Teachers’ Responses to Educational Research:
A Hermeneutic Inquiry

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores teachers’ responses to educational research. The study is situated in the growing area of inquiry known as knowledge mobilization. The existing literature shows that teachers face a variety of barriers to reading and utilizing educational research, including insufficient institutional support and a lack of time. Other challenges come with research itself. For instance, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe a triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis in research. First, it is not possible for the researcher to sufficiently capture the lived experiences of research-participants. Second, the validity of research findings is always contested. Third, it is a challenge to make ethical choices and act upon them. These three crises constitute the conceptual framework for understanding how teachers address them while reading educational research.

Twelve in-service language teachers joined a wiki-based discussion forum, whose purpose was to form a community of readers built upon the principles of reader-response
criticism. The participants then read a peer-reviewed journal article and exchanged opinions through threaded discussions. These discussions were the first source of data for this study. The second source of data was individual in-depth interviews conducted with the participants at the end of the wiki project. The collection and interpretation of data were guided by Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.

In this dissertation, I present a number of ways of reading that the participants employed in their interpretations of the research text. Their ways of reading are discussed as a recognitive approach to the crisis of representation, an interpretive-ecological approach to the crisis of legitimation, and an imaginative-ethical approach to the crisis of praxis. Based on the insights gleaned from these ways of reading, I propose that the field of knowledge mobilization take an audience-oriented approach to disseminating and utilizing educational research.
To my grandfather,
for his love and inspiration.
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Preface: The Beginning of an Interpretive Journey

“We understand differently if we understand at all.” — Hans-Georg Gadamer

The beginning of this inquiry dates back to 2007, when I started my career as an English-language teacher. The institution where I was working at the time had a tradition of classroom observations. Each term, teachers were required to observe at least two classes of their colleagues. Upon observing each class session, they submitted a brief report to the director of the institution.

One day, one of my colleagues, to whom I give the pseudonym Irene, observed my classroom. A few hours after teaching the class, I was asked to meet with the director of the institution. I went to her office and found her to be upset. She referred to the classroom observation feedback report that Irene had submitted. In her comments, Irene wrote that, during my class, I talked more than what was recommended by research. She criticized my teaching due to excessive “teacher talk time” (TTT). She referred to a research report in which she had read that TTT, i.e., the amount of time that a teacher talks during a lesson, should not be more than 20% of the total class time. The director of the institution advised, rather angrily, that I follow research-based “best” practices.

As a novice teacher, this was a professional stumbling block. Upon reflection on this incident, I feel that my colleague, Irene, took a one-size-fits-all approach to understanding research. Admittedly, my evaluation of this event involves my own interpretation, and I cannot be certain about Irene’s understanding of my pedagogy. But such is the nature of interpretive work. We endeavour to understand each other through interpretation; yet, the “canonization” of any particular interpretation is not desirable. As Hans-Georg Gadamer
(1975/2013) teaches us, in our interpretive work, what we do is to bring into play opinions and possibilities and put them at risk. Putting my opinion at risk of fallibility, I would say that Irene failed to realize that, on the day she observed my class, I was introducing a new grammar topic, so I had to take the time to explain certain concepts to my students. She hastily generalized her knowledge about TTT to my teaching. But, education is too complex a business to make hasty generalizations!

Such an approach to research finding is on the rise. Teachers are now asked to base their practice on research-based evidence (Wrigley, 2015). Policy documents produced by ministries of education around the world rarely acknowledge that research findings—drawn from a particular context, using carefully designed methodology, and presented through specialized language—may have different meanings in different contexts. Comparisons are often made between evidence-based medicine and evidence-based teaching (for example, Hargreaves, 1996). One cannot deny the importance of evidence. In fact, people have benefited enormously from the Evidence-Based Medicine movement (Wrigley, 2015). However, in an effort to apply the evidence-based model from medicine to the field of education, government agencies and many researchers often present a simplistic view of what evidence means and does. What is alarming is not the concept of evidence itself, but the way in which it is being prescribed for teachers. As Simons (2003) notes, “The relationship between evidence and policymaking or practice is complex, affected by relationships, ideologies and professional preferences as much as by evidence. It is by no means a panacea for all contexts and practices” (p. 303).

As a practitioner, I was concerned about how research findings were promoted in practice contexts. After embarking upon my doctoral studies at the University of Toronto, I
learned the importance of *interpretation* in human and social affairs. When Professor Karyn Cooper introduced me to the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, I found a lens for looking at how research may be interpreted by practitioners. Gadamer has revolutionized the field of interpretation by showing the dynamism between the whole and the parts of the text. He has shown how the reader draws upon past experiences and engages in creative dialogues with the writer through the text, and within a particular context. In this sense, our understanding is both enabled and limited by time and language. Gadamer’s hermeneutic principles of text-interpretation inspired and informed my inquiry into how teachers read and respond to the findings of educational research. Here, the task is to construct meanings, rather than simply report on them. These hermeneutic principles, woven throughout this dissertation, form the overarching conceptual framework and methodology of my inquiry. To be clear, the study does not aim to investigate how teachers *apply* research-based knowledge to their practice. Rather, the aim is to understand how they *interpret* research texts.
A Note on Terminology: Education and Educational Research

In this dissertation, the term “research” is used to mean systematic and formal inquiry that uses methods of investigation generally accepted by the community of which the inquirer is a member. Such inquiry aims to find new insights or to establish new conclusions about the topic or phenomenon that it investigates. Thus, to conduct research means “to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 167). In the field of education, research may have two general purposes: (1) to develop disciplinary knowledge (knowledge generation is viewed as an intellectually stimulating activity for its own sake), and (2) to improve teaching and learning (knowledge generation is viewed as a practical activity to enhance educational quality and effectiveness). Following Whitty (2006), I use the term education research to refer to the first purpose, and the term educational research to refer to the second purpose. In other words, by educational research, I mean systematic inquiry “that is consciously geared towards improving policy and practice” (Whitty, 2006, p. 173).
Chapter One: Introduction

The central question that this inquiry asks is: How do in-service teachers read educational research? This question is significant because teachers are now being called upon to turn to research-based knowledge for their professional development. This call is part of a global movement for evidence-based practice in all professional domains including education. Teachers are no longer left to their tacit knowledge. Now, programs of teacher education “have a clear vision of the teacher they are trying to develop and the research on which their view of practice is based” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 79). Similarly, there are efforts to take a research-informed approach to the professional development of in-service teachers (Broad & Evans, 2006). These efforts may be described as a research-based professional development approach (Lumpe, 2007), which demands teachers’ greater engagement with research (Dimmock, 2016).

The push to use research-based evidence in education has emerged from two key beliefs: “school knowledge is abstract and universal,” and “empirical evidence is an efficient indicator of knowledge and learning” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 1). These beliefs drive the search for “what works” in education. Enthusiasts of evidence-based practice strongly argue that educational practices and policies should be based firmly on scientific evidence established through rigorous empirical studies, often utilizing quantitative research methods. Such enthusiasm for evidence-based practice has influenced numerous pieces of government legislation, such as No Child Left Behind in the United States, as well as countless recipes for classroom activities that “work” (e.g., Marzano, 2003; Mitchell, 2008).
One of the primary aims of the “what works” movement is the revival of ideas that may be collectively labelled as positivism (Lather, 1986). From this perspective, researchers use experiments to control and measure outcomes through explicit and replicable procedures. Proponents of positivism argue that “by understanding the laws governing human social life, research could facilitate practical control over it for collective benefit, just as natural science enables us to control our physical environment to a considerable extent” (Hammersley, 2007, p. xi). One of the most vocal supporters of this positivist view of educational research is David Hargreaves (1996), who laments that school-teaching is not a research-based profession. He believes that educational research does not have sufficient impact on practice. However, critics of the positivist approach to evidence-use are “worried about the expectations policy makers hold about what evidence can and should do in relation to [teachers’] professional practices” (Biesta, 2010, p. 493; see Hammersley, 1997, for a criticism of Hargreaves’ proposal for an evidence-based teaching profession).

One of the antecedents of evidence-based practice (EBP) was the body of work that had identified a gap between research and practice in the field of education (Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003; Kaestle, 1993; Kennedy, 1997; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Mitchell (1999), among others, observed that most published research had little or no influence on classroom practice. Many teachers found research “neither accessible nor relevant for their particular situations” (Randi, 2007, p. 261). Although a variety of initiatives have been taken in the past decade to disseminate educational research (Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007), studies indicate that “school practitioners continue to make little use of research” (Dagenais et al., 2012, p. 285). Commenting on the distance between research and practice, Ball (2012, p. 284) warns
educational researchers against what Howard Zinn characterized as “publish while others perish.”

The starting point in my inquiry is that dissemination of research is not enough; we need to understand how teachers actually read and interpret research findings. Based on this assumption, I explored how a group of teachers read and responded to a text of educational research. In this introductory chapter, I first discuss the oft-cited research-practice gap in education and a variety of strategies that have been proposed to bridge it. Then, I focus on the work of knowledge mobilization and identify three problems in it. Finally, I situate my study within a small but growing body of work that examines teachers’ reading of educational research.

The Nature of the Research-Practice Gap in Education

Most members of the public do not use educational research as a source of education-related information. In general, educational research is very much under-utilized (Yettick, 2015). For example, Zeichner (1995) described “a situation where many teachers feel that educational research conducted by those in the academy is largely irrelevant to their lives in schools” and they rarely “look to educational research conducted by academics to inform and improve their practice” (p. 153). Similarly, Mitchell (1999) observed that “the great majority of published research has little or no influence on teaching practice” (p. 44). In a comprehensive review of the literature, Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2003) identified numerous barriers for practitioners to use research, and found that there was a lack of an organizational culture that values and supports the use of research knowledge in the public sector. For example, Shkedi’s (1998) case study with Israeli teachers found that very few teachers used educational research to develop their professional knowledge.
Shkedi’s study also revealed that research literature was unavailable to most practitioners, and that those who occasionally read research reports faced difficulty in understanding the abstract language and statistical data. Similarly, Papasotiriou and Hannan’s (2006) study with Greek primary school teachers found that few teachers read educational research. Those who did read hardly ever applied their reading to classroom practice. Nassaji’s (2012) survey with teachers in Canada and Turkey found that about half of the participants had never or rarely read research-based articles. Similarly, Borg’s (2009) international study with teachers from thirteen countries revealed that teachers had a low level of engagement with educational research.

Teachers who participated in Tavakoli’s (2015) study, conducted in England, believed that teachers and researchers were two different communities of practice, and that membership in one community limited, and sometimes restricted, membership in the other. One of Tavakoli’s participants thought that “the main job (for the research community) then is to take research and to make it available to practitioners” (quoted in Tavakoli, 2015, p. 46). Perhaps, this participant speaks to the importance of the dissemination of educational research. Another participant argued that “as long as the researcher hasn’t been too long out of the classroom then you can rely on their research” (quoted in Tavakoli, 2015, p. 45). This participant is concerned about the legitimacy of the researcher’s findings and recommendations. I will return to this concern for legitimacy in Chapter Two.

If we look at the distance between research and practice through a North American historical lens, we see that, after periods of pessimism, there was much optimism about the role of educational research during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Kennedy, 1997). However, this brief period was followed by another pessimistic turn. Researchers and
practitioners were both worried and skeptical about the usefulness of research. Kaestle’s (1993) article “The Awful Reputation of Educational Research” summarized many of these concerns, for example, the lack of influence of educational research on classroom practice. Nevertheless, the second phase of pessimism was different from the first one (i.e., pre-1960s) in the sense that researchers now began to investigate the gap between research and practice as a topic in its own right (see, for example, Eisner, 1984).

Educational researchers also developed a distinct body of work that focused on why research “failed” to influence practice. Kennedy (1997) identified four hypotheses that were put forward as reasons for this “failure:”

(a) The research itself is not sufficiently persuasive or authoritative; the quality of educational studies has not been high enough to provide compelling, unambiguous, or authoritative results to practitioners. (b) The research has not been relevant to practice. It has not been sufficiently practical, it has not addressed teachers’ questions, nor has it adequately acknowledged their constraints. (c) Ideas from research have not been accessible to teachers. Findings have not been expressed in ways that are comprehensible to teachers. (d) The education system itself is intractable and unable to change, or it is conversely inherently unstable, overly susceptible to fads, and consequently unable to engage in systematic change. (p. 4)

More than a decade later, most of these reasons seem to persist (Dagenais et al., 2012). Ball (2012) identifies similar reasons for the research-practice gap. First, most practitioners find research reports inaccessible. Second, there is a lack of professional norms for practitioners to engage with research. Third, very few practitioners and policymakers carry out research. Fourth, educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seldom work in collaborative forums. Finally, research findings are rarely used to formulate new policies; rather, they are used to support political decisions already made (Ball, 2012). These points raise concerns about the practical value of educational research. If the existing gap between research and practice continues to widen, critics such as Ball (2012) suspect that students
will *perish* while educational researchers *publish* their findings. Although this dissertation is concerned with educational research, I do not assume that research findings are the only source of teacher knowledge. Teachers acquire pedagogical knowledge from a variety of sources, for example, their own past experience of being students, narratives of practice, and the wisdom of practice itself (Lortie, 1975; Shulman, 1987; Tyson, 2016).

Nevertheless, many researchers and policy makers have paid attention to how research findings may be made more useful for practitioners. Generally, they call for greater cooperation among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (Wagner, 1997). Governments, ministries of education, and policy think-tanks have also devised a variety of models for the dissemination of research findings. Broekkamp and van Hout-Wolters (2007) discuss four such models: (1) the research development diffusion (RDD) model, (2) the evidence-based practice (EBP) model, (3) the boundary-crossing practices (BCP) model, and (4) the knowledge communities (KC) model.

The first model, RDD, emphasizes the importance of translating research results and transmitting them to practitioners. It is based on the assumption that very few practitioners pay attention to research. Therefore, it assigns a central role to mediators who select, adapt, and distribute research findings. The second model, EBP, focuses on careful application of research evidence to practice. Unlike the RDD model that includes evidence from diverse research traditions, EBP focuses exclusively on empirical evidence obtained through randomized studies. These two models, which advocate a one-sided insistence on research use, are often contrasted with the third and fourth models, both of which emphasize collaboration and interaction between researchers and practitioners. The third model, BCP, values “combining tasks from different professional domains;” for example, a teacher may
“carry out research in his [sic] own teaching practice” (Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007, p. 209). The fourth and final model, KC, is based on the premise that a strong link can be established if individuals participate in professional networks, in which they share interest, benefit from each other’s expertise, and generate new knowledge.

Working within or outside the models mentioned above, some take an information approach to bridging the research-practice gap. For instance, Williams and Coles (2007) call for developing individual teachers’ capacities to successfully use educational research. They examined teachers’ lack of research engagement from the perspective of information literacy—defined as “the capability of individuals to locate and critically evaluate information, and to make effective use of information in decision-making, knowledge creation and problem-solving” (p. 188). Williams and Coles (2007) concluded that “teachers’ use of research evidence is likely to be enhanced by greater development of [their] information literacy” (p. 186). While authors such as Williams and Coles underscore the importance of developing teachers’ information literacy, others suggest that information and communication technologies be incorporated in the process of research dissemination. For example, Cooper (2014) discusses how research-brokering organizations can use various online strategies and social media, in addition to their official websites, to disseminate research knowledge.

From Knowledge Management to Knowledge Mobilization

There is a growing body of literature that focuses on knowledge management in education. Broadly speaking, knowledge management draws ideas and inspiration from business organizations. It is based on the argument that “the concepts, tools, and techniques of organizational knowledge management can be applied to the professional practices and
development of teachers” (Carroll et al., 2003, p. 42). For example, Hargreaves (1999) recommends that schools deploy middle managers for effective knowledge management. He puts forward his argument using the following analogy:

Top managers are too far from front-line experience to have the current “hands-on” knowledge that is crucial to the generation of new knowledge and practices. On the shopfloor, the work is too narrowly conceived or demanding to allow the distancing needed in knowledge creation. Middle managers, however, serve as a “strategic knot” between top managers and the front-line engineers, a bridge between the company’s vision and the chaotic reality of its implementation, between “what is” and “what should be.” (p. 133)

In recent years, the idea of knowledge management has been taken up by several programs that aim to increase the impact of research on practice. One strand of such work is now known as knowledge mobilization (KM), which asks: “How can research-produced knowledge be better ‘mobilised’ among users such as practising educators, policy-makers and the public communities” (Fenwick & Farrell, 2012, p. 1). This is a growing area of study as governments, universities, schools, and other organizations look for new ways of applying research knowledge to professional practice (Cooper, 2014).

The concept of knowledge mobilization is gaining popularity among policymakers, administrators, and practitioners in almost all domains of public service. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada defines knowledge mobilization as:

The reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia—in such a way that may benefit users and create positive impacts within Canada and/or internationally, and, ultimately, has the potential to enhance the profile, reach and impact of social sciences and humanities research. (SSHRC, 2016, para. 32)

National governments around the world are focusing on how research-based knowledge can be used to improve and maintain effectiveness and efficacy of their systems of public service
such as education. Therefore, “it is not surprising that there is a growing demand for education[al] research that is useful and for efforts to ensure that this research is used in developing education policies and practices” (Nutley, 2013, p. 243). In general, the primary aim of KM is to motivate the public to become users of research results so that research can make positive changes in their activities and behaviours. I should emphasize that there are disagreements and debates about how research-knowledge is being mobilized. For example, research findings are often used to subjugate education for economic profits (by privatizing schools) and to create competition among states (Ball, 2009). Another point of debate is about who holds the power to choose educational research in the KM activities. Some critics argue that the way research results are chosen for teachers actually de-skill and disempower teachers and may have a negative impact on their professional learning and growth (Endacott, Wright, Goering, Collet, Denny, & Davis, 2015).

The concept of knowledge mobilization begs a number of questions. For example, what does knowledge look like when it is mobilized? What makes knowledge portable? Fenwick and Farrell (2012) believe that it is text that makes knowledge portable. In contrast to the view that knowledge is situated in the practices of small local communities, the textual approach to knowledge attempts to “universalize” the validity and use of knowledge. Referring to the work of Dorothy Smith (1999), Fenwick and Farrell (2012) argue that the textual character of knowledge not only helps knowledge “to move from one domain to another,” but it also gives knowledge “apparent immutability and objective ‘truth’” and “coercive force in locations that are remote from its origins” (p. 3). In the case of research-based knowledge, texts play important roles because research text is distinct from the
research itself. The text regulates its readings in the future, and most of these readings avoid the particularity of the research being reported in the text. As D. E. Smith (1999) writes:

Texts are the mediators and bases of discourses and ruling relations that regulate and coordinate beyond the particular local setting of their reading or writing. But they are always occurrences in time and space: they happen; they are constituents and organizers of actions and courses of action; they are activated at a particular moment of reading in the time it takes to do that reading and in a particular place. The act of reading is very deceitful in this respect; it conceals its particularity, its being in time and place. (p. 80)

In spite of the challenges of textuality, texts of various types continue to be the primary medium of the transfer and dissemination of research.

In order to increase the impact of research on practice, various types of dissemination processes have been proposed. For example, Klein and Gwaltney (1991) describe four types of dissemination: spread, choice, exchange, and implementation. The first type—spread—is a “one-way diffusion or distribution of information” (p. 246). In this type of dissemination, knowledge producers share and promote the use of knowledge among target audiences. Compared to the first, the second type—choice—is more reactive and responsive because it “helps users seek and acquire alternative sources of information and learn about their options” (p. 246). This type of dissemination is usually carried out by clearinghouses, libraries, data bases, and information centres. The third type of dissemination is called exchange, which “involves interactions between people and the multidirectional flow of information through such media as conferences, forums, computer networks, feedback systems, and so on” (p. 246). The fourth and final type of dissemination is implementation, “which includes technical assistance, training, or interpersonal activities designed to increase the use of knowledge” (p. 247).
These approaches to research dissemination take a textual approach, which is reflected in the activities of organizations such as the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) in the UK. This organization searches and finds “the most useful research” to create opportunities for teachers’ continuous professional development. It aims “to help teachers make informed decisions about the most effective and efficient approaches to use in their own context” (CUREE, 2015, para. 1). Another similar initiative is a project jointly implemented by the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education (OISE). This project, known as Research for Teachers, publishes summaries of research findings deemed relevant to elementary school teachers. Online publications of research summaries include both text-based PDFs and podcasts. Another example is the initiative called Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE), which aims to support educators in developing evidence-based practices. OERE believes that teachers have busy work schedules and, therefore, publishes brief summaries of educational research that are between two and four pages in length. These summaries are freely accessible online, and “point to the practical ways that educators can use...research to improve their practice” (OERE, 2015, para. 3).

These KM initiatives focus on establishing strong connections between researchers and practitioners. There are mediators of various kinds who make such connections. Hargreaves’ (1999) argument for employing “middle managers” is prototypical of these initiatives, which follow a producer-push model of research dissemination. They aim to improve the communication and marketing of research, using strategies such as writing policy briefs and executive summaries that are short and jargon-free so that busy

1 Examples of research summaries are available at http://www.etfo.ca/resources/eresources/researchforteachers/pages/default.aspx
practitioners can read them quickly (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007; Tseng, 2012). The producer-push model of KM supports a dominant tendency in the field that “assumes a one-way flow of information from research to practice, and views research users as relatively passive consumers of evidence” (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2009, p. 554, emphasis added).

The perspective taken in this dissertation opposes such a portrayal of teachers as passive consumers of research. I maintain that while research dissemination is helpful, we need to understand how the disseminated research becomes meaningful for practitioners. For example, how might research help teachers who are always bound by their unique context and its nuanced cultures and material structures? Therefore, understanding how teachers read and interpret research is of paramount importance.

Three Problems in the Work of Knowledge Mobilization

A review of the literature on knowledge mobilization reveals three significant problems. The first problem is that most approaches to knowledge mobilization focus on the administrative dimensions of research dissemination. They are concerned with the roles that each party involved in KM processes should play. These approaches rely heavily on mediators and brokers who translate, simplify, and convey research findings to practitioners. This reliance on mediators, I believe, is likely to reinforce “an objectivist epistemology that views knowledge as a transferable object” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 713). The administrative dimension of knowledge mobilization tends to focus on issues such as who has the power to do research, who should be included in the processes of knowledge transfer, who decides what research is important for practitioners, and so on (Rickinson, Sebba, & Edwards, 2011).
Although I recognize the value of this administrative focus, I feel that it is concerned much more with the *management* of the researcher’s theoretical knowledge than with the *generation* of the teacher’s pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, it does not seem to pay attention to the complex nature and various sources of teachers’ pedagogical knowledge (Morine-Dershimer & Kent, 1999). An administrative focus on knowledge mobilization is not sufficient “because the kind of knowledge that research can offer is of a very different kind from the knowledge that classroom teachers need to use” (McIntyre, 2005, p. 359). Therefore, we need to understand how teachers interrogate and interpret researchers’ theoretical knowledge so that it may contribute to their practical pedagogical knowledge.

Traditionally, knowledge has been conceptualized as *justified true belief* (Nagel, 2014). There are various debates about this view of knowledge and elucidation of them is beyond the scope and purpose of my work here (for details, see Moser, Mulder, & Trout, 1998). Debates about the concept of knowledge stretch back to the ancient Greek philosophers who discussed in detail the notions of *episteme* and *techne*. Two broad kinds of knowledge, i.e., *knowing that*... and *knowing how*..., have dominated the discussions about knowledge. Other terms that have been used to describe these two types of knowledge include *declarative and procedural, theoretical and practical*, and *technical and practical*. Gitomer and Zisk (2015) use an example that illustrates the distinction between *knowing that* and *knowing how* types of knowledge. This example involves two persons. The first one is “a young person who rides a bicycle quite skillfully, yet cannot articulate accurately any of the actions that contribute to successful riding” (p. 6). The second person is “an elderly, infirm engineer who can describe in exquisite detail how to ride the bicycle. Yet, because of physical limitations, the engineer cannot actually ride the bicycle. Which of these individuals
knows how to ride a bicycle?” (p. 6). This analogy points to the practical and technical dimensions of knowledge: while the former is expressed in and learned through practice, the latter is expressed through codification (Eraut, 1994).

Today, there is greater consensus that teacher knowledge extends beyond formal teacher education programs and professional development workshops. Successful teachers draw from the interconnections of contents, processes, and contexts of learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2008). The literature on teacher knowledge identifies multiple sources and kinds of knowledge. In a broad sense, there are two kinds of teacher knowledge: propositional knowledge (knowing that...) and performance knowledge (knowing how...). Examples of other kinds of teacher knowledge include local, craft, situated, and tacit knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) make a distinction among three conceptions of teacher knowledge: knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, and knowledge of practice. First, knowledge for practice refers to the body of formal and theoretical knowledge generated mostly by university-based researchers “for teachers to use in order to improve practice” (p. 250). This view of knowledge is grounded in the argument that teaching has a knowledge base that can help teachers improve their practice. Second, the conception of “knowledge in practice” implies “what many people call practical knowledge, or what very competent teachers know as it is embedded in practice and in teachers’ reflections on practice” (p. 250). This conception of knowledge views teaching as an uncertain craft, which is often dependent on unpredictable particularities of life in and outside the classroom. In this light, teachers acquire valuable knowledge through their experience of and ongoing reflection on teaching.
Finally, the conception of “knowledge of practice” maintains that pedagogical knowledge “is generated when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time that they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation” (p. 250). From this perspective, teachers develop by generating knowledge of their practice in their local contexts and by connecting this kind of knowledge to other socio-political issues outside their contexts. Instead of dividing knowledge into the theoretical and the practical, or synthesizing the two, the conception of knowledge of practice views knowledge generation as a pedagogic act and emphasizes the teacher’s role in generating context-specific knowledge through ongoing and systematic inquiry into and reflection on practice.

In a similar vein, Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) make a distinction between research knowledge and local knowledge. Teachers’ local knowledge comes from their direct experiences with how things work in their teaching contexts. Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) argue that research knowledge “cannot have a direct bearing on practice because it is oblivious of compelling local issues that frame the thinking and drive the behavior of practitioners in a particular locale” (p. 2). Therefore, these authors believe that the success of “schools depends on a better understanding of the interplay between research knowledge and local knowledge” (p. 2).

Lee Shulman’s (1987) work sheds further light on various types of teacher knowledge. His categories include content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values. Shulman (1987) argues that among these categories of knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge is
of particular importance because “it represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8).

While much more can be said about the concept of pedagogical content knowledge, it is not the primary purpose of my writing. What Shulman says about the sources of teacher knowledge is most pertinent to my project. Shulman (1987) identifies at least four major sources of teacher knowledge:

1. scholarship in content disciplines,
2. the materials and settings of the institutionalized educational process (for example, curricula, textbooks, school organizations and finance, and the structure of the teaching profession),
3. research on schooling, social organizations, human learning, teaching and development, and the other social and cultural phenomena that affect what teachers can do, and
4. the wisdom of practice itself. (p. 8)

It follows, then, that teachers gain knowledge from a variety of sources. While each source has its relative merit, this dissertation is concerned primarily with the third source of teacher knowledge, i.e., formal educational scholarship, which “includes the findings and methods of empirical research in the areas of teaching, learning, and human development” (Shulman, 1987, p. 10). When it comes to the work of knowledge mobilization, what remains to be seen is how teachers make sense of empirical research that is disseminated to them. This is important because “teachers’ instructional choices relate to a range of factors that underscore not only the complexity of instructional influences but also the difficulty teachers face in making instructional choices” (Evans & Hundey, 2006, p. 64).

The second problem in knowledge mobilization is that its strategies often follow the methods of traditional professional development (PD) activities. Rather than encouraging teachers’ direct engagement with research, they merely tell teachers about research
Mediators such as teacher-trainers and professional developers choose, summarize, and convey research findings to teachers. As a result, teachers get to know research-based recommendations that are selected by the mediators. This is best exemplified by the training model of PD, which “is generally ‘delivered’ to the teacher by an ‘expert’, with the agenda determined by the deliverer, and the participant placed in a passive role” (Kennedy, 2005, p. 237). The ways research-based recommendations are delivered to teachers through traditional PD and various KM initiatives may reinforce “a discourse that focuses on the professional as deficient and in need of developing and directing rather than on a professional engaged in self-directed learning” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 712). Like the training model of PD, KM strategies often portray teachers as incapable of self-directed professional learning.

Additionally, a heavy focus on knowledge transfer without engaging teachers in the processes of knowledge transformation may hinder teachers’ authentic professional learning. Webster-Wright (2009) defines authentic professional learning in terms of the teacher’s “lived experience of continuing to learn as a professional” (p. 715). Her conceptualization of authentic learning is premised on the conviction that “professional knowing is embodied, contextual, and embedded in practice” (p. 724). Thus, the notion of authentic professional learning departs from the traditional models of professional development based on a deficit view, i.e., teachers are in need of being developed. While I agree with Webster-Wright’s (2009) notion of authentic professional learning, I would like to extend it by drawing from existential philosophy.

Authenticity is one of the central concepts in existentialism. Among the myriad of approaches to existentialism, I follow the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–
1855), often referred to as the first existentialist (Joseph, Reynolds, & Woodward, 2011).

Kierkegaard was concerned “for the existing individual,” and his argument was “that each of us has an urgent task to become an ethical-religious self in the face of anxiety, suffering and despair” (McDonald, 2011, p. 285). Kierkegaard has heavily influenced the work on the distinction between authentic and inauthentic forms of life. Generally, authenticity denotes being true to one’s self. A failure to be true to oneself may lead one towards an inauthentic form of life/existence. As Carman (2006) writes, “The triumph of abstract reflection over concrete personal commitment... and its insidious effect is the creation of a social world dominated by an impersonal – indeed imaginary – normative authority governing our thoughts and actions, namely ‘the public’” (p. 232). Summarizing the concept of authenticity, Holt (2012) writes that:

The heart of the idea of authenticity is the injunction for the unique individual to take ethical responsibility for how one decides to live life. Conversely, the notion of inauthenticity is connected to the realization that, for the most part, our lives are shaped by different factors that in various ways undermine our inclination to take this responsibility seriously. (p. 7)

Elsewhere, I have discussed the implications of this existential view of authenticity for teachers’ professional learning (Anwaruddin, 2015). In the context of this dissertation, teachers may not be able to gain authentic learning experiences if they are treated as passive consumers of research-based recommendations transmitted through the conduits of various KM projects.

Text-based conduits of research dissemination contain a paradox. On the one hand, the text seems to be an unavoidable medium of research dissemination. On the other hand, the text presents a highly abstracted form of knowledge, which is often detached from the setting of its origin. In an attempt to achieve global validity, texts usually overlook local
particularities of their roots. As D. E. Smith (1999) writes, “The texts integral to the social organization of these forms are complemented by technologies or disciplined practices that produce standardized local states of affairs or events corresponding to the standardized texts” (p. 73). Although her argument is not meant specifically for knowledge mobilization in education, it has important implications for teachers because “the objectified extra-local character” (p. 73) of the textual approach to research dissemination may “reproduce the ruling relations” (p. 74) that have long existed in the relationships between researchers and practitioners.

In her early writings from women’s standpoint, Smith identifies a tension between being a mother at home and a sociologist at a university. D. E. Smith (1999) writes that the latter has a strange character “of being put together so that the subject participate[s] in objectified relations organized beyond the local particularities of her domestic consciousness” (p. 4). Thus, the ruling apparatus developed in advanced capitalism encompasses not only economic relations, but also knowledge and its associated practices. Institutional categories and bureaucratic complexities textualize people’s lived experiences so that they can “fit” administrative and managerial schemata (DeVault, 2007). For this reason, Smith (1999) believes that “it’s particularly important to avoid conceptualizations that lift phenomena out of time and place, constituting them as discursive entities in the peculiar timelessness of established...discourse” (p. 7). In the case of teachers’ engagement with research, this “ruling relation” may become a barrier to their authentic learning, which requires personal commitment of the teacher as an individual who confronts social and administrative pressures and ethical dilemmas in their everyday practice.
The third problem is that the KM initiatives focus disproportionately on educational research conducted through randomized controlled trials using quantitative methods. Yet, KM’s explanations of the research-practice gap and possible ways of bridging it speak of educational research in general terms and do not provide suggestions for specific traditions of research. Since various research traditions are grounded in radically different epistemologies (ways of knowing) and ontologies (the nature of our being), we need to understand how different research traditions can be meaningful for practitioners. In this dissertation, the focus is on the qualitative tradition of educational research.

The definition of qualitative research is anything but agreed upon. It varies markedly from one individual to another. The adjective “qualitative” not only refers to a set of research methodologies and methods, but it also alludes to the foundational debates of epistemology and ontology. In its most common usage, the word qualitative distinguishes non-numeric data (in the form of words) from numeric data (Schwandt, 2007). However, “one could easily generate qualitative data via an open ended interview, transform those data into numbers, and analyze them by means of non-parametric statistics” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 248). Therefore, what the word qualitative actually means is not easy to pinpoint. Although distinction between qualitative and quantitative research may become blurry at times, qualitative researchers generally emphasize “the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8).

Qualitative research has a lengthy history dating back to the 5th century BCE when the Greek scholar Herodotus examined various phenomena from historical and cross-cultural perspectives (Erickson, 2011). Among its many developmental phases, the German tradition
of human sciences made important contributions to qualitative research. For example, Wilhelm Dilthey advocated inquiries that bring to the fore everyday human actions (both individual and social) and the meanings ascribed to them. The main purpose of such inquiries was “understanding (verstehen) rather than proof or prediction” (Erickson, 2011, p. 44). Dilthey believed that “the object of the human sciences should not be to understand life in terms of categories extrinsic to it but from intrinsic categories, ones derived from life. Life must be understood from the experience of life itself” (Palmer, 1969, p. 102). This focus on the intrinsic is a call for situating both the observer and the observed in the world. In keeping with this, I adopt the following definition of qualitative research proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (2011): “qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). This definition is not meant to be all-encompassing, but it should be a good starting point for my discussion of qualitative research.

An important feature of qualitative research is that it is interpretive. As the German tradition of human sciences emphasized, interpretation is a necessary step to understanding life from the experience of life itself. Charles Taylor (1987) succinctly explains the pivotal role of interpretation:

To be a living agent is to experience one’s situation in terms of certain meanings, and this in a sense can be thought of as a sort of proto-‘interpretation.’ This is in turn interpreted and shaped by the language in which the agent lives these meanings. This whole is then at a third level interpreted by the explanation we proffer of his [sic] actions. (p. 46)

Thus, the centrality of interpretation in qualitative research points to the fact that humans—unlike atoms and chemicals—actively participate in individual and social activities. They
constantly endeavour to understand their environment through the lens of their particular history and culture. Each individual’s culture influences how she/he makes meanings of various actions and events and how she/he acts upon those meanings (Hammersley, 2013). In a word, the interpretive-qualitative researcher opts for understanding people’s active interpretations of their experiences and social phenomena.

Working within this interpretive tradition, most qualitative researchers do not just collect piles of empirical materials to write up their reports. They construct qualitative interpretations. Due to this interpretive character, qualitative research also invites readers to construct interpretive meanings of research texts. For this reason, the present inquiry is concerned with how a group of teachers read and interpret a qualitative research text.

What Do We Know about Teachers’ Reading of Published Research?

Very few studies have investigated teachers’ reading of published research. The majority of studies in the area of research utilization have focused predominantly on the barriers to teachers’ engagement with research and the factors that may facilitate such engagement (e.g., Borg, 2009; Dagenais et al., 2012; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003; Ion & Iucu, 2014; Miretzky, 2007; Nassaji, 2012; Papasotiriou & Hannan, 2006; Tavakoli, 2015). My literature search has yielded only a handful of studies that explored teachers’ reading of research reports. Four general purposes may be identified in these studies.

The first purpose is to understand teachers’ general responses to research articles. Zeuli’s (1994) study is an example of this purpose. In this study, thirteen teachers were asked to read three articles. They were given a number of questions to respond to. One key finding of this study was that the participants “were more interested in research products,” and that
they “were like consumers interested in making decisions about what goods to procure without understanding further why the decision is warranted” (Zeuli, 1994, p. 53). Based on this finding, the author concluded that “reading research may be important, but how it is read is more consequential” (Zeuli, 1994, p. 54).

The second purpose is to identify specific reading strategies that teachers use while reading research material. For example, Shearer, Lundeberg, and Coballes-Vega (1997) selected twelve professionally active teachers, who were asked to choose three articles from any professional journals. They were asked not to read the articles prior to the protocol session, at which each participant was to meet one of the researchers. The researcher arbitrarily chose one of the three articles and asked the teacher to read it. These authors found that “teachers read professional articles for four purposes: (a) to expand their knowledge, (b) to understand or solve an instructional problem, (c) to improve their instruction, and (d) to garner support for a current instructional practice” (p. 594). The researchers also found that “the teachers were highly strategic” and that they “used an average of 25.58 strategies when responding to text, primarily summarizing or paraphrasing parts of the article” (p. 594). Other strategies included verbalizing, jumping around in the text, underlying or making margin notes, and looking for specific information.

The third purpose is to understand and compare teachers’ vs. researchers’ reading of research material. For instance, Bartels (2003) recruited three teachers and three researchers. He chose two articles, one considered researcher-oriented and the other teacher-oriented. Both articles dealt with the topic of written feedback to language learners. The articles were re-typed to eliminate any information that could identify the names of authors and the journal in which they had been published. The participants were given the articles and asked to read
them overnight before they were interviewed individually by the researcher. Bartels found that researchers and teachers used the information contained in the articles in different ways.

Another finding of Bartels’s study—the aspect most relevant to my work—concerned how both groups of participants established the validity of the articles. The researcher-participants established validity “through the presentation of objective, empirical evidence for any arguments made” (Bartels, 2003, p. 743), while the teacher-participants established validity of the articles on the basis of the connections that they could make between the articles and their classroom reality. Moreover, the teacher-participants validated the articles alone, that is, an article was considered valid if it had implications for their own teaching. However, the researcher-participants thought that an article was valid if it made significant contributions to the scholarly community.

The fourth purpose is to explore how teachers incorporate research findings in their own action research projects. For example, Cain (2015a) worked with eight teachers at a large secondary school located in the North of England. He provided them with three journal articles featuring research about teaching gifted and talented students. After reading the articles, the participating teachers designed and carried out their own action research projects. The overall goal of these projects was to improve the participants’ ability to appropriately challenge their gifted students. Cain supported the projects through monthly meetings where he prompted discussions and responded to teachers’ queries. The findings of this study suggest that “teachers transformed propositional knowledge into practical knowledge by developing their conceptual understandings; [and] they transformed abstract, impersonal knowledge into context-specific, personal knowledge by using cases from their previous experiences” (Cain, 2015a, p. 488). All the teachers participating in Cain’s study
believed that the journal articles they had read influenced their thinking and practice. It is important to note, however, that they tested research-knowledge against their own personal experience in the classroom.

My inquiry is situated in this small but growing body of work that examines how teachers read and respond to educational research. The key contribution that my project makes to this body of work is that it sheds light on three distinct challenges that teachers may face when they read and engage with educational research. I turn to these challenges in the following chapter.
Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

As discussed in Chapter One, there are numerous barriers to teachers’ direct engagement with published research (Ball, 2012; Borg, 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003; Kennedy, 1997; Montgomery & Smith, 2015; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). For example, a lack of time is an oft-cited reason for teachers’ low engagement with research (Borg, 2009). A lack of institutional support is another key reason why many teachers do not read and utilize research (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015). In addition to these barriers, there is another set of challenges that comes with research itself. In discussing such challenges, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe a triple crisis as it pertains to qualitative research. According to these scholars, the first crisis—the problem of representation—is concerned with the argument that “researchers can no longer directly capture [the] lived experience” of their participants (p. 19). The second crisis involves the re-thinking of legitimation and validity of research findings and recommendations. The third crisis is concerned with praxis, that is, “to effect change in the world” (p. 20).

The Crisis of Representation

Representation is one of the key concepts in the human and social sciences (Vieira & Runciman, 2008). Discussions about representation can be traced back to the classical Greek scholarship. For example, in his allegory of the cave, Plato (1972) describes the situation of a group of prisoners in an under-ground cave. The prisoners are chained by their legs and by their necks, and they have been there from childhood. The only source of light is the cave’s entrance connected to a long passage behind the prisoners. Outside the cave entrance, people
often carry along various objects. The prisoners are able to see shadows of these objects on a parapet in front of them, like the screen of a puppet-show. Because the prisoners have seen only the shadows, their words do not refer to anything other than the shadows. For them, the shadows are the only realities. Now, what will happen if one of the prisoners is set free, walks around in the “world,” and sees the objects whose shadows he used to see in the cave? As Plato (1972, p. 229) asks, “What do you think he would say, if someone told him that what he had formerly seen was meaningless illusion, but now, being somewhat nearer to reality and turned towards more real objects, he was getting a truer view?” Plato believes that the person will be perplexed and most likely think that the objects that he sees now are not as real as what he formerly saw (i.e., the shadows). Through this allegory, Plato underscores the problem of representation. Like him, Aristotle (2013) also engages the concept of representation when he defines poetry as an imitation (mimesis) of human actions. Commenting on Aristotle’s mimesis, Abrams (1999) writes that “the poem imitates by taking an instance of human action and re-presenting it in a new ‘medium,’ or material—that of words” (p. 123). Thus, for Aristotle, poetry is a dramatic representation of human actions.

The scholarly literature on the concept of representation is vast, and the scope of this dissertation allows only a partial overview. The idea of representation has been taken up by many researchers of humanities and social sciences. Some of their discussions and debates are captured in Marcus and Fischer’s (1986) Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences. A key argument in these discussions is that “the crisis [of representation] arises from uncertainty about adequate means of describing social reality” (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 8). We have seen renewed attention to the crisis of representation since the 1980s. However, the problem of representation has existed for
centuries. For example, Edward Said (1978) vividly describes in his classic book *Orientalism* that authors often used rhetorical devices to portray their subjects in particular ways as if they were in need of *being represented* to the world. Said’s critique was pointed primarily towards Western writers writing about the Eastern people. His notion of orientalism is based on a “positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him [sic] the relative upper hand” (Said, 1978, p. 7). The subjects of the orientalist writers, “who must be spoken for, are generally located in the world dominated by Western colonialism or neocolonialism; thus, the rhetoric [that Western writers use] both exemplifies and reinforces Western domination” (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 1).

It may be helpful to look at the notion of representation from an etymological perspective. The term representation derived from the Latin *repraesentare*, which means “‘to make present or manifest or to present again,’ and in classical Latin its use [was] confined almost entirely to inanimate objects” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 241). It meant literally to bring an object or a person into somebody’s presence. It could also mean “the embodiment of an abstraction in an object,” such as a piece of sculpture (Pitkin, 1967, p. 3). In the Middle Ages, the concept gained a new meaning when it was used in writings on Christianity to connote a mystical embodiment. The concept of representation experienced a notable expansion “in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, when the Pope and the cardinals [were] often said to represent the persons of Christ and the Apostles” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 241). The term representation was further popularized with the rise of parliamentary governing systems. One of the earliest works in the English language to use the term representation was Sir Thomas Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* (completed in 1565). Smith wrote that “the
Today, representation is used in a variety of ways and in the broadest possible terms. In all of its uses, representation has a referent, someone or something that is represented through or in the act of representation (Decreus, 2013). Rosenau (1992) writes about the possible uses of representation:

- **Delegation**: one individual represents another in parliament. It is resemblance; a painting represents on the canvas what the painter observes. It is replication; the photograph (image) represents the person photographed (object). It is repetition; a writer puts on paper the word (language) that represents his/her idea or thought (meaning). It is substitution; a lawyer represents a client in court. It is duplication; a photocopy represents the original.

This brief discussion indicates the pervasive nature of representation’s working in human affairs. For this reason, many philosophers—both ancient and modern—have rightly called humans “the ‘representational animal,’ *homo symbolicum*, the creature whose distinctive character is the creation and manipulation of signs—things that ‘stand for’ or ‘take the place of’ something else” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 11).

Scholars with a postmodern or poststructuralist bent generally reject the modernist notion of representation, which maintains that there is “truth” out there in the world and it can be accurately represented. Authors such as Baudrillard (1983) and Barthes (1975) argue that words and signs are only symbolic and they do not bear direct relation to the world. As Rosenau (1992) summarizes, “Representation assumes the validity of a copy that is only a simulacrum, a copy of a copy, a copy for which there is no original” (p. 95). From this perspective, there is no direct representation in the postmodern world. The “facts” about the world are nothing but manifestations of various *language games* (Wittgenstein, 1958). There
is no single way of representing that which is universally true. This is what has come to be known as the postmodernist “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 3). Summarizing postmodernism’s take on representation, Maxine Greene (1994) writes that “what is called postmodernism entails rejection of the idea of language as a medium expressing or representing what pre-exists” (p. 208).

Many critical, feminist, and post-colonial scholars are also concerned about the concept of representation. While some express considerable unease with the representation claim, others reject it outright. For example, Alcoff (2009) believes that today there is greater agreement about the problem in representing others. This agreement has emerged from the acceptance of two principal claims:

First, there has been a growing awareness that where one speaks from affects both the meaning and truth of what one says, and hence that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one’s location.... The second claim holds that not only is location epistemically salient, but certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous. In particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or re-enforcing the oppression of the group spoken for. (Alcoff, 2009, p. 118)

While my reading of representation is informed by various disciplinary perspectives, I draw particularly on literary and cultural studies. Below I present a brief overview of three major theories of representation.

There is a triangular relationship in all forms of representation: “representation is always of something or someone, by something or someone, to someone” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 12). Another dimension to this relationship is the intender who says, for example, let this pen stand for knowledge. Thus, the work of representation involves at least four parties: an intender, the person/object/phenomenon to be represented, something by which it is
represented, and the person(s) to whom representation is addressed. Only the latter has to be a human person. An important component in the process of representation is the context because representation never occurs in isolation. It always involves a broader field of signification. As Mitchell (1990) says, “the dab of paint that stands for a stone will probably do so only in the context of a whole field of dabs of paint…. Take the dab of point out of that context, and it ceases to represent [the stone], becomes merely a dab of paint” (p. 13).

Stuart Hall (2013) discusses three broad approaches to representation, which may be helpful to further understand Mitchell’s notion of representation. The approaches are reflective, intentional, and constructivist. First, proponents of the reflective approach believe that meaning lies “in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world” (Hall, 2013, p. 10). Second, the intentional approach to representation maintains that “it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean” (Hall, 2013, p. 10). Critics of the intentional approach argue that this approach is flawed because it views language as an entirely private phenomenon and ignores its social dimensions. The social dimension maintains that communication through language happens when interlocutors engage shared linguistic conventions and codes. As Hall (2013) points out, “our private intended meanings...have to enter into the rules, codes and conventions of language to be shared and understood” (p. 11, emphasis original). Finally, the constructivist approach (also known as constructionist approach) acknowledges the social and public character of language and other sign systems. It holds that neither objects/events in themselves nor the users of language and signs can determine the meaning. For supporters of this approach, both the material world
and the symbolic practices are important. As social actors, we use a great variety of concepts, signs, and symbols—often influenced by cultural practices and beliefs—to make meanings. In this light, “things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems—concepts and signs” (Hall, 2013, p. 11, emphasis original).

With regard to research, the concept of representation is often described as a crisis, which questions the ability of the researcher to adequately describe social realities. Schwandt (2007) writes that “the crisis is part of a more general set of ideas across the human sciences that challenge long-standing beliefs about the role of encompassing, generalizing (theoretical, methodological, and political) frameworks that guide empirical research within a discipline” (p. 48). In other words, “the crisis of representation is about the inability of...researchers to present in their written reports the lived experiences of those they study” (Willis, 2007, p. 155). Some critics question the researcher’s ability as well as his/her moral right to represent the researched. Thus, researchers are challenged “to negotiate a balanced view that incorporates not only the ‘facts’ of the lives of the individuals under scrutiny, but also the ‘facts’ of the researchers’ own lives” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 60). In light of this crisis of representation, my inquiry explores how teachers interpret and understand what is “represented” in educational research texts. In other words, how does a teacher engage what a researcher, as a “knowing” subject, represents in/through a text?

The Crisis of Legitimation

The second crisis is concerned with legitimation. According to Jürgen Habermas (1975), legitimation is one of the four crisis tendencies that occur in late capitalism (the other three are economy, rationality, and motivation). The concept of crisis can be understood from a variety of perspectives. For example, Habermas (1973/1984) begins with a discussion of how
“crisis” is used in medicine. In this regard, crisis refers to a phase of a disease when the patient’s self-healing powers are insufficient for recovery. Habermas also talks about crisis in reference to classical aesthetics and the doctrine of salvation. However, it is the economic and sociological background against which Habermas develops his theory of legitimation. The economic system of advanced capitalism “establishes and conceals a power relationship” and “keeps creating new and more problems as it solves others” (p. 40). The state apparatus has two simultaneous and important functions: “to levy the necessary taxes from profits and income and employ them so efficiently as to prevent any crises from disturbing growth” (p. 52). If the state fails in the first function, then we see a deficit in its administrative efficiency. If it fails in the second function, the result is a deficit in legitimation.

As the state’s administrative function increases, so does its need for legitimation. One way of achieving legitimation is to turn towards political democracy on the basis of universal suffrage. However, a crisis of legitimation also occurs in democratic systems of governance. An example of this situation is when the state attempts to disrupt the normative and cultural bases of the society. It may also occur when, for example, formal schooling competes with family upbringing. Therefore, Habermas (1973/1984) theorizes that “the state can avoid legitimation problems to the extent that it can manage to make the administrative system independent of the formation of legitimating will” (p. 53). The state does this by applying strategies such as separating expressive symbols from the instrumental functions of administration by means of expert opinions and legal expertise. Another strategy of achieving legitimation is advertising. Various advertising techniques often utilize emotional appeals and arouse people’s motives in order to portray “certain contents positively, and
devalue others” (p. 53). Thus, the public “is engineered for purposes of legitimation,” and is
given “the function of structuring attention by means of areas of themes and thereby of
pushing uncomfortable themes, problems, and arguments below the threshold of attention”
(p. 53). For the arguments briefly presented here, Habermas concludes that late-capitalist
societies are afflicted with a crisis of legitimation.

When applied to social science research, the concept of legitimation is used to imply the issues arising from *authority* that “refers to the claim a text makes to be an accurate, true,
complete account of experience, meaning, a way of life, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 46). Many scholars and practitioners question the researcher’s ability to claim “objective
truth.” Therefore, the crisis of legitimation in research is about warrant, i.e., “what warrants
our attention and why” (Willis, 2007, p. 155). This question is usually addressed through
discussions about validity. The researcher attempts to demonstrate that his/her study is
credible. Validity is one of the main criteria to judge the quality of research studies. As Bosk
(1979) wrote many years ago, the issue of validity in research asks the question: Why should I believe it? To claim that the findings of a study are valid is to argue that they are true and
certain (Schwandt, 2007). Thus, validity of research is the area where the concept of
legitimation is addressed.

The notion of validity has traditionally been attached to the quantitative traditions of
research. Many researchers are not comfortable with this notion, and some reject it outright.
For most qualitative researchers, validity refers to a quality that distinguishes some studies as
better than others. For this reason, some researchers use the terms validity and
trustworthiness interchangeably. They do so to suggest that a study is plausible, credible, and
defensible (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).
Patti Lather (2001) writes that qualitative researchers are “caught between a rock of responsibility and accountability and a soft place of the continued claims of scientism to one-best-way production and legitimation of knowledge” (p. 248). In this sense, the concept of validity involves elements of confusion and disagreements. Geertz (1973) told a story of a British man in colonial India, which may be illustrative here. The Indian man told the British man that “the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle” (pp. 28-29). The British man asked, “What did the turtle rest on?” “Another turtle,” replied the Indian man. “And that turtle?” asked the British man again. The Indian man said, “Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down” (p. 29). Through this story, Geertz makes the point that there is no “bottom turtle” in ethnographic interpretation and that cultural analysis is always incomplete (Maxwell, 2013). To address this challenge, Maxwell (2013) proposes a critical realist approach, according to which we “do not have to get to the bottom turtle to have a valid conclusion” (p. 122). We just need to get to a turtle that we can stand on securely.

We can shed more light on the concept of validity by briefly discussing five kinds of validity relevant to qualitative research (Maxwell, 2002). They are descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity. Maxwell argues that these kinds of validity are broadly aligned with the kinds of understanding gained from qualitative inquiries. First, descriptive validity is concerned with the factual accuracy of an account as reported by the researcher. In other words, it is to make sure that the researchers “are not making up or distorting the things they saw or heard” (Maxwell, 2002, p. 45). Second, interpretive validity refers to accurate portrayals of meanings attached by the participants to the phenomenon under study. Here, the researchers are concerned with what
the “objects, events, and behaviors mean to the people engaged in and with them” (Maxwell, 2002, p. 48, emphasis original).

Third, theoretical validity points to an account’s credibility and defensibility as a theory of a phenomenon. This kind of validity has two important aspects: “the validity of the concepts themselves as they are applied to the phenomena, and the validity of the postulated relationships among the concepts” (p. 51). Fourth, generalizability denotes the extent to which the account of a particular phenomenon, situation, or population may be extended to other phenomena, persons, or contexts. Generalizability is understood and applied differently in qualitative, quantitative, and experimental approaches to research. In qualitative research, it “usually takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of the particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process, in different situations, can lead to different results” (p. 53). The final kind of validity that Maxwell (2002) discusses is called evaluative validity. He believes that this kind of validity is not as important to qualitative research as are descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity. Yet, some qualitative researchers may have to deal with evaluative validity, which “involves the application of an evaluative framework to the objects of study” (p. 55). For example, evaluative validity becomes an important issue in a statement like “The student was wrong to throw the eraser at the teacher” (Maxwell, 2002, p. 55).

Cho and Trent (2006) discuss two broad approaches to the question of validity in qualitative research: transactional validity and transformational validity. These approaches may shed further light on the relationship between validity and (the crisis of) legitimation. First, the transactional approach is based on active interactions between the researcher and the study participants. Transactional validity is “an interactive process between the
researcher, the researched, and the collected data that is aimed at achieving a relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 321). Second, transformational validity challenges the very notion of validity. It aims to achieve “an eventual ideal” (p. 320). In other words, transformational validity is viewed “as a progressive, emancipatory process leading toward social change that is to be achieved by the research endeavor itself” (Cho & Trent, 2006, pp. 321-322). It is critical in the sense that it endeavours to change existing social conditions.

After delineating transactional and transformational validity, Cho and Trent (2006) propose an alternative framework of validity, which is recursive and process-oriented. While their alternative model has its own merit, it does not add fresh insights to my purpose in this dissertation. Therefore, I do not discuss their alternative framework here. Nevertheless, their discussions of the two broad approaches to validity—transactional and transformational—clearly reflect key contemporary debates and advancements in understanding validity in qualitative research. These two approaches and Maxwell’s (2002) five kinds of validity discussed above point to the complex and nuanced understandings of the concept of validity.

While validity is often understood differently by different individuals, there are a number of procedures that qualitative researchers use to establish validity of their studies. For example, Creswell and Miller (2000) discuss nine such validity procedures: triangulation, member checking, audit trail, disconfirming evidence, prolonged engagement in the field, thick and rich description, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, and peer debriefing/review. Researchers tend to use one or more of these procedures to demonstrate that their studies and findings are credible. Thus, they address the crisis of legitimation in
their research studies. However, what is important to know is how readers of research-texts understand and react to the validity procedures utilized by researchers. The inquiry presented through this dissertation is concerned with how teachers interpret the validity of research findings and recommendations. In other words, it explores how teachers respond to the crisis of legitimation in a selected text of educational research.

The Crisis of Praxis

The third crisis in qualitative research that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) mention is about praxis. The concept of praxis can be traced in the works of many philosophers from Aristotle to Hegel to Marx to Gramsci to Freire. Vazquez (1977) presents a detailed philosophical treatment of the concept of praxis. In ordinary usage, the Greek word praxis is roughly translated as “practice.” When somebody uses the word praxis, the intent is generally to talk about action or doing something. However, for my purpose in this dissertation, it is perhaps best to begin with Aristotle’s idea of praxis because it achieves a distinctive meaning in his writings. As Richard Bernstein (1971) writes, by using the notion of praxis, Aristotle refers to particular ways of life that are concerned with ethics and politics. At times, Aristotle draws a contrast between theoria and praxis. Here, theoria refers to the sciences and activities in which the goal is to know for its own sake. At other times, Aristotle draws a contrast between poesis and praxis. In this contrast, he attempts to distinguish activities and disciplines which are primarily a form of making (building a house, writing a play) from doing proper, where the end or telos of the activity is not primarily the production of an artifact, but rather performing the particular activity in a certain way, i.e., performing the activity well. (Bernstein, 1971, pp. ix-x, emphasis original)
Thus, in Bernstein’s reading, Aristotle’s notion of praxis requires both knowledge and practical wisdom. In praxis, a person is concerned not merely with gaining knowledge and wisdom for its own sake, but also with “doing—living well” (p. x).

Within the community of qualitative researchers, the notion of praxis has been popularized primarily through the works of Gadamer and Habermas. For both of them, praxis denotes a particular form of human activity, which is different from the common usage of the term practice. Commenting on Gadamer’s and Habermas’s contributions to the revitalization of the Aristotelian notion of praxis, Schwandt (2007) summarizes a threefold distinction between theory and practice.

First, theory (episteme) is “an activity [that] arises in the life of contemplation; it is separate from the practical and productive life of the polis” (p. 241).

Second, productive activity (poiesis) is concerned with bringing about a product or result. This kind of activity requires technical knowledge (techne), e.g., the kind of knowledge possessed by an expert in a particular field. Such knowledge “is a means to the achievement of the final product as the end of the activity” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 242). In Habermas’s (1971) view, techne (technical knowledge) is the aim of empirical-analytic sciences, which are concerned with prediction and control. Such knowledge attempts to express objectivism through a series of basic statements (Habermas, 1971). The technical knowledge of empirical-analytic sciences nurtures “a fundamental interest in controlling the environment through rule-following action based upon empirically grounded laws” (Grundy, 1987, p. 12, emphasis original).
Third, practical activity (*praxis*) is concerned with the conduct of one’s life in society. This kind of activity requires practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which enables one to do the right thing and to do it well. Practical activity “leaves no separably identifiable outcome as its product, hence the end (aim) of the activity (i.e., being a ‘good’ human being, teacher, doctor, lawyer, etc.) is realized in the very doing of the activity itself” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 242). However, in *phronesis* (practical wisdom), which Gadamer also describes as moral knowledge, the concept of application becomes highly problematical. Gadamer (1975/2013) believes that we can apply something what we already have, but moral knowledge is something we cannot learn and possess like a *techne*. Moral knowledge is not possess-able in that it is always context-dependent. As Gadamer (1975/2013, pp. 327-328) explains, what is right cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires us to perform a right action. In contrast, when a craftsman wants to make a tool, its essence can be fully determined by the use for which the tool is intended. Therefore, Gadamer (2001) summarizes that:

> Our praxis does not consist in our adapting to pregiven functions or in the thinking out of suitable means for achieving pregiven purposes…. Rather, our praxis must consist in prudent choices as we pursue common goals, choices we arrive at together and in practical reflection making concrete decisions about what is to be done in our present situation. (pp. 83-84)

I take Gadamer’s conceptualization of praxis as a starting point in this inquiry because it not only provides a succinct definition of the term, but also points to the importance of taking an ethical approach to educational research in an era when teachers are under pressure to use research findings to adjust their instructional practices.

In light of Gadamer’s works, we may safely conclude that praxis is morally-committed and informed by norms and traditions. Persons engaging in praxis are mindful of
the consequences of their actions. Thus, praxis is contrasted with technical knowledge, which aims to achieve a known objective or outcome by using pre-given methods. While technical knowledge is concerned with the quality of an outcome or a product (separate from the person producing it), praxis is “concerned with doing what is right and proper” (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 16). In praxis, the ends are not fixed. They are in constant revision. This revising requires a form of reason, which involves choice and judgment, and “is distinguishable from technical reasoning whose overall purpose is to consider the relative effectiveness of action as a means to some known end” (Rogers, 2003, p. 81).

The concept of praxis may be further illuminated through the works of Paulo Freire. Working with illiterate peasants, Freire (1970/2005) observed that many people accepted power structures and oppression as inevitable. He was worried about the complex workings of oppression because the marginalized often became oppressors once they climbed up the power ladder. He was deeply concerned about this vicious cycle of oppression. He concluded that the oppressed must struggle, along with those who are in true solidarity with them, for their liberation. However, he also identified a great obstacle to the achievement of liberation. The obstacle was the oppressive reality itself, which “absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness” (p. 51). In order to resist the domesticating tendency of the oppressive reality, “one must emerge from it and turn upon it,” suggested Freire (p. 51). Freire believed that “this can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). A key feature of Freire’s praxis is to engage in dialogue with others because dialogue, as a process, challenges the hierarchy between the oppressor and the oppressed, between the teacher and the student, and between
various forms of knowledge. For Freire, a truly liberatory pedagogy can be established only on “a permanent relationship of dialogue” (p. 68).

In the case of teachers’ engagement with research, how can they have dialogue with researchers? In fact, some commentators believe that the gap between research and practice in education exists not because teachers are anti-intellectual and unprofessional, but because the kind of knowledge that researchers produce is of little value to teachers’ practice (McIntyre, 2005). Teachers need “knowledge how” that will lead to their pedagogical knowledge, which is the kind of knowledge that directly informs teachers’ classroom activities. However, as McIntyre (2005) goes on to argue, educational researchers are concerned primarily with “knowledge that” or propositional knowledge. In a similar vein, Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) make a distinction between research knowledge and local knowledge. Teachers’ local knowledge comes from their direct experiences with how things work in their teaching contexts. For this reason, Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) argue that research knowledge cannot have a direct impact on practice because it is detached from the local issues that teachers have to attend to in their day-to-day work. Therefore, understanding the dynamics that go into the intersection between the researcher’s propositional knowledge and the teacher’s local knowledge is important for better utilization of educational research. Echoing this argument, McIntyre (2005) believes that “research cannot be helpful except through quite complex processes culminating in classroom teachers engaging in dialogue with research-based proposals” (p. 363). As a way of responding to the crisis of praxis mentioned above, such a dialogue would require teachers’ phronesis (practical wisdom).

Now, the question that we are confronted with is: How might teachers address the challenges of the triple crisis? As I discussed in Chapter One, the literature on knowledge
mobilization does not seem to respond to this question. Most knowledge mobilization initiatives are concerned with various ways of making strong connections between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Many of these initiatives tend to treat research-based recommendations as universally valid and effective. Such treatment ignores the contextual realities of schools where knowledge is supposed to be utilized for educational improvement. Moreover, knowledge managers often treat teachers as passive and uncritical consumers of research findings. Teachers are viewed as merely practitioners who are not-yet-professionals. Furthermore, knowledge managers appear to focus on developing teachers’ individual capacity to use research findings to improve their practice, rather than creating a collaborative culture conducive to sharing, personalizing, and utilizing educational research for the development of pedagogical knowledge.

In the chapter that follows, I discuss how a group of teachers read an educational research text and responded to the triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis in it. I also present the theoretical perspective that guided the interpretation of data gathered from the participating teachers.
Chapter Three: Theory and Methodology of the Study

Reader-Response Criticism

Since the central focus of this study is on teachers’ reading of educational research, it is important to briefly discuss the theory of reading that informs the study. A few initial questions are essential to any reading theory: “What do readers do when they read? Is reading determined by the text, by the reader’s subjective responses, by social, cultural and economic factors, by conventions of reading, or by a combination of these?” (Bennett, 1995, p. 2). Questions such as these have been taken up by literary critics who have worked under the general banner of reader-response criticism. Critics such as Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Jonathan Culler, Steven Mailloux, and Paul de Man focused on the location of textual meaning. Their turn to the reader was due to “an intense concern with the text-reader relationship, with the reading process, [and] with our acts of understanding and interpretation” (Freund, 1987, p. 5). This tradition, which gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, attempted to throw light on the intricate relationships between the reader and the text within particular contexts. Insights drawn from reader-response criticism form the theoretical foundations of this inquiry into teachers’ reading of educational research.

Surveying responses to the question of the location of meaning, Bennett (1995) identifies three major groups of critics. The first group of reader-response critics, led by Norman Holland and David Bleich, believes that it is “the particular response pattern of the individual reader” that produces meaning (p. 4). The second group, including Michael Riffaterre, takes a structuralist approach and believes that the text itself directs and controls
the production of meaning. The third group of critics, including Wolfgang Iser, focuses on “the interactive space of reading,” which requires negotiations between the text and the reader (p. 4). This perspective is also echoed in the works of Louse Rosenblatt (1978), an early proponent of the study of reading, who made significant contributions to reader-response criticism. Rosenblatt’s works underscore the position that readers bring their unique backgrounds to the text and that meanings are constructed in active, back-and-forth transactions between text and reader.

In summary, reader-response criticism brings to the fore the reader’s contributions to the making of meaning. It views the reader as an active agent because no text has meaning until it is read. In this sense, “meaning is in potentia, so to speak” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 726). However, scholars working within this tradition disagree as to what influences the reader’s acts of meaning-making. About this issue, there are five major perspectives: textual, experiential, psychological, social, and cultural (Beach, 1993). First, textual theorists are interested in how readers use their knowledge of text/genre conventions to make meaning. Second, experiential theorists pay attention to readers’ personal experiences with texts and how such experiences influence the meaning they make. Third, psychological theorists are interested in readers’ cognitive and subconscious processes that play important roles in their meaning-making. Fourth, social theorists examine how the social contexts of readers influence their transactions with texts. Finally, cultural theorists focus on how readers’ cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes shape their response to texts. While these perspectives differ significantly, they are all concerned with “how readers create meaning” (Beach, 1993, p. 9).
In addition, a broad consensus has emerged from the works of reader-response theorists. Schweickart and Flynn (2004) identify three points of this general consensus:

First, the text is not a container of stable objective meaning, so interpretive disputes cannot be decided simply by reference to the objective properties of the text. Second, the reader is a producer of meaning; what one reads out of a text is always a function of the prior experiences; ideological commitments; interpretive strategies; and cognitive, moral, psychological and political interests that one brings to the reading. And third, readings are necessarily various; there is no single noncontroversial set of standards for adjudicating interpretive disputes. (pp. 1-2)

Taken together, the five perspectives (Beach, 1993) and three points of consensus (Schweickart & Flynn, 2004) underscore the important roles that readers play in constructing meanings of texts.

Another question that has significant implications for this study is: what is the reader, or who reads? Reader-response critics’ answers to this question are also varied. Bennett (1995) lists a number of theories that characterize the reader:

a. the reader is a hypothetical construct with all possible knowledge and interpretive skills at his or her disposal;
b. the reader is an individual subject and reading is determined by his or her ‘identity theme’;
c. the reader is not an individual but a community of readers functioning through the reading strategies employed by a particular member of that community;
d. the reader is a series of moves or responses more or less predetermined by the language of the text itself but ‘concretized’ in the act of reading;
e. the reader is an individual in a particular historical and social situation whose responses are available to empirical investigation through written records; and
f. the reader is a woman, a gay man, the member of an ethnic minority or other marginalized person whose responses involve a certain resistance produced by ethnic, sexual or social difference. (Bennett, 1995, pp. 2-3)

Of these, point c is particularly relevant to my project. To illustrate this point, I draw on Stanley Fish (1980). One of his central arguments is that it is only within a given community
that readers find “facts” of reading, and “that these ‘facts’ are as much a product of the community as they are of the interpreters” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 733).

**Interpretive community:** Fish (1980) uses the term *interpretive community* to refer to groups of people who share certain strategies of text-interpretation. These strategies influence the ways texts are read and meanings are made. He argues that “meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of a reader’s activities and for the texts those activities produce” (p. 322). One of Fish’s (1980) anecdotal examples may be illustrative here. In the summer of 1971, Fish was teaching two courses in the same classroom. The first course, beginning at 9:30 a.m., dealt with linguistics and literary criticism. The second course at 11:00 a.m. focused on English religious poetry of the 17th century. On a particular day, Fish wrote an assignment for students of the first class, but it was still on the blackboard when students of the second class came to the room. The assignment read:

```
Jacobs-Rosenbaum
Levin
Thorne
Hayes
Ohman (?)
```

Jacobs, Rosenbaum, Levin, Thorne, and Hayes were linguists, but Ohmann was a literary critic. Fish joined Jacobs and Rosenbaum with a hyphen. He was unsure about the spelling of Ohmann’s name; so, he put a question mark in parenthesis. The only change Fish made between the two classes was that he drew a frame around these names and wrote “p. 43” on the top of the frame. When the students of the second class came in, he told them that what they saw on the blackboard was a religious poem. Then, he asked them to interpret “the
poem.” The students began to interpret it as a religious poem. One student thought that the poem appeared to be in the shape of cross or an altar. Most of them believed that the poem was written as an iconographic riddle. Some students interpreted the last word (Ohman) in a number of interesting ways. They gave the word three complementary readings as: omen, Oh Man, and amen. In the interest of space, I refrain from presenting details of how Fish’s students interpreted “the poem” (see Fish, 1980, Chapter 14 for further discussions of students’ interpretive activities). By this and other related examples, Fish (1980) established his point that an interpretive community is not simply a collective of individuals, but rather certain strategies or norms of interpretation that they share. In this way, Fish emphasized the view that “our categories of perception are not unique, individual or idiosyncratic, but conventional and communal. Encoded in language, institutionalized, already in place, they exist prior to the act of reading” (Freund, 1987, pp. 107-108).

One criticism of Fish’s notion of interpretive community is that “it is difficult to clearly distinguish between interpretive communities – that readers’ responses may reflect membership in, or allegiances toward, a range of different interpretive communities” (Beach, 1993, p. 163). Although such criticism might be true in the case of texts addressing a broad range of audiences (for example, a popular novel), it may not be applicable to specialized texts such as reports of educational research. In the case of educational research, it is possible to clearly distinguish between certain interpretive communities. Examples include, but are not limited to, a group of students who participate in a study, a number of parents who read the findings of the study, a group of researchers who examine the validity of the findings, a group of teachers who read the report to find pedagogical implications, and a committee of administrators who aim to gain insights from the study to develop particular policies.
Furthermore, in my reading of Fish’s (1980) theory, the notion of interpretive community does not cancel out the possibility of our membership to multiple communities. In fact, we all belong to more than one community (Wenger, 2009). Our membership to various communities is not static and permanent. We may choose to leave old communities and join new ones or return to pre-established communities. In some communities, we may act as core members while in others as peripheral members. Therefore, the critique of Fish’s theory of interpretive community is problematic because permanent membership to a particular interpretive community is undesirable in an enterprise as dynamic as education.

My view of teachers as an interpretive community has flexible boundaries with a good deal of give and take. While teachers participate in one such community, they may bring their knowledge and experiences from other communities to which they also belong. Such a pluralist view of community is in alignment with the sociologist Robert Bellah’s (2006) argument that

all of us belong to more than one community and there is no community to which we belong exclusively without having some of our roles outside of it. This means that we are constantly shifting between being insiders and outsiders with respect to all the significant communities to which we belong. In principle that allows for openness and flexibility. (p. 307)

This argument clearly refutes allegations against Fish’s theory and its openness to different interpretive communities.

In summary, Fish does not aim to reduce interpretive reading to subjective whim. Instead, he shows that readers create meaning “by reflecting the culturally transmitted expectations, predispositions, and biases that produce readers themselves and program them to read one way rather than another” (Graff, 2004, p. 28). From this perspective, it seems logical for teachers to form an interpretive community in order to engage with research texts.
Such a community is likely to provide teachers with particular reading strategies and certain community assumptions (Fish, 1980), which may enable them to make sense of the idiosyncrasies of pedagogical events presented in published research-texts (Mitchell, 1999). Thus, Fish’s reader-response theory provides a strong foundation for my inquiry.

**Methodology**

In this dissertation, the term methodology is used to refer to the general guidelines that I follow while conducting and disseminating the inquiry. It encompasses paradigms of research, issues of design, and methods of data gathering and analysis (Schensul, 2008). From this broad perspective, methodology is conceptualized as a general theory of how the inquiry is conducted. According to Hammersley (2011), the literature on methodology generally addresses three inter-related meanings: (1) methodology-as-technique, (2) methodology-as-philosophy, and (3) methodology-as-autobiography. All three of these are considered in my conceptualization of methodology.

First, methodology-as-technique refers to the description of methods that the researcher uses, the specification of types and proper application of the methods, and the explanation of how choices among methods are made. Second, methodology-as-philosophy focuses on various assumptions that underpin different forms of inquiry. It asks questions such as: What does objectivity mean? Is objectivity possible or desirable? Is it possible to represent “objects?” Can research produce unbiased accounts of social phenomena? Finally, methodology-as-autobiography relates to the personal accounts of how research is done. It judges research knowledge in relation to the processes of research and the persons involved. Moving away from the positivist position that research can accurately represent the phenomena under study, methodology-as-autobiography advocates a constructivist view of
understanding people and phenomena. Unlike methodology-as-technique that portrays the researcher “as a rational actor deploying technical skills to resolve standard problems,” methodology-as-autobiography views the researcher as a person who is at the mercy of events, contingencies, luck, as well as expertise (Hammersley, 2011, p. 28).

**Hermeneutics:** My understanding of methodology is informed by Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. The history of hermeneutics, as a branch of philosophy, dates back to the classical age. In the ancient Greece, hermeneutics, or the act of interpretation, was used as a necessary vehicle for translating divine messages such as oracles and omens to general people. This was reflected in the activities of Hermes who brought messages from the gods to human beings. As Gadamer (2006) writes,

> Hermeneutics is the practical art, that is, a technē, involved in such things as preaching, interpreting other languages, explaining and explicating texts, and, as the basis of all of these, the art of understanding, an art particularly required any time the meaning of something is not clear and unambiguous. (p. 29)

Therefore, at the heart of hermeneutics is a belief that there is a difference between what is said and what is meant (Smith, 2010).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is generally regarded as the founder of modern hermeneutics. He used hermeneutics primarily for interpreting religious and legal texts. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) extended Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics to the understanding of epistemology and methodology of the human sciences. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), however, challenged Dilthey and took an existential-phenomenological approach to hermeneutics. Heidegger’s ideas were later extended by his student Gadamer (1900-2002), who developed *a hermeneutics of understanding*. Smith (2010, p. 433) believes that “contemporary hermeneutics operates largely in the shadow of” Gadamer, particularly of his
suggestion “that creative interpretation begins with a query: What is the question for which this (event, text, saying) is the answer?”

Since hermeneutics is a broad and contested field of inquiry, I shall discuss some tension and debates within the field before I choose a particular hermeneutical tradition. Drawing on Gallagher (1992), I briefly outline four different approaches to hermeneutics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Basic premise</th>
<th>Primary aim</th>
<th>Advocates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative hermeneutics</td>
<td>Using appropriate methods, the interpreter can transcend his/her historical limitations and understand what the author originally intends.</td>
<td>To reproduce the meanings of the text as intended by the author.</td>
<td>Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Betti, and Hirsch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate hermeneutics</td>
<td>The interpreter can never achieve an objective interpretation of the author’s intention because the interpreter is always conditioned by his/her historical existence.</td>
<td>To endeavour to understand the meaning by engaging in creative dialogue with the author/text. (Note: history and language both limit and enable this dialogue.)</td>
<td>Gadamer and Ricoeur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical hermeneutics</td>
<td>No methods can enable us to attain the original meaning because there is no final truth in or beyond the text.</td>
<td>To employ deconstructionist readings and to disrupt certain concepts such as meaning and authorship in the text.</td>
<td>Derrida and Foucault (inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical hermeneutics</td>
<td>Interpretation may be performed to penetrate false consciousness and to emancipate individuals from political and economic exploitations.</td>
<td>To uncover the ideological nature of our belief-systems and to establish an ideology-free hermeneutic situation.</td>
<td>Habermas and Apel (inspired by Marx, Freud, and the Frankfurt School)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these four approaches, I choose Gadamer’s moderate hermeneutics to frame the methodology of this inquiry. Moderate hermeneutics is chosen because it encourages the reader to have creative dialogues with the author. For Gadamer (2001), hermeneutics is essentially “the art of reaching an understanding—of something or with someone” (p. 79).
This kind of dialogic understanding is necessary for teachers because their work is always influenced and often constrained by various factors such as accountability measures, administrative pressures, and various policy mandates. A complete indeterminacy and undecidability of meaning, which radical hermeneutics would suggest, may not be helpful for teachers to have creative dialogues with educational policymakers, administrators, and researchers. Therefore, I draw upon moderate hermeneutics, which is also known as philosophical hermeneutics. More specifically, I utilize three central concepts from Gadamer’s writings: method, language, and tradition. Below I discuss how these three concepts relate to the three genres of methodology: methodology as technique, as philosophy, and as autobiography.

**Method:** Controversies over method have been at the centre of the history of hermeneutics. For Schleiermacher, the ultimate goal of the hermeneutical method was the discovery of the author’s thought and intention. In contrast, Dilthey attempted to provide the humanities “with a scientific method of their own, different from the methods of the natural sciences, but nevertheless securing a level of objectivity analogous to the one attained in natural science” (Römer, 2016, p. 87). Both Heidegger and Gadamer rejected Dilthey’s conceptualization of method. Their critique “was not directed against method as such, but against a particular kind of method prevailing in the Cartesian tradition of scientific knowledge” (Römer, 2016, p. 88). Gadamer developed his detailed philosophical stance about method in his magnum opus *Truth and Method.* Here, method is put in opposition to truth. For this reason, some philosophers, including Ricoeur (1981), wonder if the book should have been called *Truth OR Method.* However, Gadamer’s hermeneutical writings suggest that he is not against the concept of method itself, but rather against the modern
conceptualization of method, which ignores the historicity of human understanding. Gadamer (1975/2013) believes that “Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live” (p. 289). As such, Gadamer’s objection is against the Enlightenment’s attempt to take the individual out of his or her historical location in search for “true” meanings of events and phenomena.

Gadamer further clarifies his thinking about method in an interview with Carsten Dutt. Dutt asks Gadamer to respond to his critics who think that Gadamer rejects the notion of method in general. Gadamer replies that those who read his book as “truth versus method” have a one-sided impression of his work. He maintains that in the humanities and social sciences, we ought to use methods that are different from the ones used in the natural sciences. Our purpose of using methods is not for the sake of control, but for the participation in the historical world so that we can better understand our lives. This position is illustrated in the following statement, which deserves to be quoted at length:

> As tools, methods are always good to have. But one must understand where these can be fruitfully used. Methodical sterility is a generally known phenomenon. Every once in a while, for instance, we find tried and true or merely fashionable methods applied in a field where they are simply unproductive. What does the truly productive researcher do? … Applying method is what the person does who never finds out anything new, who never brings to light an interpretation that has revelatory power. No, it is not their mastery of methods but their hermeneutical imagination that distinguishes truly productive researchers. And what is hermeneutical imagination? It is a sense of the questionableness of something and what this requires of us. (Gadamer, 2001, pp. 41-42)

This Gadamerian view of method informs my understanding of methodology-as-technique. A method is a way of beginning a conversation with the participants, but this way is always questionable in the sense that it does not predict the outcome of the conversation. In this light
of hermeneutical imagination, methods are used in the present inquiry to gather empirical materials in ways that aim to illuminate the participants’ social and historical locations in relation to their understanding of the phenomenon under study.

**Language:** In Gadamer’s hermeneutics, language is both a condition and a limit of understanding. His hermeneutical inquiry is “guided by the basic idea that language is a medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together” (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 490). Thus, Gadamer’s hermeneutics is drawn towards the dialectic of the Greeks who “did not conceive understanding as a methodic activity of the subject, but as something that the thing itself does and which thought ‘suffers’” (p. 490). The activity of the thing itself is what takes hold of the subject. This observation leads Gadamer (1975/2013) to make the profound statement that “Being that can be understood is language” (p. 490, emphasis original). This hermeneutical view of language underpins my methodology-as-philosophy. It points to the importance of attentiveness to language when our goal is to understand how individuals make sense of their life and world.

According to Gallagher (1992), when Gadamer says that “all interpretation is linguistic,” he underscores “the essentially linguistic relations we have to traditions” (p. 104). In other words, language is not a means, but the process of establishing our relation with traditions. Gadamer does not want to see language as a mere “sign” because doing so ignores the fact that our first meaningful relations with others are established through language. In this sense, “it is only through language that we have a world” (Wachterhauser, 1986, p. 31) because “in language the reality beyond every individual consciousness becomes visible” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 407). Palmer (1969) summarizes the importance of language in hermeneutical methodology:
Language shapes man’s [sic] seeing and his thought—both his conception of himself and his world....His very vision of reality is shaped by language. Far more than man realizes, he channels through language the various facets of his living—his worshipping, loving, social behavior, abstract thought; even the shape of his feelings is conformed to language. (Palmer, 1969, p. 9)

In Gadamer’s hermeneutics, language both limits and facilitates understanding. He believes that understanding is a historical and linguistic event, and “what emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the subjective opinions of the partners to the dialogue” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 331). Thus, when understanding is conceptualized as an event (Geschehen), “it is something that happens to them [interlocutors] in a way they had not anticipated and that they could not control” (Wachterhauser, 1986, p. 36, emphasis original). What makes this happening possible is language, through which the meeting of humans and the world becomes possible. This philosophy of language informs the methodology of this inquiry, in which I pay attention to how the participants use language to have dialogue with each other and with the authors of a research-text.

**Tradition:** For Gadamer, tradition is a condition of understanding. This is reinforced in his conviction that understanding is always a historically effected event. This means that our traditions, or what Gadamer also calls “prejudices,” always inform our understanding of ourselves and the world outside us. In this sense, “understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one’s subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 258).

Therefore, what we understand is “always under the influence of history” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 90). As Gadamer (1975/2013) writes,

The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of*
the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being. (p. 289, emphasis original)

Does this mean that we are always trapped in our prejudices and historical traditions? Smith (1993) believes that this is not the case for the following reasons: “First, we must always be open to risking and testing our prejudices in our dialogical encounters with others. Second, traditions are ‘living’ or are always in the process of being reshaped through reinterpretation” (p. 196). Therefore, any act of interpretation requires a constant dialogue between self and other, between past and present.

This view of tradition lends insights to my conceptualization of methodology-as-autobiography. As a researcher, I belong to specific traditions and carry my prejudices with me. For example, I grew up in a monolingual environment in a rural village of Bangladesh. After completing three years of my undergraduate studies in Bangladesh, I went to Beloit College in Wisconsin, USA. At Beloit, I majored in literary studies for my BA (honours) degree. At that time, I was drawn to reader-response criticism, which taught me to appreciate the reader’s contribution to the act of reading and meaning-making. After receiving my BA, I returned to Bangladesh and became an English-language teacher. My cross-cultural experiences of learning and teaching, e.g., an institutional push for applying Western theoretical knowledge to a South Asian context and an over-emphasis on the “measureablity” of student learning, led me to contemplate on such issues as theory, practice, cultural relevance, and the importance of interpretation in pedagogical activities. This personal history is active in my methodology because it influences how I understand my participants’ perspectives on the phenomenon under study. In keeping with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, I maintain that, in all understanding, history (traditions and prejudices) is effectively at work.
Therefore, it is not my aim to overcome my historical consciousness and interpret my participants’ responses from an “objective” point of view. This hermeneutical principle poses a particular challenge to me. It points to a tension between autobiography and history, i.e., “the autobiographical has to be connected to a moment in time in order to understand not only how historical events unfold but to understand why these events unfold as they do” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 60, emphasis original). In this light, my hermeneutic methodology is attentive to how the researcher as well as the research-participant understands their autobiographical selves at the intersections of the historical time and the traditions that they belong to.

In brief, two important points about understanding in Gadamer’s hermeneutics are that we understand each other through language (conversation) and that our understanding is always influenced by our historical locations. Summarizing Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, Wachterhauser (1986) writes that “all human understanding is never ‘without words’ and never ‘outside of time’” (p. 5). Such a view of understanding provides a methodological resource for this project. This methodological resource is based on the principles that

(1) understanding and interpretation are part of the total human experience of the world; (2) meanings evolve and are always in process; (3) a participant’s story of lived experience is filtered by his or her cultural and social location and history; (4) there will always be gaps, partial truths, and power differentials in talking about those experiences; and (5) that the present influences the story of the past. (Walshaw & Duncan, 2015, p. 307)

These hermeneutical principles guide the present inquiry, in which I aim to understand the experience of myself and of the participants of the inquiry.
Participants: In order to recruit teachers, I sent a Call for Participants (see Appendix I) to professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English, International Literacy Association, TESOL International, TESL Canada, TESL Ontario, and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers. I requested them to send out the call through their emailing lists. I also posted the Call for Participants on the social media pages of these organizations. Although a lot of teachers expressed interest in the study, ultimately twelve of them agreed to participate. I sent them an informed consent form (Appendix II). All of them signed and returned the consent form to me before participating in the study. Of the twelve participants, four were from Canada, five from the United States of America (one of them was teaching in Japan at the time of data collection), one from Romania, one from Ivory Coast, and one from the Isle of Man. All participants were teaching English for academic purposes. Two of these teachers were working at elementary schools, and nine of them at high schools. One teacher was working at a community college, but she had taught at a high school prior to joining the college.

These teachers joined a wiki-based discussion forum, which I created for this research project. As the primary research site, the wiki provided the participants with an opportunity to form a community with individuals from diverse backgrounds and settings. Furthermore, it was expected that the dialogic and open-ended nature of the wiki would encourage the participants to interrogate each other’s interpretative strategies and assumptions (Fish, 1980). In this online community, the teachers read educational research and addressed the triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
Below I briefly introduce the participants, and then I provide a rationale for the diversity of their backgrounds and geographical locations. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

**Adam** is from Texas, USA. He is an experienced teacher with a Master of Education degree. At the time of data collection, he was a language arts teacher at a high school in south Texas. He was teaching English literature in an ESL setting. Many of his students were immigrants from Mexico, and they were learning English as an additional language.

**Alison** is a public high school teacher in Detroit, Michigan, USA. She has been teaching for 15 years. Her undergraduate degree was in Communication Arts/English, and her master’s degree was in Educational Leadership. Alison’s certification is in English/History. She is also certified as a K-12 administrator. At the time of data collection, she was teaching English classes for “at-risk” students. All of her students were performing below their grade level.

**Amelia** lives in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. At the time of participation, she was teaching high school English. She had also taught in New Hampshire and in California. She had an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in Secondary English Education. Amelia was looking for a permanent teaching position, and had been covering maternity leaves for few years, which had given her “the opportunity to see a variety of schools, their methods, and where they fell in regards to the evolution of education” (from her wiki post).

**Anna-Nicole** is from Romania where she teaches at a public school. She has been teaching English for ten years to young students (aged 7 - 15). At the time of data collection,
Anna-Nicole was preparing for her First Degree Certificate. In the Romanian education system, teachers have to pass a series of qualification tests—such as the Definitive Degree and the Second Degree—to get their terminal professional qualification, which is called the First Degree.

**Caroline** is an experienced ESL teacher. She received her Bachelor’s degree in English and her Teaching Certificate from a university in western Canada. Her lengthy teaching career was based in the greater Vancouver area. She has recently retired after many years of teaching ESL academic preparation courses to educated adults from around the world. Prior to her career at a community college, she had taught ESL in a high school. At the time of data collection, she was serving as a writing mentor.

**Jessica** is from the Isle of Man. She is an English teacher working with 11-18 year olds. She started out her working life as a journalist, but she changed course and became a teacher in 1991-1992. Initially, she taught GCSE and A level, and then moved to China where she worked as an exams officer and examiner for the British Council. Then she spent two years in a small international school before taking a position at a school in Brussels, Belgium. She is interested in education as a human right and the impact of globalisation on education.

**Kyle** is an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in Ivory Coast. He teaches at a public secondary school. The age of his students ranges from 9 to 20 years. He graduated with an English major from a prestigious university in Ivory Coast. Kyle received his teaching diploma from a teacher training college in 1993 and then started his teaching career in 1994. Recently, he participated in a professional development workshop on assessment at a university in Oregon, USA.
Maya teaches English at an elementary school in Toronto, ON. Many of her students speak a language other than English at home. Maya grew up in India, and she came to Canada in her late teens with her parents. She received her Bachelor’s degree and teaching certification from Ontario.

Noah is from New York, USA. He received his Bachelor’s degree in English literature education and master’s degree in education. He worked in various public middle and high schools as a substitute teacher. At the time of data collection, he was teaching English at a private language school in Japan. His clientele was comprised of both young and adult students. Their proficiency levels were significantly varied.

Rosaline is an experienced ESL teacher. She has been teaching at a private school in Toronto for the last six years. She was born in Sri Lanka and did her elementary education there. Then she came to Canada with her family. She earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from two universities in Ontario. She has attended several academic conferences for her professional development.

Scarlett is an ESL teacher, currently working at a high school in Iowa, USA. She teaches English language classes to 10th – 12th grade students. She graduated with degrees in English and Secondary Education. She has extensive experiences of teaching international students, particularly from Hispanic, Russian, and Ukrainian backgrounds.

Tania is from Toronto, ON. She has a Master of Arts degree in Psychology. She is an experienced ESL teacher. In her long career, she has taught English to international students in diverse contexts. She teaches students from the teen years up to 30 years of age, who are either doing a gap year from their colleges back home or trying to gain admission to a
Canadian university or college, or they are employed and require better English to perform their business duties and improve their career. At the time of data collection, Tania was teaching ESL at a private school in Toronto, ON.

The diversity of these participants’ backgrounds, ethnicities, and geographical locations is important for this research project, especially from the perspective of the globalization of knowledge. It is vital to gain insights from teachers from diverse contexts because such insights may help us develop a democratic research imagination. This kind of imagination defies the view of knowledge as the property of nation-states or the elite who dominate the sites of knowledge production. In this light, we cannot deny “the necessity to globalize the research imagination” (Kenway & Fahey, 2009, p. 15). My understanding of a democratic research imagination is drawn from what Appadurai (2000) has described as “globalization from below.” Rapid changes brought about by globalization destabilize “secure knowledge niches” and make “it less possible for ordinary citizens to rely on knowledge drawn from traditional, customary or local sources” (Appadurai, 2006, pp. 167-168). On the other hand, it is very difficult for practitioners in any professional domain to keep up with the (over)flow of new knowledge. For this reason, Appadurai (2006) would say that “Globalisation makes knowledge—of whatever type—simultaneously more valuable and more ephemeral” (p. 168).

The production of research-based knowledge is a privilege available only to the global elite. The majority of the world’s population is consumers of such knowledge. Despite its global flow, research continues to be parochial in nature. It is especially so when it carries the elite worldview of the researcher. Appadurai’s conceptualization of “globalization from below” is a powerful attempt to interrogate the academic metaculture that characterizes the
conduct and dissemination of research. It asks us to attend to varied sets of public spheres so that we may be able
to create partnerships in teaching and research so that our picture of areas does not stay confined to our own first-order, necessarily parochial, world pictures. The potential payoff is a critical dialogue between world pictures, a sort of dialectic of areas and regions, built on the axiom that areas are not facts but artifacts of our interests and our fantasies as well as of our needs to know, to remember, and to forget. (Appadurai, 2000, p. 8)

In light of the above argument, it is important to understand the perspectives and experiences of professionals who are located in diverse geographical contexts, which are simultaneously global and local. Their experiences may reveal “vernacular discourses” that are helpful “to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 3).

**My relationship with the participants:** I endeavoured to build a relationship with the participants, as more of a co-participant than as a “researcher.” At the root of this relationship was my interest in conversing with them. I envisioned our conversations to be open-ended and unpredictable. As Gadamer (1975) writes, “to conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed” (p. 330). Thus, in a genuine conversation, one does not impose his/her views on the other, but rather shows openness to the object of inquiry as well as to other partners of the conversation. I followed Gadamer’s (1975) suggestion that “the first condition of the art of conversation is to ensure that the other person is with us” (p. 330). In this spirit, I created my online profile with details such as my background, photograph, and web-links to my blogs and social media pages to establish good rapport and a collegial relationship with the participants and, thus, to ensure that *they were with me.* I hoped that my relationship with the
participants would enable me to “wander together with” them, as the original Latin meaning of the word “conversation” suggests (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48).

**Why online community?** I created the wiki-based online community for four primary reasons. First, in-service teachers are now increasingly participating in online communities for professional learning (Holmes, 2013; Lindberg & Ologsson, 2010). Proponents of online community argue that it provides teachers with a collaborative environment to interact with peers at a distance (Carr & Chambers, 2006). It may also “support teachers and educators in reflecting on their practice, in a collaborative and supporting learning environment” (Kirschner & Lai, 2007, p. 129). Researchers have also examined why teachers participate in online communities. For example, Hur and Brush (2009) identify five reasons for teacher’s participation in online communities. The reasons are sharing emotions, utilizing the advantages of online environments, combating teacher isolation, exploring new ideas, and experiencing a sense of camaraderie. Similarly, Hew and Hara (2007) identify seven motivators for teachers’ sharing knowledge online. The motivators are collectivism, reciprocity, personal gain, altruism, protecting anonymity, respectful environment, and pursuing individual interests. Consequently, online communities have become a preferred space for many teachers (Baker-Doyle, 2011).

Second, online communities rely heavily on Web 2.0, which denotes the second generation use of the internet. Compared to the first generation that was limited to the presentation of information, the second generation allows users to actively create and share information on the web. McLeod and Vasinda (2008) use the following analogy to highlight the difference between the two:
Web 1.0 was one-way communication, a lecture or a monologue. Only those with enough resources or specific knowledge could actually do the “talking” while all others remained mute…. [In contrast,] Web 2.0 can be compared to a dialogue, an engaging class discussion or two-way communication. (p. 260)

Because of the Web 2.0 features of the wiki forum, it was expected that the participating teachers would generate and share knowledge and information with one another.

Third, the supporters of Web 2.0-based online community believe that it offers opportunities “to connect teachers in ways that encourage them to deepen their professional knowledge, offer support to one another, to mentor and be mentored, and to engage in professional dialogue” (Hutchison & Colwell, 2012, p. 274). By offering these opportunities—such as engaging in dialogue with colleagues located within diverse contexts—online communities may facilitate what Lieberman and Mace (2010) describe as making practice public, i.e., “making artifacts and events of practice, and reflections on practice, available to interested educational audiences” (p. 78). These authors further argue that going public “facilitates improved teaching and that all teachers can benefit from making their practices public and sharing them with each other” (p. 78). This argument points to the roles that online communities may play in combating teacher isolation—which has historically functioned as a key impediment to teachers’ continuing professional learning and school improvement—as most teachers plan, execute, and evaluate their classroom practice alone (DuFour, 2011; Lortie, 1975). Moreover, the professional dialogues that online communities may encourage are aligned with the social view of learning, which maintains that “what we take as knowledge and how we think and express ideas are the products of the interactions of groups of people over time” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 5).
Finally, the online community was helpful in bringing the participants together. They were located at diverse geographical locations and were working during the time of data collection. Therefore, it was not possible for them to meet in person as a group. The flexible nature of the online community proved helpful for them to participate in discussions because they did not have to be online at any specific time; that is, their communication with one another took place asynchronously.

In brief, the online community was in alignment with Fish’s (1980) theory of interpretive community. It was also supported by the social and distributed notion of professional learning. As Putnam and Borko (2000) write, “when diverse groups of teachers with different types of knowledge and expertise come together in discourse communities, community members can draw upon and incorporate each other’s expertise to create rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning” (p. 8). Such a community perspective on professional learning has been well-received by many teacher education programs (Gagné, 2009). Because “teachers learn much from each other,” professional “development approaches which build on collegial and collaborative work among teachers have become prominent in the discourse on school improvement and educational change” (Thiessen, 2001, p. 320). An online community was deemed appropriate for such collegiality and collaboration.

The decision to use the wiki-based online community was not inspired by technological determinism, which maintains that the tools and artifacts we use shape and dictate our thinking and activity, and that a given society’s development and cultural values are determined by its technologies. The bulk of research on the educational use of technology is based on this view of technological determinism (Oliver, 2011). A growing body of work,
which opposes this deterministic view, asks us to recognize that individual users always bring their own experience, knowledge, and understanding to the technology they use. Here, the user is viewed as an *active agent* capable of resisting the deterministic tendency of technology (Mason, 2016). Rather than taking any one of these positions that are based on the traditional structure-agency dichotomy, I am interested in technology’s role in mediation, especially when it comes to our relationship with the world. According to the strand of Science and Technology Study (STS) that I draw from, technological mediation is concerned with “the role of technology in human action (conceived as the ways in which human beings are present in their world) and human experience (conceived as the ways in which their world is present to them)” (Verbeek, 2006, p. 363).

To understand technology’s meditational role, Martin Heidegger’s analysis of the use of tools in human being’s everyday relationship with the world is a good starting point. As we see in the famous example of the cobbler’s hammer (Heidegger, 1962), a hammer as a tool is used in a specific relational context. Its uses are understood in relation to the nails and the sole of the shoe. It is necessary that the cobbler learns how to use the hammer. However, once the hammer is in use, it ceases to remain as an object-as-such. In other words, when we use the hammer “to drive nails, our focus is on the successful driving of nails…. Only when the hammer breaks do we focus our attention on the hammer itself, rather than the result for which it is normally used” (Dusek, 2006, p. 75). The hammer becomes part of the cobbler’s practical knowledge, which is more bodily than conceptual. The cobbler must learn how to use a hammer. However, once the hammer is in use, it is no longer an object; it becomes the means of the cobbler’s experience itself (Walters, 1995). For this reason, Ihde (1990)
Elaborating on his philosophy of technology, Ihde (1990) illustrates the role of tools and artifacts in our relationship to the world, the diversity of human-technology relations, and the non-neutrality of technology. A central theme in this philosophy of technology is that technologies are always culturally embedded. Ihde’s core argument is that human beings have always already left the Garden of Eden for a technically mediated world of some sort. We are homo technologicus by our very nature. Technology is not something added on after the fact…. Technology is as natural to human beings as language and culture; its specific content is historically contingent but it will always be found wherever there are human beings. (Feenberg, 2012, p. 1)

Ihde discusses a number of relationships that we can have with technology. Two of these relationships are pertinent to Verbeek’s notion of technological mediation that I am drawn to. The first one is the embodiment relation. This happens, for example, when I use a pair of glasses to look at the world. The world is perceived in a different way. In Ihde’s (1990) words, “I am aware of the glasses, but the focal phenomenon is the perceptual transparency that the glasses allow” (p. 94). Here, technology (the glasses) becomes an extension of the human body (Verbeek, 2006). The second relation is hermeneutical. In this relationship, technology provides us with a particular representation of the world, which requires interpretation. For example, “reading off a thermometer does not result in a direct sensation of heat or cold but gives a value that requires interpretation to tell something about reality” (Verbeek, 2006, p. 365). This mediational role of technology is what attracted me the most while designing the wiki-based online community.
**Engagement with research:** In the online community, the participants read and responded to an article by Stribling, DeMulder, and Day (2011). This article\(^2\), published in an open-access online journal, reported on a qualitative study that had engaged 57 K-12 teachers in community-based critical literacy practices. The goal of the study was “to support teachers’ professional development of dispositions and capacities that promote social justice and civic responsibility both in and through school practices” (Stribling, DeMulder, & Day, 2011, p. 22). In the Stribling et al. study, teachers had spent a day in the community where their students lived. One year later, they returned to the same communities for further exploration. The first community engagement activity was called “The Community Walk,” and the second was called “The New View Walk.” After each “Walk,” teachers wrote reflective journals and shared their learning with others. Stribling, DeMulder, and Day (2011) found that through their community exploration activities, the teachers “gained enhanced awareness of social inequalities [and some of them] made connections between the observed community disparities and their civic responsibilities to work towards social justice” (p. 21).

At the beginning of the wiki project, I shared the Stribling et al. article with the participants and invited their opinions about it. I also asked them to share any suggestions for another article. All participants wanted to move ahead with this article. Ultimately, this article was chosen for four main reasons. First, engaging teachers in community-based critical literacy practices is a useful approach to in-service teachers’ professional learning. Second, the article provided practical implications for my participants in the sense that they

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\(^2\) The article is not included in this dissertation because it is an open-access article freely available on the World Wide Web. DOI: 10.9741/2161-2978.1051 URL: http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1051&context=jpmec (Accessed: July 10, 2016)
could organize community-based activities in their own contexts for their professional learning. Thus, the article qualified as educational research (Whitty, 2006). Third, the article reported on a qualitative inquiry. Because qualitative research is often marginalized in knowledge mobilization activities (as discussed in Chapter One), I was committed to providing qualitative research. Finally, the article was published in an open-access journal; therefore, accessing it was not a barrier for the participants. A lack of access to subscription-based journals has been identified as a major barrier to teachers’ engagement with research (Borg, 2009). Schools generally do not subscribe to journals of educational research because they are expensive. Due to corporate publishing and knowledge capitalization, the prices of research journals are increasing dramatically. Paradoxically, access to research is a real problem in a time when policymakers often talk about the “knowledge society.” To address this problem, open-access journal publishing has been a fruitful initiative (Willinsky, 2006). Open-access journals are published online and anyone can download and read them free of charge. For this reason, selecting an open-access journal article seemed to be appropriate for this research project.

Sources of data: Data were collected from two sources: participants’ threaded discussions on the wiki forum (mentioned above) and individual in-depth interviews. First, all participants read the article and shared their responses to it through threaded discussions on the wiki. Wikis are very helpful for exchanging ideas and collaborating with others (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001). For the purpose and theoretical underpinning (i.e., interpretive community) of this research project, wiki appeared to be an important source of data. As a collaborative research site, a wiki may provide a rich source of qualitative data. Through information from discussion boards that operate in parallel with the collaborative editing and personalized information
found on individual user pages, researchers can examine the discussion and rationale that supported particular collaborative features and decisions over time. (Kane & Fichman, 2009, p. 3)

Inspired by the above argument, the wiki was named TIDER (teachers’ interpretive and dialogic engagement with research). This was a closed group; that is, the contents of the wiki were viewable only by the members of the group. After participant introductions and initial discussions about the aims of the project, the Stribling, DeMulder, and Day (2011) article was shared among the members. The wiki site was open for six months (June – November, 2014). The first discussion was posted on June 9, 2014 and the last one was on October 1, 2014. While the participants were free to initiate discussions about any topic, the threads of discussion that I created were based on the triple crisis conceptual framework. For example, in one of my discussion prompts, I invited the participants to respond to the “crisis of legitimation.” They were asked to think about the credibility of the researchers’ findings and claims, and to share whether or not they found the claims acceptable. For each discussion thread, the participants were encouraged to share opinions about the article and respond to each other’s comments. All their posts and comments were collected for analysis.

The use of wiki was not without challenges. As Clare Brett’s (2009) work suggests, “while wiki technology offer[s] the possibility of distributed and shared [learning]…this kind of activity departs significantly from the existing individualistic culture of learning, creating difficulties in adapting to this new environment” (p. 287). Wiki requires a shift from individualistic to collaborative ways of thinking, learning, and sharing. Fortunately, all twelve participants were proficient users of Web 2.0 technologies such as wiki. If they were not, they would not have agreed to participate in the study because the wiki feature of the study was clearly mentioned in the Call for Participants.
The second source of data was individual in-depth interviews. The participants were interviewed towards the end of the wiki project because the goal was to better understand their wiki discussions and any patterns that had emerged from them. Thus, the questions that I asked the participants during the individual interviews were informed by and/or derived from their wiki discussions (for a sample of interview questions, see Appendix III). Of the twelve participants, eight were available for interview. Of these eight, one participant was interviewed face-to-face. The other seven were located in geographically distant regions; for example, Caroline was in British Columbia and Adam was in Texas. Therefore, I offered them online interviews via Skype because it appeared to be cost and time effective. Four of them were able to give their interviews via Skype. Recording software named Callnote was used to record the Skype interviews. The duration of each interview was 60 – 90 minutes. Three of the participants were travelling and were not available for the Skype interview. They sent me their responses to the interview questions in word documents through email.

Through these interviews, I sought deep understanding held by the participants who were “the real-life members of or participants in” the phenomenon that the study aimed to explore (Johnson, 2002, p. 106). These interviews were inspired by Gadamer’s (1975/2013) notion of conversation, according to which,

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion. (p. 375)

Thus, Gadamer underscores that a genuine conversation requires respect, open-mindedness, and willingness to risk one’s own pre-understandings. In these conversations, I envisioned my role—metaphorically—as “a traveller on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48).
Analysis of data: Following Miles and Huberman (1994) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), I returned to my conceptual framework to make sense of the data collected from the sources mentioned above. This return was helpful to deal with data overload and to identify segments of data that were relevant to the purpose of the study. Two methods of coding were used to select and analyze the data: descriptive and interpretive. Based on Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) triple crisis framework, three master codes were created: REP (representation), LEG (legitimation), and PRA (praxis). These master codes were used for descriptive purposes; that is, to attribute a concept and a phenomenon to a segment of data. In other words, these master codes were useful to identify central concepts and ideas in the data gathered from the participants (Glesne, 2014).

Once the descriptive coding was completed, the data needed to be interrogated, which required “the process of moving from coding to interpretation, that is, the transformation of the coded data into meaningful data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 47). Yet, the chunks of data identified through descriptive coding “entail[ed] little interpretation” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). Therefore, an interpretive analysis of the data was performed. My interpretive approach to understanding the data, i.e., an “analysis of what is to be made of them” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 46), was based on the hermeneutic tradition mentioned above.

The purpose of this interpretive work was to understand, rather than explain, the participants’ responses to the research text. What does the word understanding mean when it is used in a hermeneutic sense? One way to conceptualize understanding is to put it in opposition to knowing. As Schwandt (1999) writes,
To understand is literally to stand under, to grasp, to hear, get, catch, or comprehend the meaning of something. To know is to signal that one has engaged in conscious deliberation and can demonstrate, show, or clearly prove or support a claim. (p. 452)

From a hermeneutic perspective, understanding is a process of learning. It is not the act “of an individual conscious mind but enactments, performances, or a kind of praxis” (Schwandt, 1999, p. 455). Moreover, understanding is relational; it is not contained within the individual. Because of its relational nature, “understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with that which challenges our self-understanding” (Schwandt, 1999, p. 458). Finally, understanding always entails the possibility of misunderstanding. The open-endedness of conversations required for hermeneutic understanding poses the challenge of misunderstanding. As Gadamer (1975/2013) writes, “a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct.... No one knows in advance what will ‘come out’ of a conversation” (p. 401). In this light, when understanding is sought through genuine dialogues, it becomes “an unrehearsed practical-moral adventure with no way of predicting how it will turn out or what will turn up” (Schwandt, 1999, p. 461).

The participants’ threaded discussions on the wiki and individual interviews provided me with texts, which I attempted to understand hermeneutically. Paul Ricoeur’s four dimensions of text were helpful in this endeavour. In two of his seminal books The Rule of Metaphor and Hermeneutics and Human Sciences, Ricoeur develops an approach to criticism based on four dimensions of text: formal, historical, phenomenological, and hermeneutic. In his introduction to A Ricoeur Reader, Mario Valdés presents a summary of these dimensions. According to the formal dimension, the text is the system of signs and rules of operation, and how they are related to each other. Analysis of the formal dimension is concerned primarily with how the text functions. Second, the historical dimension of the text is based on “the
basic presupposition that all texts and all readers are historical” and it points to “an undeniable dialectic of the historical ground of the text and the distinct ground of the reader” (Valdés, 1991, p. 27). Analysis of this dimension asks what the text speaks about. Third, the phenomenological dimension of the text is about the reader’s experience. Analysis of this dimension aims to reveal what the text says to the reader. Finally, the hermeneutic dimension of text, which is most relevant for this project, is concerned with self-understanding. This dimension underscores the “tension between the text’s autonomy and the assimilating force of the reader’s appropriation” (Valdés, 1991, p. 28). Analysis of the hermeneutic dimension asks: How has my world changed as a result of reading the text? The “reflective assessment” (Valdés, 1991, p. 28) of understanding that goes on in the hermeneutic dimension may be further understood by Gadamer’s concept of the hermeneutic circle.

The concept of the hermeneutic circle originated from ancient rhetoric and was later expanded by Schleiermacher and Dilthey. In general, the hermeneutic circle denotes that understanding the whole and understanding its parts are interdependent and necessary for the grasp of the meaning of a text/event/phenomenon. As Weinsheimer (1989) writes, “the hermeneutic circle is distinct from linear induction because not only do the parts lead to understanding the whole but also there must be an understanding of the whole prior to examining the parts” (p. 126). For Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and other proponents of conservative hermeneutics, the circle—movements between parts and whole—is “a necessary condition of interpretation, but the circularity of the process is only temporary” because “the interpreter can come to something approximating a complete and correct understanding of the meaning of a text in which whole and parts are related in perfect
harmony” (Schwandt, 2007, pp. 133-134). Thus, conservative hermeneutics uses the circle to extract the “true” meaning of texts/events.

However, Gadamer (1975/2013) departs from this view of the hermeneutic circle. He argues that conservative hermeneutics places the reader “within the writer’s mind” from where he/she is supposed to make sense of “all that is strange and alien about the text” (p. 304). Instead, Gadamer proposes an ontological view of the hermeneutic circle, which is always situated in a broader context. In other words, both the interpreter and the subject of interpretation are tied to a broader context and its traditions. In this sense, the circle is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 305)

Thus, the hermeneutic circle is not a method, in the strict sense of the term. It is rather an ontological approach to understanding. This ontological character of the circle asks us to conceptualize understanding as “an entering into—a participation in—an event of transmission [which] is perhaps the central insight of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics” (Risser, 1997, p. 74). The ontological hermeneutic circle maintains that the meaning of any phenomenon resides at the intersection between the whole and the parts. The interpreter is always influenced by his/her pre-understandings and belongingness to the tradition (history). The principal vehicle by which the interpreter participates in this belongingness is language (i.e., a relation of self-to-other). Hence, echoing Gadamer, we may say that understanding is always a historically and socially effected event.
Drawing primarily upon the concept of the hermeneutic circle as an interpretive lens, I did close readings of the data with the purpose of understanding how the participants addressed the triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis in the selected research text. In the processes of reading the data, there were two hermeneutic circles concurrently at work. First, the participants interpreted the research text from their own unique location in time-space, and then I entered into a dialogue with the participants’ interpretations. Thus, the interpretive analysis followed a circle of what Anthony Giddens (1993) would call *double hermeneutic*. In double hermeneutic, “two circles overlap to the degree that the researcher is able to live his or her way into the subject’s personal experience stories” (Denzin, 2002, p. 354). However, the circles do not overlap completely because the participant’s experiences are not the same as those of the researcher. Therefore, my acts of interpretation entailed “perceiving importance, order, and form” in everything I was learning from the arguments and stories of the participants (Peshkin, 2000, p. 9). The goal of this interpretive analysis was not to be able to explain methodically achieved knowledge (Dunne, 1993), but rather to deepen understanding of the phenomenon under study.

One challenge for using the hermeneutic circle as an analytic tool is that it may lead to infinite processes of going back and forth between the parts and the whole. In other words, when does the interpretation end? For this difficulty, some argue that the hermeneutic circle often becomes a “vicious circle.” Yet, hermeneutic philosophers such as Gadamer (1975/2013) and Ricoeur (1981) strongly defend the usefulness of the hermeneutic circle. A general agreement is that interpretation ends when one has reached a *good Gestalt*; that is, “when one has reached a sensible meaning, a valid unitary meaning, free of inner contradictions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 47). Following this agreement, the interpretive aim of this
project was to learn from the participants with a practical interest, rather than an abstract cognitive reasoning. This kind of understanding-learning was sought in order to look at the participants’ readings of the research text through new lenses (Moules, McCaffrey, Field, & Laing, 2015). Such lenses are important to understand “the interplay between the individual and the world” (Cooper, 1995, p. 245).

**Selection and presentation of data:** Due to the open nature of this qualitative inquiry, it accumulated a large amount of data. Therefore, a key analytical task was to select and sort the data. This was not simply a mechanical undertaking, but rather an interpretive one. Any decision to omit or re-locate data entailed making a judgement (Glesne, 2014). For example, in the following chapter, I use direct quotations from eight of my participants. To leave out quotations from the other four participants was an analytical choice of data reduction. This choice was made in order to present the key findings of the inquiry that relate directly to the triple crisis framework. This method of data organization and reduction was helpful because “our cognitive tendency is to reduce complex information into selective and simplified gestalts or easily understood configurations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The reduction of data was a moral choice because hermeneutical interpretation is not a pursuit of knowledge from a purely epistemological standpoint. Instead, interpretation is a practical and moral activity (Smith, 1992). For this reason, Gadamer (1975/2013) describes hermeneutics as a practical philosophy.

The decision to not use quotations from some participants does not imply that these participants do not make contributions to this inquiry. Two important themes emerge from the data collected from the four participants who are not featured explicitly in the Findings
chapter. The first theme is the accessibility and relevance of research. As one participant believes,

There is such a plethora of information out there but knowing where to find it and having the time to really sit down and peruse it with the attention that it deserves is very hard for teachers as we all well know. (Amelia, wiki discussion)

Another participant has a similar opinion about the accessibility of research. She thinks that

The biggest hindrance for teachers seeking out research is that most often research is written for researchers, not for practitioners. It becomes more of a challenge to find applicable, user-friendly information, and when teachers’ workdays are scheduled down to the minute, this added challenge steals away valuable time that could be better used interacting with quality research and directly impacting student need. (Scarlett, wiki discussion)

This opinion about the accessibility of research is also echoed in Jessica’s wiki posts. She adds that much of the research literature is, in her view, irrelevant to practitioners. She gives an example of a graduate course in which she had to read Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas. She “found these dead white European males utterly irrelevant to [her] classroom and staffroom practice. The ideas are interesting on a cool philosophical plane, but are entirely remote from [her] experiences in a multi-national school teetering on a financial brink” (Jessica, wiki discussion).

The second theme gleaned from this group of participants is what may be described as the marketization of education. The marketization project attempts to privatize education and turn it into a profitable venture. As Apple (2004) argues, educational reforms and regulatory practices that are based on neoliberal market ideologies do tremendous harm to students from certain social, cultural, and economic groups. This concern is expressed through the discussions of two of my participants. For example, Alison talks about her grief for what she sees as the market’s intrusion into education:
Although I started my career in a field other than teaching, education is my passion. It’s in the fabric of my being, part of who I am. I’m grieving for what is being lost as our state tries to turn educating students into a business. The deepest part of my grief lies with my at-risk kids who are being marginalized in this “new world.” (Alison, wiki discussion)

Alison’s grief echoes the concern raised by critical scholars such as Henry Giroux (2010), who thinks that the market models of education “reduce teaching and learning to reductive modes of testing and evaluation” (p. 709). The use of test scores to measure the quality of teaching undermines the transformative potential of teaching and learning. Another participant underscores this market force in education: “we all know that standardized testing is pretty much pointless and yet we all do it to have the power to fire teachers, give money to districts, and shape the future of our adolescents” (Amelia, wiki discussion). Such market-oriented reforms are likely to increase inequality in education. They push toward the establishment of universal mechanisms for social reproduction (Connell, 2013). While these two themes have their own merit for re-thinking educational research and practice, they do not directly relate to the triple crisis conceptual framework, which undergirds this inquiry. Therefore, they are not taken up in further detail in the Findings chapter of this dissertation.
Chapter Four: Findings (Or What I Have Learned from the Participants)

Before presenting the key findings, it is important to address the issue of legitimation in my own interpretation. As Charles Taylor (1985) asks, “What if someone does not ‘see’ the adequacy of our interpretation, does not accept our reading?” (p. 17). He suggests that we aim to make “clear the meaning originally present in a confused, fragmentary, cloudy form” (p. 17). But, it leads to a further question: “How does one know that this interpretation is correct?” (p. 17). Taylor’s answer to this question is that we try to show the reader that a particular interpretation “makes sense of the original nonsense or partial sense. But for him [sic] to follow us he must read the original language as we do” (p. 17). For me, one way of making sense of the findings is to put them in juxtaposition with my past experiences as a teacher. This process of juxtaposition involves “numerous occasions for interpolating and extrapolating, judgment-making and assuming, doubting and affirming” (Peshkin, 2000, p. 5).

I offer a hermeneutical invitation to readers to read my interpretations in a dialogical way in which we—the interlocutors—shall aim to understand the object of the inquiry with, and not against, each other’s perspectives. Furthermore, I do not make definitive claims based on my interpretations because, hermeneutically speaking, any interpretation is subject to multiple re-interpretations. Here, I follow Maxine Greene (1995) when she says:

My interpretations are provisional. I have partaken in the post-modern rejection of inclusive rational frameworks in which all problems, all uncertainties can be resolved. All we can do, I believe, is cultivate multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same. (Greene, 1995, p. 16)
Like Greene’s, my interpretations are provisional and they are meant to be dialogues with readers. As a hermeneutic inquirer, I deal “with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others, and ultimately of the whole” (Taylor, 1985, p. 18). Thus, the end of an interpretation could easily be the beginning of another interpretation. As the poet Gwendolyn MacEwen (2007) puts it, “the moment when it seems most plain / is the moment when you must begin again” (p. 92).

Below I present my interpretive synthesis of the participants’ responses to the research article of Stribling, DeMulder, and Day (2011). The synthesis comprises certain ways of reading research that I draw from one or more participants. Because reading is a socially-mediated and context-dependent practice, these participants, had they been in a different context, might have read the same text in different ways. Therefore, I do not intend to generalize their ways of reading to other participants or other teachers who did not take part in this study. The ways of reading research presented below suggest the varied and multiple ways in which the participating teachers interpreted the research text. Although the findings are presented following the order of the triple crisis framework as discussed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), it is important to note that the three crises occur neither sequentially, nor do they represent mutually exclusive domains.

Section One: On the Crisis of Representation

The analysis of data suggests that most of the participants viewed the research-based article (of Stribling et al.) as both a means of representation and a potential obstacle to it. They showed a generally positive attitude towards the article. They were willing to read and learn from it. Their ways of reading constituted an interpretive approach to understanding the
article and its implications. In short, the participants neither rejected outright nor accepted wholesale the knowledge claims made in the article. Rather, they drew upon their previous experiences to make sense of the article.

Below I describe their interpretive readings of the article, which make for what I describe as a *recognitive approach to representation*. This recognitive approach arises from the act of recognition by a relevant audience (i.e., teachers) and sheds light on research mobilization in the field of education. It also underscores the importance of audience recognition with regard to the representability of educational research and a dialogical approach to its dissemination and utilization.

The participants who viewed the article as a potential obstacle to the representation of the “real” world made their argument in two ways. First, they did a close reading of the article and identified a few places where they saw a crisis of representation. For example, one participant named Rosaline asked critical questions about what the participants of the Stribling et al. study had meant by certain statements. As Rosaline wrote on the wiki discussion forum:

> On page 10 [of the Stribling et al. article], a participant named Julia says: “It helped me realize that I wanted to change my classroom practices to meet the needs of all students.” I understand that taking action is important and I applaud Julia for thinking about changing her practices. But, how do I know about the “changes” in her practice? How does she want to implement these changes? Is change always better? On what conditions, will her changes be helpful for her students?

Thus, Rosaline used close reading as a strategy to make sense of the Stribling et al. article. From the hermeneutic perspective, Rosaline’s reading focused on the parts (the particular) of the research text as a way of understanding the whole (the general).
The second way of pointing to the issue of representation was to interrogate underlying assumptions about academic research. Some of the participants believed that it would be impossible to avoid the crisis of representation. As Noah wrote, “But this idea of representational crisis—I think it’s unavoidable. Simply, it’s part of the nature of conducting research in infinitely complicated and dynamic systems like education” (wiki discussion).

Yet, the majority of participants took an interrogative approach to reading the research text. Some of them interrogated the assumptions that the authors (Stribling et al.) made to establish knowledge-claims. As one participant said:

I also observe the obvious bias of the writers of the study as they evaluate the discoveries made by participants Anna and Nancy: “While it is a positive step for her to recognize the pride of community members, Anna needs to further examine” an assumption she makes about low income families, they say, as if Anna needs their approval to arrive at a correct place in her thinking. (Caroline, wiki discussion)

Such interrogative reading, as I interpret it, does not suggest a willing suspension of trust. Nor does it promote the indeterminacy of meaning from a radical poststructuralist perspective. This interrogation was not to disbelieve the author’s ability to name their participants’ experiences. Rather, it was used to question the knowledge-claims more deeply. The participants’ interrogative reading suggests a cautious skepticism about the representation of reality through written texts such as journal articles.

While some participants were concerned about the written form of communication as a potential obstacle to representation, others viewed it as a convenient means to representation. These participants were generally inclined to believe that the article had reflected the experiences of the study participants. They also argued that the journal article was the best available means for the researchers and their readers to have a meaningful
communication. By and large, these participants were willing to rely on the researchers to understand the experiences of the study participants. As one of them said,

> It’s like appointing a lawyer to represent you in the courtroom. It’s possible that your lawyer will say something that you wouldn’t say or mean. But you kind of have to trust your lawyer. As for the research article that we are talking about, I think we have to understand the issue as a “symbolic” representation, like, when an ambassador “represents” her/his country. (Maya, wiki discussion)

This participant’s analogy of the lawyer and the ambassador illustrates her opinion about the importance of an intermediary (i.e., text) with regard to representation in research. It also points to the importance of texts in the work of knowledge mobilization (Fenwick & Farrell, 2012). Furthermore, the participants who viewed the article as a means of representation were willing to accept the fact that something might be lost during the process of representation. As the following quotation suggests, “I think I’d probably agree with those people that said that this is probably not a crisis; and it’s just a natural way of the relay of information, that something will get lost in translation like that” (Adam, interview). This participant was not too worried about the problem of representation.

Viewing the research article both as an obstacle and as a means of representation, some participants showed interest in the article, drew upon their previous experiences, and interpreted the article and its findings. For Tania, the crisis of representation is like a bad customer experience, which gets circulated faster than a good experience:

> If you have a bad experience in a store, you will tell ten people; if you have a good experience, you are gonna tell three of your close family, friends, people you really like. So, if you discover something in your research, you share it.... And, it stimulates discussion, and that in itself is a worthwhile activity. (Tania, interview)

As this quotation indicates, Tania believes that in most cases educational research is helpful for practitioners. If a piece of research stimulates a discussion amongst practitioners, then it
has its educative value. Another participant named Caroline also echoed this point of view.

As she said:

> On the whole, I am less inclined to worry about the meta-thinking, the so-called crisis of representation and more inclined to applaud the efforts of these teacher trainers [researchers] to give their students some practical experience that prepares them to meet students and other members of the communities where these learners live and work. (Caroline, wiki discussion)

In this way, both Tania and Caroline appreciated the research reported in the article.

While the participants mentioned above were generally supportive of the research, the ones cited below made a case for interpreting its findings. For them, interpretation was necessary for the utilization of research in their local contexts of teaching. The following quotation illustrates how this participant listened to the researchers by reading the article but, at the same time, how she used her critical thinking and past experiences to make practical sense of the article:

> So I think we need to listen to what the researcher has to say about the participants, but we also have to think critically about the researcher’s claims and recommendations. Ultimately, I respect the researcher, but I make my own meanings of the researcher’s findings. And my experiences and my teaching context play important roles in my meaning-making. (Maya, wiki discussion)

Maya’s response was pointed particularly to Stribling et al.’s finding that after taking part in the community-based project, their participants demonstrated “a strong commitment to reading the world in which their students live” (p. 28). While Maya appreciates this claim, its implications for her professional development are dependent on the context of her teaching. She argues that a community-based project like the one employed by Stribling et al. may not be possible in the socio-material context of her school. The importance of context in teachers’ reading of research is further discussed later in this chapter.
Like Maya, Anna-Nicole also underscored the importance of interpretation while reading research articles. She did not expect to learn everything about the study reported in the article. Instead, she trusted the researchers’ synthesis of the key findings. As she wrote, “I think they [the researchers] synthesized everything and added their personal interpretation of it. This is what I expect from a case study. When reading it, I make my own interpretation and I decide if and how I am going to use it” (Anna-Nicole, wiki discussion). Thus, both Maya and Anna-Nicole highlighted the importance of taking an interpretive approach to reading educational research. Such an approach entails an interrogation of knowledge-claims made in research texts. Here, interrogation does not suggest a distrust in the research text and an indeterminacy of its meanings. Rather, the interrogative reading asks the reader to draw upon his/her past experiences as well as to read research texts against the contexts of their work.

**Rethinking representation in educational research:** As discussed in Chapter Two, the work of representation involves at least four parties: an intender, the person/object/phenomenon to be represented, something by which it is represented, and the person(s) to whom representation is addressed. In the case of this study, Stribling, DeMulfer, and Day (2011) intended to represent the experiences of their research participants through their journal article to the participants of my study.

The findings of this study suggest that the work of representation comes to fruition if and when it is recognised as such by the audience to whom representation is addressed. This observation speaks to a struggle for recognition, which is one of the most fundamental problems in our social and political affairs. Hegel (1977) was among the first philosophers to give a serious treatment to the concept of recognition. His famous account of the struggle for
recognition between the “master” and the “slave” demonstrates how people attempt to be recognized as certain types of individuals and with certain identities. Their relationships are often of dominance and submission wherein two individuals take extreme positions in opposition to each other. As Hegel (1977) wrote, “The recognition of self in its other at first presents itself in a one-sided form in which only the one side does the recognizing, and the other side is merely recognized” (p. 521).

In reference to this struggle for recognition, McBride (2013) asks an important question: “Who can bring a struggle for recognition to a conclusion by providing an authoritative account of which claims must be recognized” (p. 151)? It may appear that the government or the community may have the authority to impose a solution by making certain rulings on individuals’ social interactions. However, McBride (2013) argues that all norms rely on relationships of claim and recognition. For example, when a claim is addressed to me, it may fail if I do not understand its nature, purpose, or potential outcomes. It may also fail when I understand the claim, but believe that I have defensible reasons to reject it. Therefore, McBride (2013) concludes that without “recognition from those to whom the claim is addressed, a putative norm cannot have authority for us” (p. 152). There is an inherent tension at the heart of this claim-recognition structure. As a member of a community, I cannot simply demand that everybody agree with my interpretation or judgement, but neither can others force me to endorse their interpretation.

The participants of this study addressed this issue of recognition in ways that may have important implications for educational research and policy. Not all of them recognized the article (Stribling, DeMulfer, & Day, 2011) as an accurate representation of the research participants and their lived experiences. Those who did recognize it as sufficiently
representative did so in multiple and nuanced ways. Their readings of the article also suggested that the research would become meaningful if and when they were able to recognize it as an “acceptable work” of representation. This may be further illustrated by an argument made in contemporary political theory. Among others, Rehfeld (2006) argues that

Political representation...results from an audience’s judgment that some individual, rather than some other, stands in for a group in order to perform a specific function. The audience uses a set of “rules of recognition” to judge whether a claimant is a representative in any particular case. (p. 2)

The work of representation becomes satisfactory when an audience for whom representation is intended accepts it as such. All participants of my study were a relevant audience of the research that they had engaged with, and most of them recognized the article as sufficient representation of the lived experiences of the people involved in that study. From the three common approaches to representation—reflective, intentional, and constructivist (Hall, 2013)—the participants chose the latter. They actively constructed the meaning of the article and used certain rules of recognition. For example, the article was deemed representational if it offered the participants either practical implications or simply a forum for discussions.

The work of representation is not realized solely by the claims of its intender, but rather through the recognition by its relevant audience. I was able to view the Stribling et al. article as representative of lived experiences only when my participants recognized it as such. Based on this observation, I recommend that the work of knowledge mobilization take a recognitive approach to the crisis of representation in educational research. At the heart of this recognitive approach is the principle of dialogue. As Taylor (1994) writes, the “crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character” (p. 32). Here, the emphasis is on the importance of entering into dialogues with others as a way of understanding ourselves through self-interrogation. Taylor’s thoughts echo the philosophical hermeneutics of
Gadamer. The act of “reaching an understanding happens in conversation, in a dialogue,” as Gadamer (2001) maintains that “our human form of life has an ‘I and thou’ character and an ‘I and we’ character, and also a ‘we and we’ character” (p. 79). This dialogical notion of self is important if we want to understand recognition’s workings in our personal and social lives. As McBride (2013) aptly puts it, “the reason we work out our sense of ourselves in dialogue with others is because we must respond to the ways others recognize us, whether we come to judge these ultimately as ‘misrecognitions’ or not” (p. 13). Others’ misrecognitions may provide opportunities for self-interrogation.

This dialogic approach to recognition is significant especially when educational researchers are called upon to disseminate their research so that it may have greater “impact” on professional practice. The recognitive approach to representation that I propose may also be helpful for the researcher’s self-understanding. When self-understanding is based upon recognition received from others, it gains credibility within a particular community. As Lynne Tirrell (1993) suggests, we gain access to a particular community’s “conceptual space” by using “a commonly shared and norm-governed language” (p. 3). Such an endeavour may help researchers to achieve “semantic authority” in order to articulate their experiences. The community’s recognition is vital in gaining such authority. Since it is the community that grants semantic authority, it can justifiably take it away (Tirrell, 1993). Drawing on Tirrell’s work, Strauss (2003) argues that recognition by others provides a better means to the formation of self-understanding because the latter is not “simply a matter of assertion, of looking into one’s heart and declaring oneself to be that which one finds there” (p. 37). In light of this argument, a recognitive approach to representation in educational
research leads to the researcher’s self-understanding, which should be helpful to access the “conceptual space” of the community of education professionals.

Section summary: The findings about the crisis of representation challenge the one-way transfer of educational research from universities to schools. While the proponents of the linear transfer model are concerned with bringing evidence-based “best” practices into schools in order to facilitate teachers’ professional development and students’ learning, we cannot be certain about the educative merit of research until we hear from the teachers to whom the research is addressed. For example, most of the participants in this study recognized the research as representative of the lived experiences of the teachers who had participated in the Stribling et al. study. Nevertheless, they were less inclined to accept the knowledge claims as presented. Instead, they actively negotiated the findings of the study and constructed meanings that were relevant for them, in their teaching context. In other words, they took a constructivist approach to representation (Hall, 2013). The representation of “reality” was determined by and realized through the audience’s recognition (Rehfeld, 2006). Thus, the teachers’ recognitive approach to addressing the crisis of representation points to the importance of having dialogical exchanges between researchers and practitioners.

Section Two: On the Crisis of Legitimation

The qualitative researcher is not a disinterested, context-independent, and value-free observer. As Maxwell (1992) writes, “we cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience. Thus, it is always possible for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives” (p. 283). I believe that this also applies to the reader who tries to make sense of the reports of qualitative
research. This leads to the question of how the reader addresses and negotiates the crisis of legitimation. If multiple interpretations are possible, how does one choose from them? The key finding that I present in this section is that the participants used four primary ways of reading to address the crisis of legitimation in the research text. These ways of reading constitute what I call an interpretive-ecological approach to reading research. This approach calls for a critical context awareness and resists the now dominant instrumental view of reading and utilizing educational research. One aspect of the instrumental view is that it attempts to universalize research findings by ignoring the crucial role that local contexts and cultures play in teaching and learning. This is reflected in the activities of many intermediary organizations that broker university-based research to advance their own policy agendas (see, for example, Jabbar, La Londe, Debray, Scott, & Lubienski, 2014).

**Reading as interrogation:** The first way of reading is reading as interrogation. Most participants interrogated the assumptions that the authors (Stribling, DeMulder, and Day) made to establish knowledge-claims (epistemology), to present certain images of teachers’ learning in reference to their being-in-the-world (ontology), and to appeal to the functionality and the usability of research findings (teleology). As one participant said:

On the one hand, it stands to reason, as the conclusion states, that teachers gain valuable experiences through the community walk, carried out twice with an interval of study between. Yet on the other hand, who gives these researchers the right and authority to approve or disapprove of the way the teachers “read the world?” Asking such critical questions about what these authors say definitely raises issues of legitimacy and validity. (Caroline, wiki discussion)

Such interrogative reading did not suggest a lack of trust in the authors’ findings and claims. Rather, the participants used what Cooper and White (2006) describe as “the power to question more deeply” (p. 8). Such deep questioning was different from what is called
reading as resistance (Wallowitz, 2004). The participants’ interrogative reading was more in line with the notion of reading as a social practice. In this kind of reading, the reader reads as a text-critic and asks questions such as “What is this text trying to do to me? In whose interest? Which positions, voices, and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?” (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 214). As a text-critic, Caroline drew from her repertoire of experiences to assess the legitimacy and validity of the article. She was willing “to believe things that seem to follow common sense and those that feel congruent with [her] life experience” (wiki discussion).

From a hermeneutic perspective, every text is addressed to its readers. Both the original readers and the interpreters of the text are expected to respond to the text in particular ways. For example, an interpreter might perform “the task of mediating between then and now, between the Thou and the I” (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 342). One of Gadamer’s criticisms of modern scientific scholarship is that it “methodically eliminates the influence of the interpreter and his [sic] time on understanding” (p. 342). Caroline’s interrogative reading seems to be aligned with Gadamer’s hermeneutics because she brings her life-experiences to her understanding of the research text. In this kind of reading, the interpreter not only answers the questions posed in the text, but also interrogates his/her own answers. Such interrogative reflexivity “focuses us on an examination of how we impose meanings on texts and the ways in which we fail in our impositions” (Eppert, 2000, p. 227). During her interview, Caroline alluded to this interrogative reflexivity by using the word “re-think.” She said that she would re-think her understandings of research findings in light of her experience. If something was not congruent with her experience and emotions, she “would then resist applying it” (Caroline, interview). She further emphasized that she could
not be formulaic about her understanding because teaching and learning are about people and relationships, and these relationships require knowing the other as much as knowing ourselves.

**Reading as dialogue**: The second way of reading that some participants utilized is what I describe as *reading as dialogue*. In this conceptualization of reading, the validity of research findings is not something given, but it is achieved through dialogues between the author and the reader. It requires the reader’s openness to the text, yet such openness does not exclude the eye of a text-critic mentioned above. What Anna-Nicole said with regard to the crisis of legitimation may be illustrative here: “I wouldn’t call this ‘crisis.’ Open-mindedness and critical thinking are enough to solve the problem. Whatever the research and whoever the author, teachers should check carefully if they can work with those ideas inside their real classrooms” (Anna-Nicole, wiki discussion). The way this participant interpreted the research text may be called reading for dialogic validity. Such reading begins without presuppositions and is built upon cognitive flexibility. In her interview, Anna-Nicole elaborated on her notion of open-mindedness that she had discussed throughout her threaded discussions on the wiki. As she explained,

> I read what the article says and I trust the fact that the author has some reasons to believe that. When I speak about open-mindedness I mean clearing your mind of all preconceptions regarding the author or the topic. When I speak of critical thinking I mean judging the article comparatively within the frame of your own experience and within the frame of other papers written on the same topic. (Anna-Nicole, email interview)

Anna-Nicole’s reading strategy was echoed in another participant’s opinion when he said, “To overcome the crisis of legitimation, I think the teacher should resort to critical thinking,
[which] could help the teacher make a decision about what is good for students” (Kyle, wiki discussion).

I illustrate this critical-thinking approach to reading research in light of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue. As a literary critic, Bakhtin contrasts the novels of writers such as Leo Tolstoy to those of Fyodor Dostoevsky. He calls the former monologic novels because the voices of their characters are subordinate to the authoritative and controlling voice of the author. In contrast, Dostoevsky’s novels are dialogic because his characters are free to speak with independent voices and these voices create a polyphony of multiple valid voices. For brevity’s sake, I choose one of Bakhtin’s central concepts, the surplus of seeing. In a basic sense, this concept means that every individual’s place in the world is unique and irreplaceable because it enables him/her to see something that others cannot see from their place. In Bakhtin’s (1990) own words,

For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he [sic], from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of object and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. (pp. 22-23)

Because each individual is situated in a distinct setting and because the researcher’s propositional knowledge is different from the teacher’s practical knowledge, interpretation of research-text requires a dialogic reading. In such reading, each individual can make a contribution to the surplus of seeing, as each one of them can offer new insights from their situatedness in a unique time-space (Kazan, 2005). Anna-Nicole’s and Kyle’s readings are indicative of such a dialogic approach to reading research. It allows practitioners a space where they may feel free—like Dostoevsky’s characters—to speak with their own
independent voices while engaging in a dialogue with the researcher through the research text.

**Reading as drawing upon prior experiences:** The third reading strategy employed by some participants was to draw upon past experiences. The term “past experience” is used in its broadest possible sense. It includes teachers’ personal and professional histories that encompass their learning to become a teacher as well as their experiences of being a teacher. As one of the participants stated, “Your background, your experiences, whether that’s just knowledge gleaned from a degree program or your experiences first hand in an educational setting is what determines the choices you are going to make” (Noah, interview). Thus, Noah’s past experiences play important roles in the decisions he makes while reading and interpreting educational research. During the interview, Noah reflected on his past teaching experiences in Japan. For example, he recalled that teaching debates to Japanese students was difficult at times. Due to certain cultural norms, most of his students did not feel comfortable to give strong personal opinions. However, Noah argued that this situation did not prevent him from providing the activity of giving opinions. As he explained:

The context that I am currently in limits my ability a little bit. I can’t say, “OK, what do you think about this?” But, I know that it is a good activity, so I will try and find ways around that such as I will draw upon my experiences as a kindergarten, elementary school teacher. And the fact that they really require structured activities, scaffold activities to sort of build up to that opinion…. (Noah, interview)

Thus, Noah drew upon his past experiences of teaching kindergarten students and designed structured activities that were helpful for his Japanese students to learn debating and giving personal opinions. He applies the same lens of past experiences to reading research text. In other words, he puts the article’s claims and recommendations against his own past

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While Noah’s assumption that giving opinions is the “right” way may be interrogated from a cross-cultural perspective, my focus in this section is on how he drew upon his prior experiences.
experiences to evaluate their validity. He believes that “the past certainly serves as a good mirror, a good tool to reflect on where we’ve been, and where we’ll be going” (Noah, interview).

According to the hermeneutic framework that informs this inquiry, past experience is an important determinant of how we interpret any text or phenomenon. When Gadamer (1975/2013) views understanding as “a historically effected event” (p. 310), he asks us to “recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work” (p. 312). Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics suggests that our understanding is not merely a subjective act; rather, it emerges from our participation in an event of tradition, i.e., “a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated” (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 302). Gadamer’s central thesis is that “it is historical life, not logical consistency, which is the final arbiter and ground of truth” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 59). In this sense, our past experiences both facilitate and limit our understanding of the present and our projection about the future. Noah’s ways of engaging the research text invite me to view his reading as a historically effected event. Turning to personal and professional histories played a facilitative role in his making sense of the research text.

Reading as attending to contextual circumstances: The fourth way of reading was to keep the context in mind. Stribling, DeMulder, and Day (2011) concluded that “for the majority of [participating] teachers, critical literacy practices had a strong impact on the ways in which they viewed their school communities” (p. 30). The majority of my participants agreed that community-based activities such as the ones employed in the Stribling et al. study would be helpful for them to understand the context where their students lived. They also believed that this kind of understanding might help them become more effective and
justice-oriented educators. However, the participants raised concerns about the vagueness in the claim made by Stribling et al. For instance, one participant in the Stribling et al. study named Julia said that the community approach to professional learning “helped [her] realize that [she] wanted to change [her] classroom practices to meet the needs of all students” (p. 30). Three participants of my study argued that such a claim lacked specificity about “change.” For this reason, they did not consider Julia’s suggestion to be meaningful for their professional learning and work.

Furthermore, Stribling et al. believed that the Freirean process of “reading the word” and “reading the world” that they utilized in their study allowed the participants “to more deeply examine the context in which their students live and learn” (p. 31). My participants did not disagree with this statement, but they used their own context to interpret the meaning of such statements. One participant said that “a claim seems valid to me as long as I can make some meanings that are sensitive to me as a teacher and to the context where I teach” (Maya, wiki discussion). Similar to Maya, Anna-Nicole also underscored the importance of context: “I think the teaching context is very important because, even if you understand research findings, you cannot use them if they do not match your context: students, books, living area, type of school, financial means and so on” (Anna-Nicole, email interview). Both of these participants conceptualized context in a broad sense. They referred to social, cultural, and material circumstances when they talked about context. This is further illustrated in Maya’s interview:

As I’ve already mentioned, each context is unique. I can’t possibly “copy” an instruction model and a best practice from another context and simply “paste” it onto my context. Also, some contexts are more supportive of research engagement than others. A lack of appropriate resources is a big barrier to accessing, reading, and utilizing educational research. (Maya, email interview)
Such a context-based approach to reading research is aligned with Fish’s (1980) reader-response theory. Speaking of “the context or contexts in which we find ourselves operating,” Fish describes meanings of text “as the products of contextual or interpretive circumstances and not as the property of an acontextual language or an independent world” (p. 268).

A rich body of empirical work suggests that context is a very important factor in understanding teaching and learning. A general agreement is that good teachers always interpret research-based evidence in accordance with their teaching contexts. Crandall (2000) summarizes that “studies of teachers attempting to implement…best practices reveal that teachers adapt them substantially to fit their specific teaching contexts” (p. 42). For example, Sharkey’s (2004) study, which investigated the role of social and institutional context in teacher learning, finds “that teachers’ knowledge of context served as a critical mediator in curriculum development in three principal ways: establishing trust and gaining access, articulating and defining needs and concerns, and identifying and critiquing political factors that affect teachers’ work” (p. 279). Based on these observations, Sharkey argues that we need to pay attention to contexts because “teachers consider a range of intricate contextual factors as they work to develop a conceptual framework that will inform their work” (p. 279). In a similar vein, Tavakoli (2015) finds that teachers generally acknowledge the usefulness of research; however, they “argue that it is learning as and through participation in the situated contexts of their CoP [Community of Practice] that gives them the ownership of knowledge” (p. 11). This line of work suggests that teachers draw upon their prior knowledge and contextual factors to interpret research findings, and that their membership to a specific community of practice plays important roles in their interpretive work.
While much of the literature on context is concerned with social and cultural factors in teachers’ life and work, four of my participants discussed another dimension of context, i.e., the materiality of context. As one of them argued,

My ability to interpret and use educational research always depends on the physical context of my work. For instance, can I have my students sit in theatre style? Can I go for a “community walk” to learn about the life of my students and those who live in the area? These are real issues for me. I think, most of the research-based suggestions will not have validity if they are not appropriate to my context. (Rosaline, email interview)

Thus, context is viewed from a broad perspective. It forms the setting for teachers’ learning and pedagogical work. Although the topic of context has been discussed in detail in the literature, it is often presented as a “supplement” to teachers’ individual agency. Fenwick, Nerland, and Jensen (2012) argue that

Despite theorists’ efforts to acknowledge the interplay of professionals’ learning with their environments, the emphasis always landed back on the individual practitioner, or more essentially the individual’s mind, as the hero of the learning story. Thus professional education and CPD [continuing professional development] continued, indeed continues, to reflect this individualist, subject-centric, psychological conception of knowledge and practice, despite recognition that these are distributed, material and relational. (p. 5)

The insights gleaned from my participants are generally aligned with the above argument. The context—broadly conceptualized as cultural, structural, and material—was closely related to the participating teachers’ interpretive work. Drawing from Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015), I suggest that teachers’ agency to read and interpret educational research be not “understood as individual capacity – as something that individuals have or don’t have – but as something that is achieved in and through concrete contexts-for-action” (p. 34). In this light, agency to read and utilize research is distributed between the teacher and the broader socio-cultural-material context.
Section summary: How did the participants address the crisis of legitimation? Based on the analysis of empirical materials, I conclude that they took an interpretive-ecological approach to validating claims and recommendations in the research text. The participants’ interpretive work was generally in agreement with the view that “validation [of research findings] is based on a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability, where it is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, and to arbitrate between them” (Kvale, 2002, p. 314). However, the hermeneutic challenge for the participants was to choose from a variety of competing interpretations. The participants used a number of strategies, or what Fish (1980) would call ways of reading, to perform their interpretive work and to evaluate the legitimacy of research. In this section, I have presented four of these strategies that the participants most frequently utilized. They are (a) reading as interrogation, (b) reading as dialogue, (c) reading as drawing upon past experiences, and (d) reading as attending to contextual circumstances. These ways of reading are built upon “the point of view of actual readers in concrete situations” (Schweickart & Flynn, 2004, p. 10). The ways of reading ask me to view teachers’ engagement with research as a sociocultural practice in specific material contexts.

Section Three: On the Crisis of Praxis

Praxis, conceptualized as making prudent choices (Gadamer, 2001) and as doing proper (Bernstein, 1971), involves an ethics of action. Here, the primary challenge is not to carry out the action, but to make choices about it. Making choices about pedagogical actions is particularly challenging because the acts of teaching and learning are highly uncertain. The issue of uncertainty becomes clearer when it comes to teacher’s adoption of research-based recommendations. Such a notion of uncertainty finds a succinct expression in Tania’s
interview. With regard to the applicability of the professional development model utilized in the research article by Stribling, DeMulder, and Day (2011), Tania said the following:

This is an interesting model…how applicable is it in our own situation? [pause] I don’t know…. But certainly, getting out in the field and getting teachers engaged in the community in a very direct and humane way can do nothing but improve their overall results. Now, whether or not the researchers were really trying to do that, what are their motivations? What is their goal? Are they trying to improve the teachers’ experience? Are they trying to improve the social lives of the students? Are they trying to create a bridge between the university and the community they serve? I don’t know! [pause] (Tania, interview)

I use the concept “pedagogy of uncertainty” to interpret Tania’s comments and questions. By pedagogy of uncertainty, I mean that the acts of teaching, learning, and developing are ambiguous, uneven, and unpredictable. These acts are uncertain because they are based “on human relationships” and they involve “predicting, interpreting, and assessing others’ thoughts, emotions, and behavior” (Helsing, 2007, p. 35). In this light, teaching, learning, and developing are inherently incomplete and always in-the-making. As Britzman (2009) writes, we often “forget that all of us are subject to the radical uncertainty of being with others in common and uncommon history and that this being with other beings makes development uneven and uncertain” (p. 27). In contrast with the Enlightenment’s “sure” ways of knowing, a pedagogy of uncertainty provides us with a “means by which we may see beyond what we think we know” (McDonald, 1992, p. 7). This uncertain nature of teaching and learning makes research-based praxis an extremely difficult project.

Making praxical choices in consumer capitalist times is harder than ever because consumerism has ushered in an era of abundance when mass-production provides consumers with endless choices (Lears, 1998). In this era, choice has become a right, and there “continues to be plenty of choice to be had” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 86). In this section, I
Present key insights about how some participants talked about making choices while reading and responding to the research article. To be clear, this inquiry did not observe how the participants carried out praxis in their classroom. Rather, it focused on their acts of reading and interpreting the article, and how such acts would have informed their praxis. Below I present a selection of interpretive readings that some of the participants employed while engaging the research text. Then I discuss how these readings constitute what I call an imaginative-ethical approach to addressing the crisis of praxis in educational research.

**Why is making choices so hard?** Making choices based on “true” meaning of texts is a particularly difficult task in late modern times, which Zygmunt Bauman (2000) aptly describes as liquid modernity. Making choices is difficult for a number of reasons. Two notable reasons are poststructuralism’s punch in the face of “true” and determinable meaning, and the unbridled rise of consumer capitalism. For a poststructuralist reader,

> A text is a chain of signifiers whose seeming determinacy of meaning, and seeming reference to an extra-textual world, are “effects” produced by the differential play of conflicting internal forces which, on a closer analysis, turn out to deconstruct the text into an undecidable scatter of opposed significations. (Abrams, 1999, p. 241)

A familiar question in the poststructuralist tradition is *where does meaning come from?* Linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure assert that meaning does not necessarily depend on the things or ideas that our language references. One of poststructuralism’s central arguments that “meaning is differential, not referential, has profound implications for our understanding of the relations between human beings and the world” (Belsey, 2002, p. 10). As human beings, we are distinct in our ability to make differential meanings. In the case of educational research, poststructuralism “offers a philosophical attack upon the scientific pretensions of social inquiry, including a critique of the very Enlightenment norms that educational research
typically prides itself on: ‘truth,’ ‘objectivity,’ and ‘progress’” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 4). A research text is potentially meaningful and its meanings are created differentially by readers through their worldviews and varying lived realities. As Greene (1994) would say, “the meaning of the work is emergent, an event associated with the activation of experience” (p. 211). Such a view of meaning does not privilege one way over other ways of reading. We simply have different ways of reading, even though we may subscribe to a particular community of readers.

The second practical difficulty is the abundance of choices in consumer capitalist societies. Contemporary consumer capitalism turns everything and almost every human activity into a profitable transaction in a competitive globalized marketplace. It turns inadequacy of things into guilt of overabundance. To this end, consumerist capitalism produces not only new goods, but also new desires and a false promise of satisfaction. The fuel of consumerism’s engine is the incipient desire on the part of the consumer to buy in an insatiable manner. While it promises greater satisfaction for customers, it actually works to institute dissatisfaction as a permanent condition. As Bauman (2008) fittingly puts it, “The realm of hypocrisy stretching between popular beliefs and the realities of consumers’ lives is therefore a necessary condition of the properly functioning society of consumers” (p. 170, emphasis original). The consumer culture that such hypocrisy nourishes changes people’s consumption habits. Now, the time between purchase and disposal is shrinking faster than ever. Longevity of use is shortened, as there are more choices in the marketplace. The choices have consequences for people’s sense of satisfaction. A perpetual search for what may satisfy the individual’s idiosyncrasies keeps capitalism’s wheels moving.
Universities are not free from the engrossing influence of consumer capitalism. Technological sophistication and free markets have provided universities with opportunities “for turning specialized knowledge into money” (Bok, 2003, pp. 13-14). One way of turning knowledge into money is “to commodify research and scholarship and then commercialize it as a profitable commodity” (Nixon, 2011, p. 11). Furthermore, in order to secure funds, researchers are now under tremendous pressure to frame their projects in ways that outline the potential impact of their research on economic growth. Caulfield and Ogbogu (2015) summarize the commercialization of university-based research and its potential risks:

- University researchers are facing increased political and institutional pressure to focus on commercializable research and to rapidly commercialize their research outcomes.
- The push or pressure to commercialize is ubiquitous, and is often presented as an unqualified social good that deserves unique governmental and institutional focus and support.
- There is growing evidence of potential risks flowing from or associated with the push to commercialize, but consideration of such risks are largely absent from policy statements and discussions. (p. 5)

In addition to this push for commercialization, research publication is linked to faculty members’ tenure and promotion. Various metrics and measures of research impact, such as citation counts, encourage them to publish and disseminate their research findings as fast as possible. As my participant Tania, quoted at the beginning of this section, mentions, we cannot be certain about the “actual” motivation and goal of the researchers. Whatever their goals might be, researchers contribute to an over-abundant supply of research. This goes back to the question of praxis: How do readers of research sort through the increasing supply of research-based recommendations and make choices that are good for themselves as well as for those for whom their work is intended?
While profusion of goods and greater ability to choose may be economically beneficial for some, this may lead to a moral crisis. As Bauman says, “A consumerist attitude may lubricate the wheels of the economy; it sprinkles sand into the bearings of morality” (Bauman & Donskis, 2013, p. 15). The market not only decreases people’s need to depend on each other—because goods are portrayed as more purchasable, controllable, and satisfying than people—but it also enables customers to draw arbitrary boundaries regarding their moral responsibilities for others. Bauman (2008) argues that:

It is now up to each individual to set the limits of her or his responsibility for other humans and to draw the line between the plausible and the implausible among moral interventions—as well as to decide how far she or he is ready to go in sacrificing personal welfare for the sake of fulfilling moral responsibility to others. (p. 51)

An illustrative example of the lack of moral responsibility to others is an accident that took place in 2011 in the industrial city of Foshan in Guangdong, China. A two-year-old girl wandered into a busy narrow lane and was run over by a van. The girl lay grievously injured for at least seven minutes. Recording of a closed circuit television showed that 18 passers-by ignored the toddler as she lay clearly visible on the street. None of them stopped to help her or call the emergency service providers (Foster, 2011). The lack of responsibility of the bystanders demonstrates the moral blindness that haunts contemporary human society, despite its unprecedented economic and technological developments. Bauman (2008) rightly observes that “the greater our individual freedom, the less it is relevant to the world in which we practice it” (p. 110).

As for the crisis of praxis in educational research in a consumerist age when the push for evidence-based practice is stronger than ever, I discuss how some of my participants
utilized particular ways of reading research. Collectively, I call these ways of reading an imaginative-ethical approach to the crisis of praxis.

**Reading as a tactic:** Before describing reading as a tactic, I shall briefly explain what I mean by the term “tactic.” In its ordinary usage, a tactic denotes an action or a strategy carefully chosen to achieve a specific goal. In the literature on research utilization, the word “tactic” has gained a special meaning. According to Carol Weiss (1979), the tactical model of research use shows how “research is used for purposes that have little relation to the substance of the research” (p. 429). For example, government agencies often appeal to research findings to justify their actions. In this model of use, research becomes a tactic in bureaucratic politics to carry out certain projects, to delay actions, or to deflect criticisms.

However, my use of the term tactic differs from Weiss’s notion. By tactic, I mean the complex ways of doing things in everyday life. These ways have very little to do with codified knowledge or generalized structures of performing certain tasks. In this sense, my notion of tactic is similar to Michel de Certeau’s. In his seminal work on people’s everyday practices, de Certeau (1984) makes a distinction between “strategy” and “tactic.” A strategy is a strictly prescribed involvement in power-relationships. It is institutionalized and feeds into political, economic, and scientific rationalization. On the other hand, a tactic is the subject’s redeployment of available resources—both discursive and material—to achieve a specific end. A tactic “does not have a place,” and it “depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). Manovich (2009) provides a helpful summary of de Certeau’s conceptualization of strategy and tactic:
The tactics are the ways in which individuals negotiate strategies that were set for them. For instance, to take one example discussed by de Certeau, a city’s layout, signage, driving and parking rules, and official maps are strategies created by the government and corporations. The ways an individual moves through the city—taking shortcuts, wandering aimlessly, navigating through favorite routes—are tactics. In other words, an individual can’t physically reorganize the city, but he or she can adapt it to his or her needs by choosing how to move through it. (p. 322)

Thus, the subject utilizes various tactics as tools for agency in his/her daily activities. It is difficult for the subject to pre-determine what tactics will be helpful in a particular situation. For this reason, de Certeau believes that the type and nature of tactics always depend on time.

A reading tactic that some of my participants mentioned is to have conversations with colleagues. This is different from “reading as dialogue” that I discussed in the previous section. Reading as dialogue involves multi-directional exchanges of ideas between the author of a research text, readers (teachers), and their colleagues. Such exchanges take place in material contexts with their unique cultures and norms. However, to have conversations with colleagues as a reading tactic is a way of understanding what is possible when it comes to research-based praxis. In her interview, Caroline discussed how having a conversation with colleagues might be helpful to read and utilize educational research:

To share the perspectives is incredibly helpful. So, if you had to read things, it would be most valuable I think, and you would be far more likely, I think, to use the information if you had had a conversation about it with colleagues. You know, even a person who was inclined to, and this might be me…to sort of dismiss it and say “Aha! More research! whatever! who cares?” And then if somebody else said, “But look at this! You know, this is this.” And then you start to see the relevance of the thing that you haven’t seen. (Caroline, interview)
While Caroline’s interview excerpt highlights the colleague’s role in seeing relevance of educational research, another participant points to the importance of having conversations in a deep sense. As she said:

I think dialogues are very helpful. But, dialogue—understood in a narrow sense—will not help. Too often, dialogues turn out to be a monologue. If people are open-minded and respectful to each other’s opinions—however different or radical they are, then I think dialogues will prove helpful. I also think that, for an activity such as engagement with research, schools need to create and support a platform for dialogue in a deep sense. (Maya, email interview)

While creating institutional supports for such dialogue does not fall under the scope of this dissertation, the participants quoted above believe that having conversations with colleagues is a good way of understanding how research may inform their praxis. This belief is further supported by another participant:

I think having conversations with colleagues is one of the most effective ways of professional learning. If I agree with them, then the agreement validates what I already knew and believed. But, disagreements are also helpful because, when somebody disagrees with me, they make me think more deeply about the issue at hand…. I also think that colleagues are at a better position to make judgments about the applicability of research-based recommendations because they work with the same student population in the same context. So, their advice, suggestions, as well as disagreements are helpful for my praxis. (Rosaline, email interview)

All three participants underscored the importance of having conversations with colleagues for making decisions about how best to utilize research-based recommendations. Thus, they pointed to what Brian Lord (1994) would call “critical colleagueship,” which aims to achieve “collective generativity—‘Knowing how to go on’ (Wittgenstein 1958)—as a goal of successful inquiry and practice” (p. 193).

However, the decisions that teachers make, based on their conversations, do not seem to be finalized once and for all. This observation brings me to what I call opportunistic
decision-making. This is perhaps best captured, albeit metaphorically, in the following interview excerpt:

The route suggested by Google is there, but if I find a better shortcut, why shouldn’t I take it? A lot of times, I think research is like a standard Google map but, as a practitioner, if I know a shortcut, I think I should take it, provided that it’s practical and helpful to me, and for my students. (Maya, email interview)

Another participant complemented this idea of “taking shortcuts” by saying that she always kept two things in mind while making decisions about utilizing research: context and students. The following excerpt highlights these two points:

I believe that each context is unique. If I read research that was conducted in a place that I have no idea about, then I have to interpret the meaning for myself. I think it will be a really bad idea to blindly follow any research findings. You have to be mindful of your own context and students. (Rosaline, email interview)

Thus, reading research becomes a tactic. How best to utilize research findings remains an open question and its answers are dependent on time and context. Decisions about research utilization seem to remain tentative, and they play out at the intersection between indeterminacy in such decisions and available opportunities. As Derrida (1999) would say, there is a certain degree of undecidability in every decision:

[T]here would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability. If you don’t experience some undecidability, then the decision would simply be the application of a programme, the consequence of a premiss or of a matrix. So a decision has to go through some impossibility in order for it to be a decision. If we knew what to do, if I knew in terms of knowledge what I have to do before the decision, then the decision would not be a decision. (Derrida, 1999, p. 66)

In short, reading research as a tactic suggests neither wholesale rejection nor blind acceptance of research-based recommendations. Rather, it involves opportunistic decision-making. This way of reading would require “teachers’ comfort with high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty” (Lord, 1994, p. 193).
Linking research text to personal knowledge base: The second way of reading is to link a research text to a personal knowledge base in order to make informed choices. In this way, reading research becomes a practice bounded by professional contexts and everyday circumstances. Before discussing how one participant did this kind of reading, it is important to briefly focus on the concept of practice. In the literature on human practice, two terms—person and culture—are generally emphasized. There is a tendency to catalogue correlations between these two terms and to view one as the function of the other. Discussions about practice have traditionally focused either on the individual mind or on the sociocultural structure. However, a growing body of work under the banner of practice theory challenges such dualistic—the micro/macro—view of human practice (see, for example, Schatzki, Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001).

Authors such as Donald Polkinghorne (2004) argue that we cannot possibly understand human practice through this dualism because people’s “everyday actions are less ordered and variable and do not conform to empirical generalizations or covering laws…. They are situation and time sensitive and determined by a logic that is different than scientific calculation” (p. 49). Therefore, Polkinghorne (2004) recommends that we shift attention “from person or culture to the interaction between them. Neither person nor culture determines the other, but practice takes place in their conjoining” (p. 49). For my participant, Noah, reading research becomes a practice occurring in such conjoining:

In our last discussion, I cited the concluding paragraph from the study, which basically claimed its importance on the grounds that it showed how a teacher’s awareness of students’ backgrounds and environments can be raised through reflective practices. Doesn’t this idea extend the boundaries? Even if the context of my teaching environment restricts the choices that I would like to make, praxis is what helps me overcome such boundaries and limitations. I believe that context informs, not determines, praxis. (Noah, wiki discussions)
This participant attempts to bring “situationally informed judgements” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 1) to his reading of research. This kind of reading opposes the instrumental view of reading that involves certain rule-following steps in order to extract the “true” meaning of the text and apply it to practice. As Noah further illustrates:

To answer Sardar’s question directly, this article added to my praxis, like another brick in the foundation of a building (why do we teachers love our metaphors so much). Can I revamp the way I teach based solely on this article? No. Rather, it adds to the collective knowledge base that allows me to make informed decisions—large and small—in my teaching. (Noah, wiki discussions)

In Noah’s reading, there is an endeavour to link the research text to his personal knowledge base while thinking about his praxis. Such an endeavour, as I interpret, makes him an informed reader rather than an ideal reader. The ideal reader is the one who is expected to extract the intended meaning of a particular text. He/she aims to know “what the text presupposes” and “to learn what the text is designed to convey” (Kay, 1983, p. 1). On the other hand, the informed reader, as conceptualized in Stanley Fish’s works, has a grasp of the language and conventions of the text and is “able to make the appropriate choices concerning possible connotations, implications, suggestions, and so on” (Bennett, 1995, p. 237). This concept of the informed reader brings us back to the question of making choices in a consumerist culture where choices are literally unlimited. While Noah links research text to his personal knowledge base as a way of making informed choices, Caroline (described below) develops an ethical approach to it.

**Reading research as taking responsibility:** The third way of reading research that I present here is to develop an ethics of reading, i.e., reading as taking responsibility for self and others. Before delving into this, I shall briefly outline what I mean by ethics. The term *ethics* attracts several competing meanings. Schweickart and Flynn (2004) discuss three
meanings of ethics that I find helpful. First, ethics asks us to distinguish between right and wrong. Second, it refers to “one’s relationship with an other, to considerations of one’s duty with regard to someone or something outside oneself” (p. 11). This view of ethics is perhaps the most dominant today. The third meaning of ethics, according to Schweickart and Flynn (2004), points to one’s relationship to self. This meaning of ethics resonates with Alasdair MacIntyre’s works and Michel Foucault’s idea of the care of the self. From this point of view, “To be ethical is to strive to cultivate the good in oneself and to live a good life” (Schweickart & Flynn, 2004, p. 11).

Ethics is mostly absent from the now dominant discourses of education. The trend of standardization and measurement of teaching and learning as reflected in “the current educational ideology impoverishes the language, thought, and practice of educators by making basic academic learning the end to which teaching and schooling are instruments” (Sanger, 2012, p. 294). However, as Elizabeth Campbell (2008) reminds us, teaching is an inherently ethical practice. Ethics in the teaching profession “cuts to the core of human relationships, speaks to the dependent vulnerability of students and the professional dedication and dignity of teachers” (Campbell, 2008, p. 377). In this light, what might an ethical reading of research look like? As discussed in the beginning of this section, there is an abundance of research, like everything else, in the consumerist economy, which is based on the “the cycle of ‘buy it, use it, chuck it out’” (Bauman, 2008, p. 147). In consumerism’s guilt of abundance, praxis informed by teachers’ reading of research may be challenged by a lack of attention and commitment to what is read. As Bauman (2008) would say, “The consuming life is a life of rapid learning—and swift forgetting” (p. 146).
In the face of such challenges of research-informed praxis, one of my participants developed an ethical way of reading research. Her view of reading as an ethical practice seems to be aligned with the second and third meanings of ethics that Schweickart and Flynn (2004) describe: one’s responsibility for the other and one’s relationship with self. Reflecting on her reading of the research text, Caroline said:

In the end, teaching is an art, not a science. And the overarching quest of the teacher who is called to the work is to become a better person and share this evolving character with others (students) as it develops. We need to return to our human roots, and have the courage to trust ourselves and bring openness to the teaching-learning situation, which is always evolving and always a two-way street. I believe the actions of the teacher trainers described in the article would encourage new teachers to broaden their horizons and question their assumptions. If they are taught and encouraged to do this before they take up their classroom responsibilities, it is reasonable to expect that, as these new teacher-apprentices develop their skills and their character, they will encourage and inspire their students to do the same. (Caroline, wiki discussions)

Thus, with regard to research-informed praxis, Caroline emphasizes that the teacher becomes a good person so that she/he can fulfil the moral duty for the other (in this case, students). This kind of ethical reading of research is opposed to an instrumental view of research-based knowledge in teachers’ professional learning and development. The instrumental view not only favours a linear model of research production-transfer-use, but it also requires that practitioners become ideal readers of research texts and extract the “true” meaning as intended by the researcher.

**Towards an imaginative motivation for ethical action:** In this research project, it was not my aim to observe how the participants actually applied their reading of research to their classroom activities. Yet, some of the participants’ responses to the question of the praxical crisis suggest that they nurtured an imaginative motivation for ethical action. The
three ways of reading, mentioned above, indicate a conceptualization of praxis that is informed by their everyday situatedness in a certain time-space that may enable or hinder the ability to do what is good and appropriate. By situatedness, I mean praxis taking place in the conjoining of the personal and the socio-cultural-material context. This is reflected particularly in Noah’s responses to the research text. For him, context is important, but so is his personal experience. As he reflected:

Instead of my current context defining the decisions that I am making, it’s sort of praxis built up over many years, and your current context serves you more experiences into your praxis.... Praxis [is] the decisions that I make based on my past experiences. (Noah, interview)

Noah’s response to the praxical crisis brings us back to the hermeneutical principle of understanding as a historically effected event (Gadamer, 1975/2013).

These participants’ ways of reading also suggest that they envision ethical praxis as imaginative and anticipatory. Their imaginative thinking signifies the potential for transformative work. As Greene (1995) writes, imagination enables us “to look at things as if they could be otherwise” (p. 19), and it “permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (p. 3). By imagining their praxis, the participants featured in this section expressed a kind of motivation for action, which would require adaptation of the research-based knowledge to new and unanticipated situations.

I should note that without observing the participants’ classrooms, I am not prepared to make definitive claims about their motivation. There are many factors that may contribute to the weakening of individuals’ work ethic (Habermas, 1975). When people become indifferent to the imperative to work, it gives rise to a crisis of motivation, which is one of the tendencies in late capitalism. Nevertheless, based on my understanding of the
participants’ reading responses, my tentative claim is that they would be willing to utilize research-based recommendations “as a tactical redeployment of available discursive (and material) resources” (Lynch & Herbert, 2015, p. 300). This is possible as long as research serves in the best interests of themselves and of their students. In this way, my participants’ motivation for ethical work is similar to Lynch and Herbert’s (2015) participants, who took an innovative, creative, and productive approach (from the ground) to a curriculum initiative that had come from above. Such motivation for ethical action is their response to the crisis of praxis in educational research.

From an Aristotelian perspective, “action (praxis) does not [always] mean deeds, events, or physical activity: it means, rather, the motivation from which deeds spring” (Fergusson, 1961, p. 8). Aristotle believed that action springs from two causes: character and thought. For example,

A man’s [sic] character disposes him to act in certain ways, but he actually acts only in response to the changing circumstances of his life, and it is his thought (or perception) that shows him what to seek and what to avoid in each situation. Thought and character together make his actions. (Fergusson, 1961, p. 8, emphasis original)

In this light, even though I did not observe the participants’ actual classroom activities, their imaginative motivation for an ethical approach to research utilization shows how they have addressed the crisis of praxis in the Stribling et al. article. Their imagination was not devoid of reality or the everyday circumstances of life. “As birds’ wings beat the solid air without which none could fly,” writes the poet William Carlos Williams (1970, p. 150), “so words freed by the imagination affirm reality by their flight.” In the case of my participants, the available resources—cultural and material—in their particular circumstances seem to be the “solid air” by which their imagination and motivation for ethical work would fly.
Section summary: The ways of reading that some of the participants employed constitute an imaginative-ethical approach to addressing the crisis of praxis in educational research. The first way of reading is to view research-based recommendation as an “opportunistic” tactic rather than as a rule-following strategy. The second way of reading is to draw a connection between the research-text and the personal knowledge base (pre-understandings) in order to make informed choices. The third way of reading is to develop an ethics of reading, which involves taking responsibility for self and others. These ways of reading research, in my interpretation, lead to the teacher’s imaginative motivation for ethical action. One may argue that imagination may not translate into action. However, concurring with Claudia Eppert (2002), I believe that human thoughts and imaginations “possess agency,” and, therefore, “they are not ethically neutral” (p. 99). They help us look at things and phenomena in particular ways, and the actions we undertake are never detached from our initial thoughts and imaginations.
Commenting on the interpretive nature of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 14) discuss four types of text that the qualitative researcher produces. The first one is called *field text* “consisting of fieldnotes and documents from the field.” The second is called *research text*, which consists of “notes and interpretations based on the field text.” The third text is named *working interpretive document*, which contains “the writer’s initial attempts to make sense out of what has been learned.” The final type is called *public text* “that comes to the reader.” An example of the public text is the journal article that the participants of this study have engaged with. Based on the insights gleaned from the participants’ reading practices, I think that a fifth kind of text emerges when the reader attempts to assign meanings to the *public text*. I call this *personal text*. The personal text is not a product of the idiosyncrasies of the individual mind. Rather, it comes into existence through the interactions between the individual reader and other members of the interpretive communities that the reader belongs to. Such interactions are influenced by the social-cultural-material contexts and the historical times in which the reading occurs.

**Modes of Professional Knowledge and Interpretive Reading of Research**

Professional knowledge is of a particular kind. It involves both propositional knowledge and practical wisdom. As Dennis Thiessen (2000) writes, “Teachers continuously engage, construct, or reconstruct their professional knowledge both in their spontaneous and often unpredictable interactions with students, and in their reflections and deliberations prior to or
following the events of classroom life” (pp. 528-529). Professional knowledge has various modes and contexts of use. Drawing upon H. S. Broudy’s work, Eraut (1994) describes four modes of knowledge use: replication, application, interpretation, and association. In the context of teachers’ professional learning, these modes are useful to understand how theoretical knowledge may inform practice. First, Eraut (1994) believes that replication of knowledge should be generally discouraged because the contexts of teaching and learning change so quickly that mindless replication is viewed as “unprofessional and unethical” (p. 28). Second, in the application mode of knowledge use, people try to translate knowledge into prescriptions for, or steps of, particular actions in particular situations. Oftentimes, application “implies working with rules or procedures, even if occasionally these are of one’s own devising” (p. 48). Third, the interpretive mode of knowledge use requires that the professional try to make sense of theoretical knowledge in order to make it useful. In this sense, it is “an interplay between theory and practice” (p. 29). Finally, the associative use of knowledge suggests that professionals make theoretical knowledge usable and communicable through reference to memories or images of previous experiences.

While applying these modes of knowledge use to teachers’ continuing professional learning, Eraut (1994) is concerned primarily with the interpretive mode. He argues that “teaching is too complex and unpredictable an activity for the replication of a blueprint or the application of a simple set of principles to provide a sufficient foundation for good practice” (p. 27). Our understanding of a certain phenomenon is shaped by how we interpret it. In other words, “perspectives or ‘ways of seeing’ provide the basis for our understanding of situations and hence the grounds for justifying our actions, but cannot be simply designated as right or wrong” (Eraut, 1994, p. 49). Like Eraut, I am concerned with the
interpretive mode of professional knowledge because the main purpose of this study was to explore how teachers make sense of research findings. In other words, how do teachers interpret the public text and make it a personal text?

As mentioned earlier, my conceptualization of interpretation is based on Gadamer’s (2013/1975) philosophical hermeneutics. His notion of the fusion of horizons is particularly helpful to understand the participants’ interpretive reading of the research text. In a very basic sense, a person’s horizon is his/her perspective upon the world. The horizon of one’s present is made up with one’s past experiences and prejudices. Partners of a conversation bring their own horizons and put them alongside each other. As Kim (2013) summarizes, “the horizon of self and that of others are continuously under adjustment through collision and empathic understanding, each person broadens his/her horizon while upholding differences” (p. 382). When we interpret texts, our own thoughts go into the construction of the meaning of the texts. In this endeavour,

the interpreter’s own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he [sic] maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly to make one’s own what the text says. (Gadamer, 2013/1975, p. 406)

Palmer (1969) presents a succinct overview of Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons, which is worth quoting at length:

The horizon of meaning within which a text or historical act stands is questioningly approached from within one’s own horizon; and one does not leave his [sic] own horizon behind when he interprets, but broadens it so as to fuse it with that of the act or text. Nor is this a matter of finding the intentions of the actor in history or the writer of the text. The heritage itself speaks in the text. The dialectic of question and answer works out a fusion of horizons. (p. 201)

The fusion of horizons reflects Gadamer’s view of a genuine conversation. The meaning of the text comes from a conversation between the reader and the author, yet the meaning that
emerges “is not only mine or my author’s, but common” (Gadamer, 2013/1975, p. 406). This kind of meaning is what gives shape to the personal text that I have mentioned above.

Gadamer’s fusion of horizons enables one to view the meaning of research text from an interpretive perspective. However, the hermeneutical principle does not solve the interpretive problems once and for all. As Ricoeur (1979, p. 91) writes, “if it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal and may be assimilated to so-called ‘rules of thumb’” (emphasis added). This brings us to the question of how we choose from competing interpretations of a particular text. In the case of teachers’ professional learning, Eraut (1994, p. 27) asks a similar question: “On what grounds does one select from a large number of possible interpretations?”

Two of Ricoeur’s key terms—guess and validation—are helpful to address the above question. Ricoeur (1979) argues that we begin our work of interpretation with initial guesses. Guessing is necessary because we cannot be sure about the meaning of the whole text without understanding its parts; yet, “the configuration and relationship of all of the constituent parts of the text can never simultaneously be revealed” (Gardner, 2010, p. 82). Additionally, it is well accepted that a text can be read from different perspectives; therefore, the kind of one-sidedness involved in any act of reading “confirms the guess character of interpretation” (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 90). However, it leads us to a further question: how do we differentiate good guesses from bad ones? Ricoeur (1979) thinks that “there are no rules for making good guesses. But there are methods for validating guesses” (p. 89). To test our guesses, we need to follow certain procedures of validation. These procedures, according to Ricoeur (1979),
are closer to a logic of probability than to a logic of empirical verification. To show that an interpretation is more probable in the light of what is known is something other than showing that a conclusion is true. In this sense, validation is not verification. Validation is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedures of legal interpretation. It is a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability. (p. 90)

This logic of qualitative probability was helpful to understand the fusion of horizons—between the horizons of the teachers and the horizons of the researchers—that took place in the acts of reading the research article. It was also helpful to interrogate my own interpretations of the participants’ interpretive readings.

Teachers’ Ways of Interpretive Reading and the Triple Crisis in Research

As discussed in the previous chapter, participants’ responses to the research text were varied. While some saw the research text as a potential obstacle to representation, others saw it as a convenient means. The majority of the participants took an interpretive approach to understanding the research text and its implications. Their interpretive readings—in the light of Ricoeur’s (1979) guess-and-validation argument—suggest that the act of representation in research texts is provisional. Representation is contingent upon the reader’s interaction with self (involving past experiences and what Gadamer would call “prejudices”) and others. An important insight learned from the participants’ readings is that the work of representation cannot be understood without the recognition from an appropriate audience. This recognitive approach to representation is aligned with Rehfeld’s (2006) view of political representation: “The Audience is the relevant group of people who must recognize a claimant as a representative, and the relevance of the group will always depend on the particular Function of a case of representation” (p. 5). In the context of my study, the relevant audience is the
teachers who have read the research text in order to learn from those represented through the text.

The work of knowledge mobilization described in Chapter One may benefit from this recognitive approach to representation. The current literature suggests that the representability of educational research is being claimed by the enthusiastic proponents of evidence-based practice. However, very little is known about how disseminated research may become meaningful for pedagogical practice, especially from teachers’ point of view. As discussed earlier, the work of representation is not only about the claims made by the intender, for example, the ministries of education or knowledge brokers. We will have a better understanding of the representability of educational research and its educative worth for teachers’ professional learning if teachers recognize it as sufficiently representative. Such a recognitive approach to representation may shed new light on the “what works” agenda because a recognitive understanding is grounded in “individuals’ affirmation simultaneously of their interdependence as social members and independence as authoritative agents” (Anderson, 2009, p. 2).

One of the dominant methods of knowledge mobilization within the “what works” movement has been the transfer of research-based knowledge to practice contexts such as schools. This is evident in such initiatives as the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). By reviewing “high quality” research, WWC aims “to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions” (WWC, 2015, para. 3, emphasis original). Most activities under the banner of knowledge mobilization are “designed to translate cutting-edge research into action-based practice that informs teachers and school communities as they seek to enhance student achievement and well-being” (Parr &
Much has been said about how the transfer of research may occur (Randi & Corno, 2007). However, as the findings of this study suggest, a linear model of research transfer, from the context of production to the context of utilization, may not be helpful because such a model of transfer does not take into consideration how relevant audiences (for example, teachers) recognize the research being transferred. Without addressing the complexities and nuances of audience recognition, a transfer model of knowledge mobilization may present what Cain (2015a) describes as “a narrow view of research,” which will “lead people to expect research to have direct and simple impact on practice” (p. 506).

Unfortunately, this narrow view of research dominates much work in the field of knowledge mobilization. The image it paints “assumes that researchers do studies, developers translate study findings into products and packages (such as new curricula), the products are delivered to schools, the schools adopt the products, and education is improved” (Atkinson & Jackson, 1992, p. 13). Therefore, a cognitive approach to the crisis of representation should ask those interested in the evidence-based practice movement to re-think the transfer model of knowledge mobilization. In regards to this re-thinking, the concept of knowledge transformation may provide a way forward (Carlile, 2004). The transformation of research knowledge may happen when teachers test the researcher’s propositional knowledge against their own experiences and, thus, construct personal pedagogical knowledge that is meaningful for them, in their teaching context, and at the present time (Cain, 2015a). Such transformation of research knowledge would require reciprocal recognition from both researchers and practitioners. The narrow view of transfer does not seem to nurture the culture that would support such reciprocity. As some of my
participants’ ways of reading suggest, the work of research dissemination and utilization needs to furnish the stage where reciprocal recognition from both educational researchers and practitioners may play out.

I note that the act of recognition itself is always contested. Recognition is not naïve acceptance or uncritical agreement. It also involves misrecognition, which may provide a generative site where the collision of different worldviews results in new understanding. For this reason, drawing on the concept of representation in contemporary political theories (e.g., Fraser, 2007; Rehfeld, 2006, 2008; Urbinati & Warren, 2008), I recommend that teachers be treated as democratic participants in the processes of negotiating the crisis of representation in educational research. Such treatment is important because a linear model of research dissemination and utilization is deemed ineffective. As discussed earlier, meanings of texts are constructed through historically and socially mediated processes. As such, teachers as readers of research are dynamic individuals whose thinking is always shaped by the contexts and cultures to which they belong. Reading of research in such contexts is multiple and open-ended. When teachers are recognized as a relevant audience, their ways of reading will challenge positivism’s desire for objectivity and its conviction that there is a single right way of representing what exists in the world (Greene, 1994).

In reference to the second key concept of this inquiry, i.e., the crisis of legitimation, the participants employed a number of reading strategies. In the preceding chapter, four of these strategies were presented:

a) Readings as interrogation,
b) Reading as dialogue,
c) Reading as drawing upon prior experiences, and
d) Reading as attending to contextual circumstances.
Adopting these reading strategies, the participants interrogated various claims made in the research text. However, their interrogation was different from Cain’s (2015b) finding. When Cain’s participants interrogated claims in research papers, “a recurrent phrase was ‘I don’t agree with that’” (p. 10). In contrast, most of my participants adopted an approach that Luke and Freebody (1997) would call reading as a social practice. This view of reading opposes “the perennial stress on individual, silent reading as meaning construction [which] is very much modeled on a 19th-century model of the solitary literary reader...for whom the power of the text is private and personal” (pp. 215-216). Reading as a social practice purports that meanings are co-constructed by members of a particular community. As most of my participants demonstrated, hermeneutical dialogues are helpful for such co-construction of meanings. This relates to Kvale’s (2002) emphasis on the validation of knowledge claims through dialogues: “Valid knowledge is not merely obtained by approximations to a given social reality; it involves a conversation about the social reality: What is a valid observation is decided through the argumentation of the participants in a discourse” (Kvale, 2002, p. 313).

The participants’ past experiences played important roles in their interrogative and dialogic readings of the research text. While interpreting the text, they also paid attention to their sociocultural and material contexts and how their contextual circumstances shaped their readings of the text. Thus, reading of research assumed an ecological approach in the sense that teachers’ agency for interpretive readings was influenced by their material environments. An ecological view of agency maintains that agency is not something to be had. It is rather “enacted in a concrete situation; it is both constrained and supported by discursive, material and relational resources available to actors” (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015, p. 30). For
example, one participant of my study argued that Stribling et al.’s claim about the positive outcome of community-based projects did not hold the same implication for her context because the socio-material makeup of her school would not support such projects in the first place (Rosaline, interview). Therefore, I concur with Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, and Miller (2012) when they say that the material ecology of the school is the one in which teachers are schooled.

Because the participating teachers’ interpretive readings were heavily influenced by their cultural and material environments, I describe their readings of research as an interpretive-ecological approach to legitimation. Here, attention to context is in alignment with other studies that have emphasized the role of context in the utilization of research knowledge (e.g., Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001). Furthermore, context is an important factor in teachers’ professional learning and development. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) suggest, in their conceptualization of teacher development as ecological change, that “the process and success of teacher development depends very much on the context in which it takes place” (p. 13). This view is reflected in Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson’s (2015) emphasis on the role of context in teacher’s achievement of professional agency. Following this line of work, my notion of an interpretive-ecological approach to reading research calls for critical context awareness. Such awareness does not isolate the reader from the material world. It resists the dominant tendency to portray the reader as an autonomous agent, capable of making sense of research findings and applying them to practice situations. Thus, critical context awareness aims to disrupt the tendency to disregard material context in teachers’ professional learning and development. It also contests the instrumental view of research utilization that has characterised the push for evidence-based practice (Sanderson, 2003).
Furthermore, critical context awareness reclaims teachers’ practical wisdom that is often eroded by the instrumental rationality of the evidence-based practice movement. In this way, it responds to the call for paying attention to the context, or what Tuck and McKenzie (2015) describe as the “where” of inquiry.

The interpretive-ecological framework of reading may provide a hermeneutical alternative to positivist and post-positivist criteria for evaluating the legitimation of research accounts. Many evaluative criteria have been proposed to judge the validity of research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, 1995; Richardson, 2000; Seale, 1999). For example, Richardson (2000) suggests five criteria for evaluating ethnographic work: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact, and expression of a reality. Many academic journals also prescribe evaluative criteria in their guidelines for contributing authors (see, e.g., Lazaraton, 2003). The search for evaluative criteria has given birth to what some commentators describe as criteriology. Schwandt (1996) defines criteriology as “the quest for permanent or stable criteria of rationality founded in the desire for objectivism and the belief that we must somehow transcend the limitations to knowing that are the inevitable consequence of our sociotemporal perspective as knowers” (p. 58). This is nicely reflected in the following stanza of Kay O’Connor’s (1996, p. 16) poem:

Validity was always an elusive prey
with tendencies
to ultimate criteria
and blinkered search for objective truth
poking at
but not penetrating
the it being measured.

Arguing against the fascination with criteriology, Schwandt (1996) proposes that we view social inquiry as practical philosophy. In this view, values of social inquiries “comprise
dialogical, interpretive, democratic communities of inquirers intent on improving their practices” (p. 70). Other critics of criteriology reject the idea of judging qualitative research. For example, Scheurich (1996) argues that the numerous constructions of validity and the criteria to evaluate them are different masks with a similar purpose, i.e., to render incommensurable differences into a disturbing sameness. Therefore, he asks us to take a deconstructive approach to the notion of validity and “celebrate the play of multiplicity and difference” (p. 49).

From the perspective of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, it is impossible and perhaps futile to formulate “correct” criteria to interpret and evaluate research findings. Drawing primarily on Gadamer’s works, Garratt and Hodkinson (1998) emphasize the importance of reader standpoint in understanding legitimation:

What this means is that the selection of criteria for making an interpretative judgment about research will partly depend on the standpoint from which the person making the judgment views the work. There is no external reference point from which to make the selection about which criteria to adopt, and any attempt to universalize preagreed criteria is therefore bound to fail. (p. 522)

In this light, the interpretive-ecological approach that I have gleaned from my participants foreshadows a hermeneutical alternative to criteriology. These participants’ ways of reading—which are influenced by their previous experiences and situatedness in particular contexts—point to the inherent multiplicity in judging the validity and usability of research. Their ways of reading generally support Garratt and Hodkinson’s (1998) argument “that criteria can only be located in the interaction between research findings and the critical reader of those findings” (p. 515). In other words, even if we could agree on a set of evaluative criteria, “their application in the experience of making a judgment would remain strongly influenced by the nature of the research report, the standpoint and dispositions of the
reader, and the socially, culturally, and historically located interaction between the two” (p. 532).

With regard to the crisis of praxis, I have argued that making prudent and ethical choices is a particularly difficult task in a consumer culture where research-based recommendations are abundant. As noted earlier, I did not observe the participants’ classroom activities. Instead, I asked them to respond to the crisis of praxis in the selected research text. The participants responded to the problem of praxis prospectively. I have synthesized and described their responses as an imaginative motivation for ethical action. The imaginaries of some of the participants suggest a high level of motivation to utilize educational research in ethical ways. However, it should be noted that there may be a considerable degree of ambiguity between what teachers say and what they (are able to) do. “One possible explanation” of such ambiguity, as Evans (2006) writes, “is that the breadth of learning goals is so broad that teachers simply make choices to cover certain elements of the curriculum in ways that are workable for the day-to-day classroom realities” (p. 428). While their motivation for praxis might have suffered from a crisis due to a variety of factors such as the education system’s failure to secure loyalty or teachers’ decline of work ethic (see, e.g., Habermas, 1975), an investigation of those factors was beyond the scope of this project.

Nevertheless, the participants’ prospective motivation for ethical work is a form of praxis, according to the Aristotelian sense of praxis. Their motivation is reflected in their tactical reading of research, efforts to become an informed reader, and the development of an ethical vision of what research should do. First, the tactical way of reading research is similar to de Certeau’s notion of resistance and creativity in cultural consumption. de Certeau (1984) shows that people’s everyday practices are the product of neither a structural/economic
determinism, nor their volunteerism solely based on situations. Rather, people re-code the signifying systems of the dominant culture. For example, a person living in a foreign country creates for himself \textit{sic} a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 30)

Thus, particular tactics that an individual utilizes help himself/herself become a creative consumer of the strategies laid out by others. This is illustrated by de Certeau’s pedestrian who “‘rewrites’ the oppressive surface details of the city” (Roberts, 2006, p. 90). For the city-walker, “walking is a potential means of opening up gaps in the symbolic continuum of the urban environment through transforming what de Certeau calls ‘place’ into ‘space’” (Roberts, 2006, p. 90). Such a space makes possible “a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 97). In short, one comes to understand not only where one is going to or from, but also what objects, landmarks, and symbols are present along the way.

Second, the motivation for praxis is also reflected in the effort to become an informed (rather than an ideal) reader of research texts. The informed reader re deploys the available resources as tactics so that the strategies that come \textit{from above} may be re-coded and used in liberatory ways. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the acts of reading that the informed reader performs occur in the interaction between the author’s intended meanings and the reader’s past experiences and personal knowledge base. From a hermeneutical perspective, we may say that the act of informed reading is a \textit{fusion of horizons}. In such reading, the reader’s own horizon is important, but it is not merely a personal standpoint. The reader brings multiple possibilities and put them at risk, and in this way, makes sense of what the
text says (Gadamer, 1975/2013). The informed reader always has opinions about the text. However, as Fish (1980) argues, it is not the opinions that make him/her an informed reader. Rather, it is the commitment “to considering the issues of motivation and agency. That commitment will be the content of his experience and it will not be the content of the experience of readers less informed than he” (Fish, 1980, p. 380).

This kind of commitment leads us to the third praxical point, namely, ethical ways of reading research. From the perspective of Aristotelian ethics, the teacher can act and live well according to principles about what constitutes the good for each individual and the good for humankind…. For the teacher or prospective teacher to learn this is to learn something more than about the science, art or craft of teaching. It means learning how to give an answer to the question of what education is for. (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 18, emphasis original)

One of the contemporary thinkers who encourage us to ask such deep questions is Bauman (see, for example, Bauman, 1993; Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012). His work on ethics shows how the “moral lag” in liquid modernity has “emptied out those moral spaces that previously were understood as an opportunity to ‘take responsibility’ for each other” (Payne, 2010, p. 210). Bauman (2008) suggests that “the concepts of responsibility and responsible choice, which used to reside in the semantic field of ethical duty and moral concern for the Other, have moved or have been shifted to the realm of self-fulfillment and calculation of risks” (p. 52). Consumer capitalism has resulted in a relief from responsibility; people’s duty towards the Other has been re-conceptualized in a mechanized formulaic fashion. As Bauman (2008) writes, “a measure of genuine or putative clarity is injected into a hopelessly opaque situation by replacing (more correctly, covering up) the mindboggling complexity of the task with a set of straightforward must-do and mustn’t-do rules” (p. 52).
Such rule-following, means-ends logic seems to be incommensurate with ethical practices such as teaching. This kind of logic often asks two questions: “what goal is being sought, and what is being done to accomplish that goal?” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 7). However, the ethics of teaching requires practical wisdom, or what Aristotle called *phronesis* (moral knowledge), and “it cannot simply be deduced from general knowledge or codified into a metric” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 7). As Gadamer (1975/2013) maintains, “Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance like knowledge that can be taught. The relation between means and ends here is not such that one can know the right means in advance” (p. 331). Thus, the practical wisdom that the ethics of teaching would require is not to be gained directly from research-based knowledge, which is often presented in the form of propositional knowledge. An ethical approach to reading research is necessary for the transformation of the researcher’s propositional knowledge into the teacher’s pedagogical knowledge (McIntyre, 2005). Such ethical reading of research has been reflected in one of my participants’ commitment to taking responsibility for self and other. In the light of Bauman’s works, this ethical reading of research involves *being-for as a modality of togetherness*. As Bauman (1995) explains,

> Being-for is entered for the sake of safeguarding and defending the uniqueness of the Other; and that guardianship undertaken by the self as its task and responsibility makes the self truly unique, in the sense of being irreplaceable; no matter how numerous the defenders of the Other’s unique otherness may be, the self is not absolved of responsibility. Bearing such a task without relief is what makes a unique self out of a cipher. (pp. 51-52)

Thus, the ethical reader of research always takes responsibility for self and other. The ethics of reading requires and generates moral knowledge, not an ends-means logic.
Interpretive Reading and Sense-making

The insights learned from the participants may be further illustrated through Cynthia Coburn’s (2001) notion of collective sense-making. For Coburn, sense-making is not just an individual affair; it is inherently social. It emerges from persons’ collective interactions and negotiations. In addition, sense-making “is deeply situated in teachers’ embedded contexts” (p. 147). Coburn’s study explored how teachers of a California elementary school made sense of policy messages about reading instruction. She found that teachers engaged “in conversations with their colleagues in formal and informal settings, co-constructed understandings of messages from the environment, made decisions about which messages to pursue in their classroom, and negotiated technical and practical details of implementation” (p. 146). Coburn identified three sub-processes that characterized the teachers’ collective sense-making. They are:

a) constructing understanding through interpersonal interaction,

b) gatekeeping, and

c) negotiating technical and practical details. (p. 152)

Each of these three sub-processes was influenced by the teachers’ points of view, professional practices, and shared understandings.

Coburn’s study also found that teachers constructed the meaning of messages through conversations with colleagues. They “were confronted with an enormous number of messages about reading instruction” (p. 154)⁴. Therefore, they had to play a gate-keeping role, that is, “once teachers constructed an understanding of what a given message was about, they either engaged with the idea or approach, or they dismissed it” (p. 154). Then, the

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⁴This is indicative of the overwhelming abundance of everything in consumer capitalist societies. Policy message or research-based recommendation is no exception to this.
teachers moved ahead with the messages that passed through the gate-keeping stage. They collectively worked out the technical and practical details about the messages and how to apply them to classroom practice. In short, Coburn (2001) found that teachers “worked with their colleagues in various ways to adapt, adopt, combine, or reject messages about reading” (p. 159).

While Coburn’s (2001) work explored teachers’ sense-making of policy messages, my study aimed at understanding teachers’ reading of research text. In spite of this difference, both of us focused on teachers’ understanding of what comes from outside or, in de Certeau’s words, from above. The findings of my inquiry extends Coburn’s model of collective sense-making in a number of ways. Reading as interrogation and reading as dialogue are aligned with Coburn’s model. However, my inquiry adds that teachers draw heavily upon their prior experiences and attend to their contextual circumstances in order to make sense of research. My participants’ responses to research also suggest that they view reading research as a tactical and opportunistic decision-making. In such tactical reading, the purpose is to become an informed, not an ideal, reader. The tactical and informed reader aims to utilize research findings in ways that are responsible for his/her professional learning, and for the education and wellbeing of students. In these ways, teachers become ethical readers when they “follow the text’s meandering movements, attend to its heterogeneous meanings, restrain the impulse to assimilate these into one point of view, acknowledge the partiality and contingency of all interpretations and their rootedness in the reader’s social and cultural location” (Schweickart & Flynn, 2004, p. 17).
Towards an Audience-Oriented Approach to Knowledge Mobilization

The participants’ ways of reading research have led me to propose an audience-oriented approach to knowledge mobilization. The principles of reader-response criticism that I discussed in Chapter Three would support this approach. In general, reader-response criticism underscores the active role of the reader in making sense of the text. It rejects the idea that meaning resides inside the text. It maintains that the text is one of many determinants of meaning. The text guides the making of meanings, but so do other factors such as the reader’s past experiences, the individuals that the reader interacts with, and the cultural and material context within which the reader is located. Unfortunately, such complexities of meaning making are generally ignored in the literature on research utilization, especially as reflected in the contemporary work of knowledge mobilization (Liyanage, Elhag, Ballal, & Li, 2009; Reid, 2014).

A recent review of literature shows that research utilization is often viewed as synonymous with the evidence-based practice (EBP) model (Heinsch, Gray, & Sharland, 2016). In this model, practice is conceptualized as rational decision making, based on “objective” and “context-free” knowledge. This view has led federal governments in many countries to adopt a top-down approach to knowledge mobilization (as reflected in the activities of the What Works Clearinghouse⁵). The top-down approach “portrays research as producing conclusions which can be made the basis for” good policy and practice (Hammersley, 2005, p. 320). Thus, an instrumental view of using research, which Weiss (1979) described more than three decades ago, still dominates the field. In this sense, the field of research utilization has not been able to get rid of the positivistic dream “that there

⁵ http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
[is] a body of knowledge, instruments and understandings that could alleviate social problems” (Huberman, 1994, p. 15). One way of moving beyond this dream is to embrace hermeneutic considerations relating to conducting, disseminating, and utilizing educational research. Such considerations will challenge meta-narratives that attempt to reduce good teaching to adherence to research-based evidence.

It is important to keep in mind “that a sound, evidential policy base is not all that is necessary for practical success” (Hammersley, 2005, p. 326, emphasis original). Ethical practice such as teaching requires moral knowledge and practical wisdom. The use of research as conceptualized in the EBP model is not likely to make a significant contribution to the development of teachers’ practical wisdom, which requires a kind of understanding that “implies the general possibility of interpreting, of seeing connections, [and] of drawing conclusions,” and ultimately leads to “intellectual freedom” (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 261). Because teaching is essentially about taking responsibility for the Other, teachers’ practical wisdom requires what Polkinghorne (2004) calls a judgement-based practice of care. Finally, teachers’ practical wisdom involves an imaginative capacity. As Greene (1995) writes, “imagining things being otherwise may be a first step toward acting on the belief that they can be changed” (p. 22). For such practical wisdom, the work of knowledge mobilization may benefit from adopting an audience-oriented approach. In this approach, meanings of research findings are always-in-the-making. They are context-dependent and co-constructed in the interaction between the research text and the reader (e.g., teachers) in specific cultural-material environments. In short, the audience-oriented approach to research utilization that I propose pays greater attention to the reader’s ways of reading and making sense of research findings.
This audience-oriented approach would also support van den Berg’s (2002) call “for increased attention to individual teachers’ interpretations of situations along with increased attention to the interaction of such interpretations with the context in which teachers live and work” (p. 617). From this perspective, the audience-oriented approach will be at odds with the linear-rational model of knowledge mobilization (as discussed above and in Chapter One). The linearity of research production-dissemination-use places heavy emphasis on the core principles of evidence-based practice. Kretlow and Blatz (2011) discuss two concepts that underscore two of these principles: type of research and magnitude of research. By type of research, they refer “to the systematic way researchers apply an intervention and measure its effectiveness” (p. 10). By magnitude of research, they refer “to the amount of studies that show a strong, positive cause-and-effect relationship between an intervention and improved academic or behavioral outcomes” (pp. 10-11). Kretlow and Blatz (2011) also recommend that teachers remember the ABCs of EBP while making decisions about “successful” instruction. In their recommendation, A stands for “access evidence-based practices,” B for “be careful with fidelity,” and C for “check student progress” (p. 11). Today, most discussions about research utilization and knowledge mobilization seem to be based on these ABCs of evidence-based practice.

The audience-oriented approach that I propose does not undermine the importance of research-based evidence. In fact, I support the promotion and utilization of “research to improve education and serve the public good” (Ball, 2012, p. 284). However, I argue that the EBP model of knowledge mobilization is not likely to serve the public good because it is based on the assumptions of positivism, which maintains that:

(1) the aims, concepts, and methods of the natural sciences are applicable to the social sciences; (2) the correspondence theory of truth which holds that reality is knowable
through correct measurement methods; (3) the goal of social research is to discover universal laws of human behavior which transcend culture and history. (Lather, 1986, p. 260)

Agreeing with Lather’s argument, my objection is against EBP’s attempt to erase the cultural role of educational research. Drawing upon the works of De Vries (1990), Biesta (2007) discusses two different roles that research can play in educational practice: the technical role and the cultural role. The EBP model plays a technical role by providing practitioners with instrumental knowledge. This technical role is concerned with “possible predictive knowledge” (Habermas, 1971, p. 308). Such knowledge “attempts to ground the objectivist illusion in observations expressed in basic statements” (Habermas, 1971, p. 308). It aims to control the environment on the basis of predictions. The technical role does not support “the provision of different interpretations and understanding of educational practice” (Biesta, 2007, p. 296). Such provision of interpretations and understanding is within the domain of what De Vries (1990) calls the cultural role of research.

To promote the cultural role of educational research, it is important that knowledge mobilization projects embrace an interpretive approach to research. This approach is likely to provide teachers with hermeneutical insights that deeply influence their thinking and activities (van den Berg, 2002). Habermas (1971) would call this a historical-hermeneutic approach, which aims for practical knowledge through interpretive investigations. Unlike technical knowledge, practical knowledge derives from the interpreter’s own situations and understandings. As Habermas (1971) explains:

The historical-hermeneutic sciences gain knowledge in a different methodological framework. Here the meaning of the validity of propositions is not constituted in the frame of reference of technical control.... For theories are not constructed deductively and experience is not organized with regard to the success of operations. Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation. The
verification of lawlike hypotheses in the empirical-analytic sciences has its
counterpart here in the interpretation of texts. (p. 309)

Thus, practical understanding is based upon interpretations of meaning that are mediated by
the interpreter’s life-histories. It is concerned with “the hermeneutic imagination [that] works
from a commitment to generativity and rejuvenation and to the question of how we can go on
together in the midst of constraints and difficulties that constantly threaten to foreclose on the
future” (D. G. Smith, 1999, p. 29).

As some of the participants of my study have suggested, teachers need a space where
they can use their judgement and prior experiences to make meanings of research that are
contextually relevant for them and ethically responsive to their students. This observation has
prompted me to propose the audience-oriented approach to the dissemination and utilization
of educational research. By proposing this approach, I respond to Sanderson’s (2003) call for
the “need to extend the scope of our concern from ‘what works’ to what is ‘appropriate’ in
addressing complex and ambiguous social problems” (p. 331). Sanderson illustrates his
argument through the following example:

A school’s policy for dealing with bullying should certainly be informed by evidence
of what is generally effective but responses to bullying incidents will be dominated
by “practice wisdom”, cautiously teasing out the most appropriate course of action in
the specific circumstances in a context of informal rules, heuristics, norms and
values. The question for teachers is not simply “what is effective” but rather, more
broadly it is, “what is appropriate for these children in these circumstances.” (p. 341)

Collectively, my participants’ responses to research text would support Sanderson’s
argument. Their ways of reading suggest that the researcher’s propositional knowledge is not
likely to provide context-responsive practice wisdom that teachers need in order to carry out
their day-to-day pedagogical work. Therefore, it is important to invite teachers’ perspectives
on and responses to research. In the present inquiry, teachers’ responses have shed fresh light
on the triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis by revealing whether or to what extent educational research can inform and improve educational practice. However, my proposal for an audience-oriented approach does not aim to romanticize teachers’ voices and responses. A particular teacher’s interpretations of educational research may not be always right or appropriate. From a hermeneutic perspective, teachers are one of the parts of a larger whole that facilitates or hinders better understanding and improved practice. Thus, my proposal avoids a dominant tendency in the literature that over-emphasizes the individual teacher’s responsibility and capacity for educational improvement (for a critique of this tendency, see Moore, 2004).

It is hoped that an audience-oriented approach to disseminating and utilizing research will be helpful to promote the cultural role of educational research (Biesta, 2007; De Vries, 1990), which the current evidence-based practice model completely ignores. If we recall the principle of the hermeneutical circle that “we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole” (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 302), then we will see that educational research is only one piece of the puzzle that makes for teaching as a highly complex and hard-to-anticipate enterprise. It is, therefore, important to ask what “evidence” can and should do. As Biesta (2010) argues, “there is a need for judgement about the relative weight of what is being submitted as evidence for a particular belief or proposition” (p. 493). The ways of reading research that I have presented in this dissertation suggest that teachers’ making of judgments and informed choices about the utilization of research is complex and contingent upon a variety of social, material, and cultural factors. Such complexity and contingency require interpretive resources that may be generated through intricate and dialogic relationships between the author and the reader of educational research.
As Gadamer’s maxim—quoted at the beginning of my preface to this dissertation—implies, a teacher may understand research-based evidence and recommendations in ways that are significantly different from other teachers’ ways of understanding. The participants’ varied ways of reading educational research, presented in this dissertation, point to this interpretive challenge. On a practical level, the ways of reading insist that projects of knowledge mobilization recognize and act upon teachers’ experiences of interpreting and enacting research-based knowledge. If this is done, then knowledge mobilization is likely to be viewed as “entangled in social processes” with competing forces, rather than “as a linear and rational matter designing more-targeted and appealing dissemination” of research (Fenwick & Farrell, 2012, p. 2). How that can be done is left for future research. It is imperative that such research be taken up at this time of renewed interest in knowledge mobilization.
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Appendices

Appendix I: Call for Participants

(On OISE, University of Toronto letterhead)

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Engaging with Educational Research through Participation in a Wiki Discussion Group

Introduction: I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I am conducting a research study that aims to explore how English-language teachers read, understand, and use educational research and what implications their ways of reading research may have for their professional development. Although a variety of initiatives have been taken to disseminate research, what remains largely unexplored is how teachers engage with research. Therefore, rather than reinforcing the traditional professional development activities that just tell teachers about research, my study aims to explore what happens to educational research once it is disseminated to teachers.

Research Methods: Twelve teachers and I will participate in a wiki discussion group, which I have created for this research project. This wiki group will provide us with a collaborative environment to engage in dialogues with colleagues and to discuss the usability of research in classroom practice. This online group is likely to liberate participants from various spatial-temporal constraints (such as teacher isolation) and to facilitate conversations with colleagues located at diverse cultural and geographic contexts.

Research Activities: As part of this study, you will join a wiki-based discussion group and create your profile as a member. You will be encouraged to use a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality. You will read, view, or listen to selected research texts (e.g., an article or a video clip) and share your opinions by posting your comments on the wiki discussion forum. In addition, you will have one individual interview with me over the telephone, Skype, Google Hangouts, or face-to-face.
**Possible Uses of Data:** The data that I will collect from you will be used in my PhD dissertation, academic articles, conference presentations, and teaching. It is possible that my dissertation will be published as a book. Ethical standards of research and publication established by the University of Toronto will guide each use of data.

**Eligibility to Participate:** You are eligible to participate in this study, if you (1) are a teacher of English as a first or additional language, (2) work at a public or private school (preferably K – grade 12), and (3) teach, or are interested in teaching, critical literacy.

**Your Rights & Confidentiality:** Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time until my dissertation is completed. Any information that may identify you will be removed. Your responses and interview transcripts will be securely stored for five years following the completion of the study. There are no known risks to participating in this study. On the other hand, you may gain valuable insights about your own professional development.

**Informed Consent:** If you are interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions or concerns about it, please contact me at s.anwaruddin@mail.utoronto.ca or 1-647-785-9572. If you would rather like to talk to someone else about this study, you may contact my research supervisor Dr. Karyn Cooper at karyn.cooper@utoronto.ca or 1-416-978-0256.

The plan of this study has been reviewed and approved by Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Toronto. For questions concerning ethical conduct of this study and participant rights, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 1-416-946-3273.

Thank you,

Sardar M. Anwaruddin
Doctoral Student
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada
Appendix II: Letter of Informed Consent

(On OISE, University of Toronto letterhead)

Title of Study: Digital Technology and Language Teachers’ Engagement with Educational Research: A Hermeneutic Approach to Professional Learning

Principal Investigator: Sardar M. Anwaruddin

Email: s.anwaruddin@mail.utoronto.ca

Telephone: 1-647-785-9572

Mailing address: 514-2575 Danforth Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4C 1L5, Canada

Dear participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating how teachers read, understand, and use educational research and the implications their engagement with research may have for their professional learning. The research will involve asking you to participate in a wiki-based discussion group. You will respond to selected research texts (e.g., an article or a video clip) and share your reactions to and opinions about the research. You are not required to log into the wiki at any specific time. You may do so at your convenience. Your postings on the wiki will be viewable to all participants of the study (approximately 12). Therefore, you are encouraged to use a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality. In addition, you will be asked to have one individual interview with me (for approximately 1 hour) over the telephone, via Skype, or face-to-face. Your interview will be audio-taped, which will later be transcribed for analysis.

The study will take between 4 to 6 months. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time until it is completed. There will be no penalty for your withdrawal, and all data collected from you will be removed and destroyed.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study, and there are no known risks—physical or psychological—involved in the study. On the other hand, by
participating in this study, you may gain valuable insights about your own professional
development.

Your wiki discussions and interview transcripts will be kept anonymous and
confidential. The data I will gather from this study will be used in my PhD dissertation,
publications such as books and journal articles, conference presentations, and teaching
activities. Please note that your name and any identifying information will be either removed
or replaced with pseudonyms. All data will be kept in a secure place for five years following
the completion of the study.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, please contact me
at s.anwaruddin@mail.utoronto.ca or 1-647-785-9572. If you would rather like to speak with
someone else about this study, you may contact my research supervisor Dr. Karyn Cooper at
karyn.cooper@utoronto.ca or 1-416-978-0256.

**Agreement to Participate in Research Study:**

I have read and understood the above study. I agree voluntarily to participate in the study.

Participant’s Name_________________________________________

Participant’s Signature_________________________ Date____________

Email_________________________________________________Telephone__________________

Please check if you would like to receive an electronic copy of my dissertation________

Please sign and return one copy to me and keep a second copy for your own records. You
may send the signed copy to me as an email attachment or via surface mail (see my address
above).
Appendix III: Sample Interview Questions

1. In order to protect your anonymity, I would like to use a pseudonym. Would you like to choose a pseudonym for yourself?

2. In your initial wiki post, you wrote: “My name is … and I am from …. I have been teaching English for ten years to young students (aged 7 - 15). I love teaching and I hope to learn a lot from this project.” I am wondering if you would like to add a few more details (for example, the type of school where you work, kinds of administrative support for professional development, backgrounds of your students, etc.).

3. In response to the discussion thread “Crisis of Representation,” you wrote: “When reading it [research-text], I make my own interpretation and I decide if and how I am going to use it.” It seems to me that when you read research-based publications, you do not accept research findings as presented. Rather, you interpret their meanings and implications. Would you agree with this observation? Do you want to add anything?

4. When you read research-texts, do you use any strategies? If so, could you discuss some of your strategies?

5. In response to the discussion thread “Crisis of Legitimation,” you wrote: “I wouldn’t call this ‘crisis’. Open-mindedness and critical thinking are enough to solve the problem. Whatever the research and whoever the author, teachers should check carefully if they can work with those ideas inside their real classrooms.” I am curious to know more about your thoughts on open-mindedness and critical thinking with regard to reading research.

6. Do you think that your teaching context is important for understanding and utilizing research findings? If so, how?

7. What do you think about dialogue with colleagues in regard to reading and utilizing educational research?

8. What do you think about the role of digital technologies in reading and utilizing educational research?