while maintaining other racial, ethnic, or language identities that students consider to be a vital component of who they are.

Furthermore, during my interview with Sarah we came upon a fascinating point of discussion regarding the nature of “identity” as it is experienced by students and expressed through class discussion. As mentioned above, when discussing identity in the classroom, students usually state that they view their cultural background as the primary determinant of their identity and do not immediately call themselves Canadian when they are asked to self-identify. Indeed, Sarah said that students “always say that they're not Canadian, truly at heart they're from wherever their parents came from”. This point illustrates the distinct characteristics of Canadian multiculturalism as it is perceived in the mainstream public consciousness: Canadian society as a “mosaic” of distinct individuals who maintain their cultural background and assert it as the core signifier of their identity. However, Sarah also indicated that her students’ experiences of identity (insofar as it is Canadian identity) are very complex as is elucidated when they begin to discuss Canada on the global stage. For instance Sarah explained that when discussing the Syrian refugee crisis in her English class last year, her students, who had previously claimed that they did not identify primarily as Canadian, then shifted to become “fiercely Canadian” by becoming “defensive and territorial with Canada”. Therefore, my interview with Sarah illustrates that the manner in which students experience their Canadian identity is complex and with many layers.
4.2.2 Understanding self and others. In order to explore the research question further, I asked participants whether they thought it is important to use Canadian literature in their teaching. Additionally, I asked participants to explain what they think Canadian literature does well or achieves (i.e. with regard to student interest or more generally as a body of literature), while also asking them if they think there is an area of Canadian literature that is lacking.

Through my discussion with interview participants, teachers revealed that students show pride and excitement in reading Canadian texts in English classrooms. This excitement is demonstrated in their level of joy when they read stories, words, characters and places that are culturally familiar to them. This component of the data aligns with the English curriculum documents, which state that students will be “more engaged in learning and they will also come to appreciate the nature and value of a diverse, multicultural society” if they see themselves and others in the texts that they study (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 4). To illustrate this phenomenon, I will discuss an example given to me by Michelle.

Michelle told me that she often reads Italian-Canadian author Nino Ricci’s Lives of the Saints in her English class and that this text proves to be tremendously engaging for her students. She says that such a text provides a unique opportunity for Italian-Canadian students to feel included in the classroom because they can identify with the stories being read there. Furthermore, the text allows those students to actively participate in classroom discussions in ways that validate their experiences and provide opportunities for them to educate their peers on what it means to be them:

[The Italian] students have so much fun explaining to everyone what those phrases mean and making everyone aware that … this is the phrase they heard from their nonna … it’s a beautiful reminder of your cultural identity but also of the fact that you’re here, also,
amongst other people and it is your – not only a responsibility – but an honour to explain to them what it means to be you.

Though Ricci’s *Lives of the Saints* is written within the context of Italian-Canadian experiences, Michelle indicated that the text is engaging for all students regardless of their background because it provides them with the opportunity to learn more about the immigrant experience, subsequent generations, and the evolution of family customs in a new country. Indeed, this is supported by the Ministry’s statement that learning about others through literature can be a source of engagement for students because it fosters an appreciation for a diverse and multicultural society (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 4). Since the student populations in Michelle’s classrooms are culturally diverse, she stresses that it is important for her as their teacher to give them something united to look at. To this end, she states that a Canadian text has a unique ability to act as a “unifier” by virtue of the fact that it is written by an author who participates in Canadian society, thereby allowing the text to speak to student experiences in an authentic way.

As my interview with Michelle went on, we came across a point of discussion that recalls the work of Pantaleo (2002), which I reviewed in chapter two when I discussed the value of Canadian literature to education. Pantaleo (2002) found that teachers across the province believe it is important to use Canadian literature in their teaching for a variety of reasons, the first of which being that it encourages cultural awareness. As a result of these findings, Pantaleo (2002) emphasizes that Canadian literature is valuable to education because it facilitates greater understanding and appreciation among students of their own individuality and their role within the Canadian collective (p. 228). Michelle shares this perspective. She believes that analyzing a Canadian text provides meaningful learning opportunities for all students, despite their varied
cultural backgrounds. For instance she says that when taking up Canadian texts in the classroom, she makes students understand that Canada is a wonderful and unique country to live in because it exposes them to the multitude of perspectives that co-exist within Canadian society, a reality that is not experienced in other places in the world: “[Canada] is a very, very unique and extremely, extremely privileged place to be because it exposes them to so much more than so many other people in other corners of the world are never exposed to”. Through such discussions, which are fostered through the analysis of Canadian texts, Michelle states that students are invited to think deeply about who they are as individuals and how they fit into the larger whole of Canadian society. Thus, the ability of literature to foster students’ understanding of themselves and others is seen as a valuable component of the English curriculum and may be especially encouraged through the analysis of Canadian literature.

4.2.3 Fostering greater understanding of Canada’s colonial history. While classroom discussions about the nature of Canadian identity, which emerge through the analysis of Canadian texts, can serve to highlight the various facets of the so-called cultural mosaic, it is important for teachers to provide students with a counter-narrative to that identity. As previously discussed in this chapter, it is important to consider the complex and shifting nature of Canadian identity. At the same time, it is also crucial to understand that multiculturalism and Indigenous perspectives have different histories and frameworks. In order for multiculturalism to be effective, it must take up the notion of settler colonialism and engage with anti-colonialist critiques (St. Denis, 2011). It is also important to understand that merely incorporating Indigenous content is not enough to bring about a “decolonization” of the classroom. Indeed, as Tuck and Yang (2012) state very clearly in their work, “decolonization is not a metaphor”. Nonetheless, as discussed in chapter two, educators must strive to include and critically discuss
such content while engaging in self-reflexive practices that foster critical awareness of their positionality within a system that inherently oppresses Indigenous epistemologies and perspectives (Battiste, 2013; Four Arrows, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Therefore, while Canadian literature provides unique opportunities for students to participate in critical discussions about Canadian identity and culture related to their own life experiences, it is crucial that teachers provide rich learning opportunities for students that expose them to Canada’s colonial history and the ways in which settlers are implicated by and within that system. In so doing, students will be challenged to think more critically about their experiences of Canadian multiculturalism and thus, they may develop a richer understanding of the society in which they live.

When I asked participants to describe an aspect of Canadian literature that they feel requires further development, participants indicated that narratives providing insight into Canada’s colonial history have been largely absent from school reading lists. However, participants also expressed optimism at the possibility of bringing those narratives into their classroom via Indigenous literature, thanks to the emerging public awareness that such narratives are valuable and important. For example, Rachel stated that “Native struggles” was a topic she felt had not yet been developed to a point where it was an integral component of – or critical counter-narrative to – Canadian literature. She went on to state that Indigenous authors living in Canada are beginning to write texts that are “just starting to” make their way into English classrooms. When pressed to explain why she thought such texts had not yet made their way into English classrooms, she responded by speaking to the marginalization that many Indigenous groups face within various social systems such as mainstream media and education. Nonetheless,
she seemed hopeful about the ability of literature to encourage critical awareness among students about the society in which they live:

> These issues have been mainly ignored by non-Native communities so it has not been within the radar to talk about them or deal with them. Now that some of these ideas are more prominent in media coverage, people’s awareness is being raised – especially in areas like literature.

Rachel’s words also reveal the importance of extending media coverage of Indigenous issues into the classroom. While it is important to bring in media coverage, talking about them on a superficial level does not suffice to help students and teachers come to terms with or even understand Canada’s colonial past (and present). What is necessary is a series of even deeper discussions that critically take up issues of discrimination and confront the “damaging assumptions and imperialist knowledge” (Battiste, 2013, p. 161) that continue to permeate the educational system.

The participants identified literature as one avenue through which to critically take up issues of discrimination and colonialism. Michelle shared her experiences of bringing Indigenous literature into her English classrooms and expressed her high regard for challenging her students to think about Canada differently. She stated that there was a great value to reading Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road* and challenging her students to “see beyond the clichés of what they have always known about Aboriginal identity”. The idea of clichés, or stereotypes, recalls the work of Johnston et al. (2007), which challenged a group of pre-service teachers to acknowledge their own biases and re-examine their perceptions of Canadian society by reading and analyzing a variety of literary texts. Through reading the various texts and participating in critical discussions about the implications of a seamless multiculturalism (in the sense that it portrays
certain cultural groups, and especially Indigenous groups, in stereotypical ways), pre-service teachers developed a deeper understanding about the complexities of the society in which they live. As illustrated through Michelle’s observations, it is possible to have critical discussions with students that work towards a similar aim. Through reading Indigenous literature and dissecting the stereotypes that students may have about Canadian multiculturalism and about Indigenous peoples within Canada, students can both “unlearn” and learn: “to unlearn racism and superiority in all its manifestations, while examining our own social constructions in our judgments and learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundations for all learners” (Battiste, 2013, p. 166).

4.3 Barriers to Developing a Rich Canadian Literature Curriculum

The findings presented in this section answer the research question: How do teachers make decisions regarding text selection? In order to address this question, I asked participants how much freedom they are given in deciding what texts they teach. Additionally, I asked them to describe what they see as the biggest challenge to their work and how they respond to those challenges. Finally, I asked them whether their school offers the elective courses, Grade 11 Canadian Literature or Grade 11 English: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, which explicitly focus on Canadian texts, themes, and issues. The following sub-themes illustrate that resources and program funding, level of interest among teachers and students, as well as hesitancy to change the literary canon are all significant challenges that hinder the development of a rich Canadian literature curriculum.

4.3.1 Resources and program funding. After analyzing the data, lack of resources was revealed to be the primary obstacle to diversifying school reading lists. Indeed, access to money
and resources was described as a significant problem in all of the interviews I conducted. For instance, when I asked how much freedom participants have in deciding what books they teach, Sarah said: “we’re left with class sets of texts so we’re very limited to that – especially because the budget in our school board, um, is kind of in peril right now”. Thus, participants indicated that their ability to access resources such as new reading materials was severely limited due to budgetary restrictions. As Michelle put it, when a teacher arrives at a particular school they must “accept what this school has had as its core texts for years … [they] inherit the curriculum that has been created there.”

The lack of access to resources was also raised by Rachel, who expanded upon this concern by describing it as the biggest challenge to her work: “we don’t have proper resources – i.e. books … the reality is you have to deal with what you have”. In order to deal with that reality, Rachel stated that she must teach whatever is “in the cupboard”, which generally does not include Canadian literature. However, since she is a self-described “huge proponent” of Canadian literature, she looks for other ways of bringing it into her classroom that do not cost any money, such as through news articles, journals, or photocopied poems and short stories.

As discussed in chapter two, Skerrett (2010) argues that the secondary English curriculum is dominated by the literary canon, which continues to be Eurocentric and Anglo-centric, and does not provide much room for Canadian texts. The data collected from interview participants seems to be largely consistent with this argument, although as discussed in chapter three, I am unable to generalize this information to all secondary schools in Ontario due to the small nature of the study. However, if indeed the curriculum that has been created at the school (via the class sets of texts that they have) primarily contains canonical texts, and resources are
low, then it becomes clear that this presents a significant obstacle to developing a rich Canadian literature curriculum at the school.

4.3.2 Level of interest. In addition to the availability of resources and funding, participants indicated that the level of interest among teachers and students in Canadian and Indigenous literatures plays a role in determining how accessible those texts will be to students. During our interview, participants spoke about individual colleagues in their English department who hold a particular interest in Canadian or Indigenous literature, stating that those colleagues make a point of bringing those texts into their classroom. For example, Michelle said: “one of my colleagues … is very, very keen on Native literature … she’s taught also some religion courses and she’s very interested in Native spirituality so she teaches … The True Diary of a Part Time Indian and April Raintree”. However, in each of these cases, participants revealed it was only one colleague in the department who held that interest and therefore only a handful of students at the school were regularly being offered the opportunity to access the literature.

Although teachers with a vested interest in Canadian and Indigenous literatures could be assets for a school that offers the Grade 11 elective courses, Canadian Literature and English: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, neither of these courses were offered at the schools where participants taught. When I pressed participants to explain why neither of these courses was offered at their school, many of them speculated that it was due to low student enrolment in the course or general lack of interest. Michelle stated that the optional Grade 11 Canadian Literature course had been offered at her school in previous years but it had been cut recently due to low enrolment numbers: “[it] used to be offered, but … unfortunately courses like that sometimes become the first target … it only had eight students enrolled”. I responded to this by asking Michelle why she thought enrolment numbers in the course were so low, and she thought it could
be due to the competing programs in the school, such as International Baccalaureate, which she stated tends to draw many students away from optional courses in literature. Since Grade 11 is primarily an elective-based year, it is not surprising that students who have had limited – or no – exposure to Canadian literature might hesitate to take the course when faced with many other competing options. Moreover, unless a teacher with particular interest in advocating for these courses promotes them to students, then enrolment numbers may remain low, prompting schools to stop offering the course.

4.3.3 Hesitancy about changing the canon. Finally, participants pointed to another factor that presents a barrier to the development of a rich Canadian literature curriculum: namely, widespread reluctance among teachers to change the literary canon at their schools. Sarah, who is the English department head at her school, spoke about the discussions she has had with other English teachers about potentially changing up some of the school’s core reading materials. Sarah recognizes that students who are frequently disengaged from certain canonical texts that do not appeal to them could benefit from being exposed to more diverse texts. However, other English teachers in her department are in opposition to such a change: “we had a conversation last year about getting rid of Shakespeare … and people were very up in arms… they felt that kids had to do Shakespeare”. When I asked her why she thought there was such opposition to the change she said: “I think a lot of it has to do with the way we were taught and this canon that kind of exists out there – this idea that kids have to read certain texts”. Thus, the disengagement from literature that Sarah describes, as well as widespread reluctance to diversifying school reading lists, could explain some of the low enrolment levels in literature courses.

The idea that students must read certain texts has been discussed in other literature. For example, in chapter two I considered a study conducted by Colarusso (2010) that documented
the actions of several teachers who sought to change their schools’ core text by adding more diverse works, many by Canadian authors, to their reading lists. One teacher in this study reported parental backlash for choosing to omit Shakespeare from their English program one year: “I think some parents believed I was denying their sons and daughters … the privilege to participate in Western culture” (Colarusso, 2010, p. 448). As previously discussed in the chapter, however, mainstream education has predominantly been a vehicle for promoting Western paradigms while largely excluding other perspectives. In Canada, this has been especially the case with Indigenous perspectives (Battiste, 2013; Deer, 2008). Therefore, the data suggests that despite efforts among individual teachers to make school reading lists more diverse and applicable to their Canadian students, they are met with resistance by others who are fiercely defensive of preserving the literary canon.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an exploration of the research findings. Furthermore, this chapter has helped to answer my research purpose, which is to explore the ways in which Canadian literature is used in English classrooms as a vehicle for fostering student engagement. This chapter has addressed the research purpose by shedding light on the conversations that are shaped around Canadian texts and demonstrating how those conversations are valuable, important and relevant to Canadian students and their life experiences. Finally, in this chapter I discussed the implications of those conversations and suggested that Indigenous literature be used as a counter-narrative to Canadian literature to ensure the richness of student understanding. Upon analysis, the research findings were organized into three themes: Identifying as Canadian, Engaging Students in Literature, and Barriers to Developing a Rich Canadian Literature Curriculum.
In the first theme, I presented strategies that participants use in order to engage students in literature. In this discussion I explained that teachers see relevance as the key ingredient in fostering that engagement. Specific strategies aim to establish the relevance of a text to student lives and within a modern context. With regards to this aim, I suggested that speaking to the enduring impact of certain topics in relation the present could present a pathway to engaging critically with Canadian literature and Indigenous literature and illuminating the present realities of colonialism in Canada. Finally, in this theme I discussed the correlation that participants see between their own passion for literature and the engagement level of their students. Moreover, the data revealed that some teachers who are passionate about Canadian literature provide students with additional opportunities to pursue the exploration of that literature beyond the class time.

The second theme explored the complex classroom discussions that emerge through the analysis of Canadian texts. Such conversations, which are predominantly focused on exploring the nature of “Canadian identity”, are considered by the participants to be especially engaging for students due to their own life experiences and understandings of what it means to be Canadian. The participants indicated that students especially enjoy reading Canadian literature because the texts are rooted in experiences, places, and themes that are familiar to them. Additionally, this theme revealed the value of engaging with critical counter-narratives to Canadian literature by meaningfully and purposefully discussing the implications of how students understand Canadian identity.

The third and final theme investigated the barriers that exist in developing a rich Canadian literature curriculum. The most significant barrier the participants spoke about is the general lack of resources and funding that schools have readily available to them. Due to this,
English departments are hindered from purchasing newer, more diverse reading materials. As a result, teachers must attempt to manage the resources that the school has, which are predominantly literary classics and do not usually include Canadian (or Indigenous) texts. Additionally, in this section I discussed participant perspectives on the widespread and lingering hesitation to bring diverse works into the classroom due to the predominance of the literary canon.

A discussion of the implications that these research findings have on the education community as a whole and in my professional practice will be discussed in the next chapter. Additionally, the chapter will provide my personal recommendations in light of the research findings, as well as areas for future research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This study was designed to investigate how teachers use Canadian literature to engage their students in secondary English classrooms. By conducting interviews with teachers and analyzing the findings, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How is literature used to engage students in English class through reading and classroom discussions?
2. How do teachers make decisions regarding text selection?
3. How is Canadian identity defined in classrooms and do these definitions include room for Indigenous and/or multicultural narratives and perspectives?

In this chapter, I discuss the research findings in the context of existing literature, analyze the implications, make recommendations, and identify areas for further research. First, I provide an overview of key findings and their significance as presented in the previous chapter. Next, I discuss the research findings in the context of the existing literature and draw out the implications for the education community and for my own teaching practice. Then, from this analysis I put forth a series of recommendations to different educational stakeholders with the aim of providing further opportunities for students to engage with literature that is both relevant and informative in the Canadian context. Finally, I conclude the chapter by articulating areas for further research based on the findings and implications by highlighting the significance of the research findings for the education community.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

A key finding from this study is that students are most engaged in reading and discussing literature when that literature is relevant to them. This finding is significant because it points to
the need for students to feel that their voices and experiences are valued and meaningfully integrated into the classroom. In order for this to occur, teachers need to adapt to their students’ needs, interests, and identities and establish relevant connections between the literature and students’ lives and experiences. According to Michelle and Sarah, this teacher adaptation and connection to students’ lived experiences are more readily facilitated when they bring Canadian texts into the English classroom.

The second finding points to how Michelle and Sarah see Canadian literature as being especially relevant and engaging for students, which is demonstrated in students’ increased level of excitement in discussing that literature in relation to their own understandings of Canada and Canadian identity. Moreover, participants believe it is important to break down the stereotypes that exist in settler colonial society regarding Indigenous identities. In order for this to occur, students must be provided with opportunities to engage with not only Canadian literature, but also critical counter-narratives to that literature via Indigenous texts. This finding is significant because it points to the need for greater opportunities for students to access literature that opens up such discussions.

The third finding of this study reveals that there are significant challenges to developing a rich Canadian literature curriculum. These challenges may be categorized into two levels: individual and system-wide. Participants indicated that the level of interest in Canadian literature among teachers is key in bringing about opportunities for students to engage with that literature. However, participants indicated that there are generally a small proportion of teachers at their school who have such an interest. Additionally, Rachel and Sarah identified the lack of resource support and a widespread as well as enduring devotion to the traditional Eurocentric canon as significant challenges to fostering a rich Canadian literature curriculum. These findings are
significant because they indicate that there is a need for greater support for teachers in order for such a curriculum to be more widely available to students. Further, these findings are significant because they point to a larger and more systematic resistance to changing the traditional literary canon, which continues to silence marginalized peoples.

5.2 Implications

The research findings have implications on the use of Canadian literature for engaging students and for enhancing their understanding of their Canadian context. In this section, I will discuss the implications for the educational community, which includes school systems, teachers, and policy, as well as the implications for my own pedagogy and teaching practice.

5.2.1 The educational community. The findings from this study have implications for school systems, which include school boards, departments, and administration. Participants saw the development of a rich Canadian literature curriculum as a crucial first step for fostering student engagement and the types of critical conversations about Canadian identity that are important to have in the classroom. However, participants also saw lack of resources and support as significant challenges to the development of such a curriculum, thus limiting this type of work from becoming more widespread among teachers. Though there are a few teachers who are interested in this work, their efforts to extend it are often limited by the amount of resources, such as books, that are made available to them by the various branches of the school system. If resources and support were more available and accessible, this work could extend beyond the few and become more widespread among teachers. Thus, these findings point to the need for greater resources, support, and training to be provided by the various components of the school system so that such work can be shared across teaching contexts.
Additionally, the findings from this study have implications for teachers. These implications are twofold. First, there are few teachers who have the interest in bringing new literatures into their classroom and discussing the complexities of Canadian identity with students. Second, teachers fear the possibility of cultural appropriation if they were to do so. These findings raise new questions about how to do this work while being respectful both to students and the identities that they explore through literature. While participation in critical discussions of Canadian identities is essential, the findings identify a gap in terms of teacher training. Such training would emphasize that bringing these discussions into the classroom is important from a social justice perspective, but also because it helps teachers make literature relevant, engaging and meaningful for their students.

Finally, the findings from this study have implications for policy. The Ontario secondary English curriculum’s Overall and Specific Expectations require that students learn to read and interpret literature, communicate orally for an intended audience, write with purpose, and develop media literacy (Ministry of Education, 2007). The manner in which these objectives are reached is at the discretion of teachers, who may work towards the expectations using a wide variety of texts. Thus, the curriculum is provides ample opportunities for teachers to facilitate critical discussions about Canada, multiculturalism, and decolonization, so long as they work towards the objectives of reading, oral communication, writing, and media studies. In fact, there are several teacher prompts that suggest using Canadian and Indigenous narratives and bringing in critical perspectives, however there is no guarantee that teachers will follow up with these prompts in their classroom. Thus, a curriculum policy could work towards garnering teacher accountability, although whether such a policy could be implemented without policing their creative liberty in their teaching remains to be explored.
5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. The process and findings of this study have led to four implications for my own teaching practice and philosophy of education. First, it has taught me the necessity of being resourceful in finding different ways of bringing Canadian literature into my classroom if there are not enough funds to buy books and other resources. As suggested by participants, there are ways of bringing literature into the classroom that circumvent the limitations of money, such as the use of newspaper articles, photocopied short stories and poems, and digital platforms. Second, this study has helped me to see the value of sharing resources and ideas with other teachers and actively seeking opportunities for professional development, especially when it is focused on issues of multiculturalism and decolonization. Third, this study has increased my critical literacy and made me more aware of how the texts we read and teach portray peoples, cultures, and identities. This renewed critical literacy has advanced my awareness of how the texts we read, and the manner in which we teach them, may convey certain messages to students that can either empower or oppress students’ identities and voices. Finally, this critical literacy has opened up my understanding of Canadian “multiculturalism” and reinforced my teaching philosophy that is grounded in embracing diversity. Going forward, I will strive to create an inclusive classroom where students’ cultures and perspectives are respected, valued, and empowered while constantly reflecting on my own positionality.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of the current study, this section outlines recommendations for different educational stakeholders.

There are three recommendations for school systems. First, school boards should provide new resources so that teachers can purchase reading material that extends beyond the class sets
of traditional literary texts that are often the only texts available in secondary English classrooms. Additionally, teachers in English departments are encouraged to regularly share knowledge and resources so that the work being done by proponents of Canadian literature can be recognized and disseminated to other educators. Finally, school administrators should become aware of the issues facing students and offer courses that reflect students’ identities. Such a move would empower students and show them that their voices and experiences are meaningfully integrated into the education system, thus increasing their level of engagement. Finally, school administrators are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities that support them in working towards social justice in their schools. These recommendations for school systems would assist me in my teaching practice by furthering my ability to work towards social justice due to the greater availability of resources and the support of my colleagues.

English teachers are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities that support them in effectively integrating critical perspectives into their classroom via Canadian and Indigenous literatures. Moreover, professional development opportunities should support teachers in learning about decolonizing initiatives that they can actually put into practice, while emphasizing the importance of doing so from a social justice lens. Finally, teacher education programs should work towards developing these skills and attitudes in their pre-service English teachers early on. This could be done with a course that explores Canadian literature with special focus on Indigenous literatures, as well as strategies to respectfully teach both in meaningful ways. Additionally, such a course could be taught by Indigenous teachers so that teacher candidates learn these strategies directly from Indigenous peoples. These recommendations for teachers would help me grow as an educator because it would support my lifelong dedication to teaching and learning while encouraging other teachers to share their
knowledge and resources. In addition, the professional development would foster a larger network of practicing teachers, which in turn can create more widespread valuing and teaching of Indigenous and multicultural literatures, thus beginning to shift the canon towards more diverse perspectives.

Finally, there are two recommendations with regards to policy. First, a system of accountability should be developed and implemented to ensure that educational initiatives, such as Ontario’s Indigenous Education framework, are being met. This would ensure that the initiatives put forth by education stakeholders in support of students’ voices and experiences are being sincerely taken up by schools across the province. Second, the secondary English curriculum in Ontario could be updated so that the suggested teacher prompts regarding Canadian and Indigenous identities become part of the Overall and Specific Expectations for mandatory English courses. As it is currently, these prompts are only listed as official curriculum objectives in certain elective English courses, such as Grade 11 Canadian Literature. These recommendations would help support the work I would do in terms of teaching Canadian literature and the issues taken up in the texts.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Whereas this present study shed light on how secondary English teachers in Ontario use Canadian literature to engage their students, there is ample room for further study on this topic. First, in order to extend the work of this study, education researchers could conduct a mixed-methods research study with secondary teachers as interview subjects. Such a study could further interrogate widely accepted understandings of Canadian identity and how it is defined, discussed, and challenged in secondary classrooms. Next, education researchers could interview students to get their perspective on literature, the Ontario English curriculum, what topics are relevant to
them, and how they understand the topic of Canadian identity. Finally, educational researchers could conduct a mixed methods qualitative research study that updates the field of Canadian literature and builds upon the work done by Pantaleo (2002). Such a study would be large in scale and would investigate how often teachers in Ontario are using Canadian literature in their classroom, and how they use that literature to educate their students. Such a project could be done with a survey that provides space for adding comments to answer prompts. Building from the previous work of Pantaleo (2002), some possible prompts could be:

1. Do you think it is important to use Canadian literature in your teaching, and why or why not?
2. How do you make choices regarding text selection?
3. What factors influence the degree to which you use Canadian literature in your classroom?
4. How frequently do you use Canadian vs. non-Canadian literature for the following genres (non-fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, poetry, myths/folktales, historical fiction), and for what subject and purpose?

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research study explored the ways in which secondary English teachers use Canadian literature in their classroom. Furthermore, this study aimed to contribute to the knowledge about how pedagogy and Canadian literature may be used to fill in the gaps that exist when it comes to decolonizing English classrooms and incorporating multicultural perspectives in meaningful ways. The intention of the study is not to conflate multicultural and Indigenous perspectives; nor does the study suggest a conclusive definition of the nature of Canadian identity. Rather, the study illustrated the value of Canadian literature to the secondary English curriculum by
shedding light on the conversations that the literature inspires and which students find especially engaging and meaningful. Finally, this study provided a discussion about the ways that Indigenous literature can be given a central place in order to challenge the traditional Eurocentric conceptualizations of what constitutes Canadian literature.

The key findings of the study were discussed in terms of their significance and their implications for the educational community as well as for my own teaching philosophy and practice. First, the study found that students are most engaged in reading and discussing literature that they see as relevant to their own identities, lives, and experiences. Second, the study found that teachers cite Canadian literature as being particularly relevant and engaging for students, which is demonstrated in their increased level of excitement in discussing the issues raised by the literature in relation to their own experiences. However, the study also found that there are significant challenges that limit the development of a rich Canadian literature curriculum, such as lack of resources, training, and teacher interest.

These findings point to the need for students to feel that their voices and experiences are meaningfully incorporated into the classroom. In order for this to occur, teachers agree that they must work to make literature relevant to their students by adapting to their needs and interests and making connections to their everyday experiences. Though participants agreed that Canadian literature is a useful way to make those connections, they saw lack of resources and insufficient support as significant barriers to their capacity to critically take up the issues of multiculturalism and decolonization via Canadian literature. Moreover, the findings suggested that many teachers shy away from taking up this work either due to lack of interest and background, or because they fear the possibility of cultural appropriation. Therefore, the study raises questions about how to
conduct this work while being respectful of students as well as the identities they explore through literature.

After analyzing the key research findings and their implications on the educational community, I recommended that school boards provide resources for teachers that extend beyond the scope of the traditional Eurocentric literary canon. I also recommended that both teachers and school administrators participate in professional development opportunities that support the development of attitudes and teaching strategies that work towards social justice education. Furthermore, the professional development should increase teachers’ and school administrators’ level of understanding of multiculturalism and decolonization within educational contexts. I also recommended that teacher education programs should work towards developing social justice attitudes and pedagogical repertoire early on. For pre-service English teacher education, I recommended a course in Canadian literature with a special focus on Indigenous narratives and strategies for teaching both in meaningful ways. Finally, I suggested that the secondary English curriculum be amended so that suggested teacher prompts regarding Canadian and Indigenous identities could become reflected in specific curriculum objectives for mandatory English courses. Such a shift in curriculum would work towards establishing a system of accountability for teachers to ensure that education initiatives set forth by various educational stakeholders are being followed through with at the school level.

As a teacher-researcher who strives for equity and social justice education, I view this study as a starting point from which to continue drawing on professional knowledge and experiences as I go forward in my career. My goal as an English teacher is to encourage the types of critical discussions about Canadian multiculturalism that I know are extremely valuable to have with students in classrooms across the country. Such discussions would increase
students’ critical literacy, which I view as the most important skill for students to develop from an English curriculum. Additionally, my goal is to continue challenging the traditional literary canon by advocating for resources that speak to the varied identities, backgrounds and experiences of my students and of the peoples within Canada.
References


CBC. (2014). 100 Novels that make you proud to be Canadian. Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/books/books100.html


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My name is Daniela Commissio 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 looking into contexts where Canadian literature is being read (or not) in English classes in Ontario and the types of conversations that are shaped around these texts. I am interested in interviewing secondary English teachers, or those who have some interest in Canadian literature more broadly. 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 for CTL7015. 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.
CANADIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

Sincerely,

Daniela Comisso

[Phone Number] [Email]

MT Research Coordinator: Angela MacDonald
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@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 Daniela Comisso 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

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 contexts in which Canadian literature is (or is not) being read in secondary English classes for the purpose of facilitating a discussion about Canadian identity as it is expressed within Ontario schools. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on the types of texts being taught in your English classes, your motivations for teaching certain texts over others, your perception of the usefulness of Canadian literature, and types of conversations that are shaped around these texts, especially regarding the nature of what it means to be Canadian. 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. The interview is confidential, and only my instructor and I will have access to this recording, which I will transcribe. If you want me to stop at any time, just let me know. Is this okay with you? Do you have any questions before we get started?

Background Information
1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What courses are you teaching this year? How many times have you taught these courses?
3. What texts are the students reading in these classes?
4. What do you think is the most important thing for students to learn in English class? Why?
5. What would you say is the most important part of your academic background? How do you think this influences how and what you teach?

Teacher perspectives/beliefs
1. Who chooses the texts that are read in your classes? How much freedom are you given in deciding what books you teach?
2. What qualities do you look for in a text that makes you decide to include it on your reading list?
3. What other factors influence the books you teach in your classes?
4. Do you think it is important to use Canadian literature in your teaching? Why or why not?
5. What do you think Canadian literature does well/achieves (i.e. with regard to student interest – or, more generally, as a body of literature in and of itself)?
6. Do you think there is a quality or an area of Canadian literature that is lacking? What is it and why is that significant?
7. How do you perceive the value placed in Canadian literature (by the education system, general population)? Do you think it is held to the same standard as other texts? Why do you think that is?
8. If the elective grade 11 Canadian Literature course was offered at this school, would you like to teach it? Why or why not? Why isn’t this course offered at this school?

Teacher practices
1. In your experience, what texts (2-3) engage students the most? Based on what you observed, what is it about these texts that did this?
2. How do you get your students engaged in what they are reading? Discuss specific strategies if possible. Why do you think these strategies work?
3. Have you ever taught Canadian texts in your class?
   • If yes: how did you approach teaching it? (i.e. was it different than teaching other texts? How was it different?)
4. What kinds of conversations developed around them?
5. Have you ever used texts as a tool to discuss Canadian culture, society, or identity with students?
   • If yes: what facets of that identity did you emphasize?
   • If no: why not? What did you discuss instead?
6. Did the students show interest in talking about Canada/Canadian identity? Provide examples or anecdotes if possible.
7. What does Canadian identity mean to you?
8. How do you work to address the (cultural) diversity of students through literature, lessons, and pedagogy?

Supports and challenges
1. If you could, how might you change the Ontario secondary English curriculum? (i.e. would you incorporate more Canadian literature?)
2. What do you see as the biggest challenge(s) to your work? How do you respond to those challenges?
3. How might the education system support you better in meeting these challenges?

Next steps
1. What advice would you give to new teachers who are committed to exploring Canadian literature and identity in English classes?