BEING AND BECOMING CRITICALLY IMAGINATIVE: EXPLORING CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM

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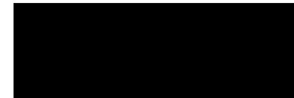
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Abstract

Critical literacy is not a matter of teaching and acquiring specific skills, but rather about constructing meaning through the process of learning. Rather than accepting and adopting traditional conceptualizations of literacy, this research conceptualizes critical literacy as an alternative educational paradigm. By recognizing the dual nature of critical literacy as both a theoretical framework and a pragmatic disposition or lens, the promise of critical literacy is explored.

This ethnographic inquiry recounts the collective stories of 26 Grade 6 students and the indefatigable teacher with whom they worked. Using a polyvocal approach, participants' voices will be heard both on their own and collectively through the use of classroom mosaics. The mosaics not only bring the classroom to life, but are also intertwined with the ways in which the participants became critically literate, and what I have now come to understand as, critically imaginative. Field texts and narrative descriptions highlight the lived experiences of participants as they learn to read and write both the word and world. Participant observation, fieldnotes, formal and informal conversations, research journal, and student artifacts punctuate the writing and provide "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) of this particular educational context.

The study concludes by offering a framework that weaves together critical literacy theory and practice with a particular focus on teaching and learning implications. This inquiry adds to our understanding of how teachers can support students to become critically literate and critically imaginative, but, perhaps more importantly, why teachers should. Ultimately, this dissertation reveals the power and promise of a critical literacy imagination for teachers, learners, and all those involved in the education of our youth.

Acknowledgements

I have a lot to be thankful for...
I had better get thanking!
~ Mo Willems

I want to begin with Mrs. S. Mrs. S, thank you for taking a chance on a stranger. Thank you for your willingness to support and mentor me, teach and guide me, and share with me the wisdom you possess. I remember writing early on in our relationship that the S in Mrs. S stands for super, stupendous, spectacular superwoman. I meant it then and I mean it now. Your love for learning and teaching, the love you show your students will only continue to positively influence those around you. You are the teacher I wanted as a student and the one I want my future children to come to know and love. I am so grateful to have shared this journey with you and cherish our friendship. It is because of you that this journey was possible.

To Mrs. S' students: thank you for allowing me to share in your journey, for being brave and open and honest everyday, for loving me, and for welcoming me into your community. Each and every one of you showed me what it meant to be vulnerable, to be brave, and that you are never too old to play soccer baseball. At the end of April, you decided that you were not ready to say goodbye. I want you to know that I, too, struggled to say goodbye. You filled my life with light and love, and telling your stories has been a true honour. As I write this, I am reminded of the laughter, and sometimes tears, that we shared together, the important moments of learning, but mostly I remember you. I hold so many special memories of each of you and it is only because of you that this work was possible. Remember to always speak your truth, love yourselves unconditionally, be proud of who you are becoming, and never stop fighting for what you believe in. Mrs. S was right when she said, "You are our future" and I know the future will be brighter because of you. Thank you for being a part of my life and for leaving your imprint on my heart.

Thank you to all of my professors who have shared in this journey. In particular, I would like to thank Michelann, my doctoral supervisor, for nudging me down this path, for your tireless efforts from beginning to end, and for helping me believe in the voice I have to share. You have been my supervisor, but more importantly a mentor in this journey of self-discovery. I always felt supported and heard, you respected my voice, and always ensured I had agency. Your continual reassurance helped me push through moments of extreme self-doubt and helped me forge my path even amidst the tallest grass. To Tara-Lynn who helped me discover my 'qualitative heart' and reassured me that it was okay to let my heart lead me where I needed it to go. You have been an unwavering support system throughout this entire journey. You have always treated me as an equal even when I didn't feel like one. Your encouragement and feedback were an invaluable part of my becoming. Terry, thank you for supporting and encouraging my love of theory. Your feedback and thoughtful responses not only challenged my thinking, but strengthened my research and sense of self. You have been a true blessing throughout this journey. Finally, Janette, thank you for helping me to see that my research and my voice are valuable.

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Dedication

My dissertation, or what the Grade sixes called 'our book,' is dedicated to Mrs. S' class.

I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to 'Poppy,' our unborn child.

I dedicate this to you, my love, in hopes that when you are old enough to go to school you will experience learning that is "nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once" (Greene, 1991, p. 43).

Your (not so) gentle kicks remind me why I keep fighting.

Love always, Mom

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Chapter One

A Roadmap For Our Journey

If I had a magic pencil, I would use it to . . .
Draw a better world, a peaceful world.
Erase war, poverty, and hunger.
I would draw girls and boys together as equals . . .
I had at last found the magic I was looking for
in my words and in my work.
~ Malala Yousafzai

Preamble

Who are you? I am a dreamer; I reach beyond the stars and planets and galaxies. I am a fighter; I fight for the underdogs, the underrepresented, and the silenced. I am an optimist; I try to see the best in everyone and every situation. I am an observer; I "look and listen and learn" (Aliki, 1998). I am a woman, a feminist, an advocate, an educator, a student, a partner, a daughter, a sister, and an aunt. I am strong-willed, ambitious, uncertain, insecure, anxious, and afraid. I am all of these at once yet not defined by any one of them. I am being and I am becoming.

As I reflect on how I came to study critical literacy, I remember a piece of advice that was given to me during the summer of 2015 by my course instructors, Michelann and Terry. The advice went something like this, "Sarah, have you heard about critical literacy? No? You *must* look into it. Everything you were talking about today within your presentation fits so well within this framework. Critical literacy has your name written all over it!" And today, after spending nearly four years exploring the literature and engaging in classroom research, I agree. Critical literacy was, is, and continues to be my path, a path that set in motion my being and my becoming. Throughout this dissertation, my being and becoming unfolds through reflective wonderings, like the paragraph that introduced this chapter. These internal wonderings differ from yet punctuate my reflective thinking, weave throughout each chapter, and are re-presented and emphasized through the use of italics.

Who Am I? Exploring My Being and Becoming

There is much to share about my being and becoming – as a researcher, an ethnographer, an academic, a learner, a teacher, and a self. I begin by acknowledging the story of where I am coming from to help you better understand where I am going (Parr & Campbell, 2012). To contextualize the chapters that follow, I recount three reflexive tales (Parr, 2008) of my journey as a student. Each tale represents a significant turning point in my life that has ultimately shaped the direction of my research and my researcher identity (Shorey, 2008).

Tale # 1: Grade Ten History Class

It was an ordinary day. The bell rang and I made my way through the crowded hallways of my high school on route to my Grade Ten history class. I was a very shy and awkward 15 year old who turned red in the face anytime a teacher called upon me in class. I wanted to blend in, so I sat somewhere in the middle of the room.

I cannot recall what we were learning that day, but the discussion made its way to a heated debate about women in politics, specifically Kim Campbell, Canada's only female Prime Minister. Campbell's tenure was short-lived lasting less than five months. Some of the males in the room felt this was telling of a woman's ability to be successful in the old boys' club of the political realm. My history teacher, a woman, looked to us females to take the floor and shut down the adolescent machismo bouncing from wall to wall. And we did. One by one, we all stepped in and stepped up, myself included. Of course, I felt shy and embarrassed, I could feel the blood rushing to my face with each word I muttered. But I could not let my sisters down. I could not let myself down. I felt a moral and ethical duty to support women everywhere.

At the end of class, over the sound of shuffling papers and chairs, my teacher asked to speak with me in private. In my experience, when a teacher wants to speak with you, it generally means that you are in trouble and about to be reprimanded for something. Steeling

myself, I timidly walked to the front of the room. And with great sincerity in her voice she said, "Sarah, you should run for Prime Minister one day. We need more women like you in politics." I really did not know how to respond; I was never very good at accepting compliments. I simply said, "Thank you," and headed to lunch.

I remember sitting down in a crowded and noisy cafeteria with her words seeping into my mind. I remember going home that day and telling my mother what she had said to me. I had always been labelled a good student, so I do not know if my mother was at all surprised. I did my work, handed in assignments on time, and respected my teachers. School was always my safe haven – from the world, from personal struggles, from anything and everything I felt the need to escape. I found comfort in books, I learned about myself through writing, and I felt proud to wear the gold star of a good student. But no grade or accreditation could ever compare to how I felt when my history teacher pulled me aside that day. I felt empowered in a way I had never experienced. I felt hopeful that I could make a difference. Today, I still remember her words, but perhaps more importantly, as Maya Angelou would say, I most definitely remember the way she made me feel.

Tale # 2: Finding Sociology

The ink barely dry on my high school diploma, I entered my first university class: *Introduction to Sociology*. I was 18 and overwhelmed in a class with 400 other students at a university with nearly 30,000 students. My professor put me at ease, reminding me of my Grade Ten history teacher. Over the years, we developed a strong relationship. Truth be told, she became a mentor for me throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Sociology introduced me to a new way of thinking. It challenged my assumptions about the world, forced me to dig deeper, and opened my eyes to a world that both reflected and challenged my experiences, my values, and my worldview. This was an important turning point

in my life, and in it, I found what I was searching for: an academic discipline that connects the heart with the mind. In the words of C. Wright Mills, "Whatever sociology might be, it is the result of constantly asking the question, what is the meaning of this?" a question I had been asking my entire life.

Sociology introduced me to new theorists and theories, like C. Wright Mills and the sociological imagination, new ways of seeing, and new ways of being in the world. It re-connected me to my childhood convictions of social justice, which I expand upon in Chapter Two. It allowed me to engage in dialogue that challenged me, helped me gain a greater understanding of the world, offered an opportunity to develop the language I needed to establish my voice, and empowered me to recognize that my story, just like all stories, can catalyze social change. I began to think differently, more critically, about my identity, ideas, experiences, and worldview; I began to "find the magic I was looking for in my words and in my work" (Yousafzai, 2017).

Tale # 3: Doctoral Studies

Four years ago, I began my doctoral journey with some trepidation. Sociologist turned PhD student in education (without teaching certification) left me wondering how my professional and personal knowledge might align with this unfamiliar discipline. Having what I perceived as a tenuous grasp on educational discourse, I walked into the very first class feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, and uncertain. I remained quiet. I have never been the student to raise her hand first or chime in with a response for every question. My approach has often been interpreted as shyness, which, to some extent, is true. I am an observer. I "look and listen and learn" (Aliki, 1998) offering my opinion or perspective when relevant.

In our research methods course, inevitably the discussion about quantitative versus qualitative research emerged, and I knew I would have to defend my position as a quantitative

researcher. I remembered the words of my history teacher; I remembered that my voice is powerful. The conversation was impassioned. No one necessarily opposed quantitative research, but it seemed that most favoured a qualitative paradigm, which was foreign to me. My former department, with the exception of a few researchers, was quantitatively driven and I unproblematically accepted this polarization.

Subjectivity/objectivity, biased/unbiased, and involved/impartial defined what I understood as the dichotomous divide of social research. As I sat listening to my peers and professors, something happened. I became less certain that the epistemologies that separate quantitative and qualitative research, and by extension researchers, are as disparate as I once believed. In truth, within my own quantitative research as a Masters student, questions of authenticity, voice, and subjectivity emerged. I thought they were long buried, but I now know that I could only ignore them for so long.

Our classroom became a shared space of learning, and on this particular occasion, not far into my doctoral journey, I learned a lot about myself. I learned to embrace where I came from in relation to where I was going and, ultimately, who I was becoming. In essence, I finally accepted the advice of C. Wright Mills (1959): "You must learn to use your life experiences in your intellectual work . . . continually examine and interpret it. . . . You are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work" (p. 196).

When class finished, one of my professors, now a member of my doctoral committee, asked to speak with me privately. I felt that rush of blood surging through me once again, just as I did when my history teacher asked to speak with me so many years ago. We talked for a while about my experiences, how I was feeling about the course and program, and where I saw myself heading as a researcher. "Sarah," Tara-Lynn said, "You have a quantitative mind with a qualitative heart." I remember feeling confused and perplexed by her statement, like somehow,

I represented an epistemological and ontological Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We said our goodbyes and I left for the day, her words weighing heavy on my (quantitative) mind and (qualitative) heart. I needed to sit with what she said, really and truly, to fully understand their significance.

As the term progressed, I remembered Tara-Lynn's words. With each article I read and paper I wrote, the significance of what these words represented grew. I began to see myself, as a researcher and an academic, differently. Along the way, I began to reconcile my head and heart, re-conceptualizing and redefining the goal of research from supporting hypotheses to storytelling and exploration, from manipulating data to the emergence of data, and from remaining objective to embracing subjectivity. No longer did I feel confined to a limited scope of research.

Reflecting back on these experiences, I realize that I learned more about myself in the first year of my doctoral program than in my seven years of university prior to this experience. Accepting the need to learn with others, discussed further in Chapter Four, our shared learning gave me the space and freedom to grow, including the gentle nudges and, at times, heated discussions. I am grateful to those who pushed me to dig deeper, to widen my lens, to embrace my being and becoming, and to view the world of research from a new perspective. These experiences provide the foundation, inspiration, and purpose for my research and are interwoven throughout each remaining page. I recognize my own subjectivities and assumptions in terms of critical literacy, learning, education, and engaging in research. I am not an objective researcher, but very much aware of my theoretical and paradigmatic positioning. It is important for you to remember these reflexive tales for they represent my "positionality, politics, values, and story" (Ellis, 2004, p. 27), all of which significantly influence my research.

Purpose of the Inquiry

Critical literacy researchers have long investigated the benefits of infusing liberating teaching practices into the classroom.[1] Over the years, researchers have pointed to the need for teachers to adopt a critical stance and be open to what happens when students are exposed to social justice picture books (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Wilson & Laman, 2007); how students interrogate and unpack bias within texts using critical literacy (Richards, 2006; Flint et al., 2015); how an expanded understanding of literacy encourages inquiry, making personal connections, and promoting reflection and social action (Keyes, 2009); the ways in which Grade One students engage in critical conversations that disrupt the status quo embedded within the curriculum (Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005); and how students write, draw, and perform their way through to understanding of social justice issues (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Lewison & Heffernan, 2008).

My research takes place at the intersection of critical literacy, social justice education, and student and teacher empowerment (Hughes, 2006). It pushes our understandings of critical literacy further, including the promise of critical literacy, particularly within a Canadian context. The research is informed by 1) my personal experiences of being and becoming; 2) the literature surrounding critical literacy; and 3) the doing of critical literacy from both a pedagogical and pragmatic perspective. My research emerges from my conviction to make the world better – fairer, freer, more equitable, equal, and loving, a conviction that I have attended to and actualized from a young age. By exploring critical literacy, it is my hope to bring

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[1] See, for example, Christensen, 2011; Comber, 2001, 2004; Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2015; Dunkerly-Bean, Bean, Sunday, & Summers, 2017; Hall & Piazza, 2008; Harste, 2003; Heffernan, 2004; Heffernan & Lewison, 2000; Horn, 2014; Flint & Laman, 2012; Freire, 1970, 1974; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2000; Gregory & Cahill, 2009; Janks, 2000, 2010, 2012; Jones & Clarke, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; Leland et al., 2003; Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2017; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Luke, 2000, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Luke & Woods, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Richards, 2006; Shor, 1987, 1992, 1999; Soares & Wood, 2010; Street, 2003; Vasquez, 2004, 2010; Wallowitz, 2008.

[2] See Behrman, 2006; Comber, 2001; Flint, Allen, Nason, Rodriguez, Thornton, & Wynter-

attention to the ways teachers can support students' convictions of social justice by first reading the word and world (Freire, 1970), and then acting upon this knowledge.

It is important to note that 'doing' critical literacy is not about following a set of instructional strategies that teachers can adopt or apply within their classroom (Behrman, 2006; Luke, 2000; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Critical literacy has implications for pedagogical practice, but these must be organically developed within the context of a particular classroom (Luke, 2000). A critical literacy lens ought to "encourage teachers and students to collaborate to understand how texts work, what texts intend to do to the world, and how social relations can be critiqued and reconstructed" (Behrman, 2006, p. 491).

Exploring how one classroom community becomes critically literate through co-construction, meaning making, interrogation, and inquiry has the potential to reveal the optimal conditions necessary for critical literacy. From teacher perceptions and dispositions all the way through to student actions, my research explores how critical literacy supports student growth, and student and teacher empowerment. As I have read, re-read, and reflected throughout this inquiry, I began to understand, similar to Malala's (2017) quote that introduced this chapter, that critical literacy helps students and the teachers with whom they work to envision and write a better world.

Research Questions

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate career, I developed a love of theory. There was something so exciting about connecting theory to everyday life. While I still read through a theoretical lens, I have developed an appreciation for the necessity of transforming theory into practice. As I situated myself within the literature, I realized that critical literacy has been well established through a theoretical lens. And, even though critical literacy researchers have made great strides in understanding the practical implications, my research presents an

opportunity to explore critical literacy naturally and authentically within a Canadian educational context, a perspective that is not well established within the literature.

I began this study with three primary research questions that were designed to explore the optimal conditions that support critical literacy, and the nature of student and teacher empowerment through critical literacy, while simultaneously linking theory into practice:

1. What are students' and teachers' experiences with critical literacy?
2. What are the optimal conditions and characteristics of classrooms that support critical literacy, as well as student and teacher engagement and empowerment?
3. In what ways can critical literacy support transformative learning, and personal and social transformation?

In addition to these questions, my objectives included

- to explore and identify practices that enhance critical literacy education across the curriculum;
- to collaborate with students and teachers to develop a portrait of engagement through multiple viewpoints, contexts, and voices; and
- to explore how critical literacy supports students in their learning, and develops a greater understanding of themselves as well as their world.

An Ethnographic Roadmap

Full disclosure. I people-watch, so when I found ethnography, or better yet when it found me, I was immediately "pulled in, called to the mystery of it" (Goodall Jr., 2000, p. 8). Ethnography is fluid, reciprocal, and dynamic allowing for flexibility and responsiveness to meet the needs of the classroom, teacher, and students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Madison, 2005). Ethnography offers a naturalistic portrait of classroom life that captures what participants say, think, and do as authentically as possible (Parr, 2008; Shorey, 2008; Van

Maanen, 1988, 2011; Wolcott, 1997). In keeping with the spirit of my research and personal convictions, ethnography brings the voices of participants to the fore. In this sense, it is an empowering approach to qualitative research that is palpable and porous and polyvocal, all at once. Throughout this dissertation, participants' voices and my voice are interwoven in an effort to provide a holistic account of the inquiry in much the same way that it emerged (Parr, 2008; Wolcott, 1999). The voices of my participants are those of 26 Grade 6 students and the indefatigable teacher with whom they worked.

This dissertation traces my journey of being and becoming, both professionally and personally, as I learned to navigate life inside a Grade 6 classroom; the journey of my participants as they explore the word and world (Freire, 1970), including their ability to effect positive social change; and the journey of one teacher as she attends to the pedagogical and practical implications of critical literacy. It represents an ethnographic account of one classroom community committed to making their mark on the world and the conditions necessary for this to happen. It is an attempt to highlight the power of critical literacy, to bring the voices of my participants into the public, and to offer practical strategies for teachers to adopt and adapt to their contextual needs. Although not generalizable, my research provides insight into the promise of critical literacy as an approach to literacy instruction and education, and the pedagogical implications for teacher attitudes and dispositions.

Chapter One began with my being and becoming as I locate myself within my research. Though I elaborate on my being, becoming, belonging, and positionality throughout each chapter, I start here because my experiences inform my work, my ways of seeing, and my ways of being with my participants. My identity is inexorably connected to my dissertation, including its purpose, direction, and significance. Although this dissertation is not my life's work, it very much represents the work of my life right now. Knowing this, I have chosen to

embrace my subjectivities because they are "at once a vessel, lens, and filter of every telling" (Madison, 2005, p. 34).

Chapter Two elaborates on my being and becoming, paying particular attention to the recursive process of discovering my worldview. It traces my sociocultural and critical lens, attending specifically to the influence of Dewey (1916, 1938/1997), Freire (1970, 1974), and critical theory more broadly. Critical literacy is offered as an alternative to traditional or autonomous views (Street, 1984, 2003) and is contextualized within its theoretical predecessors, namely critical theory and critical pedagogy. I elaborate on existing theoretical frameworks and models of critical literacy (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Janks, 2000, 2010; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015), which is followed by a discussion that connects some of the literature already shared (Comber, 2001; Flint & Laman, 2012; Labadie et al., 2012; Leland et al., 2003; Vasquez, 2004).

Chapter Three begins with a reflexive tale (Parr, 2008) of my "interpretive turn" (Goodall Jr., 2000, p. 78) from quantitative to qualitative researcher. Next, I provide a comprehensive overview of ethnography that articulates and answers the question, *Why ethnography?* I describe my research design, research questions, and methods for data collection, analysis, and representation/re-presentation. It is within this chapter that you will also meet my participants. I then examine some of the ethical implications of engaging in ethnographic work with children.

Chapter Four explores my role as catalyst and facilitator as researcher within this inquiry. I begin by recounting the tale of meeting my participants as I negotiated entry into the research site. My growth from an insecure researcher willing to share her vulnerability (Brown, 2012, 2017) and the resultant roles I adopted are well documented within this chapter. You will begin to hear the voices of my participants as I describe how I continually negotiated

and sustained relationships. Snippets of conversation, student artifacts, fieldnotes, narrative descriptions, and personal reflections are presented in order to demonstrate the evolution of my being, becoming, and belonging within the context of the inquiry. It is within this chapter that my positionality is most visible.

Chapter Five addresses my first research question by providing an extended view of life inside a Grade 6 classroom. The focus of this chapter is to give you a rich and detailed narrative of our classroom. By describing significant moments of critical literacy, the following thematic tales are discussed: teaching and learning about civil rights, understanding what does it mean to be unique, advocacy and action, critical media literacy, truth and reconciliation, and inventing critical literacies.

Chapter Six addresses the final two research questions and articulates six classroom conditions that support critical literacy. Description of each condition proceeds through three phases that move from general to specific: (1) a theoretical overview; (2) selected classroom vignettes from the truth and reconciliation inquiry; and (3) a discussion of how the condition translates into practice.

Chapter Seven details my eventual exit from the research site. Through personal reflections, narrative descriptions, and students' goodbye letters, I depict my final identity as someone to remember. This chapter recounts my scheduled last day with my participants, and the reciprocal imprint we have on each other's lives. It also demonstrates the real impact researchers can have if they proceed with "genuine curiosity, sincere interest, and the courage to be 'vulnerable' to another" (Madison, 2005, p. 36).

Chapter Eight concludes with a discussion of the six conditions of critical literacy, including recommendations for educators, implications for teaching and learning, social significance, and recommendations for future research. In this chapter, I will also revisit, within

the context of research literature, the questions that catalyzed this inquiry, *What are students' and teachers' experiences with critical literacy? What are the optimal conditions and characteristics of classrooms that support critical literacy, as well as student and teacher empowerment? And how can critical literacy support transformative learning, personal growth, and an increased sense of self-efficacy as an agent of (social) change?*

Definitions

For the purpose of mutual understanding, and ease of facilitation, I offer the following definitions of concepts.

Critical Literacy

In this dissertation, critical literacy is understood as a lens, mindset, or disposition for both teaching and learning. Critical literacy is not something teachers simply add on to classroom instruction, but rather a way of being in relation to texts, our selves, each other, and the world (Luke, 2014; Vasquez, 2017). As a framework, critical literacy is not a set of instructional practices or a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, it is a responsive and flexible framework that looks, feels, and sounds differently in different contexts, and develops, emerges, and accomplishes different things depending on the context and place in which it is being used (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001; Vasquez, 2004, 2017).

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy perceives education as a political act (Freire, 1970). It is concerned with justice and equality, resisting dominant power and ideologies, transforming oppressive power relations between teachers and students, and promoting justice and equality through education (Kincheloe, 2008). It is an approach to education that views students and teachers actively collaborating and co-constructing knowledge as they consciously engage in the act of transformation (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989).

Critical Theory

Critical theory, within this dissertation, refers to a philosophical paradigm that seeks to "understand the sets of historically contingent circumstances and contradictory power relationships that create the conditions in which we live" (Apple, 2000, p. 5). Critical theory is not about fault finding or finger pointing, but rather an approach to understanding and eradicating the social conditions and systems that perpetuate and maintain inequity, alienation, exploitation, dominant power imbalances, and social control.

Empowerment

Empowerment, within this dissertation, moves beyond a literal conceptualization of having, giving, or being powerful to encompass the ability to think and act critically upon the world in an effort to transform self and society (Banks, 1991; Giroux, 1992; Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013; Shor, 1992). Empowered students are motivated, confident, courageous, and willing to take risks in pursuit of learning (Gay, 2000).

Empowering Pedagogy

Empowering pedagogy is a student-centred approach to education where students learn to relate their personal and academic growth to public life by "developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about power, inequality, and change" (Shor, 1992, p. 16). Learning unfolds within a classroom context that is participatory, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, democratic, and inquiring (Shor, 1992). Empowering pedagogy is critical and democratic and student-led all at once.

Engagement

Engagement, within this dissertation, is understood as the active involvement of students within the process of learning (Cambourne, 2000; Park, Holloway, Arendtsz, Bempechat, & Li, 2011). Engaged learners can sustain both independent and collaborative

work, are intrinsically motivated to learn, critically engage with learning, and believe in their ability to learn. Engagement is not understood simply as something visible or academic, but includes positive inclinations toward the learning process that involves the physical, cognitive, mental, social, and emotional responses and aspects of learning.

Literacy

Literacy is understood as an embodied and embedded set of social practices, practices that are "patterned and conventional ways of using . . . language that are defined by culture and regulated by social institutions. Different communities do literacy differently" (Janks, 2010, p. 3). In this sense, literacy as social practice is dialogic and flexible, socially and historically situated, and multimodal and multifaceted.

Concluding Remarks: A Road Map

This dissertation tells the story of a vulnerable ethnographer who looks and listens and learns (Aliki, 1998; Brown, 2012, 2017). It tells the story of 26 Grade 6 students and the deep commitment of one teacher whose capacity to support, encourage, and transform are second to none. This ethnography explores our collective story and the lasting, perhaps even life-changing, impact in the hearts and minds of all those involved. As reader, I share my vulnerability with you and, in return, I ask that you look and listen and learn from the stories woven throughout these pages. Listen without judgment of what you believe students are capable of. Listen without assumptions and reservations and skepticism. Listen for the nuanced voices that emerge. Listen for the pauses and silences. Listen for love and laughter, heartache and pain, and resistance and activism. This is my invitation for you to look and listen and learn from our story.

Chapter Two

Cultivating the Conditions for Critical Literacy

UNLESS someone like you
cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It's not.
~ Dr. Seuss

Preamble

What counts as literacy? Who makes this decision? What images come to mind when you hear the word? Do you picture a young child reading a storybook? A student writing in a journal? What about blogging, designing a website, snapping selfies, or editing a short film? Orally communicating, singing, or simply telling a story? Is literacy only about decoding text or can we begin to think of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing text as literacy practices, too? (Gregory & Cahill, 2009; Janks, 2000, 2010, 2013, 2014; Jones & Clarke, 2007; Kempe, 2001; Patel Stevens & Bean, 2007)

The field of language and literacy, and by extension literacy education and instruction, is replete with competing views about what constitutes and counts as literacy. On one side of the debate is what Street (2003) calls an autonomous view where becoming literate has positive cognitive and social implications for other areas of learning. Introducing literacy to those who are illiterate, for example, "will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their 'illiteracy' in the first place" (Street, 2003, p. 77). This view approaches literacy as a culturally neutral and universally technical skill that ignores both the social context within which literacy takes place, as well as the cultural and ideological implications (Luke & Woods, 2009; Street, 2003). This view, in my opinion, represents a

historically inflexible and unproblematically monologic conceptualization that dominates a great deal of educational policy, public opinion, and pedagogical practices. On the other side of the debate are those who approach literacy as an embodied and embedded set of social practices that are "based in particular worldviews [which] vary from context to context" (Flint et al., 2015, p. 27), what Street (2003) refers to as the ideological perspective. Literacy as social practice is dialogic and flexible, socially and historically situated, and multimodal and multifaceted.

This debate, perhaps spectrum is a more appropriate term, stems from what is understood as literacy, what practices are deemed relevant and meaningful, and the role of the individual as well as their community, both local and global, as they learn to read the word and world. The debate runs far deeper than theory, pedagogy, and epistemology, for students are always implicated and impacted by it and its attendant consequences. Drawing attention to the debate is not an attempt at identifying a winner or loser necessarily, but rather my intention is to stir the proverbial pot in an effort to re-energize and re-focus our lens in order to interrogate and problematize "what counts as literacy [by asking] 'whose literacies' are dominant and whose are marginalized" (Street, 2003, p. 77). Recognizing that "the ethnographic present never remains as it is described" (Heath, 1983, p. 9), critical theorists have set the stage beautifully to include contemporary experiences, understandings, and perspectives through the eyes of students and teachers in the ongoing dialogue.[2]

As a critical social constructivist, I believe in the value of understanding and acknowledging the cultural, social, historical, and political factors that have shaped and

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[2] See Behrman, 2006; Comber, 2001; Flint, Allen, Nason, Rodriguez, Thornton, & Wynter-Hoyte, 2015; Gregory & Cahill, 2009; Flint & Laman, 2012; Heath, 1983; Horn, 2014; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Jones & Clarke, 2007; Keyes, 2009; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005; Lewison & Heffernan, 2008; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Richards, 2006; Sharp, 2012; Wilson & Laman, 2007; Vasquez, 2004, 2010

influenced how literacy is understood, experienced, and enacted. Epistemologically, this propels me to ask questions such as *Whose experiences are celebrated and validated, and whose are silenced and marginalized? Whose voices are heard within the classroom? How can we celebrate epistemological diversity in meaningful and authentic ways? How do we ensure that each student is heard, engaged, and included not only within classroom practices, but curriculum content as well?* These questions, along with many others, guide my inquiry.

This chapter provides a look at the aforementioned debate through a discussion of traditional and social constructivist conceptualizations of literacy, as well as the broader implications for students, teachers, and learning. The ideological and theoretical predecessors of critical literacy are discussed in depth in order to provide insight into the theoretical and practical implications and applications for students and teachers. Finally, this chapter provides a look at critical literacy research, what counts as literacy, the need to broaden and expand dominant conceptualizations, and the benefits of infusing critical literacy into everyday classroom practices.

Discovering My Worldview: Situating the Researcher Before the Inquiry

Discovering my worldview is an iterative, recursive process that often manifests through reading, writing, and self-reflecting. In this sense, reading and writing become a form of reflective practice, providing an opportunity to "re-imagine [my] personal understandings, re-vision [my] personal narratives, and identify those things that resonate and give [me] the courage to move on" (Richardson, Parr, & Campbell, 2008, p. 282). As I engage with this process of self-discovery, my internal dialogue becomes clearer and I gain greater confidence in putting my voice in print. *These* pages become a living document, a home that nurtures my voice as I write. I will admit that finding my voice has been arduous, frustrating, at times even discouraging, and mustering the courage to share that voice within a wider context is, quite

frankly, terrifying. Of course, this tale is slightly hyperbolic, but it certainly tells a different narrative than that of the self-assured doctoral student who is confident and ready to take on the world. Confidence certainly comes, it ebbs and flows just like any other emotional state. The point I am trying to make, even if in a comical way, is that finding who you are when you strip away all the stuff, being confident in the voice you want to share with others, while simultaneously combating endless bouts of imposter syndrome, is a challenge, something I do not feel garners enough attention (or praise for achievement) within the world of academia.

While I cannot speak for others, for the sake of transparency, you should know the source of my anxiety. Ultimately, it comes down to one seemingly simple question: Do I know enough? Perhaps the better question, and what I should have asked myself from the very moment I entered graduate school, is: Can I ever really know enough? Reflecting on this question, I take solace in Parr's (2005/2006) candid admonition that "knowing is a relative term . . . we can never know everything about everything because the world is continually changing, but we can know something about something, which will help us to know something more than we knew yesterday" (p. 139). With this acting as a guiding principle to mitigate some of my imposter syndrome symptoms, I found the courage to move forward, reassured that as I read, wrote, and reflected, I was in fact learning more – more about myself, my worldview, the world around me, as well as the literature. Because self-discovery is a journey and my process is about "acknowledging that the journey is the destination and that the adventure is very much shaped by who and what we are" (Parr, 2010, p. 454), I had to re-visit my earlier question (remember the one that induced so much anxiety in the first place?) in order to grow as an individual, a student, a researcher, and an academic. When I strip away all the stuff that others see, when I quietly sit and reflect on who I am and, perhaps more importantly, who I am becoming, what do I find?

Asking these questions allowed me to situate myself within both a constructivist and humanist paradigm (Parr, 2008). Constructivists contend that we actively construct meaningful and contextualized knowledge through experiencing and reflecting on the world (Noddings, 2012). From this perspective "knowledge about the world does not simply exist out there, waiting to be discovered but rather is constructed by human beings in their interaction with the world" (Gordon, 2008, p. 324). Social constructivists celebrate epistemological diversity and pluralism (Parr, 2008) by rejecting "narrow epistemological borders" (Malott, 2010, p. 388) in favour of multiple realities "that are socially and experientially based, local and specific, and dependent on their form and content on the persons who hold them" (Guba, 1990, p. 27). Knowledge is, therefore, a socially situated, contextually oriented construct that both reflects and refracts (Bakhtin, 1994) experiences that are embedded within larger sociocultural and historical contexts.

Interweaving Constructivism, Humanism, and the Critical

To say that Dewey (1916, 1938/1997) has influenced and shaped my constructivist, and arguably humanist, worldview is an understatement. Dewey (1938/1997) emphasizes "the organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 14). Learning within this context builds on and integrates students' natural and intrinsic curiosities, actively involves students, incorporates past and present experiences, and acknowledges students' existing knowledge structures as assets within the classroom (Dewey, 1916, 1938/1997). Grounded in Dewey's (1916, 1938/1997) philosophy of education, my worldview values the lived experiences of students as a rich resource to be acknowledged, utilized, and firmly embedded within educational environments, perhaps because this is what I value for myself as a learner. Using students' lived experiences as a springboard for learning creates the possibility for an

alternative educational paradigm, one that rejects educating from the neck up in favour of educating the whole person: mind, body, and soul.

Constructivist classrooms (see Figure 2.1) transform students from passive recipients to active co-constructors of knowledge (Freire, 1970), what Connelly and Clandinin (1992) refer to as "curriculum makers" (p. 48). If we interrogate what counts as knowledge, and if we attempt to infuse Dewey's (1916, 1938/1997) ideals into current educational contexts, what we find is that learning pervades and develops in meaningful and authentic ways under these conditions.

Figure 2.1: Principles of constructivist classrooms

Learning is about

- constructing knowledge, not receiving it;
- understanding and applying, not recall;
- thinking and analyzing, not accumulating and memorizing; and
- being active, as opposed to passive, learners

Note: Adapted from *Creating and sustaining the constructivist classroom 2nd ed.* (pp. 7-9), by B. A. Marlowe & M. L. Page, 2005, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Like Dewey (1916, 1938/1997), Freire (1970, 1974) has had a significant influence on my worldview, as well as research interests. I am, among many other things, particularly inspired by Freire's (1970) unwavering passion, commitment, and dedication to the underprivileged, the voiceless, the marginalized, the underrepresented, the powerless, and the historically silenced. Since I was a young child, I have felt this conviction to try to make the world better – fairer, freer, more equitable and equal – in whatever capacity I could. While I cannot pinpoint a specific turning point in my life, one day these convictions "went from being here to being everywhere. It wasn't just a part of me anymore... it was now a part of everything" (Yamada, 2013). Some may suggest that I am romanticizing my experience of childhood and that instead I was inexperienced and naïve, with limited understanding of the

complexities of the adult world. Critical reflection on my youth enables me to now see how my experiences and convictions have shaped me, propelled me, and led me down my current path. Today, I believe that finding Dewey (1916, 1938/1997) and Freire (1970, 1974) were inevitabilities, perhaps even destiny. If nothing else, they serve as affirmation that I have, in fact, made the right choice in pursuing my personal and professional goals and that others, regardless of their achievements or notoriety, share similar convictions.

One particular moment of clarity and affirmation came from reading Freire (1997):

> What I have been proposing is a profound respect for the cultural identity of students – a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the color of the other, the gender of the other, the class of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other; that implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other. (pp. 307-308)

Pieces of my paradigmatic puzzle came together as I read this and realized where and how Dewey and Freire converged. Here, I found a confidence and comfort that allowed me to take an epistemic stance and situate myself within my research.

While this was one of many significant aha moments, I was still left feeling something was missing; there was still another layer I needed to (re)discover to strengthen my worldview and, by extension, my voice within this journey. Through reflection, I realized that I had not explicitly honoured the experiences and knowledge that I brought to my doctoral work, namely my critical worldview. In essence, I had neglected Dewey's (1938/1997) charge of honouring "experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (pp. 27-28). It is possible that I overlooked this important piece of my lens because I felt that I had not yet fully explored and discovered novel and unanticipated insights about myself. I came to realize that, while this is important, it is equally important to "honor [my] own personal history and the

knowledge [I] have accumulated up to this point" (Madison, 2005, p. 19). Immersing myself in sociological discourse as an undergraduate and masters student shaped my critical worldview, and to ignore these influences was misguided and inauthentic. I realize that, for me, looking at the world through a critical lens is not a conscious effort anymore; it is simply how I see the world. And I remain confident in the belief that it is only through this critical lens that I am able to unite and strengthen a constructivist and humanist paradigmatic worldview.

Today, I realize that applying a critical lens is not necessarily about fault finding or finger-pointing (Apple, 2000), but rather "understanding the sets of historically contingent circumstances and contradictory power relationships that create the conditions in which we live" (Apple, 2000, p. 5). My worldview is instrumental in understanding how relations and apparatuses of power produce and sustain inequitable social relations and institutions as a form of social control and oppression (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991; Foucault, 1980; Janks, 2000; Kincheloe, 2004; Marcuse, 1964; Marx, 1867/1967). Using a critical lens allows me to re-imagine, much like my younger self did, how things might be different, more equal, fair, democratic, and just. Indeed, I can re-imagine the possibility of achieving Dewey's (1916/1966) goal of "improving the life we live in common so that the future shall be better than the past" (p. 191).

Interweaving constructivism, humanism, and the critical provides a dialectical theoretical framework and worldview that moves "beneath surface appearances . . . by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison, 2005, p. 7), while simultaneously recognizing the power of human agency. In so doing, my hope is to develop a philosophy of education that celebrates the stories, histories, memories, and experiences of all students, not simply those who fit into dominant cultural discourses and social norms; develops a language of critique, hope, and possibility (Giroux, 1992); creates educational contexts that fight for, embrace, and promote social justice and social action (Lewison et al., 2002); creates

and sustains critical consciousness (Freire, 1970); and makes "the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (McLaren, 2003, p. 189).

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

Reflecting back on my being and becoming, which is woven throughout each chapter, forces me to acknowledge the influence of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) on my research. Not having an explicit background in education, it took some time before I discovered Vygotsky (1978, 1986), and even longer for his theory of learning to really make sense. In fact, I did not truly grasp the concept, or its importance in my being and becoming, until I was fully immersed in classroom research, detailed in Chapters Four through Seven.

Crucial to my understanding was coming to terms with what Vygotsky (1978) referred to as the zone of proximal development defined as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). The zone of proximal development is achieved when educators scaffold learning opportunities for students that push them to the edge of their comfort zones. In this sense, students take on tasks that they may not necessarily be able to complete independently today, but, through guidance and support, they eventually master. Pushing students to the edge of their comfort zone not only promotes growth, but also develops greater resilience and grit as students learn to overcome challenging tasks and obstacles. The idea of pushing, what I later call nudging, students to the edge of their comfort zones (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) was seminal to my understanding, and eventual theorizing of, critical literacy.

Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Literacy

In order to get at the heart of understanding and interrogating what counts as literacy – the phenomenon that catalyzed this inquiry – I discuss critical theory and critical pedagogy in

depth in order to provide insight and context for the development of critical literacy, which I maintain is preferable to autonomous conceptualizations. A study of critical literacy would indeed be fragmented without exploring the theoretical and historical discourse that led to its evolution. As such, if we use the analogy of a tree to describe the relationship between critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical literacy, critical theory represents the tree's roots, critical pedagogy the trunk, and critical literacy the branches. In this sense, critical literacy branches off (all puns intended) from critical pedagogy, which is rooted in critical theory; the three are inextricably connected.

Critical Theory – At the Root of It All

According to McLaren (2003), critical theory "does not . . . constitute a homogeneous set of ideas. It is more accurate to say that critical theorists are united in their *objectives*: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (pp. 185-186, emphasis in original). My explication, then, will not outline a set of fixed characteristics, as this is contrary to the enterprise of critical theory and, by extension, to my dissertation and research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Nor will this be an exhaustive analysis of critical theory; to do so would require its own dissertation. Instead, I will discuss what critical theory offers my theoretical framework and research, namely a language of critique and possibility as we seek to interrogate "pervasive inequalities and injustices in everyday social relationships" (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 7).

Critical theorists seek to uncover and expose how economic, cultural, social, and political systems intersect and operate, paying particular attention to the exploitative and oppressive relations that allow such systems to prosper (Apple, 2000). Critical theory begins "with the premise that *men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege*" (McLaren, 2003, p. 193, emphasis in

original). Broadly speaking, it draws on Marxian critique and epistemology, whose aim is the emancipation and liberation of oppressed and subordinate social groups from the chains and shackles of the capitalist system. From this standpoint, capitalism is inherently oppressive for it suppresses, to the point of extinction, productive and creative activity which, for Marx (1867/1967), is one of the primary means by which individuals acquire personal fulfillment and meaning (Segaert, 2002). The conditions of capitalism transform human beings into objects or appendages of its system, replacing creativity and solidarity with the imperatives of competition, production, and profit (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Under these conditions, we are no longer individual subjects but rather objects of an exploitative, alienating, and oppressive system, forced to compete with one another for power, privilege, status, and wealth (Bronner, 2011; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Marx, 1867/1967).

In unalienated work, individuals are free to fulfill their own uniquely individual needs independent and irrespective of anyone else (Ollman, 1971). To be unalienated implies that "the kind of work that should be the main part of life is the kind of work you would want to do if you weren't being paid for it. It's work that comes out of your own internal needs, interests, and concerns" (Chomsky, 2012, para. 2). To be alienated, a symptom and consequence of capitalism, suggests that such powers (i.e., inherent interests and needs) are, in fact, intentionally suppressed and controlled by external factors that are built into the very fabric of the capitalist system (Rinehart, 1996; Segaert, 2002). In this sense, alienation represents "human estrangement – from persons, objects, values, organizations, or from oneself . . . the source of alienation is seen as residing in the social structure rather than in individual personalities" (Rinehart, 1996, p. 14). The nexus of this system, that is the means by which individuals are controlled both internally and externally, is rooted in and perpetuated through ideological mechanisms of control. This system of perpetual alienation, exploitation, and

control, for Marx (1867/1967), sustains the existing social structure by relegating oppressed and subordinated groups into a state of false consciousness, preserving the existing system.

The success and strength of capitalism rests in the ability of those in positions of power (i.e., bourgeoisie) to convince or indoctrinate oppressed or subordinated individuals and social groups (i.e., proletariat), ideologically, to support a system that works in direct opposition to their interests (i.e., false consciousness). Ideological control, meaning controlling how and what people think, obfuscates systemic social contradictions and relations of power that can lead to real social change thereby sustaining an oppressive and exploitative social structure (Allman, 1994). The emphasis, here, is the "effective suffocation" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 7) of liberatory needs, the entrenchment of ideological control, the promotion of false consciousness, and the perpetuation of an alienated existence that are a direct result of the capitalist system (Marcuse, 1964). You may ask yourself, as I have many times: How can this system survive in the 21st century? According to Chomsky (1994), it is quite simple:

> In a military or a feudal state . . . it doesn't matter much because you've got a bludgeon over their heads and you can control what they do. But when the state loses the bludgeon, when you can't control people by force . . . when the voice of the people can be heard . . . you have to control what people think. (p. 42)

These "apparatuses of control" (Foucault, 1980, p. 102) can take many forms including cultural representations that naturalize an individual's place within society (i.e., the ideology of individualism), the language that is used to validate and legitimate truth or knowledge, media propaganda that depicts a particular social context or circumstance (Chomsky, 1994), and educational systems that privilege some more than others (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1992; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; McLaren, 2003; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). These apparatuses of power ensure that those who are in power benefit from the existing system and, therefore,

support and maintain it in an effort to ensure that their own privilege endures (Chomsky, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). I am not suggesting that we develop a narrative that necessarily points fingers in a particular direction or somehow implies that subordinate groups do not have agency. Rather, my intention is to dismantle essentialist views that unproblematically perpetuate and support a naturalized social order (i.e., everything is in its place) of haves versus have-nots in an effort to illuminate the intentional manipulation of social relations and social contexts at the hands of those who are in control.

In addition to Marxist epistemology, critical educational theorists draw inspiration from the Frankfurt School (McLaren, 2003), including figures such as Fromm (1955), Marcuse (1964), Horkheimer (1972), and Habermas (1990). Members of this generation reject economic determinism – a critique of Marxist epistemology, which rests on the belief that economic factors dictate the nature and direction of all social life (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Instead, they employ a dialectical mode of thinking by blending the "historical, relational, and normative dimensions of social inquiry and knowledge" (Giroux, 2001, p. 35). These critical theorists expand upon Marxist epistemology by interweaving the macro and micro dimensions of social life; the individual social actor exists within a social structure that creates, and is created by, that very system (Giroux, 2001; Kellner, 2003; McLaren, 2003). Dialectical thinking, from an epistemological standpoint, demands "reflection back and forth between elements like *part* and *whole*, *knowledge* and *action*, *process* and *product*, *subject* and *object*, *being* and *becoming*, *rhetoric* and *reality*, or *structure* and *function*" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 33, emphasis in original). In this sense, the individual social actor can never be separated or isolated from the society in which they live; the two act and are acted upon by one another. Thus, we can begin to see the shift away from economic determinism, as envisaged by Marx (1867/1967), toward an interrogation of the relationship between culture and power, dominant and marginalized

discourses, and social structure and social actor in an effort to identify sites of cultural reproduction and domination, such as schools, that exert power over individuals (Foucault, 1988; Giroux, 2001; Marcuse, 1964). Within this new paradigm, the focus of critique becomes

> How things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours, etc. . . . We should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, [and] thoughts. (Foucault, 1980, p. 97)

If we apply this epistemological lens to schools, a dialectical theory of education would maintain it as a site for cultural reproduction and domination (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), as well as resistance and emancipation (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003). From this perspective, education

> Does not stand alone, a neutral instrumentality somehow above the ideological conflicts of society. Rather, it is deeply implicated in the formation of the unequal cultural, economic, and political issues that dominate our society. Education has been a major arena in which dominance is reproduced *and* contested, in which hegemony is partly formed and partly fractured. (Apple, 1989, p. vii, emphasis in original)

In this sense, schools unproblematically contribute to the reproduction of inequality and oppression, for example, along lines of class, race, gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity by persuading individuals "to stay in the place which falls to [them] *by nature*, to know [their] place and hold to it" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 210, emphasis in original). When this happens, certain "authorized versions of what counts as knowledge" (Olson, 1995, p. 127) are constructed, which minimizes or silences many non-dominant voices. Conversely, schools can adopt a critical stance by developing counter-hegemonic language, knowledge, and

practices (Giroux, 1988), promote cultural awareness, respect, and tolerance (Keyes, 2009; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005), and empower all students, including those who have been traditionally marginalized, through a curriculum that reflects and embraces diversity (Sharp, 2012; Wilson & Laman, 2007) and different 'ways with words' (Heath, 1983). In so doing, teachers allow themselves, as well as their students, the opportunity to question, "What is power?" (Foucault, 1988, p. 101), what constitutes knowledge (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989), and who has the power to determine what knowledge counts? Teaching from this standpoint takes an epistemic stance that recognizes knowledge and truth as socially constructed, contextually oriented, and rooted within a wider historical, political, and social context (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). What is needed, then, is an opportunity for students to dissect, deconstruct, challenge, and problematize what counts as knowledge in such a way that allows them to understand there are always many factors, both implicit and explicit, to consider. As Foucault (1980) eloquently articulates, "it's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power . . . but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates" (p. 133).

Creating a space for critical discourse and dialogue engenders Bakhtin's (1994) heteroglossia where "Truth is relativized by its dialogic contact with another social discourse, another view of the world" (p. 73). Knowledge or truth does not exist out there in the ethereal, but, instead, is socially constructed by individuals through dialogue and experience, as they not only interact with other individuals but larger sociohistorical and political contexts. In this sense, students learn that knowledge, truth, language, and meaning are always "in process [and] unfinalizable" (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 74).

Critical theorists problematize and interrogate how oppressive practices that privilege particular social groups are embedded within the foundation of public education in a way that

serves to reinforce dominant discourses and social norms, while simultaneously silencing marginalized voices. This critique, and ultimate rejection, is predicated on the need to challenge and dismantle dominant and essentialist epistemologies that support schooling as an extension of the capitalist system (i.e., serving economic interests by creating complacent workers) in favour of a view that charges schools to develop students' capacity to think, to act, to be in control of their learning, and to recognize themselves as agents of social change (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Giroux, 1992). Within a larger social context, the educational paradigm proposed by critical theorists transforms an exploitative and oppressive narrative into a story of hope and possibility where we can re-vision and reorient our efforts for a "qualitatively better life for all" (McLaren, 2003, p. 62), moving us closer to fulfilling the ideals of Dewey (1916, 1936/1997) and Freire (1970).

Critical theory also infuses educational discourse with a language of critique and possibility, allowing us to move away from reductive theorizing based on economic determinism to "boundary-crossing . . . bringing together various dimensions of social life" (Kellner, 2003, p. 58). Residing in the critical realm positions one to develop an understanding of the larger historical and sociopolitical circumstances, and concomitant power relations and practices, which shape and influence the conditions of everyday life (Apple, 2000). Further, it provides an opportunity to begin unpacking and teasing out the ways in which social institutions, particularly schools, perpetuate, produce, and reproduce, whether implicitly or explicitly, relations of domination and control, as well as the ways in which oppressive relationships and dominant discourses can be contested, challenged, and transformed (McLaren, 2003). The ultimate challenge, as I see it, is creating the necessary conditions for students to develop their critical lens and critical voice as they begin to define and navigate their role not only as learners, but also as members of society. The dominant questions become,

What conditions are needed to support a paradigmatic shift of learning from an institution of social control to one that nurtures students' critical lens? Do teachers' perceptions need to change? What classroom practices are necessary to fulfill the ideals of Dewey (1916, 1938/1997) and Freire (1970)?

Critical Pedagogy – The Trunk

What happens when students are given an opportunity to develop their critical lens? Or when teachers use students' experiences and interests as the foundation for learning? If we acknowledge that learning is not simply absorbing information but generating knowledge (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989), then we must ensure that our approach rejects the underlying belief in a "static and finite view of knowledge" (Olson, 1995, p. 121). Building on the work of critical theorists, critical pedagogy provides a lens to explore, understand, and interrogate public education and the role it plays as an institution of power. One of the first assumptions to break down is the possible disconnect between what students do and learn in school and the larger society. This breaking down is one of the fundamental aims of critical pedagogy. Keeping in mind that descriptions are always "shaped by those who devise them" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 5), what I offer, here, is indeed shaped by, and reflective of, my personal subjectivity and constructivist – humanist – critical worldview.

According to Freire and Macedo (1987), the primary role of critical pedagogy is to help students uncover and name, in an effort to attend to, the various tensions of social life. Working from the view that education is inherently political (Apple, 1989; Freire, 1970; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989), critical pedagogy embodies and supports the principles outlined in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Principles of critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy
- is grounded in a vision of justice and equality;
- is dedicated to alleviating human suffering;
- resists the harmful effects of dominant power; and
- transforms oppressive relations of power.

Note: Adapted from *Critical pedagogy primer* (pp. 6-11), by J. Kincheloe, 2004, New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Much like the progenitors of critical theory, critical pedagogy analyzes the institution of schooling through a historical and sociopolitical lens in order to understand how and why it functions in particular ways (McLaren, 2003). Grounded in the principles of love, respect, and justice, critical pedagogy "is founded on the conviction that schooling for self and social empowerment is *ethically prior* to a mastery of technical skills" (McLaren, 2003, p. 188, emphasis in original). By drawing attention to the ethical and humanistic responsibilities of educational institutions, and, by extension, those who work within them, critical pedagogy intentionally rejects the banking model of education, which is predicated on the assumption that students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with expert knowledge by the teacher (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1985; Freire, Fraser, Macedo, McKinnon, & Stokes, 1997; Freire & Macedo, 1987). This line of thinking and teaching is imbued with the rhetoric of liberal rationalism, which, according to Lankshear and Lawler (1989),

> . . . entails a strong notion of academic authority. The educator/teacher is taken to be *in* authority largely because they are *an* (academic) authority. They possess mastery of tools for rational judgment and belief which pupils are in the process of acquiring. It is only through education that pupils eventually become authorities in their own right. (p. 149, emphasis in original)

Liberal rationalism underwrites the practical application of banking education in the classroom (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989), which has significant implications for how students learn to position themselves as readers, writers, learners, and citizens (Gregory & Cahill, 2009). Under these conditions, students learn deference and conformity (Dewey, 1938/1997; Freire, 1970), inauthenticity (Brown, 1991), self-deception (Crites, 1971), and alienation (Giroux, 1987, 1988, 1992, 2001, 2011; McLaren, 2003; Olson, 1995). Knowledge is often bestowed upon students, but this knowledge is "hollow, alienated, and alienating" (Freire, 1970, p. 57). In essence, educational contexts that support banking education undermine students' individual agency, creativity, critical consciousness, and political power; ideologically, this serves the interests of dominant social groups and maintains the status quo. Banking education supports the absorption of knowledge, as opposed to actively generating it; separates knowledge into discrete, fragmented, and autonomous subjects of inquiry; and fails to situate learning within a wider historical and sociopolitical context thereby preventing students from making deep connections between curriculum content and the world in which they live (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989).

Educators who fail to critique and reject banking education, whether intentional or not, "become complicit in perpetuating the dominant ideology . . . [and] disavow the funds of knowledge that our students bring with them" (Gregory & Cahill, 2009, p. 8). If they actively reject this model, they explicitly accept what Freire (1970) describes as problem-posing education where learning is no longer an act of depositing but generating knowledge, connecting students to their experiences, personal biography, cultural heritage, community, and the world (Freire, 1970; Wallowitz, 2008). Problem-posing education supports and cultivates communication, consciousness, conscientization, dialogue, and praxis, that is, reflecting and acting upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970). The purpose of

schooling, and ultimately learning, is re-defined and re-imagined as an opportunity for "re-inventing, re-creating, re-writing" (Freire, 1985, p. 2) our lives and our experiences, recognizing how our individual experiences are embedded within and therefore shaped by sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, and creates an entry point for all students, including non-dominant learners, to share their voice within the classroom (Olson, 1995). In this sense, students are no longer relegated to a position of docility but "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire, 1970, p. 68), unveiling, questioning, interrogating, and transforming the world around them. This transformation and re-visioning creates classrooms "grounded in trust, flowering by means of dialogue, kept alive in open spaces where freedom can find a place" (Greene, 1988, p. 134). With this guiding principle, learning begins with a profound respect for students' experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997; Flint et al., 2015; Jones & Clarke, 2007), as well as a deep desire to help students develop a critical understanding and lens through which to view the world and contextualize their lives in relation to institutional, cultural, and sociohistorical factors (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). The kind of emphasis given within a problem-posing paradigm is to nurture students' wide-awakeness (Greene, 1978; Olson, 1995; Pautz, 1998) by asking how can we "educate for freedom" (Greene, 1988, p. 116). Further, this paradigm emboldens and empowers students and teachers to act in meaningful and authentic ways by constructing new ways and new lenses for looking at the world (Greene, 1988; Lewison et al. 2002).

Rather than accepting schools as neutral sites that simply transmit knowledge (Apple, 1989; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1999), critical pedagogy views knowledge as a social construct (Bruffee, 1987), which implies that alternate bodies of knowledge can be created and that all voices, particularly marginalized ones, need to be heard (McLaren, 2003; Olson, 1995; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998;). Viewing knowledge as a social construct

underscores the philosophical foundation of constructivism and critical theory, and its importance for critical pedagogy. By proposing a dialectical and constructivist theory of education, critical pedagogy recognizes that students and teachers are jointly responsible for constructing knowledge, creating meaning, and shifting the nexus of power from the teacher as sole narrative authority to a shared sense of power within the classroom (Apple, 2001, 2011; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003; Olson, 1995; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). In this sense, critical pedagogy not only emphasizes the experiences students bring with them to the classroom but uses this as a springboard for learning (Dewey, 1916, 1938/1997; Olson, 1995). Within this new learning environment, students are given an opportunity to develop their critical lens and critical arsenal to re-write their own narratives, to establish their narrative authority, and to meaningfully transform their own lives (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1985; Freire et al., 1997; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Greene, 1995; Olson, 1995).

In combination, critical theory and critical pedagogy provide a theoretical framework that re-conceptualizes the role of education from an institution of social control to one of emancipation, liberation, empowerment, resistance, and transformation. The promise of critical pedagogy rests with its ability to re-vision an alternative educational paradigm that fosters agency, combats cultural domination, interrogates issues related to power, and is committed to creating a more just and equal society (Dewey, 1916; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; McLaren, 2003). The dominant questions now become, *What are the conditions necessary for the development of students' critical lens? How can teachers support transformational learning as envisioned by Freire (1970) and Dewey (1916, 1938/1997)? How can educators support students' narrative authority within contemporary classrooms?*

Pedagogy of discomfort. Contexts that support critical pedagogy not only re-conceptualize the purpose of education, but also invite students and educators to critically re-

evaluate and re-define their beliefs, values, and worldviews. As Boler and Zembylas (2003) note, re-evaluation can often induce feelings of guilt, frustration, anger, sadness, and even resistance as new ways of understanding push against and conflict with deeply ingrained assumptions, behaviours, habits, and privileges. Learning within this context can lead to an increased sense of discomfort among students and educators, what Boler and Zembylas (2003) refer to as a pedagogy of discomfort. Figure 2.3 outlines the principles underlying their pedagogy.

Figure 2.3: Principles of a pedagogy of discomfort

A pedagogy of discomfort

- emphasizes the need for both students and educators to move outside of their comfort zones;
- invites critical inquiry into personal beliefs, assumptions, values, and worldviews;
- calls upon students and teachers to work toward social justice;
- cultivates learning environments grounded in critical thinking; and
- supports students and educators as they learn to live with others.

Note: Adapted from "Discomforting truths: The emotional terrain of understanding difference,"(pp. 108-127) by M. Boler and M. Zembylas, in P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Pedagogies of difference: Rethinking education for social justice*, 2003, New York, NY: Routledge.

Pedagogy, viewed as discomfort, is not simply about putting in cognitive labour, but requires emotional labour as well. Educators and learners must pay close attention to their emotional responses and reactions to learning for it is through these emotional stances that unconscious biases, privileges, and perpetuation of dominant ideologies become visible (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). Like Vygotsky (1978, 1986), a pedagogy of discomfort pushes students to the edge of their comfort zone – the unexamined emotional investments woven throughout our daily lives – that demands vulnerability and risk-taking (Boler, 2004). Within this context, learners can have both negative and positive emotional experiences as they tackle 'tough' topics (e.g., racism, sexism, colonialism, etc.), but it is critical for educators to not only demonstrate their own emotional labour, but also their "willingness to engage in the difficult work of . . . allowing one's worldviews to be shattered" (Boler, 2004, p. 128). A pedagogy of discomfort demands cognitive and emotional investment, growth, and a willingness on the part of learners

and educators as they take responsibility in the fight against injustice (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). Critical literacy offers an additional, and complementary, lens to guide discomforting pedagogical practices and dispositions where teaching and learning for social action thrives.

Critical Literacy – The Branches

In their book *Literacy, Schooling & Revolution*, Lankshear and Lawler (1989) pose the following questions:

> What constitutes *literacy*? . . . . What is the politics of literacy a politics of? How is literacy related to, say, reading or literature? What is the relationship between literacy and the curriculum? Does 'literacy' refer to the possession of certain specifiable techniques and skills? If so, what are they? And can literacy be understood solely in terms of these techniques and skills, or does it necessarily refer also to the content and context through which they are acquired and exercised? (p. 1, emphasis in original)

If we accept these questions as legitimate and critical questions, which I do, then it is incumbent upon us to strive to understand the conceptualizations of literacy that are dominant and pervasive, and those that are marginalized and silenced (Street, 1984). It is, therefore, necessary to explore and interrogate dominant understandings of literacy that underwrite epistemological assumptions and practical applications within public education in an effort to ensure that emancipatory literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987), what I will come to describe as critical literacy, is a fundamental component of contemporary conceptualizations and practices. An exploration of critical literacy would be incomplete without a foundational understanding of what it rejects, namely a traditional or autonomous view (Street, 1984).

The limitations of traditional or autonomous literacy. Traditional literacy is often understood as "the mastery of skills, processes, and understandings in making meaning from and through written text" (Luke & Woods, 2009, p. 9). From this perspective, literacy is

understood, rather unproblematically, to be a fixed body of skills that an individual either has or does not (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Luke & Woods, 2009; Parr & Campbell, 2012; Perry, 2012). These skills are assumed to be neutral, unbiased, and universal, which can be learned and used by everyone and applied within all contexts (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Luke & Woods, 2009; Parr & Campbell, 2012). For Cambourne (2017), traditional literacy represents a discourse of acquisition where language and literacy learning are acquired like objects, "some kind of physical, tangible stuff, or thing which exists independently of the human mind" (p. 20). Learning language or learning to read has

> . . . 'size' (or 'mass') that can be 'measured' (and/or 'scored'). . . . it can also be 'moved' from one place to another, it can be 'stored' in different places, it can be 'packaged' in different ways, it can be 'lost,' 'misplaced,' or 'reduced' and it can be 'broken down' into hierarchies of smaller subparts. (Cambourne, 2017, p. 20)

Traditional literacy assumes that knowledge is objective, transferrable, moulded, and thrown away (Cambourne, 2017) and is deeply ingrained in current educational contexts where learning to read and write, as well as the dominant texts and mediums that are used, emphasize technical learning often devoid of critical analysis (Giroux, 1987). Even though constructivist theories of knowledge, learning, and teaching made their mark nearly three decades ago (see Cambourne, 1988; Gee, 1990; Street, 1984; Vygotsky, 1986), traditional literacy is still alive and well, reflected in standardized testing and formal assessments, such as those administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). As many critical literacy theorists suggest, traditional definitions and conceptualizations are outdated and fail to meet the needs of 21st century learners, particularly marginalized or non-dominant students (Comber, 2001; Flint & Laman, 2012; Horn, 2014; Green, 2001; Kempe, 2001; Sharp, 2012). Such conceptualizations perpetuate dominant (i.e., white, middle-class, male) cultural norms, discourses, and "ways with

words" (Heath, 1983) that further ignores, excludes, and silences marginalized voices. This results in an educational system that privileges some more than others. While great strides have been made to re-orient literacy education (see the *Capacity Building Series* by The Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2015), the journey is far from over. Cambourne (2017) suggests that, what is needed now more than ever, is a "counter campaign of reclamation" (p. 18) to convince teachers, parents, administrators, and policy makers to change the ways they talk and think about literacy and learning. My research takes up Cambourne's (2017) call to action, to re-claim by reframing educational research rather than refuting or rebutting our adversaries.

The promise of new conceptualizations of literacy. Rejecting traditional conceptualizations, critical literacy theorists support literacy as an embodied and embedded social practice that allows students to draw upon past and present experiences, background knowledge, linguistic capital, cultural heritage, etc., to make deep and meaningful connections as they read the word and world simultaneously (Comber, 2001; Freire, 1970, 1974; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke, 2012; Vasquez, 2004, 2010; Wallowitz, 2008). Lankshear and Lawler (1989) suggest that this type of literacy requires "social practices of reading and writing [that] bring words and the world together around the pursuit of an ever enhanced understanding of the relationship between biography and structure" (p. 151), what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls the sociological imagination. Critical literacy is about helping students develop their sociological imagination (i.e., understanding the intersectionality of history, biography, and society) so that they can recognize the dynamic and complex relationship between language and power in an effort to support social justice and social action within classrooms and beyond (Behrman, 2006; Lewison et al., 2002; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015). Critical literacy does not, however, promote a prescribed instructional methodology, but rather represents a process

or lens through which to view learning, as well as epistemological perceptions of educators' roles. As such, it is best described as the practical application of critical pedagogy that helps students develop and construct a critical lens as they think, produce, consume, read, write, and make sense of the world around them. In an attempt to facilitate a cohesive understanding of critical literacy, diverse views of looking at literacy are considered. These include: literacy as social practice, literacy as resistance and critique, and literacy as empowerment and emancipation. While discussed separately, these are not either/or categories but should, instead, be interpreted as elements that work together to provide a holistic conceptualization of critical literacy.

Literacy as social practice. Critical literacy theorists reject the traditional view of literacy in favour of literacy as social practice that is localized, contextualized, and socially constructed (Luke, 1991). Within this perspective, we are able to highlight the importance of local, social, political, and cultural contexts within educational environments and, by extension, society at large as students work through the curriculum (Giroux, 1987). From this perspective, literacy and learning are viewed as inherently political projects in which individuals read the word in an effort to become more critically aware of their world (Apple, 1989; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1987, 1992; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989). Literacy as social practice is about "what people *do* with reading, writing, and texts in real world contexts and why they do it" (Perry, 2012, p. 54, emphasis in original). Working from a critical sociocultural perspective, I draw on the six propositions in Figure 2.4 as a conceptual framework for this inquiry.

Figure 2.4: Propositions of literacy as social practice

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts;
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life;
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible, and influential than others;
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices;
- Literacy is historically situated; and
- Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense-making.

Note: Adapted from *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (p. 8), by D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanič, 2000, London, UK: Routledge.

Critical literacy moves away from traditional approaches that "divorce reading from its ideological and historical contexts" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 108) toward literacy for critical consciousness, what Freire (1970) calls conscientização. Under these conditions, students are able to challenge master narratives, utilize discursive practices, and engage in self-reflection and social action through multiple literacy events and practices (Barton et al., 2000; Johnson & Rosario-Ramos, 2012). Rather than promoting a unitary and monologic one-size-fits-all approach, thinking about literacy as social practice recognizes that literacy varies from one context, as well as one learner, to another (Harste, 2003; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Street, 2003). In this way, critical literacy "is not a finite set of practices" (Comber, 2001, p. 2), but rather an opportunity to help students learn to question practices of privilege, injustice, inequity, and inequality (Comber, 2001; Roberge, 2013); to view the world through a more critical lens (Harste, 2003); to open up space for students to play with and invent their own critical literacies (Comber, 2001; Vasquez, 2010); and to imagine the possibility of making the world fairer, freer, more equal and democratic (Janks, 2014).

Students are encouraged to challenge the objectivity of knowledge, interrogate texts, and question naturalized assumptions or truth claims (Janks, 2010; Kamler, 2001; Lewison et

al., 2002). Understanding literacy as social practice "suggests that researchers [and educators] must attend to local meanings as well as the influences of larger social systems" (Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006, p. 201). The emphasis, here, is the relationship between language, literacy, and power, which has implications for what is learned, as well as how literacy is positioned and enacted within the classroom (Janks, 2010; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Roberge, 2013; Van Sluys et al., 2006). Critical literacy practices, while not prescribed, often involve questioning the ideological intentions of texts, critiquing issues of inequality and injustice, making space for counter-narratives, transforming social conditions, examining the power of language, questioning what counts as knowledge, recognizing that language and texts are never neutral, and disrupting normative patterns of everyday life (Behrman, 2006; Leland & Harste, 2000; Janks 2010; Kamler, 2001; Lewison et al., 2002; Lewison et al., 2015; Lewison & Heffernan, 2008; Shor, 1999; Van Sluys et al., 2006; Vasquez, 2004, 2010). Re-orienting the everyday lives of students through new and alternative lenses positions them to begin interrogating the ways in which texts produce and sustain dominant discourses, normative practices, and hegemonic ideologies (Hagood, 2002). Students also come to understand that knowledge is constructed – which can be de-constructed and re-constructed – and that there are many possible ways of understanding, interpreting, and creating knowledge and meaning beyond prevailing dominant modes (Janks, 2000, 2014; Wallowitz, 2008).

Literacy as resistance and critique. Critical literacy is not a set of pedagogical skills and strategies that one simply adopts. It is a mindset, a lens through which to view the world and our role in it (Wallowitz, 2008). Teaching and learning from a critical stance becomes an act of resistance against the status quo that allows teachers and students to examine how certain texts, languages, practices, and knowledge maintain and perpetuate systems of power, privilege, and dominance (Ayers, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1987; Wallowtiz,

2008). Not encouraging students to question what counts as knowledge, and what and whose knowledge counts, tacitly endorses the status quo (Shor, 1992). Furthermore, “a curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them, and no need for change” (Shor, 1992, p. 12). Critical literacy educators explicitly accept the task of opening up possibilities for students to begin questioning what knowledge is valued within our society, as well as the process through which knowledge becomes authorized and validated (Kincheloe, 2004). Students begin to understand how they have been culturally and politically indoctrinated and how this influences their own values, beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions of self (Christensen, 2011). Critical literacy as resistance is a call to action to make inequity visible, to fight against injustices within everyday contexts, to make dominant cultural knowledge and discourses explicit, and to empower students to perceive themselves as agents of social change. It is an overtly political approach to teaching and learning, and to the ideological, sociolinguistic, and cultural contexts of the curriculum and pedagogical practices that interweaves social, political, and cultural discourses through an analysis of how texts work, under what circumstances, with what consequences, and for whom (Luke, 2012).

Critical literacy helps students develop critical filters or lenses to evaluate how texts are positioned, ideologically, and how texts are positioning them as readers and learners (Patel Stevens & Bean, 2007; Roberge, 2013; Van Sluys et al., 2006). Further, it creates the possibility that a language of critique becomes the new norm (Giroux, 1992) and that students and teachers can develop the capacity to “rewrite, redesign, and reshape” (Luke & Woods, 2009, p. 1) their own literacy imagination and, by extension, their identity, sense of self, and overall worldview as an agent of social change.

Literacy as empowerment and emancipation. By encouraging students to question and challenge knowledge, rather than absorb or memorize facts, students develop the capacity to examine their everyday experiences in relation to society (Roberge, 2013; Shor, 1992). Critical literacy theorists aim to empower rather than oppress, encourage rather than stifle, and give voice to, rather than silence, all students. Teaching from this stance empowers students by engendering and reinforcing their own ability to act, to make decisions, to have narrative authority, and to be active agents within the learning process (Olson, 1995; Robinson, 1994). Empowering education is committed to self and social change, and is a student-centred approach that views learning as active, dialogical, and critical (Shor, 1992, 1999). Rather than anesthetizing creativity (Freire, 1970), critical literacy as an emancipatory paradigm actively engages students in their own learning by recognizing and supporting their natural curiosity, as well as the language, values, experiences, and knowledge they bring with them into the classroom (Dewey, 1916, 1938/1997; Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 1987; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; Shor, 1992; Wallowitz, 2008). Within this perspective, students learn "to be critical citizens who can think, challenge, take risks, and believe that their actions will make a difference in the larger society" (Giroux, 1988, p. 214). They also learn to explore the underlying forces that have shaped their lives, experiences, and assumptions by learning to read in new and critical ways, allowing students to regain the power to control their own learning and, by extension, their own lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

Critical literacy as a new educational paradigm transgresses the narrow assumptions of traditional literacy education and equips students with the ability to examine knowledge, language, and power critically. Furthermore, critical literacy creates educational contexts that connect students' individual experiences to larger historical and social processes, power relationships, and social relations (Shor, 1992). It transforms students from passive recipients of

knowledge to critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (Freire, 1970) allowing students the opportunity to recognize that "they – talking together, writing together – are the authors of their world" (Greene, 1991, p. 167). In the words of Brown (2010), it allows them to "own [their] story" (p. 23).

Critical literacy is not simply a method for teaching students to make inferences and read between the lines within language instruction. It is about helping students understand the relationship between language and power, social relations and social structures, and their own biography as it exists and is shaped by external forces beyond their control (Roberge, 2013). It is also about teaching students that these structural forces and social institutions are not finite and impenetrable. It is about instilling in children the belief that they can make a difference even when things may seem hopeless and immutable. Critical literacy is not, however, relegated to the confines of literacy instruction; it interweaves throughout the curriculum and classroom life. We must, therefore, look for ways to support learners, to help them develop their unique critical lenses, and reinforce their position as agents of social change beyond the four walls of our classrooms.

Models of Critical Literacy

Various understandings and approaches to critical literacy education pervade the literature. To set the stage for my research, I outline four conceptual, yet related, frameworks that guide this inquiry: Luke and Freebody's (1999) four resources model, Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions framework, Janks' (2000, 2010) interdependent framework, and Lewison et al.'s (2015) model for critical literacy instruction.

Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model

Luke and Freebody (1999) outline a conceptual framework that not only expands our understanding of literacy as social practice, but broadens our conceptualizations of reading

practices and processes. Included in their framework are four interrelated reader roles: code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text analyzer (Figure 2.5).

Code user. Code users are able to decode text using a phonics-based approach to reading that include "phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, and decoding skills" (Parr, 2008, p. 25). Within this perspective, students decode symbols (e.g., alphabet, sounds, etc.) to read and, presumably, comprehend text (Leland et al., 2005; Luke & Freebody, 1999).

Meaning maker. Meaning makers utilize textual and personal resources as they engage with texts (Leland et al., 2005). In this sense, students interact with and compose "meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts, taking into account each text's interior meaning systems in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning system" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 5). Thus, as students develop their awareness of literacy practices, they draw upon personal repertoires and experiences to make meaningful connections with the texts they read.

Text user. Text users begin to question the purpose of text, the language used, and the implicit social relations imbued within texts. Learners begin to develop their critical lens in relation to texts, and are positioned to begin interrogating how texts are influenced and shaped (i.e., their tone, language, images, etc.) by external factors (Luke & Freebody, 1999). This role positions readers to assume the final role as text analyzers.

Text analyzer. Text analyzers critically analyze the ideological function of texts by asking what does this text do to me? Through a critical lens, students begin to understand that texts "represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people's ideas – and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 5).

Providing students with ample opportunities to develop each reader role is paramount. Reading is viewed as a simultaneously efferent, aesthetic, cognitive, sociocultural and political experience (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Moving from code user to text analyzer, for example, is an interactive process, rather than a distinctly independent endeavour where students move through distinct stages of reading. The four resources model is not intended as a prescriptive approach that provides an "instructional panacea" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 3) for literacy education. Instead, this model provides "openings in the curriculum that enable teachers, students, and communities to explore alternative ways of structuring practices around texts to address new cultural and economic contexts and new forms of practice and identity" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 3). This model and its practices attempt to dismantle traditional conceptualizations of literacy as skill development moving toward an understanding of how institutions shape the social relations of literacy practices in an effort to develop students' capacity to recognize the non-neutrality of texts. Within a wider context, Luke and Freebody (1999) are attempting to "make a substantial contribution to transforming the social distribution of knowledge, discourse, and, with these, real economic and social capital among specific communities, groups, and individuals" (p. 5).

Figure 2.5: Four resources model

Code User Students use phonological and phonemic awareness, word recognition, symbols, etc., to decode text as code users.	**Meaning Maker** Students use personal and prior knowledge structures to create meaning through text as a text participant (e.g., cultural resources, cultural meaning).
Text User Students begin to recognize and interrogate author intent, including the tone, language, and images used.	**Text Analyzer** Students recognize that: texts are not neutral; particular perspectives are presented; certain voices are missing/silenced; texts can be critically analyzed and redesigned.

Note: Adapted and compiled from the following resources: Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Campbell & Parr, 2013; Ontario Expert Panel on Literacy.

Lewison et al.'s Four Dimensions Framework

Similar to Luke and Freebody's (1999) four resources model, Lewison et al.'s (2002) framework consists of four interactive dimensions: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice within the classroom (Figure 2.6). This model is perhaps the most well-known framework of critical literacy. Their objective is to develop a conceptual framework of literacy instruction and practices within a sociopolitical context where literacy is both examined critically and positions learners to develop a critical lens (Lee, 2012; Lewison et al., 2002).

Disrupting the commonplace. Critical literacy is intended to develop new lenses that enable us to view our everyday lives as social actors (Lewison et al., 2002). From this perspective, we are able to situate what is learned in school, and all knowledge for that matter, within larger historical and sociopolitical contexts in an effort to problematize not only what we learn, read, write, think about, etc., but how we engage in these activities (Lewison et al., 2002; Shor, 1987). For example, students are prompted to ask questions such as, "How is this text positioning me" and "What is the author's intent or ideological motive" (Comber, 2001; Lewison et al., 2002; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Disrupting the commonplace is about developing the capacity to critique, tease out, and lay bare the ideological meanings of texts and the ways in which what and how we learn, as well as the language we use, supports or disrupts normative and dominant discourses that support the status quo (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1990; Lewison et al., 2002).

Considering multiple viewpoints. Critical literacy practices also encourage students to understand texts from their own individual and unique perspectives while, simultaneously, imagining how this understanding might be different from the point of view of someone else (Lewison et al., 2002). Students are offered opportunities to incorporate multiple voices,

viewpoints, and perspectives in a way that legitimizes and values all voices equally (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2000). Contexts that support engagement with multiple perspectives expose students to counter-narratives, conflicting viewpoints, and traditionally marginalized or silenced voices (Lewison et al., 2002). It also allows students to stand in another's shoes by examining and reflecting upon the similarities and differences between their own lives and storied lives, pushing their thinking deeper as they consider why particular stories have been silenced. Students begin to understand that knowledge is socially constructed and relational, that there are no universal or objective truths, and that we must embrace and celebrate epistemological diversity through cultural awareness, open-mindedness, respect, and tolerance (Luke, 2012; Malott, 2010; Wallowitz, 2008).

Focusing on sociopolitical issues. According to critical theorists, literacy instruction is never neutral and, as such, it is incumbent upon us to understand and uncover how sociopolitical systems, power relations, apparatuses of power, and dominant discourses and language influence both what and how we teach, as well as what and how students learn (Apple, 1989; Comber, 2001; Foucault, 1980, 1988; Freire, 1970, 1974; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Lewison et al., 2002; Powell, Cantrell, & Adams, 2001; Roberge, 2013). By accepting this responsibility, students who have been traditionally marginalized are afforded access to dominant discourses and forms of literacy without devaluing their cultural heritage or linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Teaching from a critical stance allows students to infuse their own stories and narratives into dominant discourses by making dominant cultural knowledge explicit (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lewison et al., 2002; Olson, 1995). If we fail to pay attention to the narrative authority of all students, learners, particularly those who are marginalized, may "'cover over' [their] lived story by telling what [they] believe is a more acceptable story, the story [they]

believe others want to hear" (Olson, 1995, pp. 127-128). If we, however, situate literacy practices within a wider sociocultural and sociopolitical context, we open up space in the classroom for students to share their lived experiences, and create authentic and meaningful learning experiences for all.

Taking action and promoting social justice. Literacy education can be used as a vehicle for social change ranging from small changes in individuals, schools, and communities to larger systemic transformation (Comber, 2001; Lankshear & Lawler, 1989; Lewison et al., 2002). This requires creating a classroom space where students can question practices and social forces that perpetuate privilege and injustice (Comber, 2001), analyze how language is used to maintain and dismantle systems of domination (Janks, 2000), interrogate the processes that sustain subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980), and encourage students to reflect and act upon their world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970). Teaching and learning from this perspective becomes an act of resistance (Ayers, 1996; Wallowitz, 2008), a call to action to explore and identify "what differences *make a difference*" (Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999, p. 70, emphasis in original), fight against injustice, and empower students as active agents of social change. Furthermore, imbuing literacy instruction in this way enables "subordinate groups to achieve a *critical* understanding, in Freire's sense, of social reality and their circumstances within it. This implies, minimally, that they learn to relate biography and structure, in sociological imagination" (Lankshear & Lawler, 1989, p. 147, emphasis in original). Students begin to see that learning is purposeful and authentic, a catalyst toward social change.

Figure 2.6: Four dimensions of critical literacy

Disrupting the Commonplace
Critical literacy allows us to view, interpret, and understand through new and alternative lenses. By problematizing and interrogating texts, popular culture, and media through a language of critique, students begin to understand how their identities, values, beliefs, assumptions, etc., have been shaped, and what steps they can take to unpack, challenge, and disrupt the status quo.

Considering Multiple Viewpoints
Critical literacy allows students to stand in someone else's shoes by examining, understanding, and reflecting upon multiple and contradictory perspectives, including traditionally silenced and marginalized voices.

Focusing on the Sociopolitical
Teaching from a critical stance allows learners to dig deeper, to go beneath the surface by examining and challenging unequal power relationships and sociopolitical systems. Literacy becomes a form of cultural citizenship, and act of consciousness and resistance.

Taking Action
Students recognize the power to create social change through literacy events and activities.

Note: Adapted from "Researching Critical Literacy: A Critical Study of Analysis of Classroom Discourse" by K. Van Sluys, M. Lewison, & A. Flint, 2006, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *38*(2), pp. 232-233.

Janks' Interdependent Framework

Janks' (2000, 2010) model is an interactive and interdependent framework consisting of four dimensions or orientations to literacy education: domination, access, diversity, and design. Figure 2.7 provides a synthesis of Janks' conceptual framework. For Janks (2000), it is imperative that we "find ways of holding all of these elements in productive tension to achieve what is a shared goal of all critical literacy work: equity and social justice" (p. 178).

Domination. Domination represents the ways in which language and hegemonic discourses operate as apparatuses of power that maintain and reproduce dominant power relations and relationships within schools and society (Foucault, 1980; Janks, 2000, 2010). To achieve this, learners require opportunities to explore how the language used in text positions them to sustain specific social ideologies across different modalities (Janks, 2000). By making these contradictions and tensions explicitly visible, students are positioned to read the word

and world simultaneously (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Readers are encouraged to understand that, just as texts are constructed, they can also be deconstructed and reconstructed from different perspectives (Janks, 2013). Students gain the sense that language and literacy practices are not neutral or unbiased, but instead work to position readers in particular ways (Janks, 2000, 2010, 2013). Most importantly, exposing how domination functions and reproduces allows readers to "name and interrogate . . . practices in order to change them" (Janks, 2014, p. 349).

Access. According to Janks (2000), educators need to find ways to balance dominant forms of discourse, literacy, and language without silencing or devaluing students' diverse 'ways with words' (Heath, 1983). The diversity of experiences, cultural heritage, knowledge structures, etc., need to be utilized as productive resources within the classroom. Literacy and learning from this standpoint provides many opportunities for students to re-design and re-vision classrooms as inclusive, socially aware, and culturally respectful spaces (Ayers, 1996; Greene, 1978; Janks, 2010). The dimension of access can also be used as a springboard to begin problematizing: *Who has access? Who does not? And why* (Janks, 2013; Luke, 1991)? Contexts that support this type of learning lead students to make deep and meaningful connections, and disconnections, between their own lives and storied lives (Janks, 2000, 2010; Jones & Clarke, 2007; Richards, 2006).

Diversity. With the expansion of what counts as literacy, critical literacy teachers can now utilize diverse texts (i.e., written, visual, oral, performative, multimedia, etc.) and a range of modalities and technologies within the classroom (Janks, 2010; Luke & Woods, 2009). By expanding literacy practices and resources, students are exposed to diverse cultures, languages, and identities, as well as acquiring new "ways of being in the world" (Janks, 2000, p. 177). Similar to Lewison et al.'s (2002) dimension of interrogating multiple viewpoints, embracing

diversity within literacy education allows students to read the word and world from multiple perspectives creating greater inclusivity and diversity within educational environments (Janks, 2000, 2010). Indeed, embracing diversity ensures that "students' different 'ways with words' (Heath, 1983) have a place in the classroom" (Janks, 2000, p. 177).

Design. The final dimension of Janks' (2000) conceptual framework is design, which refers to students' ability to utilize the multiplicity of resources available to them to challenge and change dominant discourses. Students' creativity must be stimulated and fostered as they make sense of and construct new meanings and explore new modalities within the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2000, 2010). Through reconstruction, students and teachers collaborate to build new discourses, construct new identities, and re-vision educational contexts that are socially just, diverse, equal, equitable, inclusive, and transformative (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2000, 2010; Lewison et al., 2002; Parr & Campbell, 2012). Equally important in this process is for educators to model how to read critically, how to transform injustices, and how to make deep connections with texts (i.e., text to text, text to self, text to world) within the classroom (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Richards, 2006; Ricker-Wilson, 2013). Through design, teachers and students learn to "*name* the world [in order] to change it" (Freire, 1970, p. 76, emphasis in original).

Figure 2.7: An interdependent framework of critical literacy

Domination without:	Access without:
• access maintains status quo; • diversity loses the potential for social change; • design eliminates agency.	• domination naturalizes the status quo; • diversity fails to recognize how difference affects access; • design reifies power and dominance.
Diversity without:	**Design without**
• domination disconnects diversity, power, and dominance; • access segregates students; • design fails to realize the full potential of diversity.	• domination risks reproducing the status quo; • access remains on the periphery; • diversity fails to use difference as a resource.

Note: Adapted from "Domination, access, diversity, and design: A synthesis for critical literacy education" by H. Janks, 2000, *Educational Review*, *52*(2), p. 178.

Lewison et al.'s Model for Critical Literacy Instruction

Rooted in principles of democracy and justice, questioning and analysis, and resistance and action, critical literacy embodies critical pedagogy where problem-posing education is actualized (Freire, 1970, 1974; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lewison et al.,2015). Lewison et al.'s (2015) model for critical literacy instruction builds on the preceding frameworks (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Lewison et al., 2002; Janks, 2000, 2010), but, according to Lewison et al. (2015), while "each of these frameworks proposes important ways of understanding critical practices . . . none was sufficient in representing the complexity of what it means to implement critical literacy" (p. xxvii). After ten revisions, their model consists of five dimensions: personal and cultural resources; critical social practices; critical stance; moving between the personal and social; and situating the model in specific contexts (Figure 2.8). As with the other frameworks, this model is neither set in stone nor inflexible, but rather adaptable to meet specific teacher, student, and classroom needs.

Personal and cultural resources. The resources that students and teachers draw upon to create critical curriculum content re-present an important piece of the critical literacy puzzle

(Lewison et al., 2015). These include personal experiences and background knowledge, printed text, popular culture and multimedia, home-based literacies, diverse languages, students' interests, and local and global issues. Within this context, literacy events and activities incorporate the six language arts of reading, writing, viewing, speaking, listening, and representing effectively expanding traditional conceptualizations of literacy to meet the needs of 21st century learners. Personal and cultural resources remind us that, as educators, not only must we remain cognizant of how we teach, but what we teach as well.

Critical social practices. The second dimension of the model "includes the specific social practices that students and teachers engage in as they create critical curricula" (Lewison et al., 2015, p. 7). This dimension draws heavily upon Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions framework outlined above (Figure 2.5). By infusing these practices into the classroom, teachers create authentic spaces for students to question issues of power, disrupt the status quo, pose new questions that demystify naturalized assumptions, and envision how things might be different in the future (Giroux, 1994; Lewison et al., 2015; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). These practices also allow students to gain a deeper understanding of what has influenced and shaped their identities, views, beliefs, and assumptions, while simultaneously recognizing how these can be re-named (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lewison et al., 2015).

Critical stance. Adopting a critical stance represents the core of the model. According to Lewison et al. (2015), a critical stance "represents the attitudes and dispositions we take on that enable us to become critically literate beings" (p. 13) consisting of four sub-dimensions: consciously engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire, and being reflexive.

Consciously engaging. Consciously engaging pushes teachers to move beyond simply responding to events where we thoughtfully and consciously decide how to respond. This

dimension allows us to not only re-name the world in a Freirean sense, but also to re-frame our world by modifying how we think, speak, and act (Lewison et al., 2015).

Entertaining alternate ways of being. This dimension involves accepting and taking risks as we come to understand the partiality of what we know, and remain open to new ways of understanding and being in the world (Lewison et al., 2015). In doing so, we maintain the possibility to create and engage in new discourses, new literacies, and new pedagogical practices as we navigate the relationship between language and power.

Taking responsibility to inquire. Inquiring, investigating, and interrogating are at the heart of adopting a critical stance. From this perspective, learners are encouraged to ask a lot of questions as they come to understand their role in the construction of knowledge. Teachers encourage students' questions through effective modelling creating a learning cycle where "*new* knowledge provokes *new* questions and where new questions generate new knowledge" (Lewison et al., 2015, p. 17, emphasis in original).

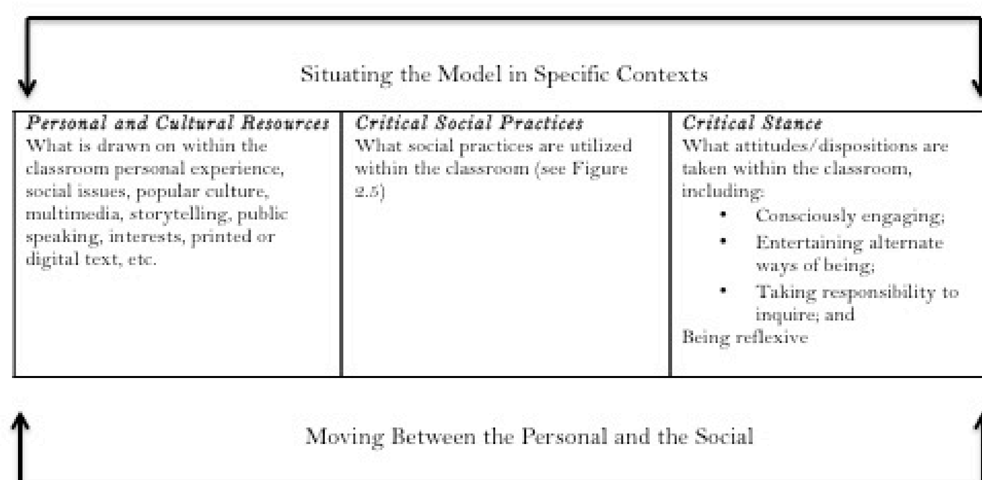
Being reflexive. The final dimension of adopting a critical stance supports reflexivity. Teachers engage in reflexive practice when they interrogate their own assumptions, beliefs, and practices and how these perpetuate or push against the status quo. Practicing reflexivity allows learners to recognize that all actions and belief systems, including those held and enacted by teachers, require interrogation and evaluation (Lewison et al., 2015). Teaching from this position requires vulnerability and risk-taking where students come to see how reflexivity leads to growth.

Moving between the personal and the social. Similar to Dewey (1916, 1938/1997), Lewison et al. (2015) charge teachers to start with what students know and ignites their passion. Students' social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) must be tied to classroom activities, literacy events, and curricular tasks so that they come to realize the inherent value of their personal

knowledge outside the classroom, what Moll et al. (1992) refer to as students' funds of knowledge. Teachers cannot, however, simply stop at the personal interests of their students. Students must have the opportunity to understand and connect their knowledge and interests to larger sociohistorical and political contexts. So even though we begin with the personal, "it is essential to move beyond it, to understand the forces that have shaped our experiences rather than just relying on experience itself" (Lewison et al., 2015, p. 20). As educators, it is incumbent upon us to provide opportunities where students can make these text-to-world connections as we support them throughout their discovery.

Situating the model in specific contexts. The environment in which we work, the individuals that work with us, and the school board in which we reside can support or hinder our ability to effectively model critical teaching and support critical literacy. Forces beyond our control, however, will always impact what we can and cannot do within the classroom (Lewison et al., 2015). As Lewison et al. (2015) remind us, "if we want to implement critical practices in classrooms, working at a school where administrators demand the use of specific mandated, one-size-fits-all materials is much more difficult than working in schools where the staff has resisted standardized curricula" (p. 20). I would extend this sentiment to include governing bodies, such as the Ontario Ministry of Education, who seem to privilege traditional conceptualizations of literacy and language instruction. Lewison et al.'s (2015) charge reinforces the criticality of continuing this line of research, for things will not improve without empirical evidence of how they can and why they should.

Figure 2.8: Lewison et al.'s model for critical literacy instruction



Note: Adapted from *Creating Critical Classrooms: Reading and Writing with an Edge* (pp. 5-21) by M. Lewison, C. Leland, & J. C. Harste, 2015, New York, NY: Routledge. Copyright 2015 by Taylor & Francis.

Do We Need a New Model?

Luke and Freebody's (1999) Four Resources Model provides a good starting point for understanding how students make sense of, and critically engage with, text. The model, though, seems to privilege reading over other forms of literacy such as speaking, writing, listening, viewing, and representing. Thus, while it is a great starting point for teachers to begin scaffolding opportunities to move students from simple code users to text analyzers, a precursor for becoming critically literate, the scope of this model is somewhat limited.

The final three models (Lewison et al.'s (2002) Four Dimensions Framework, Janks' (2000, 2010) Interdependent Framework, and Lewison et al.'s (2015) Model for Critical Literacy Instruction), while extensive and broad in scope, focus too much on understanding critical literacy from a pedagogical standpoint. Make no mistake, teachers are fundamental to bringing critical literacy into the classroom, but by focusing so much on what teachers can and

should be doing, students' voices get lost. While I see value in all of these models, no one model can provide all of the answers, ideas, or methods. That being said, the greatest weakness for all models is the lack of balance between both theory and practice, and teacher and student. My goal is to provide a framework that attempts to blend theory with practice through both a pedagogical and pragmatic lens.

Critical Literacy in Practice

Critical literacy researchers have made great strides in demonstrating the value of critical literacy in the classroom, paying close attention to the ways in which students and teachers engage with critical literacy, as well as the broader implications for learning.[3] This being said, Laman (2006), like Kuby (2011), suggests that there are educators who maintain the belief that schools should shelter children, particularly young children, from the harsh reality of society by not burdening them with "issues of the adult world" (Laman, 2006, p. 204). This is not the view to which I subscribe; instead, I support Gregory and Cahill's (2009) assertion that critical literacy "should begin in the classrooms of the youngest children in our schools so they may grow to become lifelong practitioners of critical literacy who question and transform social injustice in our world" (p. 8).

There is a burgeoning area of research involving elementary classrooms, as outlined below, which illuminates how young children become critically literate when given the time and space to do so (Kuby, 2011). My goal is to highlight the work being done with elementary school children for they have been underrepresented and silenced within the literature too long (Comber, 2001). Rather than provide an extensive review of critical literacy research, like Wohlwend suggests (2013), I draw upon a few key studies to demonstrate the breadth of the

[3] See Comber, 2001; Flint & Laman, 2012; Gainer, Valdez-Gainer, & Kinard, 2009; Horn, 2014; Green, 2001; Kempe, 2001; Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012; Leland, Harste, Davis, Haas, McDaniel, Parsons, & Strawmyer, 2003; Lewis-Bernstein Young, 2009; Vasquez, 2004, 2010; Weih, 2014.

field, and to tease out the nuances of critical literacy for both teachers and students. Figure 2.9 provides an overview of each researcher and their respective thematic categorization. These studies were also selected because they contributed to my understanding of critical literacy as catalyst, which was important for data analysis, interpretation, and re-presentation.

Figure 2.9: Critical literacy research in practice

Thematic Category	Researchers
• *Poetry as Catalyst*	• Flint and Laman (2012)
• *Picture Books as Catalyst*	• Wolk (2004), Leland, Harste, and Huber (2005), Labadie, Pole, and Rogers (2013), and Dunkerly-Bean, Bean, Sunday, and Summers (2017)
• *Questions and Wonder Statements as Catalyst*	• Labadie, Wetzel, and Rogers (2012)
• *Post-It Provocative and Problematic as Catalyst*	• Leland et al. (2003)
• *Personal Connections as Catalyst*	• Leland et al. (2003)
• *Writer's Workshop as Catalyst*	• Gregg, Hoyte, and Flint (2012), Dutro (2009), Burns (2004)
• *Catalogue Analysis as Catalyst*	• Comber (2001)
• *Collaborative Re-readings as Catalyst*	• Comber (2001)
• *Protest as Catalyst*	• Gatto (2013)
• *Toys, Power, and Play as Catalyst*	• Vasquez (2004) and Wohlwend (2011, 2013, 2017)

Poetry as Catalyst

Flint and Laman (2012) conducted an in-depth qualitative study in two third-grade classrooms over a nine-month period. During this time, teachers compiled critical literacy text sets paying special attention to the medium of poetry. Teachers also read several critical literacy texts to students encouraging learners to "problematize and make visible socially significant issues in communities and the world" (p. 14). Interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and classroom artifacts were used to explore how students, and the teachers with

whom they worked, became critically literate through poetry. What they discovered was that these young children reflected on and wrote about their personal lives and experiences (e.g., fears, concerns, etc.), used poetry as a venue to address injustices and ideological questions (e.g., issues related to culture, Chinese immigrants), and incorporated a variety of sign systems that deepened their understanding of the world, and created new forms and modalities of individual literacy practices.

Picture Books as Catalyst

Picture books can engage students in critical conversations that positively contribute to their critical literacy stance. Wolk (2004), for example, explored how picture books engaged his sixth graders in conversations about democracy and racism. *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), tells the story of two neighbours, Clover who is African American and Annie who is European American, in the 1950s. Wolk used this picture book as a catalyst to open a dialogue with his students about their experiences with racism, and their own stereotypes and prejudices. For example, he asked his students how the fence separating Clover and Annie "could be a metaphor for our pervasive social divisiveness" (p. 29). The students were able to make real-world connections and compared the fence in the story to the Berlin Wall and the Mexican-American border. By the end of the story, the students imagined tearing down the invisible fence that separates white people and black people (Wolk, 2004).

Leland, Harste, and Huber (2005) similarly found that first-graders can use picture books to understand homelessness, racism, and war. After reading stories like *The Lady in the Box* (McGovern, 1997) and *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1991), Kim's students expressed a desire to help homeless people and a frustration that people could lose their homes due to factors beyond their control like losing a job. Kim also noticed an increase in students' level of compassion toward others, the quality of their writing and art, and their ability to grasp the

bigger picture within a text. Kim's story demonstrates the ways in which young students can read, write, talk, and draw their way through to critical understanding by disrupting what is considered normal and taking action to dismantle commonly held assumptions (Leland et al., 2005).

Dunkerly-Bean, Bean, Sunday, and Summers (2017) explored the ways in which global children's literature and drawing can be a catalyst for understanding issues of fairness, equity, and justice among three to five year olds. Using the picture book *Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale From Kenya* (Chamberlin & Chamberlin, 2006), the students used puppets, posters, photographs, and a dramatic play centre to become critically literate. Children, for example, used drawing and dramatic play to re-create unjust circumstances about poverty where poverty was closely tied to a lack of money. While these young children developed a strong understanding of poverty, "societal or systemic reasons for poverty remained largely unaddressed" (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017, p. 684). Furthermore, when it came to solving the main conflict of the story (Mama Panya not having enough money to feed her son's friends), the children were invited to combine their paper coins to help Mama Panya buy her ingredients, just like the community members did in the story. Most of the students decided to combine their coins in the essence of fairness demonstrating their comprehension of the text and stewardship towards others. However, following the read aloud, the classroom teacher commented that, "Most of us hopefully don't choose to live in poverty, it happens to some people, and some people are very resilient and they fight their circumstances that could have them in poverty" (p. 687). While this teacher's intentions were good, her comments perpetuated the myth that poverty is individual rather than systemic, and if you work hard enough you can pull yourself out of this vicious cycle. This research demonstrates the importance of critically

reflecting as teachers in an effort to remain mindful of and work toward dismantling personal biases, assumptions, and stereotypes.

Finally, Labadie, Pole, and Rogers (2013) investigated how read alouds allow kindergarten students to make personal connections, challenge inequality, and envision social change. In total, 15 picture books were read to the class, all focused on the issue of social class.[4] These researchers found that read alouds and follow-up discussions using picture books about social class issues act as a springboard for critical literacy learning. For example, students grappled with issues of job loss, hunger, homelessness, experiencing tight times (i.e., financial struggles), and poverty. These kindergarteners were able to develop a nuanced understanding of social class through personal connections, background experiences, and taking on multiple perspectives. Using picture books that focused on social class allowed these students to disrupt commonplace assumptions about poverty, like those held by the previous vignette's teacher (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017), and "created an ongoing conversation in the classroom that helped to deepen and extend comprehension around critical social issues" (Labadie et al., 2013, p. 334).

Questions and Wonder Statements as Catalyst

Labadie et al. (2012) explored what critical literacy looked and sounded like within a grade two classroom. Students were introduced to *Allen Jay and the Underground Railroad* (Brill, 1993), the tale of a young boy who helps free a slave. Through open-ended questions and statements such as, "I wonder..." and "You think so...," these students were encouraged to read through multiple perspectives (Labadie et al., 2012; Lewison et al., 2002). The researchers, in

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[4] *Amelia's Road* (Altman, 1993), *Gregory Cool* (Binch, 1994), *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998), *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007), *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1991), *Sam and the Lucky Money* (Chinn, 1995), *Uncle Getting Through Thursday* (Cooper, 1998), *Willie and the Soup Kitchen* (DiSalvo-Ryan, 1991), *A Castle on Viola Street* (DiSalvo-Ryan, 2001), and *City Green* (DiSalvo-Ryan, 1994), *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979), *Somebody's New Pajamas* (Jackson, 1996), *My Rows and Piles of Coin* (Mollel, 1999), *Rich Cat, Poor Cat* (Waber, 1963), *A Chair for my Mother* (Williams, 1982).

collaboration with the classroom teacher, concluded that, a careful examination of both the illustrations and language used within the text allowed students to use critical literacy practices to address the myriad of social issues related to racism, freedom, and civil rights. In this study, the use of questions and wonder statements during read alouds provided a safe space for young children to create meaningful personal connections and explore deeper social issues.

Post-It Provocative and Problematic as Catalyst

Mitzi Parsons (Leland et al., 2003) shared critical literacy books with her middle school students, prompting them to write post-it notes on specific aspects of the texts they found provocative and problematic. This approach deepened student reading of the text and they listened more carefully as the texts were read aloud. Prompts included, "something important I want to remember," "a question I have," and "a connection I made with the book" (pp. 9-10). One of the critical literacy texts Mitzi shared was *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (Lester, 1998), a graphic and disturbing depiction of the deplorable treatment of slaves. In response to the prompt "an image I relate to this book," students were asked to sketch their own illustrations of the story. Some of the students' drawings included slaves in chains and the scarred back of a slave who had been savagely whipped. Mitzi introduced students to the vicious and inhumane treatment of slaves and issues related to racism and human rights. Ultimately, Leland et al. (2003) concluded that Mitzi's students were able to move beyond their original interpretations to create new forms of meaning and "see new possibilities for understanding and interacting with the world" (p. 10).

Personal Connections as Catalyst

Leland et al. (2003) also recount the tale of Abby Davis who worked with fourth and fifth grade students in a multi-age classroom. *Making up Megaboy* (Walter, 1998), a tale about a young boy who shoots a convenience store owner, was shared with students as a read aloud. As

she read, Abby encouraged her students to think about why the young boy shot the store owner and how the story may be different had the other characters interacted with him more constructively. For example, in response to the question, "What can we do to prevent something like this from happening" (p. 11), students suggested befriending Robbie (the main character of the story), being kind to him, and standing up against bullying. This particular discussion concluded with students making connections to larger social issues, such as school shootings, as well as their own experiences with bullying. Students agreed that one of the first steps toward mitigating some of these issues is to create a safe and inclusive classroom community where everyone feels valued, valuable, and welcome. Through this text, students were able to reflect on and implement real changes within their own classroom.

Writer's Workshop as Catalyst

Gregg, Hoyte, and Flint (2012) suggest that writer's workshops provide students with multiple opportunities to draw on personal resources and "create space in the classroom for unique life and family stories" (p. 20). Working with third grade students, the teachers, researcher, and research assistants selected picture books that focused on inequality and/or immigration.[5] Each day, the teachers would engage in a read aloud followed by a discussion of literary elements, current events, and personal connections culminating in a Writer's Workshop with an emphasis on poetry. Gregg et al. (2012) concluded that "critical literacy texts support the ability of students to make deeper, more substantive connections between their own life experiences, those of the characters, and to events occurring in their communities and beyond" (p. 22).

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[5] *The Number on my Grandfather's Arm* (Adler, 1987), *A Day's Work* (Bunting & Himler, 1994), *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine & Nelson, 2007), *Sister Anne's Hands* (Lorbiecki & Popp, 2000), *Richard Wright and the Library Card* (Miller & Christie, 1999), *Yellow Star* (Roy, 2008).

Sharon, a third grade teacher, asked her students to respond to the following question, *What are some signs of hard times?* based on the text *Leah's Pony* (Freidrich, 1996), which tells the story of a young girl who sells her pony to buy back her family's belongings, home, and livelihood (Dutro, 2009). Sharon's students wrote about similar financial struggles based on personal experiences. For example, Julian wrote about his mom's inability to pay bills, Tiffany discussed her mom's car breaking down, and Thomas acknowledged that not having a family car was a struggle. Dutro (2009) concluded that not only are young students able to write their way through to understanding of inequality by drawing on personal experiences, but that more time needs to be devoted to these endeavours within daily instruction.

Finally, Burns (2004), a first grade teacher, invited their students to explore the presidential process in an effort to become critically literate. Families were also encouraged to participate in this inquiry by helping their child research political platforms, watch the news, and read the newspaper. Inviting students into critical incidents, such as researching political platforms, comparing and contrasting political parties, and remaining open to seeing candidates in new ways, allowed students to expand their awareness of the election process, making connections with the electoral process, and become critically literate by focusing on issues of social justice and taking action to promote change. For example, following Bush's inauguration, the students wrote letters to the president about any issue that ignited their passion. Through these literacy activities, Burns (2004) supported their students to become critically literate.

Catalogue Analysis as Catalyst

Jenny O'Brien, a primary school teacher, believes in the power of critical literacy even with her five-to-eight year old students in a disadvantaged suburban school in Australia (Comber, 2001). Within her practice, O'Brien problematizes texts that students read, as well as the texts she chooses to read aloud, by encouraging students to "consider the text as a crafted

piece in which authors make decisions to represent realities in certain ways" (p. 93). For instance, O'Brien had her students analyze Mother's Day catalogues as an opportunity to consider, and ultimately problematize, gender, culture, and advertising. Through this literacy activity, students became critical of the images and ideas depicted within these texts, as well as the intentions of those who put them there.

Collaborative Re-Readings as Catalyst

Josie McKinnon also works within a disadvantaged primary school in Australia (Comber, 2001). During a literacy event, junior students were discussing whether *Counting On Frank* (Clement, 1990), a story about a mathematically inclined young boy, was an appropriate text to read to their primary school learning partners. This discussion led to a collaborative re-reading of the text wherein students began to view the story differently. For example, one student eloquently articulates this re-reading: "I reckon that when you first look at the book you think it's funny and it doesn't give that impression afterwards except if you look into it a bit more then you start to see what it's actually saying about parents and their personalities" (Comber, 2001, p. 98). This research demonstrates the ability of young readers to develop an awareness of the socially constructed nature of texts as a means to examine and contest "'natural' representations in stories and the versions of knowledge authorized in . . . texts" (Comber, 2001, p. 95).

Protest as Catalyst

Gatto (2013), a retired elementary school teacher, argues that teachers must create "authentic classroom lessons to teach literacy practices necessary to succeed in school, participate in life outside of school, and build social relationships across time" (p. 241). Working within a low-income neighbourhood before retiring, Gatto noticed that many of her students, 89% of which qualified for free or reduced lunches, chose to go hungry on a daily basis rather

than eat cafeteria food. Encouraging the students to do something, Gatto created the *Lunch is Gross* project where the students questioned why the fruit they received was rotten or unripe, why they received so few menu options, why the food tasted bad, and why they were being forced to eat food they did not like. The students wrote individual video scripts and recorded video clips depicting school lunches, and later selected, sequenced, and edited scenes to create a cohesive documentary, which was later posted on TeacherTube. The students' documentary caught the attention of the superintendent, who agreed to join the students for lunch. The superintendent agreed that he "wouldn't even touch the salad with a ten-foot pole" (Gatto, 2013, p. 248) and committed to rectifying the issue. The *Lunch is Gross* project was talked about across the United States, so much so that the students were awarded a Healthy Hero Award by the local health foundation and a $500 grant that was used to create the *Healthy Kids* magazine at their school. As a result of the students' hard work, the school lunch program was expanded to include a high nutritional diet. Gatto (2013) concluded that "critical literacy became a way for my students to question and take action on the discourses and decisions that affected their everyday lives" (p. 251).

Toys, Power, and Play as Catalyst

Vasquez's (2004) work represents an important piece of research for it is one of the few studies to take place within a Canadian context. Unlike some other critical literacy teachers, she does not simply adopt critical literacy during short-term projects or particular subjects. Rather, when working with three-to-five year old students, she negotiates critical literacy across the entire school year. From the standpoint that "a critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived" (p. 12), Vasquez embraces critical literacy as more than just process; it is how she views her role as an educator, even with the youngest of children. For example, she critically engages and negotiates topics related to toys, power, and play (e.g., Power Rangers and underlying social

issues; Vasquez, 1999); students' sense of powerlessness; gender representations in the media; environmental issues; and cultural diversity.

Wohlwend (2013) suggests that

> Play purposefully masks meanings, twists language forms, slips cultural constraints, and muddies its own definitions, producing perfect conditions for testing power and stretching the ideological limits of the surrounding culture within a deniable, and therefore, safe space. (p. 82)

In this sense, offering young students opportunities for unstructured and unmediated play provides a safe space where "rebellious acts or threats to authority" (Wohlwend, 2013, p. 82) can be explored in a safe, protected space. Technological expansion now provides students with new digital spaces through which to explore, construct, re-construct, and negotiate emerging and embodied literacies, digital navigation, and make meaning of their lived worlds (Paley, 2004, 2010; Wohlwend, 2013, 2017). Harkening back to Dewey (1916, 1938/1997), play also encourages students to incorporate personal and cultural resources, lived experiences, and imagination, while simultaneously expanding what counts as literacy (Paley, 2004, 2010; Wohlwend, 2013). Children learn to work together within a shared space, which positively contributes to a heightened sense of belonging, social relationships, and participation within a peer and classroom culture.

An expanded understanding of what counts as literacy must also acknowledge children's toys as texts, which has implications for both consumer, personal, and cultural identities (Wohlwend, 2013). Some toys, such as Barbie, Bratz, Diva Starz, and G.I. Joe, reinforce dominant gender norms, roles, and identities through their physical features, roles, and intended use. Playing with these toys can reinforce gendered roles and ideologies, but children can also use their play to transgress and rebel against particular types of identity

politics by dismantling notions of boy/girl and masculine/feminine dichotomies. For example, in a three-year long ethnographic study inside a kindergarten classroom, Wohlwend (2011) found that doll play not only disrupts traditional gender stereotypes, but helps students negotiate the "doing and redoing" (p. 18) of gender. Johnathan and Zach used dolls and Disney princesses to do gender differently, expand role expectations for boy and girl play, and disrupted the intended use of their toys by transforming Ariel into the 'brother' doll (Wohlwend, 2011). This research demonstrates the importance of play for early childhood experiences, as well as the ways in which young students become critically literate through play.

Closing Thoughts

Fifteen years ago, Comber (2001) claimed, "there have been few classroom descriptions of possibilities for critical literacy in the early years of schooling" (p. 92). While great strides have been made, as evidenced by the preceding research, we need to continue this work to showcase the benefits of adopting a critical stance. Just as knowledge is not static, neither are literacies; they evolve, conceptualizations broaden, and our understandings deepen. And, even though the literature above represents a fraction of critical literacy research, it illuminates how critical literacy can be implemented within the classroom and the implications this has for teachers and learners of all ages.

Critical pedagogy and critical literacy allow us to re-vision education as dialectical and collaborative, personal and social, and transformative and lifelong (McLaren, 2003). But, without continued empirical evidence of how and why things can and should be different, "we . . . rely too much on the past [and] we think too little about the present" (MacGintie, 1983, p. 682). Educators must find cracks within the curriculum, even in the face of opposition, to engage in and support critical literacy wherever and whenever possible. My charge is for

educators to find those cracks and break through them, effectively moving critical literacy from the periphery to centre stage. In so doing, teachers create optimal conditions for students to be more open-minded, actively engaged, and strategic readers (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004), create dialogue and debate, and help students move from where they are to where they can be. Research dedicated to understanding "what critical literacy is and how it functions" (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 55), as well as what it offers, provides empirical evidence that can transform existing classroom practices. Through this work, not only can we re-present students' and teachers' experiences by offering rich descriptions of classroom life, but, perhaps more importantly, we can demonstrate the value of adopting a critical stance to become critically literate and what I have come to know as critically imaginative, discussed in Chapter Eight. This is the promise of my research.

Chapter Three

Gathering Words, Gathering Memories

Jerome collected words.
He collected words he heard . . .
He collected words he saw . . .
He collected words he read . . .
~ Peter H. Reynolds

Preamble

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations and choices that guide the purpose of my research, namely to explore, understand, and describe the optimal conditions that support critical literacy. An ethnographic design is conducive to this pursuit for it provides "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) of a Grade 6 classroom that seamlessly interweaves data collection with classroom practice (Shorey, 2008). Ethnography also supports my conviction to invite participants to join in the research process as active participants and co-travellers, opening a space where their authentic voices emerge. In so doing, ethnography offers a research design that incorporates and interweaves multiple sources of data, methods, and voices, effectively "drawing the reader into the story being shared" (Scheffel, 2008, p. 63). Ethnography has the potential to capture the day-to-day routines, rhythms, and practices of classroom life, as well as emergent conversations and moments of meaning-making that are paramount to this inquiry.

This chapter is divided into four sections. I begin with what Parr (2008) calls a reflexive tale by recounting my personal journey of self-discovery, an "interpretive turn" (Goodall Jr., 2000, p. 78), so to speak, from quantitative to qualitative researcher, necessary background information to this inquiry. In the second section, I provide a comprehensive overview of ethnography, as well as my rationale for selecting an ethnographic research design. The third

section describes my research design, beginning with a description of my research participants, and shifting to a discussion of my research questions, and methods for data collection, analysis, and representation/re-presentation. The final section addresses some of the ethical implications of engaging in classroom ethnography with children.

Methodological Considerations

Where Do I Begin? A Reflexive Tale

As I prepared to enter the classroom, I wondered, *How does an outsider enter a classroom community? Will I gain entry? What do I look for? How will I know what is significant, important, or unexpected? Should I try to remain impartial? Is impartiality possible, desirable, or ethical? What do I hope to gain from this experience? And, how can I support participants along the journey?* The realization that I did not necessarily have answers to any of these questions induced a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty. I often joke that there is one thing in life I am certain about and that is uncertainty. And while this often spirals into uncontrollable anxiety, it eventually pushed me to find direction and clarity. As I recently confessed to one of my committee members, "I am nervous, but in a confident way."

Forging my path. Turning to the literature on ethnography left me feeling, at best, overwhelmed, and at worst, terrorized (Becker, 2007). Heeding as best I could Becker's (2007) advice, "use the literature, don't let it use you" (p. 149), I persisted, determined to read as much as I could before entering the classroom. I read research methods texts, conversed with my supervisor and committee, and skimmed the methods chapters of numerous dissertations. The options seemed endless: action research, case studies, discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, and an array of ethnographic methodologies (e.g., performative, auto, classroom, reflexive, collaborative, and critical to name a few). I felt inundated and intimidated, paralyzed by fear of making the wrong choice. Pulled into a vortex of what ifs, I took a step

back from the literature. I needed time and space for reflection. I needed to find, or perhaps forge, my path.

Leaving behind my old identity. Graduate school is filled with rites of passage; course requirements, supervisor selection, comprehensive exams, and ethical clearance pave the PhD journey culminating in conducting original research, writing it up, and successfully defending that work. We are, according to Levinson (1998), "academic apprentices, caught up in a fundamentally conservative/conserving rite of passage [who] learn to make their primary social commitments to their immediate supervisors and the knowledge base of the department" (p. 92). We learn deference and respect, continually seeking validation from our supervisor who has earned a rightful place as an academic authority. In Chapter Two, I alluded to my battle with imposter syndrome, a battle I have been fighting for nearly a decade. It all began when I was a master's student. My supervisor, a brilliant quantitative researcher at the height of his career and someone I admired and respected greatly, and still do, agreed to take me on. Because I selected him as my supervisor, I knew that, regardless of what I researched, my methodology would fall under a quantitative paradigm, which for someone with math anxiety seemed daunting. With his guidance and support, I learned to run regression analyses, one and two-way ANOVAs (analysis of variance), and factorial ANCOVAs (analysis of covariance). The end result was an impressive thesis that demonstrated "the power of statistics and the clean lines of quantitative research" (Brown, 2012, p. 316).

Even though I spent hours, days, weeks, even months with this data, I felt disconnected from it. The numbers, although they represented an individual's response, seemed to lack a human quality. More experienced quantitative researchers are likely able to understand their data in relation to their participants, but a two-year master's program did not equip me with this ability. And while I successfully overcame personal obstacles, most notably my math

anxiety, these experiences lingered. I felt distanced from participants, analyzing data as though it just exists never thinking about who was attached to the response. I remained objective, or so I thought. Today, the gift of time and distance has shown me that my research was never objective or neutral, but laden with my assumptions, experiences, beliefs, understandings, and subjectivities, as all research is. Does this discredit or invalidate that research? Absolutely not, but it does reinforce the imperative of critical self-reflection and researcher reflexivity. Hindsight has given me greater perspective allowing me to question my assumptions and preconceptions about what constitutes research and what it means to be a researcher. Dissonance between my former and current researcher identity grew and I knew that falling back on what was familiar would be misguided. I knew quantitative research no longer made sense for who I was becoming, which meant I had to accept the risk of trudging into the unknown. And with the support of my supervisor, and a new perspective about engaging in research, I was comfortable broadening my researcher lens to reflect methodologies committed to empowerment, authenticity, dialogue, and collaboration.

Becoming a social constructivist researcher. Lather (1992) suggests that, "how one views the methodological issue of objectivity/subjectivity depends upon one's epistemological grounding, one's philosophy of what it means to know" (p. 92). Keeping in mind that "knowledge [is] constructed and reconstructed through experience . . . [not] separate from the knower . . . [but] negotiated as individuals continuously interact with the world" (Olson, 1995, p. 120), my assumptions of what it means to know embraces Schon's (1983, 1987) view of knowledge-in-action, Guba and Lincoln's (1989) notion of constructed knowledge, and Olson's (1995) concept of embodied and interactive knowledge construction. Situating myself as a social constructivist researcher allows me to accept my subjectivity as "an inherent part of research" (Madison, 2005, p. 9), what I call leaning into the bias. My values and assumptions will find

their way into my inquiry, regardless of whether or not I want them to (Lather, 1992). Knowing this, I have two choices: I can try to wear a mask of objectivity or I can accept the responsibilities and ethical imperatives of transparency and reflexivity. My epistemological stance, paradigmatic worldview, prior experience, researcher commitments, and past training positions not only how I approach this inquiry, but also how I act, what I look for, how I feel, and how I interpret my data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Choosing the latter approach allows me to say with confidence that I make no claims of engaging in objective, neutral, or value-free research. Instead, I choose to lean into the bias, accepting what it is, how it positions me, and the impact this has on my research.

In examining and setting aside some aspects of my old identity, my role as researcher transforms from purveyor of expert knowledge to co-constructor in dialogue with participants (Lather, 1986; Maguire, 2005). Rather than seeking facts, my primary intent is to re-present, as authentically as possible, participants' tales as they naturally emerge within the classroom (Van Maanen, 2011). Re-presenting these tales requires attending "to complexity, to what those in a setting believe should be the case, to tensions arising from divergent points of view, and to paradoxes between stated objectives and the ways people go about trying to reach them" (Wolcott, 1997, p. 347). It also requires remaining mindful of questions such as, *What methodology will capture the nuances and complexities of classroom life? How can I authentically capture participants' voices, experiences, and stories? How can I help to empower participants? How might I contribute to emancipatory research? And, how can I authentically and ethically re-present participants' tales?* Goodall Jr., (2000) suggests that, "when you feel pulled in, called to the mystery of it [ethnography], you have arrived" (p. 8). And after a long and in-depth literature review I found an untrodden path in ethnography, a path that could only be forged by my footsteps.

Methodology – An Overview of Ethnography

What is Ethnography?

Wolcott (1999) refers to ethnography as a wildcard methodology, which "makes it fun to engage in, but something of a risk as well" (p. 89). Because ethnography refers to both the process and product of research, it is simultaneously a way of seeing and re-presenting. As process, it is based on the premise of describing "people and culture, using firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation" (Ellis, 2004, p. 26). In other words, ethnographers explore, enquire, and examine ultimately producing a detailed narrative of a particular time and place (James, 2001; Parr, 2008; Van Maanen, 2011; Wolcott, 1997, 1999). Ethnographers ground their data through deep immersion by getting close to participants and their everyday lives (Emerson et al., 2011; James, 2001). The ethnographer captures what participants say, think, and do holistically and naturalistically, continually striving for authenticity and detail. This approach creates the possibility that every utterance, interaction, experience, and question becomes part of the whole, transforming separate, perhaps even disparate, parts into a complete tale.

In an effort to contribute to empowerment, ethnographers share the research process with participants by means of collaboration, effectively opening up a dialogic space for multiple perspectives to emerge (Iannacci, 2005; Lassiter, 2005; Parr, 2008, 2011; Scheffel, 2008). Proceeding by way of reciprocity and collaboration allows ethnographers to acknowledge the complexities of adopting an insider-outsider perspective where we can, even if momentarily, see the world through participants' eyes (Maguire, 2005; Parr, 2011). Not only does this ensure participants' voices are reflected, re-presented, and captured, but also strengthens participants' roles within the inquiry as active co-travellers. It is a broad approach to classroom research that allows both researcher and reader to enter the world of the classroom (Parr, 2008).

Drawing on and interweaving critical ethnography (Bhattacharya, 2008; Brown & Dobrin, 2004; Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993), collaborative ethnography (Atkinson, 1990; Davies, 2008; Lassiter, 2005; Wolcott, 1997, 2008), classroom ethnography (Hammersley, 1990), emergent ethnography (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008), and voiced ethnographic research (Smyth, 1999, 2006; Smyth & Hattam, 2001), Figure 3.1 outlines an assemblage of ethnographic characteristics that guide my inquiry and research design.

Figure 3.1: Guiding ethnographic principles

Ethnography is an emergent, responsive, and flexible methodology characterized by:

- collaboration (Lassiter, 2005);
- dialogue (Robinson, 1994; Tedlock, 2000);
- interpretation (Denzin, 1999; Geertz, 1973; Hammersley, 1990; Van Maanen, 2011);
- "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6);
- reflexivity (Davies, 2008);
- openness (Rossman & Rallis, 2003);
- respect (Fine & Weis, 2004);
- representation/re-presentation (Wolcott, 1997, 1999; Van Maanen, 2011); and
- vulnerability and risk-taking (Brown, 2012, 2017).

Ethnography as Storytelling

Van Maanen (2011) reminds us that, "ethnography is a storytelling institution," which carries with it ethical imperatives and moral responsibilities (p. 3). Keeping in mind "the many limitations we bring as [a research] instrument" (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 34), as well as our positionality, reinforces the need to "honestly grapple with the divisions between Self and Other. . . with the complexity of representing human experience" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 48). Building relationships based on trust and reciprocity – a "give-and-take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power" (Lather, 1990, p. 263) – not only helps ensure reflexivity, but also contributes to a shifting paradigm of greater parity where power is shared equally among participants. Proceeding by way of reciprocity acknowledges, understands, and honours the dialectical relationships between researcher, participant, and social context. Ethnographers

interpret stories within a wider sociocultural framework effectively interweaving the individual social actor with larger social structures (Anderson, 1989; Iannacci, 2007; James, 2001; Parr, 2008). The ethnographer can then situate a single classroom within an extended sociopolitical and historical context yet still privilege participants' voices (Corson, 1998; Parr, 2008), which allows for recursiveness and movement, a back and forth between different lenses and ongoing conversations developing rich data and deepened personal narratives (Geertz, 1973; Stich et al., 2012). What emerges is interwoven with individual and shared experiences, "a meeting of multiple sides . . . one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other's world" (Madison, 2005, p. 9).

For Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. . . . Researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). In this sense, stories become "data with a soul," (Brown, 2012, p. 316) breathing life into the inquiry in unexpected ways. The promise of this inquiry is anchored and local knowledge, contextualized narratives, an insider's perspective, and participant empowerment (Fine & Weis, 1996; Pole & Morrison, 2003; Smyth, 1999). Not only will this ethnographic account develop new and richer understandings of critical literacy, but also create the possibility for ethnography and educational research to matter beyond the walls of the academy (Lassiter, 2004).

Why Ethnography?

Ethnography supports my exploration of critical literacy by asking questions like: *What is happening? Why is this happening? And what meaning do participants derive from these experiences* (Purcell-Gates, 2004)? Ethnography allows me to explore my questions, understand participants' perspectives, and utilize their insights rather than impose, control, or manipulate the research context or participant tales (Parr, 2008; Wolcott, 1997). My approach establishes

the possibility for a greater understanding of how students and teachers construct knowledge together and create meaning in their everyday lives (Maguire, 2005). It also renders effective critical literacy practices visible, helps us understand teachers' experiences, and demonstrates the "construction of knowledge as a jointly produced work in progress" (Goodall, Jr., 2000, p. 8).

For James (2001), ethnography is conducive to working with children because it enables them "to be seen as competent informants about and interpreters of their own lives and the lives of others and is an approach to childhood research which can employ children's own accounts centrally within the analysis" (p. 250). From this perspective, we move from doing research on participants to researching with them, especially children, viewing the world through their eyes and sharing these important moments with them (Bray, Lee, Smith, & York, 2000). This approach to research can be an empowering experience for participants as they come to see themselves as active agents of and contributors to the process of inquiry. Ethnography is a style of research that not only matches my research questions and objectives, but also the researcher I am becoming (Shorey, 2008).

Ellis (2004) admits that, "being nosy and a good listener are two primary prerequisites of a good ethnographer" (p. 27) and that, "you don't really choose ethnography; it chooses you" (p. 26). Similarly, Goodall Jr., (2000) admits, "I don't think I consciously 'decided' to live and write this way. I'm not sure anyone does. To become a writer in a genre called ethnography is a choice that more accurately finds you, and then defines you" (p. 22). In this sense, I hesitate to acknowledge ethnography as my choice, though perhaps a case can be made. Rather, ethnography is my path, not only in terms of this particular journey, but in life as well.

Research Design

According to Goodall Jr. (2000), "new ethnographers want readers to take what we say *personally*. We want our words to make *differences* in their lives" (p. 14, emphasis in original). By extension, I want my research to make a difference in the lives of my participants. My research design emerges from this conviction; this is important for you to remember as you proceed through the remaining chapters.

Participants

Grade 6 students. Entry into the research site did not proceed as smoothly as anticipated, which will be detailed in Chapter Four. Participant recruitment was initiated by my supervisor, Michelann, who reached out to a school in Muskoka, ON with whom she had an established relationship. A classroom teacher (Mrs. S) and the school principal were contacted directly by Michelann to gauge their level of interest in working with me. They both demonstrated great interest and invited me to visit the school for an introductory meeting. Because of Michelann's efforts, I successfully became part of a Grade 6 classroom.

Our classroom community, and I use the possessive pronoun "our" intentionally, was comprised of 27 students, 26 of whom returned signed parental consent forms and signed their own consent form at a later date (see Appendices 1-3 for Letters of Information and Consent Forms). There was an even number of boys and girls. Toward the end of the inquiry, students selected their own pseudonyms for our story and had agency to determine their level of involvement at all times throughout the inquiry.

From the moment I stepped into the classroom, I knew this was an inclusive community built on collaboration, risk-taking, and fun. For example, during my introductory visit to the school, the Grade 6 class was having a holiday poetry slam. As I walked into the room, a student dressed up in an elf costume, stood at the front of the class lip syncing an upbeat

rendition of *Jingle Bells* by the Barenaked Ladies. The class clapped and cheered when the performance finished, which demonstrated the communal nature of their classroom.

The more time I spent in the classroom, the more I realized how inquisitive the students were. Similar to Pollard (2011), “there were many strong and spirited personalities in this group” (p. 44), which will emerge within the remaining chapters. I learned quickly that this classroom was a vibrant learning environment and the students, along with their teacher, breathed life into this space and, by extension, my research. I developed strong bonds with most, if not all, of the students, which made saying goodbye that much harder. We had many discussions about what it means to be a researcher, discussed in Chapter Four, and, even though our days were filled with laughter and fun, the students approached my research respectfully and maturely. They truly were my fellow travellers, and the story that unfolds in the remaining chapters re-presents an assemblage of us all.

Classroom teacher. In her mid forties, Mrs. S, a pseudonym, began her career in the Niagara region of Southern Ontario teaching Kindergarten, moving to her current school one year later where she has worked for the last eighteen years. She has taught every grade but three and four, was a Special Education Resource Teacher for seven years, and worked at the school board as a Special Education Consultant, returning to the classroom one year later. She has been an educator for nineteen years and, while her experience shines through, the level of engagement, energy, and enthusiasm she brings everyday reflect the eagerness of a beginning teacher. Mrs. S is an active member of the school community coaching volleyball, spearheading the social justice committee (MAC group), acting as principal-in-charge, and mentoring beginning teachers and teacher candidates. Excerpts from my research journal illustrate the kind of teacher she is:

> I quickly took notice of how dynamic her teaching style is. She embraces technology and multimedia (e.g., TedTalk, YouTube, etc.), which seems to connect with and engage students. She's not afraid to take risks or ask challenging and thought-provoking questions. Mrs. S has welcomed me with open arms and our relationship and rapport developed quickly. She is very much open to my immersion in classroom life. (Research Journal, January 16, 2017)

> I cannot recall how this conversation began, as I was trying to remain mindful of her need to get to work, but she alluded to the fact that she tries to marry components of the curriculum together, rather than teaching subjects separately. I told her that was a thread that ran throughout her days, and my fieldnotes and research journal were filled with the word DYNAMIC. That, among many other things (e.g., amazing, committed, dedicated, passionate, compassionate, kind, empathetic) is a word that perfectly describes her approach to teaching. Great teachers deserve to be praised, just as they praise their students, and Mrs. S deserves more praise than I can give her. She is truly one of the most outstanding teachers I have ever met. I am honoured to learn from her, to be guided by her, and to be part of her journey, as much as she is part of mine. (Research Journal, January 27, 2017)

Mrs. S was catalytic to this inquiry, and we quickly became collaborators. She tells it as it is and we actively negotiated the research design to fit with her schedule, activities, and lessons and she ensured that the research was always purposeful for her students. We quickly fell into our own rhythm and routine enabling me to observe and interweave without ever imposing or interjecting into her plans. Collectively and collaboratively we made it work. She always offered a helping hand and supported my pursuits. I deferred to her expertise, particularly when it came time to schedule focus groups, though she was quite comfortable with

me doing my own thing. She offered sage advice on how to build relationships, which she felt was paramount to this inquiry, how to approach students, and always recognized my efforts. She encouraged me to ask students questions, to conference, to prompt them to think deeper, to provide verbal and written feedback, to teach, and to learn with and through her, as well as the students. She was always open to my ideas and my research and I, in turn, remained open to what she needed on a daily basis.

Mrs. S was more than just a teacher who opened up her classroom to me. She was a mentor, role model, confidant, sounding board, and friend. We would often chat about life outside the classroom and we came to know each other on a personal level. We joked, laughed, listened to and supported one another; our relationship transformed into something far greater than I ever could have imagined. Our lives intertwined both professionally and personally. For example, I texted her "Happy last Monday!!!" which coincided with the first Monday since the inquiry began that I was not in class. She responded, "Thanks!! Weird you're not here!" Today, we still text. On my last day, she gave me a card; her message captures the essence of our relationship and what this journey meant to her:

> Sarah, I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to share the Grade 6 class with you! Not only did we become great collaborators, but friends. This is not a goodbye, as I know we will be working together again ☺. Wishing you all the best with your future endeavours. ~ Mrs. S (emphasis in original)

Classroom context. The walls of the classroom were adorned with student work, motivational quotes, literacy resources, and genius hour posters to name a few. Google Chromebooks and iPads were readily available in class, students with exceptionalities had personalized iPads, and Mrs. S used an FM system and microphone to help those students who struggled to tune out ambient noise. A foam puzzle mat, beanbag chairs, and large pillows sat

in cozy corner where students could work, read, or relax during indoor recess. The classroom library had something for everyone from comic books and graphic novels, fantasy stories and science fiction, to non-fiction texts. Flexible seating was allowed and students were encouraged to get up and move, without disruption, when needed. There was even an exercise bike for students to use.

School context. This journey took place in a small school in Muskoka Ontario, Canada, with a population of approximately 285 students, the majority of whom are bussed to and from school. It is a close-knit community that regularly initiates school-wide activities such as garbage cleanup, family activities, and movie nights. When you walk into the school, visitors are welcomed with decorated hallways proudly displaying student work. Each day I was present, I had to sign in at the office where the school secretary, whom I got to know quite well, greeted me. The office was busy; parents and visitors would come and go, students would pop in, but I always felt welcomed and acknowledged. Teachers would greet me in the hallways and students said good morning, a testament to the respectful and inclusive environment of the school community.

The school, much like Muskoka, was ethnically homogeneous and the class with whom I worked had one visible minority student. The school day ran from 8:40 a.m. to 3:20 p.m., with two 15-minute breaks for morning and afternoon recess and a 60-minute break for lunch. Morning announcements began around 8:55, followed by Oh Canada and prayers (it was a Catholic school).

Research Questions

As I planned this inquiry and situated myself within the literature, the following overarching questions guided my pursuits:

1. What are students' and teachers' experiences with critical literacy?

2. What are the optimal conditions and characteristics of classrooms that support critical literacy, as well as student and teacher engagement and empowerment?
3. In what ways can critical literacy support transformative learning, and personal and social transformation?

In addition to these questions, my objectives included:

- to explore and identify practices that enhance critical literacy education across the curriculum;
- collaborate with students and their classroom teacher;
- to develop a portrait of engagement through multiple viewpoints, contexts, and voices; and
- to explore how critical literacy supports students in their learning, and develops a greater understanding of themselves and the world.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Janesick (2000), a qualitative research design is holistic, looks for relationships within a particular system or culture, concerns itself with personal interactions, focuses on understanding a particular social setting, and demands immersion and prolonged engagement in the field. I considered each of these characteristics as I built the structure of my study. What emerged was a research design that was fluid and flexible, emergent and adaptable, and reflexive of, and responsive to, what made sense for participants in a given moment or context (Duke & Mallette, 2011; Geertz, 1973; Parr, 2010, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Wolcott, 1999, 2008). Ethnography supported these pursuits allowing for an exploration of how Mrs. S defined, understood, nurtured, and supported critical literacy; how critical literacy can change classroom dialogue; how conceptualizations of literacy, including activities, events, and practices can transgress traditional definitions; and how students and their teacher

collaboratively constructed meaning through the six language arts of reading, writing, viewing, representing, speaking, and listening. From a practical perspective, this design allowed me to unobtrusively observe, interweave my presence with existing classroom practices seamlessly, and balance my needs with participants' needs. This design blended dialogue, reciprocity, and collaboration, the pillars of this inquiry (Lassiter, 2005; Wolcott, 1997).

As method, ethnography was a way of looking, including "*all* the ways one may direct attention while in the field" (Wolcott, 1997, p. 43, emphasis in original). Truly looking and seeing, however, was more than simply observing; it had purpose and intent, it moved recursively between observing, listening, jotting down notes, journalling, reading, sensing, thinking, reflecting, and continuing to observe (Heath & Street, 2008) in order to provide "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). As ethnographers, we actively construct and create, rather than passively record and analyze, data; we are important research instruments (Heath & Street, 2008; Shorey, 2008; Simon & Dippo, 1986; Thomas, 1993). In designing this study, I drew upon ethical principles, my theoretical framework, ethnographic methods, and the practices of collaboration, intuition, openness, risk, and vulnerability (Madison, 2005). Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) refer to this as bricolage, from the French word bricoleur referring to someone who "makes use of the tools available to complete a task" (p. 167). These dimensions and tools allowed me to pick and choose, select and sort, and blend and combine what was most useful and relevant in a particular context, but not in a prescriptive manner (Madison, 2005). While daily decisions needed to be made, in collaboration with research participants, my research design relied upon observation, formal and informal conversations, interpretation of artifacts, photographs of student work, journalling, and my own experiences during the inquiry. Specific tools included fieldnotes, researcher journal,

individual and group conversations, audiotapes, and participant observation. Figure 3.2 presents a comprehensive overview of the research design.

Figure 3.2: Research design summary

Methodological Approach	Qualitative: Classroom Ethnography	
Methodological Tools	Participant Observation, Fieldnotes, Research Journal, Conversations (individual, small group, whole-class), Focus Groups, Photographs of Student Work, Literature Circles, Student Artifacts	
Participants	Students (26: 13 females, 13 males), Classroom Teacher	
Data Analysis	During Inquiry: Read fieldnotes, research journal to note patterns, connections, similarities, differences, as well as unexpected findings that stood out, were unclear, or original (marked for future enquiry). Participant clarification and member-checking.	After Inquiry: Re-read fieldnotes, research journal, and student artifacts using constant comparison to note patterns, connections, similarities, differences for themes of meaning, categories, perspectives, and points of view. Presentation of data using student mosaics and classroom vignettes.

Data gathering timeframe. Heath and Street (2008), drawing attention to the importance of time within ethnographic research, offer researchers three timeframes, what they call time modes, to help organize and plan data collection: compressed, selective intermittent, and recurrent. In a compressed time mode, researchers observe and record for short, but intensive periods of time in an attempt to capture what is important to participants. In a selective intermittent time mode, researchers jump in and out of the research site for observation, but their length of stay within the field is prolonged. Finally, in a recurrent time mode, researchers look for changes over time, often dividing their observations into specific temporal phases (e.g., beginning/end; Heath & Street, 2008). Throughout data collection, I blended Heath and Street's (2008) compressed time mode, with its focus on intensive observation, with the flexibility of the selective intermittent mode. My approach allowed for observation days to be somewhat planned in advance, which allowed the students to have a

sense of when I would be present, but also remain flexible and responsive to the fluctuations, and often interruptions, of classroom life.

In response to Heath and Street's (2008) assertion that, "every fieldworker has an obligation to respect and therefore not to disrupt, dislodge, or disturb the environment under study any more than is necessary" (p. 61), Mrs. S and I negotiated three observation days per week (usually Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday). Shifts and adjustments were made as needed to accommodate participants' schedules (e.g., snow days, field trips, special events, etc.). In total, I visited the classroom 50 times with the length of each visit lasting approximately three hours (8:30-11:30), though, on occasion, I would spend a full day in class. Most observation days occurred during the morning, but I varied my observation times to include some afternoons (8 out of 50 observation days). Originally Mrs. S and I agreed to a timeframe of January to the end of April. However, as time went on and relationships developed, she invited me to finish the school year with the students.

Participant observation. Participant observation, what Wolcott (1999) calls experiencing, captured participants' daily interactions as they unfolded naturally within the classroom (Duke & Mallette, 2011; Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001). Observing, sensing, reflecting, and listening with purpose and intent to what participants say and do allowed me to respond, refine, and reposition my role as researcher, my research questions, and ethnographic methods for data collection. Engaging in this type of observation required keen listening skills, visual acuity, patience, prolonged engagement, and an unimposing and non-judgmental disposition (Heath & Street, 2008; Parr, 2008). It also required balancing the role of participant and researcher, recursively moving back and forth between the two when needed in an effort to fully immerse in classroom life (Scheffel, 2008, 2011). Collaborating with participants, as well

as learning and respecting their ways of being, was paramount within this inquiry (Parr, 2011; Tedlock, 2000). Figure 3.3 offers a list of questions that initially guided participant observation.

Figure 3.3: Guiding questions for participant observation

- What conversations are students having? Do they revolve around specific texts, ideas, etc.?
- What questions do teachers ask?
- Whose voices are heard? Whose are silenced?
- How is engagement conceptualized and enacted? How do we know?
- What knowledge is being constructed?
- Are students exposed to real-world issues? Do teachers shy away from these? Why?
- What literacy practices are encouraged? Are certain practices encouraged more than others (e.g., reading vs. writing)?
- How is empowerment supported, enacted, understood?
- How has students' sense of self changed over the duration of the inquiry? What role has this inquiry had? Has their been personal growth? What role have I had?
- What do the voices of teachers sound like? What are their concerns, anxieties, fears, frustrations, and roadblocks?
- What are students learning? Teachers? Myself?
- How have I changed? How have I grown? What is different?

Fieldnotes. Fieldnotes, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), are "one of the most important kinds of field texts that allow us both to fall in love with our field and to slip into cool observation, as well as to provide the detail that fills in our memory outline" (p. 104). They ground our writing by detailing the social and interactional moments of what we see and hear (Emerson et al., 2011). They capture verbal exchanges, such as ongoing conversations, habits of speech, like jargon or slang, social practices, and the connections we make as researcher (Goodall Jr., 2000). During my visits, I would jot down what I observed and heard during conversations and whole-group discussions, and reflect on what I thought and noticed, as well as how I felt. Key ideas, words, events, and activities were quickly scribbled down serving to "jog my memory" (Parr, 2008, p. 70) during full transcription. Recess breaks were sometimes used to catch up on my fieldnotes and I would make audio memos as I drove home. Once home, I transformed my jottings into full fieldnotes. At the end of each week, I re-read

each fieldnote entry, reflecting on and expanding upon what I observed, as well as my interpretations, that I then shared with Mrs. S to honour her role as collaborator. This sharing of my fieldnotes gave her an opportunity to clarify, contextualize, expand upon, react to, or challenge my observations and interpretations, strengthening their validity, accuracy, and authenticity, while simultaneously empowering her.

Like Parr (2008), I often wondered if my fieldnotes sufficiently captured the full field experience. Classroom life was busy and unpredictable and sometimes veered into chaos, so I knew trying to capture everything was inconceivable. Fieldnotes, according to Goodall Jr., (2000) are,

> . . . partial, partisan, and problematic. . . . You write what you have been *attracted to* and *convinced by*. You write what you have read as *meaningful;* you interpret what you have read as a meaningful *pattern.* The story you write will be part of the larger story of who you are, where you've been, what you've read and talked about and argued over, what you believe in and value, what you feel compelled to name as significant. (pp. 86-87, emphasis in original)

Knowing this, I accepted that, while my fieldnotes may not reflect and re-present the field experience word for word, they did attend to and interrogate questions related to this inquiry (see Figure 3.3 and research questions).

Interviews and semi-structured (creative) conversations. In-depth ethnographic interviews are powerful and insightful data-gathering techniques (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Like Parr (2008) and Clandinin and Connelly (1994), ethnographic interviews were conceptualized as creative conversations – emergent/informal and semi-structured/formal – in an effort to recognize the "mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422). This method acknowledged the reciprocal relationships

between participants and myself as both researcher and participant observer, which was used to add depth and texture to data gathered through day-to-day interactions and observations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Parr, 2008; Scheffel, 2008; Wolcott, 2008). Because ethnography necessitated responsiveness and flexibility, formal and informal conversations allowed for the active engagement of participants and openness to spontaneous shifts in conversation and context (Duke & Mallette, 2011; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Madison, 2005; Maguire, 2005).

Over the course of the inquiry, emergent small group and individual conversations were recorded, particularly during literacy events and activities such as literature circles and group work, ongoing conversations with the classroom teacher, and student focus groups. Heeding the advice of Maguire (2005) that "children do talk with one another both inside and outside the classroom" (para. 12), I maintained a broad view of all students during the inquiry, though some naturally emerged more than others. My approach to data collection was to maintain and uphold, as much as possible, the equity of selection, mitigate pressure to participate, and support students' agency (Maguire, 2005). For example, extending the invitation to the entire class to participate in a focus group was my way of ensuring that no student felt left out. On Day 26, Mrs. S gave me the floor. The following excerpt is drawn from the whole-class transcription and also serves to demonstrate the relationships I built with participants.

Sarah: Good morning . . . I asked Mrs. S if I could have just a few minutes of class time today to talk a bit about what I've been doing in terms of my research and where I'm going. So today marks my 26th day in class. *Class cheers!*

Mrs. S: Seems like way more than that.

Sarah: Yes . . . it seems like a lot longer than 26 days, but it's really flown by. I've really enjoyed my time here. It has been wonderful, very insightful and inspiring.

Gabriel: Don't leave!

Sarah: Never? I think I wrote to you (referring to Mrs. S), I wish I could stay forever... but, unfortunately I can't. *Class "ahs"*

Jerom: You're breaking up with us.

Sarah: No, no today's not my last day!

Mrs. S: No, I'll give you warning; don't worry.

Sarah: Yes, we will prepare you for that day; don't worry.

Mrs. S: We'll have a celebration.

Sarah: So, what I've been looking at in terms of your work are things like how you learn, what you learn, the conversations you have with one another when you're in your group work or when you're working with partners. And I'm really interested in understanding how Mrs. S supports your learning in terms of the content, what sort of resources she uses to engage you... *interrupted by announcements* I've been talking with my supervisor, who is basically my Mrs. S as well as Mrs. S about how I can sort of capture your stories and your experiences with learning in a meaningful way. . . The data I've captured so far is very rich and fantastic, but the piece that's missing or I would like to have more of are your voices. I try to do my best when I'm in class when I can to try and speak with all of you but, because your days are so busy, we don't really have a lot of time to chat or as much time as I would like to chat. So with

> that being said, what I am proposing are to run small discussion groups outside of class time and that will give us more of an opportunity to chat in smaller groups so that I can hear all of your voices and all of your stories, and all of your aha moments that you have in class without necessarily interrupting class time. . . . You are not expected to participate, Mrs. S doesn't expect you nor do I. It is entirely your choice.
>
> (Transcribed Conversation, April 6, 2017)

Following our discussion, I scheduled five focus groups (18 students in total) that ran during morning and lunch recess. Sample questions are provided in Figure 3.4, though much of our conversations emerged naturally and spontaneously (described in my fieldnotes and audio recordings); the full set of questions can be found in Appendix 4. I approached each conversation in an open-ended, responsive, and reciprocal manner, ensuring that what I asked and enquired about was always relevant and meaningful for participants. Small group discussions were audiotaped, with the permission of participants, and later transcribed and re-read to highlight recurring themes and insights.

Figure 3.4: Conversation starters

Student Questions	**Teacher Questions**
• Do you like to read/write? • Is reading fun/enjoyable? • Do you think reading and writing are important? Why or why not? • If I said texts are constructions, what do I mean? • When you read, do you think about how the story could be told differently? • Do you think texts (e.g., books, magazines, movies, etc.) are neutral and balanced? • Why is it important to learn about people like Martin Luther King Jr.?	• What does critical literacy mean to you? • What does engagement mean to you? • What does engagement look like? • How do students respond to critical literacy texts? • What engages students during the literacy and language block? • Why is flexibility so important? • Why is inquiry so important within your classroom? • Why is professional development important to you?

Research journal. My research journal became an additional data source where my personal reflections, and internal meanderings and wonderings about the process of the inquiry, came to life. I kept this separate from my fieldnotes in hopes of "writing my way through" this journey (Parr, 2008, p. 73). My research journal was a place for me to write about and reflect on my experiences as a researcher, the questions I was pondering, my shifts in perspective, and some of the tensions I encountered along the way. It also served to honour the transformation of my voice from an insecure researcher to someone who learned to be comfortable in her own researcher skin. My research journal became a personal narrative, an ongoing reflexive tale (Parr, 2008) where I allowed myself the freedom to simply write. Sometimes my reflections helped to illuminate and focus my research questions; other times it was an outlet to "get started on my writing" (Parr, 2008, p. 73). Whatever the case, my entries were what I needed them to be at a particular time and in a particular context. They helped me to "contextualize the story being told" (Denzin, 1999, p. 514), my role as researcher, my experiences within the field, and my understanding of classroom life as a site and source for transformative learning.

Artifacts. According to Wolcott (1999), "events we have witnessed can be related to others only through the details we provide" (p. 80). These details, however, must "respect the contextualized situatedness of children in research [and classroom] activities" (Maguire, 2005, para. 26). In an effort to capture students' authentic voice – a voice that perhaps is less influenced by my presence – artifacts of student work became an important data source. With help from the participants and Mrs. S, I gathered artifacts of students' work related to literacy activities across the curriculum with particular attention to their use of written, multimedia, and multimodal texts; how they created meaning through text; and how they produced their own critical literacy texts in class. Most of the artifacts re-presented in the remaining chapters were drawn from the students' journals, a space where they could write without getting caught

up on spelling, grammar, or writing conventions. As such, I have, at times, carefully corrected the students' excerpts to maintain clarity of thought during re-presentation, while remaining mindful of the need to uphold the integrity of participants' voices. Photographs of student work were also captured, with the permission of participants, as a way to "freeze time and to capture specific visual artifacts and interactions that were created in the process of everyday learning events" (Shorey, 2008, p. 69). Mrs. S provided curriculum materials, such as literacy worksheets and handouts, curricular and pedagogical resources, and Ministerial documents that helped to contextualize student work, giving me greater perspective on Mrs. S' role as curriculum maker and how she supported students.

Tying It All Together

The data sources from the above methods resulted in fieldnotes from 50 observation days, transcriptions of all focus groups, artifacts and photographs of student work, and pedagogical and curriculum resources provided by Mrs. S. All of these data sources became important field texts as I both progressed through the inquiry and began to shift my focus from data collection to analysis (Parr, 2008; Shorey, 2008). Each method served to crystallize the data and tales that emerged in as much detail as possible (Parr, 2008; Richardson, 1994, 1997).

Data Analysis: Digging Into and Through the Data

Analyzing qualitative data was an iterative and recursive process. Consistent with ethnography, this involved "becoming familiar with [my] completed database [by] moving backwards and forwards across it, reading, re-reading and comparing aspects until [I was] sure of what it contains" (Grbich, 2013, p. 261). The data gathered during site visits were carefully scrutinized for patterns, categories, and themes, as well as points of view and commonalities, providing insight for future data collection (Grbich, 2013; Parr, 2008); this first stage of analysis coincided with data collection in the classroom and involved checking and tracking the

data to see what emerged, identifying patterns and areas for follow-up, memoing, and personal reflections (Grbich, 2013). Line-by-line and eclectic coding, which combined two or more coding methods through constant comparison, were used (Saldana, 2009). The second level of analysis involved reading and re-reading all data sources in an effort to understand and share the story being told; focused coding and theming the data; developing themes in relation to current literature, as well as original insights; and, identifying areas where theory meets practice in building opportunities for critical literacy, student engagement, and emergent literacy practices (Gibbs, 2007; Parr, 2008; Saldana, 2009; Scheffel, 2008). Figure 3.5 provides a summary of the data analysis phases. During observations, I maintained a broad view of all students in the classroom and my data reflected the stories of many different students.

Figure 3.5: Stages of data analysis

Phase 1	Phase 2
• checking and tracking data; • identifying follow-up areas; • highlighting who, what, why, when, so what?; • reading/re-reading data; • initial coding (line-by-line, In Vivo, Process, and Eclectic) and analytic memoing.	• labelling chunks of data; • focused, eclectic, and theoretical coding; • constant comparison; • themeing the data; • thematic analysis; • linking data to theory and practice.

Re-Visiting My Research Questions

As I entered the classroom, my questions were broad and open-ended, positioning me to explore them as a natural extension of regular classroom instruction. My questions served as a guide for exploration not a set of fixed hypotheses. My approach deepened my understanding of classroom life as participants interacted with text, engaged in literacy activities, and constructed meaning (Duke & Mallette, 2011; Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001). My questions, along with my approach, allowed me to remain flexible and responsive to participant and contextual needs, which I learned was critical when working with a school (Parr, 2008).

Becoming comfortable engaging in an unpredictable environment was not an easy or straightforward task. There were moments of extreme self-doubt where I questioned whether or not I was actually doing things right – collecting the right data, saying the right things, or engaging in the right behaviours. I often left with more questions to reflect upon and interrogate: questions about my assumptions and preconceptions, the inquiry, the classroom teacher, the students, and myself. And even though the questions were endless, I took comfort in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke (2000):

> Be patient toward all that is unsolved in [my] heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given [me] because [I] would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps [I] will then, gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (p. 35)

Remaining open to this process, including my questions, was paramount to this journey. The successes, struggles, and self-doubt not only strengthened the inquiry, but also gave me perspective on the kind of researcher I was becoming. Even though I was uncertain, the advice offered by Brown (2012) remained at the forefront of my mind: "We must walk into the arena, whatever it may be . . . with courage and the willingness to engage. . . . **we must dare to show up and let ourselves be seen.** This is vulnerability. This is *daring greatly*" (pp. 12-13, emphasis in original). So, as best I could, I dared greatly; I was vulnerable and uncertain, I took risks, and I let myself be seen, and the risks were worth it, but not without tension. These tensions and personal struggles permeate my fieldnotes and research journal, and are detailed in Chapter Four.

As I began gathering data and settling into the culture of the classroom community, the questions that guided my inquiry began to shift in conceptualization and scope. The following excerpt from my research journal, one month into the inquiry, illustrates this evolution:

> Reflecting on my research questions, I am left wondering whether I went into this inquiry too prepared. Should I, for example, have allowed the questions to emerge based on the events that took place in the classroom or was I justified in following my original trajectory? Even though this tension is warranted, I remember Wolcott's (1999) advice that "ethnography cannot proceed without purpose" (p. 69). The past month has given me greater perspective about life inside the classroom and while I am still interested in exploring how critical literacy is supported and nurtured, what is changing is my gaze... I am becoming more interested in how students PRODUCE and CONSTRUCT their own critical literacy texts... Is it possible to highlight how we can use existing texts and the texts students produce? I need to sit with my questions more, but I think these are significant questions worthy of exploration. (Research Journal, February 15th, 2017)

While I was still interested in my original research questions, as I came to know more about life inside the classroom, what became of increasing interest was exploring and developing a rich understanding of students' and teachers' perceptions of personal growth, sense of self-efficacy to create change, and understanding of themselves in relation to the world. During the latter part of the inquiry, my focus shifted from how critical literacy was supported and understood to how participants felt they benefitted and grew academically, personally, and socially. Thus, my original research question, "In what ways can critical literacy support transformative learning, and personal and social transformation?" was re-conceptualized as: How can critical literacy support transformative learning, personal growth, and an increased sense of self-efficacy as an agent of self and social change? The following secondary research

questions also emerged as I considered questions that dealt specifically with the construction of critical literacy texts and flexibility:

- What types of critical literacy texts do students produce?
- How are students supported, encouraged, and empowered to construct and create their own critical literacy texts? What opportunities are offered?
- What do students gain – academically, personally, socially – from engaging with existing and self-constructed critical literacy texts?
- What resources do teachers need to effectively model and support critical literacy within the classroom?
- How can we nurture students to develop their critical literacy imagination?
- What role does flexibility play in relation to emergent literacy and how can emergent critical literacy support students and teachers?

As I came to know more – about ethnography, critical literacy, the research site, participants, and myself – my questions not only helped guide my gaze, but also allowed my gaze to widen providing richer data and deepened relationships with participants. It is by seeing the process through, from beginning to ending, including the unexpected sidesteps and meanderings, even potential setbacks, where our stories come to life. Ethnography provided and supported a methodological space wherein every utterance, interaction, experience, and question became part of the whole, transforming separate parts into a complete and rich tale.

Negotiating Ethics in Lived Research

Because of the way children are sometimes viewed within society, they are not necessarily accustomed "to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults" (Punch, 2002, p. 325). The challenge is to engage in research that shifts the nexus of power from the researcher to the researched so that power is equally shared among participants

(Maguire; 2005; Parr, 2010). While this may be an unattainable goal in its purest form, we can remain reflexive of our positionality by employing research practices "in line with children's experiences, interests, values, and everyday routines" (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 482). Reflexivity, according to Maguire (2005), "requires a decision-making process involving children that is both interactive and iterative. It also calls for a rethinking of a new epistemology of childhood and children and more positive view of children's agency and capacities" (para. 18). To achieve this, four areas of consideration guided my inquiry: (1) dialogue, rapport, reciprocity, and transparency; (2) balancing power relations; (3) issues of re-presentation; and (4) including multiple voices.

Dialogue, Rapport, Reciprocity, and Transparency

Noddings' (2005) ethic of care has four major components, which were interwoven throughout each visit: modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Researchers can model care by demonstrating how and why we care in our interactions with others. Creating caring and trusting relationships with our participants, and responding to their needs through open-ended and mutually respectful dialogue, can help researchers achieve this goal. For Noddings (2005), dialogue is a "common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning" (p. 23); in other words, it is emergent. This enables participants to question and debate our intentions, objectives, and interactions as researchers, while simultaneously connecting us with one another in meaningful and authentic ways. By leaving ourselves open to the journey, we ensure that what emerges is authentic and organic, reciprocal and collaborative, and never imposed or deceitful (Lather, 1986; Noddings, 2005).

I began my research with an understanding that "qualitative and ethnographic inquiries necessitates not only the establishment of rapport [and] trustworthy relationships with child participants but also a reconceptualization of their roles as human beings and as real engaged participants" (Maguire, 2005, para. 26). In trying to understand students' perspectives, I listened carefully to what they had to say, making great effort to share their experiences as best I could (Harding, 1992; Parr, 2011; Scheffel, 2008). To be the researcher I wanted – moving "from 'reading over the shoulders of natives' to 'reading alongside natives'" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 14) – meant that I needed to be more than a simple observer. I needed to be there for them, present and in the moment each time I stepped into the classroom. As I observed and interacted, remaining present was at the forefront of my practice, evidenced throughout my field texts. For example,

> As I walked across the parking lot, a couple of students from class shouted, "Hi Ms. Driessens!" I smiled back, gleefully, and gave them a big wave. . . . I was determined to make today a 'relationship building day.' I wanted the students to know me beyond my researcher role and identity. I wanted them to know and understand that I am here for them, to listen to and tell their stories, to share in their learning, and to be more than a researcher in the class.
>
> The students were very open to my presence, and I quickly became part of the class. Perhaps this is largely due to the fact that I am open and vulnerable – I am interested in playing their games, engaging in their lessons, and completing classroom activities – and not looking to impose or intervene; I'm just here, for them, in whatever capacity or context they require. [Today] I was different things for different students. Some just wanted my help spelling a word or getting a website loaded. Others were more intrigued by my presence, particularly my notebook. Some just wanted to talk

with me, share their work, and others were still uncomfortable or unsure. (Research Journal, January 23, 2017)

Building trustworthy and trusting relationships required time and constant re-negotiation, but was critical not only to establish rapport with participants but to honour their lives, stories, and openness and generosity (Punch, 2002; Smyth & McInerney, 2013; Stich et al., 2012; Van Maanen, 2011). Critically moving back and forth with reflexivity, honesty, humbleness, and humility (Lassiter, 2005) while "'being here', might just persuade [me] to produce clearer, more insightful, and considerably richer pictures of what it was really like to fully experience 'being there'" (Smith, 2007, p. 172).

Balancing Power Relations

When engaging in research with children, it is important to address the issue of power, particularly the power differential between researcher, teacher, parents, and children. Despite the fact that I aimed to empower participants, children hold less power than adults within society (Maguire, 2005; Punch 2002). Recognizing children as knowledgeable and capable learners with a voice to share and a story to tell created the possibility for a participant-centred approach where power was shared equally (James, 2001; Parr, 2010; Scheffel, 2011). Voiced and empowering ethnographic research re-conceptualizes and reverses the positivist paradigm where "the researchers know, and young people are expected to willingly comply in supplying and surrendering information" (Smyth, 1999, p. 5). Researchers can reverse the dynamics of power through reciprocity and dialogue, "empowering subjects by turning them into co-researchers" (Lather, 1986, p. 73).

One of the ways I approached this problematic was to respect students' roles, voices, and value. My goal was not only to remain mindfully reflexive of the power I held as an adult researcher, but to try and mitigate the power differentials between adults and children, while

simultaneously building rapport and trust (Maguire, 2005; Scheffel, 2011; Smyth, 2006). Remaining mindful of my own positionality and power was particularly salient during observations, for students' powerlessness was less visible (James, 2001). While I made every effort to greet and chat with the students each morning I was there, guided lessons minimized interaction, and sometimes students forgot I was present. I could not help but wonder if this represented implied consent. To assuage my personal concerns, I made great effort to check in with students following the lesson to remind them of my presence and re-negotiate their consent. Because of the relationships we had built, they expressed no concern about my recordings, but this still gave them the opportunity to have agency and control over what I recorded.

The issue of consent in research with children has been raised time and again. Bound by the ethical codes of conduct as set out by Nipissing's Research Ethics Board and the local school board meant that I had to obtain parental consent prior to data collection. Maguire (2005) notes that consent is often mediated through parents/guardians, which acts as an additional form of power in the research process. Because I view children as informed, knowledgeable, and capable social agents, I was morally and ethically obligated to obtain student consent even though institutional protocol did not require me to do so. Prior to collecting data, whether observationally or more formally through digital recordings including group discussions, photographs of student work, and informal conversations, I would check-in with students and consent was re-negotiated. My approach to participant consent was ongoing and dialogic throughout the duration of the inquiry and, by the end, all student participants had signed their own letter of consent.

Even though we had many discussions about consent, I often wondered if students agreed because they were "used to having to try to please adults" (Punch, 2002, p. 328). This

tension lingered and became an inescapable thought pattern throughout my time in class. For example,

> Even though students made the choice to participate and I gave them the time and space to ask questions, why am I feeling odd, like I did something wrong? Perhaps this is the inherent power imbalance between adults and children. Even though I was clear that participating was THEIR choice, that no one expected them to participate, I can't help but wonder if they genuinely want to be a part of the story or are merely placating me because I am an adult and they have been socialized to please us, to cede their own agency because of our age difference and social category. Maybe I will never be sure. At least I know in my heart that I did all I could to ensure their decision was informed and derived at independently. Maybe in time my feelings (of guilt, uneasiness, uncertainty?) will slowly dissipate. . . . We can [only] remain reflexive and aware continuously pushing our thinking, our work, and ourselves, all the while remaining open, really and truly, to this process and all that comes with it, whether positive or negative. (Research Journal, February 2, 2017)

While not the only way to approach ethnographic research, I believed in my method. I knew that solving the tension between adults and children would not be easy, but would require continual reflexivity and re-negotiation. By paying attention and remaining reflexive, responding to participants' needs, and being open and flexible as I made the everyday lives' of participants visible helped ensure I was not implicated in perpetuating dominant power relations while remaining faithful to and upholding the integrity of my participants' lives.

Issues of Representation/Re-Presentation

Who has the right to represent/re-present participants' experiences and stories? Whose voices will be privileged? Whose voices will be silenced? How can we capture multiple representations/re-

presentations? And what purpose does our research serve (Lassiter, 2005; Levinson, 1998)? These are just some of the questions I grappled with as I thought about data re-presentation.

Ethnography is "written representation of a culture. . . . It carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 1). As ethnographers, we select what gets captured, how it is re-presented, the field texts that are produced, and the tales that are told. These are choices made by us, as researchers, captured through our eyes and imbued with our assumptions, subjectivities, and worldviews (Emerson et al., 2011; Goodall Jr., 2000; Van Maanen, 2011). We must accept the responsibilities of re-presenting others by asking, "How does our writing . . . reproduce a system of domination and how does it challenge that system? For whom do we speak and to whom do we speak, with what voice, to what end, using what criteria" (Richardson, 1997, p. 57)? It is a reminder to always recognize that "all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems" (Harraway, 1988, p. 583).

"Vision is *always* a question of the power to see" (Harraway, 1988, p. 585, emphasis in original). How we choose to see can guide us along a path where participatory methods and empowerment pervade. By carefully listening to participants' voices, suspending judgment, and remaining reflexive of the inseparability of our subjectivities from our research, we can move toward representation/re-presentation that is fair and authentic, even though these re-presentations are always partial (Eisner, 1988; Goodall Jr., 2000; Madison, 2005). Remaining transparent through credibility checks, or member checking, must be built into the foundation of our inquiry ensuring that what is captured ethically and authentically re-presents participants' stories and experiences (Lather, 1986). This is why I chose to share my fieldnotes with Mrs. S and check in with students regularly.

Throughout this journey, I found myself echoing the struggle of Fine and Weis (1996) regarding re-presentation: "In our texts, we ponder how we present (a) *ourselves* as researchers choreographing the narratives we have collected; (b) the *narrators* . . . and (c) the *others*. . . . working hard to figure out how to represent and contextualize [all three] " (pp. 266-267, emphasis in original). This tension is what Fine & Weis (1996) refer to as the triple re-presentational problem. Within the context of this inquiry, dominant tales emerged: students' tales, the classroom teacher's tale, and the researcher's tale (Van Maanen, 2011). Because "students will see classrooms one way, teachers another, and ethnographers a third way" (Frank, 1999, p. 4), seeing through diverse participants' eyes and contextual lenses constructs a narrative that reflected, embraced, and interweaved multiple voices and polyvocality (Sanger, 2003; Gallagher, 2008). In doing so, what is of primary importance is that what was captured reflects what participants say, think, and do as much as possible.

Including Multiple and Silenced Voices

Maguire (2005) maintains that a large proportion of Canadian educational research ignores children's voices, excludes their perspectives, and disregards their capacities to make decisions. It is against this narrow view of child participants, including their capabilities, that I built the design of my research. As such, I approached each day with the objective of creating a platform where multiple, diverse, and even divergent voices could emerge (James, 2001; Maguire, 2005; Smyth, 1999, 2006). Together, we made this a collaborative space for all participants to articulate their views, perceptions, and points of view, myself included. However, the more time I spent in class, the more I interrogated what it truly means to have a voice. As Dewar (1991) charges, "the issue is not who has a voice; we all have voices and speak with them in very different ways. The problem arises when we define our strategy . . . as one that enables us to 'give' certain groups of people a voice. What does it mean to give?" (p. 75). I

had to take a step back to really sit with Dewar's (1991) assertion and the tension it created. I realized that I was not giving voice to participants, but sharing my privileged position so that theirs could be heard within a wider context. As I reflected, I came to understand voice as a powerful medium, an idiosyncratic and pluralistic expression, and a vehicle where one can contextualize and understand the world, the self, and how and where they meaningfully connect (see Figure 3.6). This realization became a guiding framework during my time in class and is interwoven throughout data representation, analysis, and interpretation. It ensures participants' authentic voices are in the spotlight and my voice interwoven as dialogically and naturally as possible.

Figure 3.6: Conceptualization of voice

The concept of voice reflects the following assertions:

- Participants are social actors with an authentic, unique voice to share;
- Children add a unique and valuable perspective to inquiry and need a space in which they can reveal what is real and meaningful to and for themselves;
- There is not a singular child's voice, but children's voices;
- All voices must be listened to; and
- Insider voices must be privileged over outsider perceptions and interpretations.

Note: Adapted from Dewar, 1991; Maguire, 2005; Smyth, 1999, 2006; Wolcott 1997, 1999, 2005, 2008.

Trustworthiness, Validity, Credibility, and Authenticity

The data gathered through participant observation, fieldnotes, conversations, classroom artifacts, and researcher journals provide "thick description" of classroom life (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). This data also meets the criteria of validity, credibility, and trustworthiness within ethnographic research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulating multiple methods and data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) increased the validity or verisimilitude of the research where readers can experience the story being told as "lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis, 2004, p. 124).

Attending to authenticity was paramount to my practice. I remained transparent and open to students' questions, especially when they were curious about what I was writing in my notebook. For example, students were allowed to look through my notebook so long as privacy and confidentiality were not breached, which they respected. I also made great effort to check in with students when I jotted down notes verbatim. I would unobtrusively and privately speak with the student directly to confirm what he or she had said and whether or not my transcription was accurate. In this way, students were offered another avenue for negotiated consent, agency, and control throughout the inquiry.

Closing Remarks

Ethnography is, in my opinion, the most fitting methodological choice for an in-depth exploration of critical literacy. It supports my observations of literacy events, activities, and practices that inform students' lives without ever controlling or manipulating the research (Parr, 2008; Van Sluys et al., 2006). Moreover, it allows me to remain open to the process, to move back and forth between my understanding of literacy and how it actualizes inside the classroom.

Today, I know the students trusted me wholeheartedly and they were comfortable asking questions so they understood the reasons for my observations, questions, and (inter)actions. Remaining both reflexive and transparent was paramount in maintaining ongoing dialogue. Grover (2004) argues that, "when children are permitted in those rare cases to become active participants telling their own story in their own way, the research experience is often personally moving and meaningful and the data [are] rich and complex" (p. 84).

Earlier I confessed my desire to make a difference in the lives of my participants. During the inquiry, I always hoped they gained something from our time together beyond being participants in a research study. Van Maanen (2011) reminds us that ethnography "irrevocably

influences the interests and lives of the people represented in them – individually and collectively, for better or worse" (p. 5). I hoped, perhaps somewhat hubristically, that our time together changed them as much as it changed me. Today, reflecting back, I know it did.

Chapter Four

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

When we were children,
we used to think that when we were grown-up
we would no longer be vulnerable.
But to grow up is to accept vulnerability...
To be alive is to be vulnerable.
~ Madeleine L'Engle

Preamble

What does it mean to be an engaged researcher? What does it mean to research with both your head and heart? Where does the line between researcher and someone to remember become defined? How do you transition from being around participants on a weekly basis to reading and writing about them in an isolated office? How do you fully and deeply capture relationships? How do you recover from a palpable loss – mentally, physically, and emotionally – once you say goodbye? How do we make sure that our journey has closure? And, how do we ensure that, once we leave, our exit is not what participants remember most? These are the questions I am left with now that formal data collection has come to an end.

The Role of the Researcher

Through field texts and narrative descriptions, this chapter details my journey from an unknown stranger to a full-fledged member of a Grade Six classroom community. It is at once recursive and reflexive, a place to be alone with my thoughts and ideas, to reminisce about my co-travellers, and to be thankful for this journey. The goal of this chapter is to reveal my being and becoming, a being and becoming that is reciprocal and transformative and idiosyncratic all at once. As the story unfolds, you will hear my co-travellers' voices, along with my own, as I negotiated my entry and multiple roles. You will meet students who challenged and changed

me, forced me to pause and reflect, and pushed me toward a deeper understanding of my research, as well as myself as researcher.

Negotiating Entry

By now, you should have a clear sense of the strong relationships and emotional connections I felt with my participants. Negotiating entry into their community, however, was not an easy or straightforward process. My approach required an ongoing openness toward vulnerability and risk-taking (Brown, 2010, 2012; Parr, 2011; Scheffel, 2008, 2011) and an acceptance that many things were out of my control. I learned the real value of remaining flexible and relinquishing control, which was no easy feat. Let me explain. I believe that I possess many positive personality traits: I am kind and caring, always put others first, and I am perpetually ambitious and determined. Being an ambitious person has led me down my path of academia, a path that has been filled with struggles and challenges, trials and tribulations, but worth every drop of blood, sweat, and tears. I grew up in a family who supported my love of learning to the extent that no one batted an eyelash when I told them of my decision to pursue a doctorate. Academia was my thing, my niche, and my comfort zone. I have always felt valued in school, like I had something to contribute, which is likely why I have chosen my particular path. In fact, the voices of my elementary school teachers still echo in my mind: "Sarah is smart. Sarah follows the rules. Sarah is a pleasure to teach." Of course I am paraphrasing because these memories occurred over two decades ago, but the way my teachers made me feel has withstood the test of time. And so, I embraced this academic identity, but hindsight has allowed me to see that I have also exploited this identity. Instead of learning *with* others, I became somewhat of a know-it-all. I was hubristic and naïve and obstinate all at once. But, when the time was right, I used my lens of reflection and learned from my past (Shorey, 2008). In so doing, I moved

beyond my narrow understanding of the world by embracing multiple perspectives and different ways with words (Heath, 1983); I learned to relinquish control, or so I thought.

As I negotiated entry into the classroom, I remembered a piece of advice given to me by Michelann, my supervisor: "Do not feel dissuaded or personally offended if your first attempt at a school does not work out. This is the reality of engaging in qualitative research." She did her best to prime me for the possibility that my plan might fall through. When it did, I fought with my old know-it-all self, struggling to keep her at bay, but she clawed her way to the forefront of my mind along with her old friend imposter syndrome strapped to her back. I am also a very controlling person; I already knew this about myself. So the minute my plan dissolved, I felt compelled to fix whatever had gone wrong. It took some time, but eventually I realized there was nothing to fix, this path simply was not meant for me. My supervisor reassured me that everything would work out and, even though I did not believe her in that moment, eventually it did. And because of Michelann's dedication and perseverance, I found a home in Mrs. S' classroom.

Today, I can reflect on my journey and realize that I have not yet mastered my new identity and I have much to learn about remaining open and responsive to the many things that life throws my way. I am getting closer to being the researcher I want to be, but this inquiry has taught me that I might not be the researcher my participants need me to be. Negotiating entry into Mrs. S' classroom, including the struggles, tears, and bouts of imposter syndrome, taught me the value of flexibility, responsiveness, and risk-taking (Brown, 2010, 2012; Parr, 2011; Scheffel, 2008, 2011). I entered Mrs. S' classroom as an insecure researcher willing to share her vulnerability and I emerged as a member of their community and an important person in the students' lives.

Inspired by Scheffel's (2008) doctoral work and ongoing advice, throughout the inquiry I adopted different roles at different times depending upon participant and contextual needs. Some of the roles I adopted were unique to this particular inquiry, whereas others resembled those put forth by Scheffel (2008, 2011), but tailored to meet participant and contextual needs. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of Scheffel's roles (2008, 2011) in relation to both the teacher and the students, as they differed slightly.

Figure 4.1: Negotiating a researcher identity

Scheffel (2011) outlined the following roles when discussing her negotiation of a researcher identity with students and the classroom teacher:

Interactions with the Teacher:

- The student teacher
- The PhD
- The helper
- The researcher
- The capable teacher
- Conflicting identities
- Teacher/researcher and
- Researcher friend.

Interaction with the Students:

- Someone's mom
- The student teacher
- The helper
- The researcher
- Significant adult
- Significant adult/researcher and
- Someone to remember.

My data is filled with similar negotiations as I explored my researcher identity and settled into classroom life. Embedded in my fieldnotes and research journal are participant inquiries about my role, my identity, my purpose, and my place. These are teased out below where I outline the following nine identities that were adopted, and sometimes ascribed, throughout the inquiry: Special visitor; Ms. Driessens; student, student-teacher, teacher, or doctor; risk-taker; Ms. Dried Raisins; trusted helper; researcher; blurring roles; and significant adult. The tenth and final identity, someone to remember, is discussed in Chapter Seven. Like Scheffel (2008, 2011) suggests, the students' inquiries were their way of demonstrating a desire to know me, and each identity helped them make sense of who I was, as well as place me inside the classroom. The roles are presented somewhat chronologically. Their progression demonstrates my gradual immersion into classroom life.

Identity # 1: Special Visitor

The first time I met Mrs. S and her class was during the students' holiday poetry slam prior to data collection. Mrs. S, so engaged with the students' performances, had not noticed that the principal and I had quietly slipped in to observe. "Oh hi," Mrs. S remarked to us, "how long have you been here?" "About ten minutes," I replied. The students were immediately curious about me. This was not a surprise visit as Mrs. S had informed the students that a special visitor was dropping in that day, ascribing me my first identity.

I chatted briefly with the students about what a PhD was and how you go about earning one, as well as what it meant to be a researcher. "Is your book going to be published?" they asked. Somewhat taken aback, I told them I believed it would. Excited by the prospect of starring in a published book, which became a recurring theme throughout the inquiry with students wondering when they can buy my book at Chapters, one student asked, "Can you dedicate your book to us?" This led to a brief conversation about using a pseudonym, or code name, which prompted them all to begin shouting out names. I suggested we wait until I knew their real names first. When it was time for me to leave, I told the class I would see them after the Christmas break. We wished one another a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and I chatted with Mrs. S for a few more minutes about the proposed research. She invited me to return on January 16, 2017 for my first official observation day. Mrs. S also asked that I send her the parental consent forms (see Appendix 1), which she offered to photocopy and distribute on the first Monday back from Christmas break. This small act demonstrated Mrs. S' openness and eagerness to participate in this inquiry, but also revealed the supportive classroom environment I was joining.

Identity # 2: Ms. Driessens

> I entered an unlit and very quiet classroom, a stark contrast from my first introductory visit. I searched for the best spot to drop my things and wandered around the class for a minute, stopping at the window to watch the students playing outside. Mrs. S walked in, hugged me and wished me a Happy New Year. My nerves and anxiety just seemed to fade away. It's almost as though her hug squeezed it all out. The students arrived and waited outside the classroom patiently. I sat on a stool near cozy corner while Mrs. S welcomed the students. In hindsight, I should have been brave enough to head out into the hallway with her. Back in class, Mrs. S re-introduced me to her class as Ms. Driessens. It made me uncomfortable being called such an official title and took me some time to get used to. (Research Journal, January 16, 2017)

Mrs. S also ascribed my second identity, Ms. Driessens, an identity into which I had to grow. Having such a formal title made me somewhat uncomfortable, at least in the beginning, but I respected the culture of the school environment, as well as Mrs. S' wishes. Truth be told, the conversation never arose; it was simply presumed that because I was an adult I would assume this identity. I always wondered, though, if the inquiry would have been different had I felt comfortable enough to express my desire to have the students call me by my first name? I will always wonder if being known as Ms. Driessens, rather than Sarah, meant I had to work harder to counter the power differential between myself and the students. While I may never know the answer to my question, in the end, being referred to as Ms. Driessens did not hinder my relationships with the students, as you will come to see.

Identity # 3: Student, Student Teacher, Teacher, or Doctor?

When I first began data collection, the students almost instinctually viewed me as a student teacher, even though we had already discussed my role as a PhD student. The students

had experience with student teachers in the past, so this seemed like a reasonable explanation. One of the roles adopted by Scheffel (see Figure 4.1) was also a student teacher. When one of the students asks their classroom teacher, “Is that the mom of someone in our class?” the teacher suggests, “For now, just think of her as a student teacher” (Scheffel, 2011, p. 60). In contrast, Mrs. S was quick to remind the students that I was not a student teacher but a PhD student and researcher. Mrs. S helped the students understand my role within the classroom, even though this role was continually in flux. The roles I adopted were not linear or mutually exclusive, but rather contextually driven and flexible. Perhaps that is why, at least initially, the students struggled to place me.

On my second day of observation, the students attended a production put on by Education Arts Canada titled *The Secret Life of Riley K*, a story about a young girl experiencing anxiety. At 1:15, we headed down to the gym. The students filed in, taking their seat on the gym floor. I decided to sit with them, rather than on the teacher’s bench, to begin breaking down those power differentials I alluded to earlier, as well as their uncertainty of my role within the classroom. Taking our seats, the students in front of me immediately turned around inquiring, “What do you write in your notebook?” signalling that I had chosen wisely. Sharing what I could, we had a conversation about what Faheem later called my “big little book” (Transcribed Conversation, April 20, 2017) before the play began. Later that evening as I thought about the students’ questions, I reflected in my journal:

> In that moment I realized that I had not done as great of a job as I would have liked informing the students that they are welcome to ask me questions, see my notes, etc. . . . In no way do I want to impose or take time away from learning, but I am hoping Mrs. S and I can carve out some time so that I can speak with the students directly. This is crucial! Kamler (2001) notes that, “calls for students to publicly reveal or even confess

information about their lives and cultures in the presence of others – including teachers – can be not only voyeuristic, but dangerous, a form of surveillance to see if students produce the right voice" (pp. 40-41). I wondered if students were concerned that I was expecting a particular, or 'right', voice to emerge? Students had a lot of questions and are very curious about my presence, which is great. I want them to be as informed as possible and I will strive to ensure they are. (Research Journal, January 24, 2017)

As the inquiry unfolded, some of the students struggled to define my identity and role. For example, Michelle and I had the following conversation during our semi-structured focus group (see Figure 4.4):

Michelle: Are there other people that do this [research]?

Sarah: Oh gosh yes! There are universities filled with people just like me. They may not be studying exactly what I'm studying, but yeah, they go into classrooms.

Michelle: Do you get paid to do this?

Sarah: Not really, no. I don't get paid to be here.

Michelle: Wait, like is this your job?

Sarah: Yes and no. So I'm still a student, like how you're a student in class.

Michelle: Wait, you're in university?

Sarah: Yes.

Michelle: How old are you?

Sarah: 30.

Michelle: How are you in university when you're 30?

(Transcribed Conversation, April 24, 2017)

After learning I was still a university student, Michelle came to, once again, associate my role as that of a student teacher, despite Mrs. S' efforts and my extended stay in the classroom:

> You are the best 'student teacher' I have ever met! (Michelle's Goodbye Letter)

Like Michelle, several of her classmates struggled to define my identity evidenced by the following fieldnote:

> I meandered about [the room] to ensure the students were on task. May, Faheem, Justice, and Shtom's table asked me what it takes to be a teacher. To clarify, I asked if they meant like what Mrs. S does and they said, "Yes." I informed them that you have to obtain a Bachelor of Education. The table asked if what I wanted to do was teach, and I told them, "Yes, but that I cannot teach within an elementary school." This led to a conversation about the fact that I could teach teachers, but not elementary school students, which they thought was pretty cool. Shtom asked if I would be called Dr. Driessens, instead of Ms. Driessens, when I was finished my PhD. (Fieldnote, March 2, 2017)

This entry highlights the evolution of my roles, as well as their inevitable blurring and sometimes confusing nature. Clearly the students were trying to make sense of who I was both inside and outside the classroom, but, like Scheffel (2011), sometimes I felt limited by these labels. However, these negotiations represent the students' need for understanding; Mrs. S had her role, the students theirs, and now I, too, must define mine.

Identity # 4: Risk-Taker

On my fourth day of observation, the Grade Six students partnered up with their Grade One reading buddies, a regular Friday morning activity. The students had found their reading buddies and were seated on the floor in the library. I felt like a fish out of water as I recounted in my journal:

> I stood in the middle of the library feeling a little lost, unsure where to go or what to do. . . . I sort of just stared at the students with a blank look on my face. I stayed fairly close to Mrs. S – my security blanket, lifeline, and mentor in this process – who perhaps sensed my uneasiness. She was deep in conversation with the Reading Recovery teacher who I had greeted a few times in the hallway. Mrs. S introduced me and she immediately knew who I was. I finally found my feet and decided to roam. (Research Journal, January 27, 2017)

To be the researcher I wanted and, in hindsight what the students needed, required me to push myself to the edge of my own comfort zone (Vygotsky, 1986). Despite my reservations and, at times crippling anxiety, I pushed through my own uncertainty to take risks and be vulnerable with the students on a daily basis. Sometimes this was as simple as meandering about the room while students worked or sharing in their classroom activities. For example, on my second day of observations, the students watched a live production of *The Secret Life of Riley K*. Following the play, the students were invited to silently reflect by drawing or writing about their own personal fears and anxieties (i.e., my dragon). I decided to write alongside the students in an effort to begin building trusting and reciprocal relationships, and so we all quietly wrote our own pieces (see Figure 4.2). When we finished, several of the students asked if I was comfortable sharing my dragon, to which I agreed.

Figure 4.2: My dragon

My dragon is ever-present. I fear change, the unfamiliar, something that takes me out of my routine. Anything that is out of my normal causes anxiety. For example, when I travel, sometimes I struggle being away from home. Often it feels as though I am ruining the trip or vacation for those who are with me. But, when I talk to those I trust and love, and who love and support me, my dragon doesn't seem quite as large. Somehow it becomes manageable.

My role as a risk-taker was further developed on the morning of *Walk and Roll*, a school-wide initiative to raise awareness about reducing our carbon footprint, where students

were invited to bike, rollerblade, walk, and carpool to school. Mrs. S informed me that the students got to play outside for an extra fifteen minutes before school started and invited me to join her on the playground to hand out snacks. On this particular morning, the students, knowingly or not, pushed me to take my biggest risk yet:

> A few students from class ran up to Mrs. S and me, surprised to see me outside (rarely do I venture out during recess). I saw the rest of the class in the back corner of the field playing a familiar, though long-forgotten, game: Soccer baseball. I played this during my elementary years, not particularly well, but I do remember enjoying it. I made my way over to the class, the majority of whom were playing, and they invited me to join in. This really required me to take a risk. The last time I played soccer baseball was when I was in elementary school. But, I knew the students wanted me to play; their excitement was palpable. They cheered my name and clapped for me. How could I possibly turn down their invitation despite my discomfort? There I stood, in a line of 11 and 12 year olds, patiently waiting for my turn. Why was I so nervous? All I had to do was kick a ball. Michelle even offered to be my runner after I commented on my lack of appropriate footwear. The students insisted I head straight to the front, though I protested to try and keep things fair. Finally caving to their requests, I walked to the front of the line, joking that it's possible I will end up missing the ball and falling, clearly trying to 'save face' in case I made a total fool of myself. A student from class rolled the ball and *BOOM* I connected! The ball soared through the air, Michelle taking off toward first base. The students clapped and cheered, hugging and high-fiving me!! I was actually surprised by how far it went. When the bell finally rang to head inside at 9 a.m., the class, overjoyed by my participation, named me MVP. It was most assuredly a memorable moment,

> something that I will cherish, and I believe the students will too. (Fieldnote, May 10, 2017)

Even though I sometimes doubted my ability to be a successful risk-taker, the students always gave me the strength, support, and courage I needed. What I discovered was that, in order for this inquiry to be successful, I needed to be brave, take risks, and have fun. I needed to continually push myself to the edge of my comfort zone and allow the students to do the same (Vygotsky, 1986).

Identity # 5: Ms. Dried Raisins Has Integrity

Becoming part of the classroom community not only required me to take risks, but to also demonstrate that I was someone with integrity, a trait that the students in Mrs. S' class valued. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes, only the second day into the inquiry, demonstrated the culture of Mrs. S' classroom, as well as the relationships that were quickly developing:

> Shtom told me how much he loved stickers. He has quite the collection on his water bottle and asked if I could bring some in. Recognizing that perhaps this was an opportunity to negotiate my entry into the culture of the classroom, I happily agreed and said I would bring some during my next visit. The students who were around were quite excited. As I was getting ready to leave for the day, a group of boys reminded me that I had committed to bringing them some stickers. They told me that if I didn't, I would receive a *notch*. I had heard them use this term a few times, but I was unsure what they meant. They explained to me that a *notch* was a line shaved into your eyebrow if you failed to live up to your word or promise. Integrity is an important character trait – clearly something they value – and wanting to ensure they saw me as someone who keeps her word I went and picked up stickers as soon as school was finished that day.

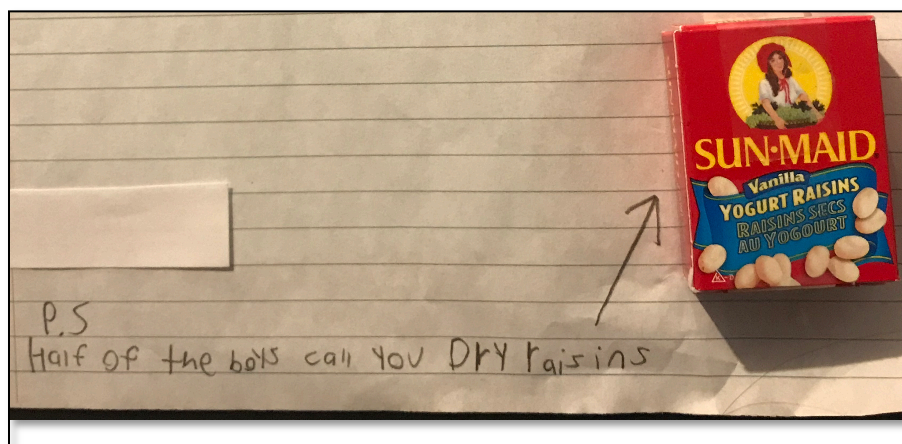
> During my next visit, the group of boys asked if I had remembered to bring stickers. I pulled them out of my bag and they all joked that now Shtom had to get a *notch*. I could hardly contain my laughter, but suggested that perhaps no one should receive a notch today. (Fieldnote, January 23, 2017)

As I reflected on the above conversation, I realized an important piece of my researcher identity:

> I wanted the students to know they could trust me, believe what I said and have faith that I will follow through with what I say; that I have integrity. (Research Journal, January 27, 2017)

About halfway through the inquiry, Jamal ascribed me a new title, Ms. Dried Raisins, a play on my last name. I interpreted this as his way of welcoming me into his life, perhaps as more than just a researcher, and the classroom community. His ability to joke with me by creating a "punny" (Jamal) nickname signalled that I had, at least temporarily, been granted insider status. While Jamal was the only one who regularly referred to me as Ms. Dried Raisins, often greeting me as such upon my arrival, unbeknownst to me, this became a running joke among a handful of boys in the classroom (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Ethan's goodbye letter



P.S
Half of the boys call you Dry raisins

Having taken the time to negotiate my entry into the classroom and students' lives by playing their games, learning their language, and familiarizing myself with their ways of life (Parr, 2008) revealed the power of "working *with* children as agents and participants rather than faceless objects and voiceless vulnerable victims of research" (Maguire, 2005, para. 7). It was important to me that the students know I was not a mere observer of classroom life, but rather interested in immersing myself as deeply and fully as possible. I believe the students' growing comfort with me, illustrated in the preceding stories, conveys my efforts and the students' acceptance of me.

Identity # 6: Trusted Helper

Over time, my decision to take risks allowed me to take on a new identity, that of a trusted helper and collaborator. Accepting risk and uncertainty by leaning into the discomfort of vulnerability forced me, quite literally, out of my chair from day one as I recounted in my fieldnotes:

> As the students completed their work, I circulated to look at some of the students' responses to start building relationships with them. I realized I had just sat in my little corner for too long. The students were eager to share their work with me and began asking if I saw theirs or would like to see theirs. (Fieldnote, January 16, 2017)

As I reviewed my fieldnotes and journal entries, I remember how anxious and unsure I felt, nervous to take that first step, uncertain how students would respond or react to my presence.

> This was my first venture away from my seat and I asked a few students if they were comfortable sharing their responses with me. And when I did, something amazing happened. The students started sharing their work with me without me asking them to. This was an important relationship building moment. I was unsure how to begin building relationships with them or developing a rapport based on trust, but I truly

> believe this intuitively happened. Children have a desire to be heard and I know that building trusting and trustworthy relationships takes time, but I think today set the foundation, or at least started us out on the right track. I realized that I needed to push myself to step outside of my comfort zone. How can I ask students to be open to this process, this inquiry, and my presence if I choose the easy default option, the path of least resistance? It is inauthentic and incongruent with my researcher identity and, quite frankly, an abuse of power. (Research Journal, January 16, 2017)

It did not take long for me to realize that, in order for the students to trust me, I needed to put myself out there and learn alongside them.

Over the course of the inquiry, I wore different hats and took on different roles. Sometimes, I was a second set of eyes during group work or a fully participating group member. Other times, I was a proofreader, someone to conference with, or simply someone willing to listen with an open heart and mind, similar to Scheffel's (2011) role (see Figure 4.1). From the beginning, I learned how to be flexible and responsive to both student and contextual needs as evidenced by the following journal entry:

> I was different things for different students. Some just wanted my help spelling a word or getting a website loaded. Others were more intrigued by my presence, particularly my notebook, some just wanted to talk with me, share their work, and others were still uncomfortable, apprehensive, or unsure of why I was there. (Research Journal, January 23, 2017)

My field texts, narrative descriptions, and time in the classroom were filled with moments of trust and collaboration: from circulating around the room and helping students navigate an online survey to getting snacks for literature circles; from rearranging students' desks at the beginning of each month to participating in school activities; and from providing

feedback on student work all the way through to co-teaching and student conferencing. Like Scheffel's (2011) role as the helper (see Figure 4.1), Mrs. S continually facilitated this identity time and again by reminding students that I was available to conference and provide additional support, "much the way a student teacher would participate within a classroom" (p. 60). One moment stands out from Observation Day 34:

> Mrs. S emailed me Friday informing me that she would be in the office Monday (today) morning as acting principal, so the students would have a supply teacher. "How do you feel about coming Monday and conferencing with the students. I know the supply teacher won't mind (she's one of our regulars). I'm even thinking we could set you up a desk outside the classroom where it is quieter and you could conference there?" (Mrs. S, personal communication May 5, 2017). Usually when there is a supply teacher, I don't come in. But, I told her that it was no trouble for me to come in and I was happy to support the students in her absence. I think we have reached a point of complete trust. Though she does not necessarily place me in the teacher role, she most certainly views me as someone who can at least help guide students in their work and trusts that I will help support them in their writing. Perhaps the confidence she has in me explains why students want to sit with me during conferencing. I truly enjoy working one-on-one with students not only because it opens up a space for a more in-depth dialogue relating to their work, but it also reinforces the relationships I've worked so hard to build. (Fieldnote, May 8, 2017)

Upon closer reflection, this narrative reveals that, despite the fact that I am not a certified teacher, Mrs. S trusted me to support students.

My role as trusted helper became particularly salient toward the end of the inquiry when students began writing their own fantasy stories. Similar to the example above, and

Scheffel's (2011) role (see Figure 4.1), each morning (Observation Day 32 - 34, and 37 - 38) students would line up to conference with me, which often left me wondering *What impact have I had on students?* and *Am I overstepping my role?* One particular example occurred on Observation Day 38 that helped me gain insight to both questions:

> Mrs. S told the students that, like always, I was available for conferencing. Students began queuing up to sit with me and, recognizing that equity and fairness are very important to this group, I made a list based on a first-come-first-served basis. One student (Earl) who I would not necessarily describe as reluctant, but indifferent, towards me, asked if he could sit with me. Mrs. S told me she thinks it's incredibly sweet that so many want to sit with me and hear my feedback. I couldn't agree more; it is something I have come to look forward to, but I often wonder if Mrs. S is ever upset by this - not in the least, she said! (Fieldnote, May 17, 2017)

Perhaps Mrs. S' growing confidence in my ability to guide and support students filtered down to the students themselves, which is why so many were eager to work with me? I believe that the preceding roles, particularly that of risk-taker, helped the students recognize that I could be trusted. At any rate, taking on multiple roles and seeing through new lenses gave me greater perspective and insights about what it takes to be an effective educator, as well as the conditions necessary for critical literacy, the focus of Chapter Six.

Identity # 7: Researcher

Research can be isolating, especially when your peers and colleagues are spread across the province. Becoming part of Mrs. S' class helped me feel a sense of connection; I felt like I belonged. Despite the close relationships that developed, I remained mindful of my original researcher identity and diligently negotiated and re-negotiated consent throughout the inquiry. The students trusted me, but that did not give me the freedom to presume consent from

beginning to end. In fact, it was their high level of trust that compelled me to continually "come clean at the hyphen" (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, p. 123). Before I photographed student work, I asked for permission, I shared with them my notes when they inquired about my writing, and I showed them my tape recorder during literature circles and focus groups obtaining 100 percent consent before turning it on. Like Scheffel's (2011) researcher role (see Figure 4.1), the students and I always discussed the use of my tape recorder before turning it on. I often joked that, "it helps my old lady brain because I can't remember everything," but reminded them that the tape recorder allowed me to pay greater attention to what they were saying during discussion. While Lauren, for example, made a visual comparison to a television remote and Therésé viewed it as a "little phone," the students understood its intended use, which Earl described as "note to self stuff."

During my first visit, I discussed with the students the need to select a pseudonym or code name, a name that was uniquely special to them so that they could not be identified by anyone reading our story. Each student selected their own pseudonym by the end of the inquiry, a testament to their agency and choice as co-travellers.

PhD researcher. Despite the fact that Mrs. S and I developed a strong relationship, glimpses of my researcher identity peeked through every now and then, similar to Scheffel's (2011) experiences (see Figure 4.1). For example, admitting that, "any words that Ms. Driessens uses that are my words, she has to put into quotations," (Mrs. S) reminded students of my researcher lens (Fieldnote, January 26, 2017). Similarly, during student speeches, I recorded the following fieldnote:

> Mrs. S invited peer feedback during speeches. During a transition, Mrs. S asked, "How do you like those questions, Ms. Driessens?" from across the room. I gave her a big nod (and smile) and replied, "I like them very much." She pointed out to me that they were

> from 2010. I wondered if she wanted me to know, understand, acknowledge, or recognize that she has been practicing critical literacy for at least seven years, long before my research commenced? (Fieldnote, March 23, 2017)

On another occasion, Mrs. S introduced me to Mike's mom as "the PhD student working in the class" (Fieldnote, March 20, 2017), blurring the lines between my identities even further. The three of us chatted for a few minutes about Mike's persuasive essay:

> Mrs. S flipped the page over to show Mike's mom how much [feedback] I had written. With a look of surprise, she commented that it was a lot. We all chuckled and Mrs. S said that I do provide a great deal of feedback, something she wished she had more time to do but doesn't when looking at 27. I agreed and told Mike's mom that I have the time to provide feedback to that extent because I'm not doing it on a regular basis. I know that Mrs. S wants to give more feedback, but can't because she's pressed for time. But, I couldn't help but wonder in that moment if she felt, even subconsciously, that this parent, having seen how much feedback I had given, would somehow judge her for not giving as much. (Fieldnote, March 20, 2017)

On one final occasion, Mrs. S explicitly acknowledged my role as researcher when she admitted, "I'd like to think that prior to Ms. Driessens' arrival, I have done this, have helped you develop a critical lens and pushed you to think deeper" (Fieldnote, June 7, 2017). Upon careful reflection, these three examples revealed two important insights: (1) Even though I was granted insider status, I was not a true insider; and (2) being observed might lead teachers to think of how they would do things differently (Scheffel, 2008, 2011). In fact, in response to the question *Describe any changes that you observed in yourself as a result of this inquiry (in your practice, your sense of identity or self, your feelings of empowerment, or your understanding, assumptions, and conceptualization of critical literacy)*, Mrs. S wrote the following:

Greater awareness of the importance of infusing critical literacy into my lessons . . . and the feeling that I do an adequate job of bringing awareness to relevant, current issues to the students at a level that they can appreciate and make deeper connections. (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017)

Researcher-Questioner. Like Scheffel (2008), engaging students in focus groups represented my most overt researcher role (see Figure 4.1). Even though these sessions were informal, they took us out of our normal shared space. Figure 4.4 provides a snapshot of how each focus group (five in total) was introduced.

Figure 4.4: Focus group introductions

Focus Group Members:	Date:	Introduction:
# 1: Autumn, Sylvia, and May	April 19, 2017	We're not going through all of these questions. . . . They're mostly questions around when you read and write, how you feel, what sort of things you like to read and write. So we're just going to have an open conversation about it. How does that sound?
# 2: Grace, Lauren, and Therésé	April 20, 2017	The questions [I want to ask] are very open-ended. Feel free to talk about whatever you want.
# 3: Mike, Faheem, Brooklyn, Myra, and Justice	April 20, 2017	I have questions that I'm interested in learning more about based on things that I've seen in class and we don't really have a lot of time to talk about them, but that being said, if there are things that you want to talk about or we kind of get on a tangent, then that's fine too. It's very unstructured, very informal.
# 4: Leo James, Gabriel, Jerom, Michelle, and Andy	April 24, 2017	So, the reason for my discussion group is because I have a lot of questions that I'm really interested in, but we don't have a lot of time in class in order for me to ask them. . . . I'm going to ask some questions and we're going to have a conversation around it. It's very informal and unstructured.
# 5: Leo James, Ethan, and Jamal	May 10, 2017	Okay so let's do this.

A thread interwoven throughout focus groups, as well as my time in the classroom was my questioning stance. Mrs. S came to associate me with asking questions when she admitted that, "You often gave that 'next step' question for them to wonder, to ponder" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). Students also came to associate my role as that of

questioner. For example, during literature circles when I admitted that, “I have a question,” Earl responded, “that’s not surprising” (Transcribed Conversation, April 6, 2017). A similar conversation took place with Focus Group Three (see Figure 4.4):

Sarah: I have an interesting question.

Faheem: I like interesting questions.

Justice: Guys, you’re gonna miss the question.

Sarah: Do you? Do you think that I often have interesting questions?

Faheem: Yes!

Justice: Yes!

(Transcribed Conversation, April 20, 2017)

What do you write about? The final piece of my researcher identity centred on my notebook, what Faheem described as my “big little book.” Students would often wonder what I was writing down and, in an effort to be a transparent researcher, I shared as much as I could with them. Students would visit my table at the back of the room asking to flip through the pages or they popped over for a visit when they observed me quickly jotting down their discussion. The following conversation with Michelle helped her to better understand what I was writing in my book.

As Michelle leafs through my notebook she says...

Michelle: You’ve been here for 31 days?

Sarah: 31 days, I know.

Michelle: That’s it?

Sarah: Yup.

Michelle: What student in this class do you mainly write about?

Sarah: *Chuckles* I write about everybody.

Michelle: The same?

Sarah: Yes.

Michelle: The exact same?

Sarah: Why? Who do you think I would write most about?

Michelle: I don't know. Maybe *pauses* I don't know.

Michelle: Is this the only class you've been to?

Sarah: Yes.

Michelle: Are you going to go to a different class?

Sarah: Nope. The book is only going to be about this class.

Michelle: Wow! If we're in Mrs. S' class next year will you come?

Sarah: To visit?

Michelle: No like, do this!

(Transcribed Conversation, April 24, 2017)

Upon careful reflection, the conversation with Michelle revealed that not only did she view me as a researcher, but also as someone she wanted to see again. I realized that I had become someone significant to her and I wondered if that was true of the others? As I admitted in my fieldnote, "My greatest hope was that, when our time ends, they would see themselves as fellow travellers along my journey, and I along theirs" (Fieldnote, May 17, 2017) rather than mere participants.

Identity # 8: Blurring Roles

As trust built, I took on greater responsibilities and roles based on the needs of Mrs. S and the students. Gallagher (2008) referred to this as a "porous methodology" (p. 72) where pedagogy and research intertwine. Having built a reciprocal and collaborative relationship with Mrs. S, she would often invite me to read aloud to the students, conference with them, provide

feedback on their work, and co-teach. In a sense she began seeing me as a capable teacher (see Figure 4.1), even though I am not a certified teacher. We shared resources with one another, moderated students' written work, and shared openly and reciprocally from beginning to end. I did what I could to lessen her workload, provide greater flexibility within her day, and support her as much as she supported her students. Mrs. S came to rely on me as a collaborator beyond my role as researcher as evidenced by the following e-mail conversation:

> Hope you're having a great birthday weekend ☺ You can see that I have trouble not 'working' on Mother's Day... sheesh...! Here are some of the questions I have posted for Book Club discussion. . . . It would be great if you could develop one question that would tie into the biblical connection between Lewis' writing using the characters of Aslan and Edmund, something that shows their ability to make a connection between Jesus and Judas, a question that shows their deeper understanding of character development. Pick a question that will give you some of your qualitative data. You are welcome to take their books home to read/give feedback ☺ (Mrs. S, personal communication, May 14, 2017)

What is of interest here is the way in which Mrs. S began looking through her own researcher lens. Just as my roles blurred within the classroom, perhaps she, too, felt her roles blurring?

I continually offered Mrs. S a helping hand not only so that I could help lighten her workload, but also as a means of thanking her for providing me with this opportunity. Yet, I still struggled with self-doubt and knowing whether or not I was doing right by all of my participants:

> I often sit and wonder if I am doing the right thing. It's hard to know, and perhaps an unanswerable question. The relationships I have developed with Mrs. S and the students leads me to believe that I am, at least partly, doing something right. How can

> one ever truly know what kind of impact they have had as a researcher? What do students think of me? Do they talk about me? Notice when I am not around or am I just inferring based on their comments? Do they like having me in class? Are they sick of me being here? Have I overstayed my welcome? (Fieldnote, March 30, 2017)
>
> Am I giving them what they need? (Fieldnote, April 25, 2017)
>
> Have I taught them anything? (Fieldnote, June 11, 2017)

Through Mrs. S, I realized the answers to many of these questions:

> I think you know the answer to these questions. You would be a great teacher. You're learning the value of relationship building and you only get that with time invested in the students. You've definitely invested in them. (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, April 24, 2017).
>
> You've modelled for them that we are never too old to learn. Your feedback has been the greatest teaching tool you have given them. Something that I could not do to the level you did. For that, I am grateful! You have given them a different perspective and most importantly, you have offered them an opportunity to build relationship skills with another adult in the room! (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, June 11, 2017)

Mrs. S and I worked well together. I offered her a new lens through which to view her role as educator and perhaps even a different perspective of her students.

Identity # 9: Significant Adult

Similar to Scheffel's (2011; see Figure 4.1) experiences, I became a significant adult in participants' lives. The following narrative description, drawn from my fieldnotes, demonstrates who I became for and to the students:

> A few weeks ago, Michelle penciled my birthday into the classroom calendar. As a result, students have been asking me all week if I would come to school this Friday.

They have learned my routine and know that Fridays are usually not days I attend. But, this Friday is special because it was my birthday. Debating with myself last night as to whether or not I should come in – their pleas meant that they saw it as an important day for celebration which I wanted to honour – I decided I would speak with Mrs. S about it today. I made my way to the classroom, smiling at Mrs. S as I passed her in the hallway. As I walked into the classroom, a group of girls were huddled in the corner where I usually sit. The lights were off and as I entered they stood upright, perhaps surprised by my early arrival. It took me a second to register what was happening. In tandem they shouted, "Happy Birthday!" I walked further into the classroom stopping dead in my tracks. My desk had been decorated with balloons, happy birthday banners, and a beautiful handmade card signed by the entire class. I beamed as tears filled my eyes; I smiled from ear-to-ear. In that moment, I realized just how much I meant to these students, which not only filled my heart with complete and utter joy, but also made the prospect of leaving that much harder.

I set my things down hurriedly to gaze upon their hard work. Cupcakes sat on the corner shelf underneath a second happy birthday banner. I thanked them endlessly declaring just how special and loved they all made me feel – it was a very special moment indeed. I snapped a few photographs of the banners, card, and table, some asking if they could be in the picture with a balloon covering their face (clearly they understood the importance of ethics!). I thought it best not to test the ethical waters. They explained that all of the stick figures on the card (29 in total) represented the class, Mrs. S, and myself… I was drawn into the 'D' of my last name. Thanking them again for their tireless efforts, I suggested we have a group hug. They all rushed in wishing me, once again, the happiest of birthdays.

The bell rang. The rest of the class filed in, standing at the doorway to see if I had arrived. Too excited to wait for Mrs. S, they piled in one-by-one each coming over to wish me a happy birthday. As Mrs. S walked in they began singing at the top of their lungs. I just smiled, perhaps blushing ever so slightly, filled with love, joy, and complete happiness. Energy was high and I was afraid that it would be challenging for them to focus on the task at hand. With some shuffling and prompting, Mrs. S was able to focus their attention and so the day began.

Announcements came on and birthdays were celebrated over the PA system, as part of our normal morning routine. The class stared at me, patiently waiting for my name to be called. When it wasn't, they were immediately offended, several of them shouted at the speaker on the wall. I assured them that it was just a special moment for our class to celebrate, and Mrs. S admitted that much of the school community didn't know who I was. "Can I go get Ms. Driessens a birthday pencil?" Shtom asked. Mrs. S was more than happy to grant him permission and we all stood for Oh Canada and prayers. We almost made it through when the principal came back on the PA system to announce one more birthday. You guessed it ... mine. The class clapped and cheered, Mrs. S smiled at me, and I just melted. How lucky am I to be recognized by this class? How privileged to have them celebrate me? Karma was mentioned during our class discussion and while I am not quite sure what I did to deserve this celebration, I like to think this journey was somewhat influenced by positive karma. Just before recess I handed out cupcakes, and the students asked if I would come outside. I chatted with Mrs. S for a few minutes – she informed me that, as a class, they decided to make a special card for me and decorate my desk – and then headed outside for recess. What a birthday to remember!! (Fieldnote, May 11, 2017)

The card the students made demonstrated that I had, in fact, become a significant adult (Scheffel, 2008) in the classroom and their "Happy Birthday" wishes added depth to this identity, as well as many others previously mentioned:

Happy Birthday, Ms. Driessens, hope it is the best one you ever had ~ Paul

Happy Birthday soccer baseball M.V.P. ~ Kaleb

Happy Birthday, you are the best. ~ Carly ☺

Happy Birthday M.V.P. Hope you have an awesome birthday ~ Andy

Happy Birthday Ms. Dried Raisins. I enjoy talking with you everyday ~ Jamal

You are so awesome! Have a great b-day ~ Justice

Hello, we appreciate you. Party on. Perfection. You! You rock! ~ Anonymous

As I re-read the students' messages and my fieldnotes, tears, once again, fill my eyes. It was an incredibly profound moment for me, a moment that not only demonstrated how the students felt about me, but reinforced that I had, in fact, become the researcher I wanted.

Negotiating the Field: Responding Through Responsiveness

Reflecting on my becoming, I now realize that my approach and negotiation significantly influenced my participants and research. My involvement was anything but objective. Students were willing to take risks with me, to put themselves out there, and to push their learning to the edge of their comfort zones because of my involvement (Vygotsky, 1986). Mrs. S and I fell into our own rhythm, and she came to rely on my support. I assumed many roles in response to what I believe she and the students needed.

Mrs. S is the educator we all aspire to be and the one we want our children to have. Yet I believe I brought value to her classroom in my ability to think critically and push students to think deeper about their learning. Mrs. S admitted that her students demonstrated growth and she attributed much of that growth to me. Because I accepted and assumed these relationships

and identities, I learned the students I could push harder and which needed more time to linger with my questions. I figured out the nuances of their classroom community and tailored my research to suit these needs. Perhaps most importantly, I realized that students have so much to offer this world, which meant that my research had much to offer, too.

Reflecting on these nine identities, I believe that I have benefitted by leaving myself open, but I also benefitted from Mrs. S' willingness to remain open and flexible to me. I had plans and goals at the outset, but these became secondary to the needs of the classroom. Truthfully, I often forgot about my goals or plans because Mrs. S and the students needed responsiveness and flexibility. Like Parr (2008), each day I provided the students with opportunities to learn and grow, to develop a relationship with another adult, and to recognize that learning is a lifelong journey. I benefitted from Mrs. S' social justice lens, but I believe that a great deal of what the students learned had to do with my disposition and approach to education. When students were encouraged to self-select texts to read or pieces to write, many students applied their own social justice lens (see Figure 4.5). Perhaps my self-positioning is too hubristic, but I believe that my presence helped strengthen Mrs. S' lens of social justice and critical literacy, both of which had a positive impact on her students.

Figure 4.5: Snapshot of social justice work

Student	Text/Topic	Activity
• Myra & Faheem • Ethan • Kaleb & Jerom • Sierra • Grace	• Hoestlandt, J., & Polizzotti, M. (1993). *Star of fear, star of hope*. New York, NY: Walker & Company. • Stead, P. C. (2010). *A sick day for Amos McGee*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishers. • Ludwig, T. (2013). *The invisible boy*. Toronto, ON: Knopf Canada Publishers. • Lorbiecki, M. (1998). *Sister Anne's hands*. New York: NY: Penguin Random House. • Choi, Y. (2001). *The name jar*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House.	Students self-selected a picture book to read and analyze using a particular Christian value.
• Hugh Zander • Myra • Faheem • Brooklyn • May	• Eliminating child labour • Ending the stigma surrounding mental health • The mental health benefits of being outdoors • Ending ocean pollution • The importance of accepting and respecting everyone	Students self-selected a topic on which to write a persuasive essay.
• Carly • Michelle • Jamal • Ethan • Justice • Myra • Faheem • Andy • May • Hugh Zander • Sierra • Grace • Therésé • Mike	• Boys not picking girls during play • Dress code – who really cares? • Teachers being allowed to use cellphones • Improving the quality of the school playground • Students should have greater privacy at school • The benefits of self-directed learning • Indoor recess reduces students' right to play • Eliminating homework • The dangers of too much technology • Dress code • We should ban guns • Bullying • No homework • Slang phrases are annoying	Students self-selected a topic on which to write a one-minute rant.

Without question, I will "come clean at the hyphen" (Fine & Weis, 1996, p. 263) by accepting and acknowledging that I influenced my participants. This is what Madison (2005) refers to as researcher positionality, which "requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or *subjective* selves [by] . . . attend[ing] to how our subjectivity *in relation to the Other* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the Other" (p. 9, emphasis in original). I do not feel that my positionality discredits my research; in fact, I believe the opposite is true. My research was stronger because it was at once subjective and reflexive, it was mine but it became *ours*. As you read Chapter Five and Chapter Six, it is important for you to remain mindful of my positionality. I am incredibly proud of the work the students created,

the growth they demonstrated, and the voices that emerged. I have done my best to capture these moments as meaningfully, authentically, and deeply as possible.

Chapter Five

Safeguarding Memories

Yayah gave her a small bag
made from soft, tanned deer hide and sinew.
"This, my girl, is a bag for you to keep all your memories.
No matter where you go, no matter what you do,
remember to keep them safe."
~ Nicola Campbell

Preamble

When I sat down to initiate formal data analysis, I found myself agonizing over how best to re-present the lives of my participants. It seemed that my time in the classroom consisted of nothing but critical literacy. As a language and literacy researcher, you would think this would inspire rather than frustrate me. Do not get me wrong, I was inspired everyday during my time in the classroom. In a very real sense, however, my problem was not getting the data but figuring out "what to do with the data " (Wolcott, 1994, p. 9). Sitting on the floor in my office, I read, highlighted, snipped, and sorted my way through to understanding. Grounding myself in my data, both literally and figuratively, allowed for it to speak to me naturally, and I began seeing themes emerge. Recursively moving between reading, writing, and reflecting transformed my fieldnotes, journal entries, and narrative descriptions into field texts that "at once look backward and forward . . . inward and outward, and situate the experiences within place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 139-140).

In my final days in the classroom, I began to understand the urgency of capturing and preserving memories, much like the characters in Campbell's (2005) quote that introduces this chapter. *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005) recounts the tale of a young girl counting down the days before she is sent to residential school. Each day, a new family member helps her gather memories that she can bring with her. Yayah, her grandmother, gives her a pouch where she

can keep her memories safe. As the cattle truck pulls up to take Shi-shi-etko away, she grabs her pouch and runs out the back door to her favourite place, the great big fir tree in her backyard. Tucking her pouch within its roots, she says:

> *Dear Grandfather Tree,*
>
> *Please keep my memories and my family safe.*
>
> *I will be home in the spring.* (Campbell, 2005)

In the same way that Shi-shi-etko keeps her memories safe within Grandfather Tree's roots, I hope to keep the memories and stories of my co-travellers safe within these pages.

Not only is *Shi-shi-etko* a useful framework and metaphor to re-present participant tales, but the story also demonstrates how intimacy develops where "you allow the other person's voice and stories to reach you, to change you" (Wessels, 2009, p. 122). My field texts and narrative descriptions are both content and vessel through which stories are told. Woven together, they are "narrative threads of experience unfolding and enfolding within the embodied persons who lived in [this classroom]" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 1).

Classroom Portrait

The goal of this chapter is to provide a rich and detailed classroom portrait of what life inside Mrs. S' classroom looked, sounded, and felt like from beginning to end. I spent a total of 50 observation days with Mrs. S' class, conducted five focus groups, audio recorded six literature circle sessions, co-taught two mini-lessons, and read, provided feedback on, and photographed countless pieces of student work. I present my findings by way of thematic tales that capture the most poignant moments throughout the inquiry: teaching and learning about civil rights, understanding what does it mean to be unique, advocacy and action, critical media literacy, truth and reconciliation, and inventing critical literacies. Each tale demonstrates "how observing, listening, and reflecting on children's literacy engagements" (Meyer & Whitmore,

2017, p. 8) contributes to what we know about critical literacy. Each tale is introduced chronologically and thematically followed by a description of the particular stories that emerged and resonated in class. Sometimes you will only hear a few participants' voices, and at other times, you will hear all voices as represented in classroom mosaics[6]. Through the mosaics, the polyvocality (Sanger, 2003; Gallagher, 2008) of the classroom comes to life and invites readers to make meaning alongside the students. Re-presenting the data through dialogically layered accounts draws attention to literacy as a social practice, and reinforces the ways in which students and teachers invent critical literacies in the classroom (Behrman, 2006; Martin, 2017). It is through these tales that a more diverse, rich, and authentic classroom portrait emerges. Each tale captures multiple narrative experiences and engagements with critical literacy as viewed through multiple lenses: Mrs. S', the students, and myself as researcher (Parr, 2008). Formal data analysis is reserved for Chapter Six. What you find below is evidence of how the students in Mrs. S's class became critically literate, and what I have come to understand as, critically imaginative, a concept that is explored further in Chapter Eight.

An Overview of Thematic Tales

When I began this journey, I envisioned myself and my research as voiced ethnography and engaged ethnography, which has a "fundamental and unswerving commitment to re-assembling, reconstructing, and portraying accounts of social life in ways that honor its inherent complexity – rather than purporting to being able to render it down to fragments, 'bottom lines,' 'recommendations,' or meaningless metrics" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 3). What I was struggling with was both the figurative and literal silencing of some voices over

[6] The use of mosaics was inspired by Wessels, A. (2009). *Interplay and overlay: Devising intercultural pedagogy* (master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (MR55791)

others. In my mind, each event re-presented only a snapshot or fragment of a few hours on any given day so, in isolation, each field text lacked the polyvocality (Sanger, 2003; Gallagher, 2008) of classroom life. Of course, part of my job as storyteller is to segment, blend, and weave the narrative together into cohesion (Ellingson, 2011), which is why I include classroom mosaics, but I knew the data would lead me where I needed to go if I remained open to it.

On my scheduled last day, I told the students that this was not goodbye, but see you soon. I held true to my promise and visited the students one month into their new school year. Mrs. S and I had not seen each other since my last day, so we spent some time catching up before surprising the students. As I was chatting with the school secretary, Brooklyn and Myra entered the office looking for supplies. Much to their surprise, I was still hanging around. In passing, the girls mentioned they remembered when I taught them about Shannen's Dream (Koostachin, 2014), which I did not think much of at the time. Upon careful reflection, however, I realized that their comment reinforced the power of critical literacy. Months had passed since I had spoken with these students, yet they still remembered the week Mrs. S and I collaboratively taught them about residential schools, current Indigenous issues, truth and reconciliation, and Shannen's Dream. Brooklyn and Myra's remarks were more than coincidence and reminded me of Michelann's sage advice to "let [the data] speak to [my] heart and be what it needs to be" (M. A. Parr, personal communication, November 30, 2017). As a result, the truth and reconciliation inquiry tale recounted below is more nuanced than the others. My intention here is not to necessarily privilege this particular tale over the others, however, the conditions for critical literacy that I put forward in Chapter Six are explored using the truth and reconciliation inquiry, which is why it is critical for you to have as detailed an account as possible.

Tale # 1: Teaching and Learning About Civil Rights

"Isn't It Cool We Can Change Things? ~ Kid President

Observation Day 1: Martin Luther King Jr.

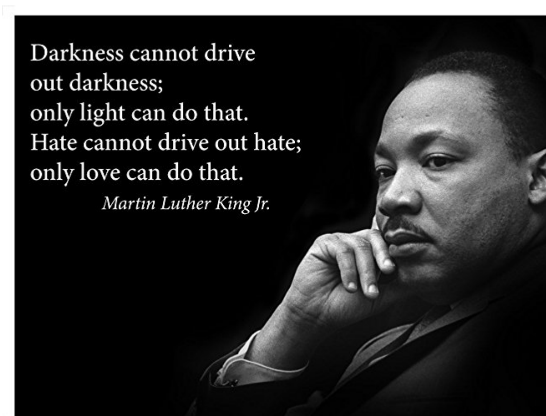
As part of Mrs. S' regular classroom routine, every Monday students wrote in their Motivational Monday notebooks to begin the day. A quote, image, or short video were frequently used (see Figure 5.1). On this particular occasion, Mrs. S invited the students to reflect on a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. (see Figure 5.2) in honour of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Before the students started writing, Mrs. S asked the class "Who is Martin Luther King Jr.?" He made black peoples' rights, he protected black people, and he created black peoples' rights were common responses (Fieldnote, January 16, 2017). Reminding the students that, "You wouldn't think twice about treating black people differently" (Mrs. S), the students began writing.

After morning recess, Mrs. S shared three videos (see Figure 5.3) to continue the conversation about Martin Luther King Jr.: a video from Kid President titled *The Story of Martin Luther King Jr.*; a pre-recorded read aloud of *Martin's Big Words* (Rappaport, 2001); and a shortened version of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech, which the students used as a mentor text for persuasive paragraph writing.

Figure 5.1: Motivational Monday writing prompts

Date	Motivational Monday writing prompts
January 16, 2017	"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." ~ MLK Jr.
January 23, 2017	Describe the taste, colour, smell, texture, and sight of your favourite fruit. Use plenty of adjectives and sensory words.
January 30, 2017	Math problem – EQAO prep[7]
February 6, 2017	Math problem – EQAO prep
February 13, 2017	"The best way to cheer yourself up is to cheer everybody else up." ~ Mark Twain
March 6, 2017	How will you use words today to be quiet in prayer and shine light on others?
March 20, 2017	"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understanding that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color." ~ Maya Angelou
March 27, 2017	Being weird is a wonderful thing
April 10, 2017	Reflect on what do you struggle with?
April 24, 2017	Math problem – EQAO prep
May 1, 2017	Math problem – EQAO prep
May 15, 2017	Math problem – EQAO prep
June 12, 2017	What is true reconciliation?

Figure 5.2: Martin Luther King Jr. writing prompt



[7] EQAO questions were sometimes substituted for motivational writing prompts.

Figure 5.3: Resources used on Martin Luther King Jr. day

Videos

- SoulPancake. (2015, January 19). *The story of Martin Luther King Jr. by Kid President.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xXZhXTFWnE
- Gokadze, I. (2013, August 28). *Martin Luther King Jr. I have a dream speech.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vDWWy4CMhE
- The Teacher's Library. (2016, January 11). *Martin's big words: The life of Martin Luther King Jr.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rc39Ka8ut6k

Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. students planned, drafted, and revised their own paragraph outlining their dream for a better world. The written dreams from Mike, May, and Myra demonstrate the power of using non-traditional texts to support student learning, and the importance of sharing real-life stories of political and social activists, practices at the heart of critical literacy and Mrs. S' classroom (See Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Mike, May, and Myra's dreams

Mike: The Basics of Healthcare

You have basic healthcare. I have basic healthcare. I even bet your neighbour has basic healthcare. But more than 400 million don't have access to the basics of health. It is my dream that everyone has access to basic healthcare, and this is how it could be a reality. Firstly, you're lucky you have healthcare. You may complain that every single time that you have to go to the doctors for a needle is SUCH a drag. But that needle may just save you from getting a terrible disease that many people die from each year. Did you know that just chickenpox, a sickness that you get a shot for, 150 people die each year? Secondly, you can help! Donations are a great and easy way to help a cause like basic healthcare for everyone. Those who can donate, you can donate to groups like the United Nations, World Health Organization, and Doctors Without Borders. Thirdly, you may start to think that "Hey, wait a second! How can I help 400 million people get basic healthcare and still continue with my normal life?" Well, the easiest way to make it easier for yourself is to spread the word. There are a bunch of people, just like you who want to help, but don't know how. Well, now you do, and you can spread the word. Start with your community. Contact your local radio or television station or newspaper. You can start a chain reaction! If someone follows these steps, then, sometime in the future, 400 million people will have healthcare.

May: I Have a Dream, Too

Just like Martin Luther King, I have a dream too. My dream is that everyone in the world will be happy. So by following these few steps I hope to make the world we live in even better and happier place. It's proven that smiling helps you and others in many different ways. Smiling can help you by lowering your blood pressure, relieving stress and boosting your immune system. Also, when you smile at others it makes them smile too. And when you smile, you automatically think that something great just happened so you start feeling good. When you feel good and make others feel good the world is happier. If everyone did something positive every day the world would be a happier place. For example, if you talk to someone you don't normally talk to or even just say hello and acknowledge them then that person feels good that you know that they are there. With people being happier, the world is happier. Sometimes people just don't have good days. That is where people have to be selfless and make that the best worst day of their lives. If someone is having a bad day something that you could do is tell them a joke. Jokes can make you laugh and when you laugh you will most likely forget about the bad day you are having and that makes the world an even happier place. Everyone in the world deserves to be happy. And my dream is to make it happen.

Myra: Ending Stigma and Discrimination
Stigma and discrimination need to stop! Stigma and discrimination are two very related things that don't make people feel good. Stigma gives you a false idea of what someone is like and if you listen to that idea it's called discriminating. Sometimes when people say these ideas out loud others are offended and rightly so. Some people do it without realizing, while others do it purposely. . . . The people that discriminate are very likely judging a book by its cover. . . . If someone does this out loud, stand up and show you care. Discrimination and stigma can cause serious mental health problems. When someone makes a rude joke about someone else, it's not funny. They might say 'I was just kidding around' or 'Don't you know how to take a joke?' The people that say these things don't see how they harm someone else, no one really ever sees it. The harm is not normally physical or visible, but it's mind hurting over and over again. Please don't discriminate or create stigma around someone. You can save lives by just keeping your comments to yourself. To help make this dream a reality all you have to do is – in some cases – nothing. That's really a way to help. Say nothing. If you're looking for other ways to help though you can stand up for those who are being discriminated against. You can donate to mental health organizations or find other organizations working to help stop this problem. If you don't have the option to donate just stand up, speak out about it, and don't contribute to the problem. We also need to be educated about this issue to know how serious it is.

The process of writing was an opportunity for these students to disrupt the commonplace, take on sociopolitical issues, such as access to healthcare and issues of mental health, take on multiple viewpoints, and take action against social injustice (Lewison et al., 2002). The students' dreams also reveal how young students accept the roles and responsibilities of stewardship, develop empathy and compassion, and find solutions to everyday problems. By inviting the students to read and write from a new perspective, Mrs. S provided an opportunity for them to write their way toward an understanding of how the world can be different and the role they might play in making positive changes, a necessary component for developing a critical literacy imagination discussed in Chapter Eight.

Observation Day 20: Maya Angelou

Prior to March break, Mrs. S invited me to develop a writing prompt that would generate rich data for my research, reinforcing the blurring of her roles as teacher and collaborator discussed in Chapter Four. To give some context for the student's quick write, she also invited me to provide a little bit of background information about Maya Angelou, the author of the quote, to help students dig deeper into the quote's meaning and significance. The following is a transcribed conversation:

Sarah: Do you remember what the Civil Rights Movement is?

Gabriel: Giving equal opportunities to black people?

Sarah: Yes! When [Maya Angelou] grew up, the United States was racially segregated and what I mean by that is black people and white people . . . were not considered equal. Maya Angelou used her experiences growing up as a black woman, and that adds another element to it, she was a woman and women were also not considered equal at the time. She used her experiences to fuel her political and social activism. She was known as a peace warrior. What do you think it means to be a peace warrior? What images do you get when you hear those words?

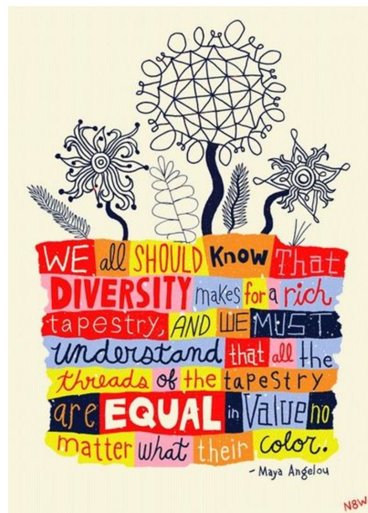
Gabriel: A person who fought for peace.

Ethan: I think of her in the 1400s, like a knight.

Sarah: Awesome! When I think of peace warrior, I definitely think of someone who fights for peace, but I also think of someone who fights through peaceful means. Rather than trying to create social change through violence or hatred, [peace warriors] collectively come together through peaceful measures. When I was younger, I thought I couldn't change things because how can I effect massive social change? As I've gotten older I've realized that change can be changing the way you think or having a conversation with someone. You don't have to think about changing the entire world though certainly reach for the stars, but you can effect change in your daily lives, within your family, within your friends, within class. The things that you all talk about have changed me immensely and you need to be open to those experiences and honour your experiences. (Transcribed Conversation, March 20, 2017)

Following our conversation, I introduced the writing prompt and reflection questions, respectively (Figure 5.5). The students' reflections (Figure 5.6) demonstrated the many ways in which they engaged in deep reflection and critical analysis.

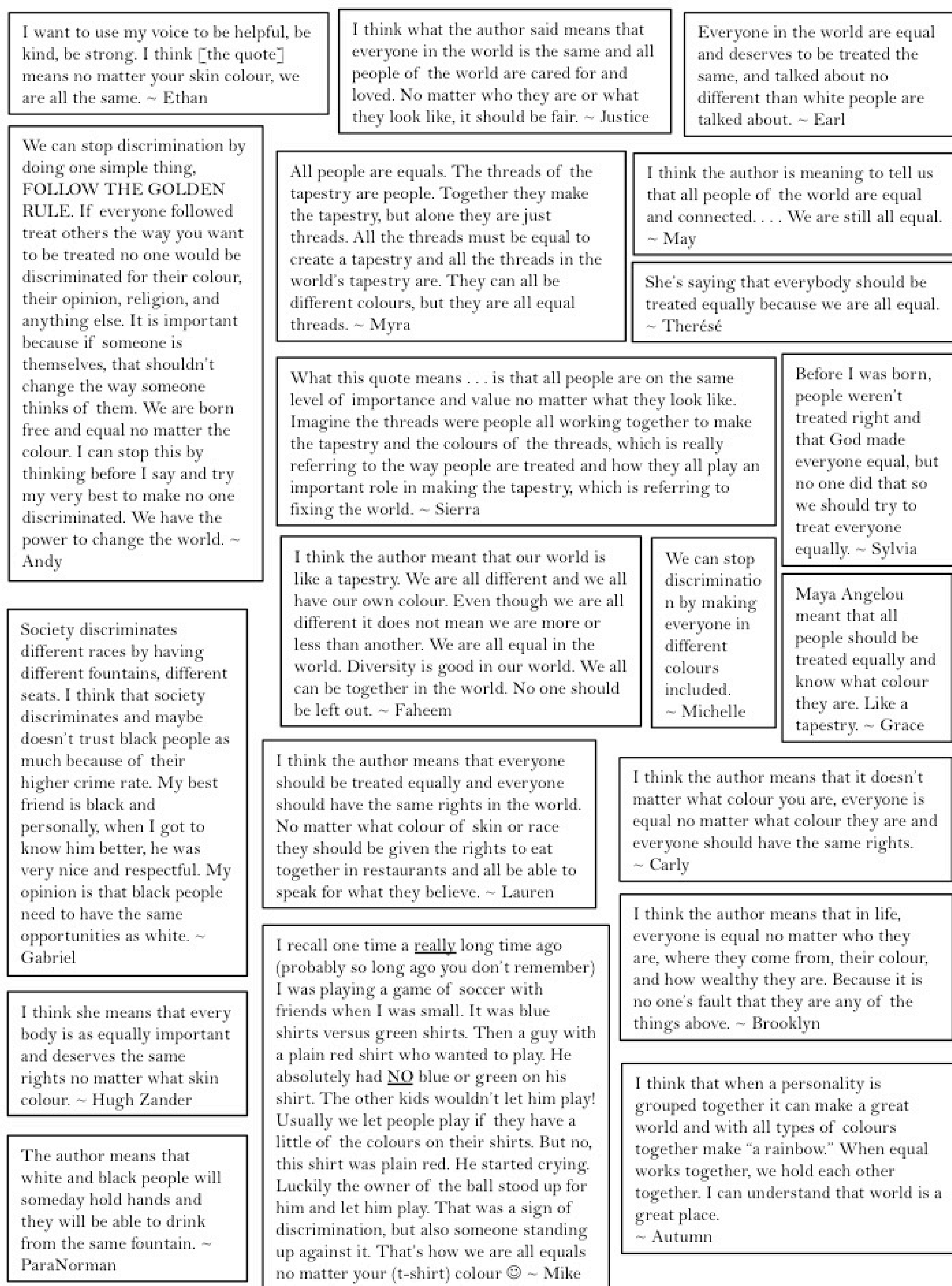
Figure 5.5: Maya Angelou writing prompt and reflection questions



Read – Reflect – Write

- What do you think the author means by, "We must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour"?
- How and why does society discriminate or put down certain groups? Can you give me an example, based on your experiences/knowledge about the world, of discrimination?
- How can we stop discrimination? What can you do? Why do you feel this is important?

Figure 5.6: Mosaic of students' written reflection



Tale # 2: What Does It Mean To Be Unique?

"Being Weird is a Wonderful Thing" ~ Mrs. S

Observation Day 22: Embrace Your Weirdness

Mrs. S played a short video, *Embrace Your Weirdness*[8] (Nordstrom, 2017), in which Ed Sheeran, a popular singer and songwriter, talks about his experiences growing up being labelled *weird*. Rather than continuing with her intended morning math work, Mrs. S asked the students to reflect on her belief that "being weird is a wonderful thing" (Mrs. S). Mrs. S' disposition of embracing difference, diversity, and uniqueness through the lens of inclusion resonated with the students as evidenced by the following journal entries:

Paul: This really speaks to me because I'm not that popular and I'm not that good in sports, but I'm good in dance and some boys find that weird. But I think it's cool that I can dance.

ParaNorman: Being weird is a wonderful thing because we all learn and think in different ways.

Myra: Being weird is being unique. Everyone is unique and talented in their own way until they try to become someone they're not. You need to be you and stand out. Tetris taught me that when you try to fit in you disappear. Dr. Seuss taught me that "Today you are you, that's truer than true and no one else in the world is youer than you." You must be you and that's all there is to it.

Justice: Being weird is a wonderful thing because you express who you are and what you are.

Jamal: There is no better you than you and no matter what you do, you have to embrace who you are.

---

[8] Nordstrom, K. (2017, March 16). *Embrace your weirdness* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zh97BM52Ukw.

Through their writing, the students took up Mrs. S' challenge of "getting beyond the quote [by] looking outside this classroom [and] thinking about the people . . . in [their] life" (Mrs. S), pulling in their experiences, and drawing on what they already know to go deeper (Fieldnote, April 3, 2017). The idea that "being weird is a wonderful thing" (Mrs. S) became a recurring theme throughout my time in the classroom.

Tale # 3: Advocacy and Action

"We Have the Power to Change the World" ~ Andy

Observation Day 24: Autism Awareness Day

Mrs. S, a former Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT), spent a lot of time teaching students with exceptionalities. Mrs. S' knowledge of autism, in particular, was a source of learning and growth for the students during the morning of April 3, 2017, Autism Awareness Day. Sharing "one of [her] passions" (Mrs. S) with the students presented an opportunity to teach the students beyond the curriculum, to share her knowledge, and celebrate inclusion and diversity. Drawing on her personal experiences of working with particular students with exceptionalities, Mrs. S recounted the ways in which her former students overcame personal, physical, and social barriers. She also shared experiences from her childhood and how hidden autism was as she grew up.

Consistent with her pedagogical beliefs, Mrs. S shared a news clip[9] discussing the newest character on Sesame Street, Julia, a young girl with autism. Following the video, Mrs. S explained that adding a character to Sesame Street brings awareness of this very important issue into mainstream media (Fieldnote, April 3, 2017). Julia offers a positive representation of a child with autism, which, for Mrs. S and I, represents the promise of critical literacy.

[9] Global National. (2017, March 20). Sesame Street introduce new autism character Julia. *Global News*. Retrieved from https://globalnews.ca/video/3323091/sesame-street-introduce-new-autism-character-julia

The morning conversation also became a site of reflection for the students. Mrs. S asked the class what they believed a student with autism can teach his/her classmates:

- "What it truly means to be different." ~ Jamal
- "Everyone has their chance to shine." ~ Faheem
- "You don't need language to show people things." ~ Mike
- "How to let him fit in." ~ Gabriel
- "Don't pressure him." ~ Faheem

The conversation also opened up multiple opportunities for critical discussions about acceptance, identity, inclusion, kindness, compassion, and difference (Behrman, 2006; Shorey, 2008). By inviting the students to consider how they can make a difference, that is by being compassionate, understanding, welcoming, and supportive, Mrs. S empowered her students to recognize the ways that they can make a real difference in the world.

Mrs. S spent the entire morning talking about autism, which was not her original intention. Initially, she wanted to have a brief conversation with the students but, as the discussion resonated so deeply with the students, she decided to extend the conversation. Taking this opportunity to teach beyond the curriculum and embrace emergent pedagogy, Mrs. S helped the students to understand that learning often ignites and is ignited by passion, and that some of our best learning happens spontaneously.

Observation Day 28: WE are silent

This particular tale is best re-presented through my fieldnotes:

> I was getting organized before class began. On Thursdays, Mrs. S helps out at breakfast club, so I knew she would be a few minutes late. The bell rings. Students entered in, but this morning was different; the hallways were eerily quiet. The only thing I could hear was shuffling feet. Mrs. S' voice came over the P.A. system inviting students to come to

the gym for a sticker, but I paid little attention to the announcement, at least initially. I walked out into the hallway to greet the students as I normally do. The students pressed their fingers to their lips motioning for me to be quiet. Curious. I must admit it was quite unusual for the students to be so quiet right before class. Usually their energy is so high having just come inside. I noticed that many of them were wearing stickers resembling name tags. Were they going on a field trip I didn't know about? Upon closer investigation I read the writing on the stickers: "WE ARE SILENT ... Today, I am going SILENT because..." and the students wrote personalized messages for why they were taking a vow of silence for the entire day. I began reading their stickers... bullying, powerlessness, voicelessness, lack of voice in government were just a few of their reasons. And then I connected Mrs. S' earlier announcement and quickly ran to the gym for my own sticker. I felt it was important to participate not only to be part of their political protest, but to also demonstrate that this activity represented a powerful and important moment where they could bring awareness to issues of voicelessness and powerlessness, and create social change.

Mrs. S arrived and we settled in for the day. With great respect and reverence, she encouraged the students to "challenge yourself to draw awareness to why we are silent. I'm asking you to be mindful of the causes... we need to be mindful of and draw awareness to" these causes (i.e., access to clean water, child labour, and access to education). "I'm asking that everyone in this class participates [by] taking the pledge of silence" (Mrs. S). Mrs. S also encouraged the students to think about their individual and collective roles, and how their choices impact or influence these issues. "You are all blessed to be here, to be part of a loving community," but these are not the experiences of all children, especially those living in developing countries (Mrs. S). The point of

today is to "feel, perhaps a tinge of discomfort" (M.S.)... stepping into the shoes of those children and families who do not have access to food, clean water, or education. (Fieldnote, April 13, 2017)

Later that day, the school participated in a hunger meal where, instead of bringing a lunch to school, each student would eat a rationed meal consisting of a cup of rice, a cup of water, and a slice of bread. During the hunger meal, Mrs. S encouraged all of the students to "remain mindful of what today represents, what they have, what they are blessed with, and to keep in mind those both near and far who don't have three meals a day or snacks whenever they want" (Fieldnote, April 13, 2017). Mrs. S continually reinforced the ways in which students can become advocates and activists by utilizing their voice and positions of privilege, bringing Dewey (1916, 1938/1997) and Freire's (1970, 1974) vision to life.

Tale #4: Critical Media Literacy

"What are the missing truths?" ~ Mrs. S

Observation Day 41-44: Toronto Star Classroom Connection

We came back together as a class after three (excruciating) days of EQAO testing. The final unit for language arts was media literacy, but Mrs. S wanted to "find a medium to explore media literacy that was engaging" (Mrs. S), authentic, and meaningful. She decided upon *Toronto Star Classroom Connection*[10] an eight-page newspaper "designed to encourage students to engage with, reflect on, and think critically about the media they encounter on a daily basis" (Star Store, para. 1). Figure 5.7 provides a list of resources and activities that supported students' critical engagement during this unit.

[10] *Toronto star classroom connection: Understanding media* is an eight-page newspaper style package designed by Kathleen Tilly, a former teacher and Instructional Leader of literacy for the TDSB, and Jonathan Tilly, current elementary school teacher with the TDSB.

Figure 5.7: Resources used during media literacy unit

Resources	Activities
Videos:	
• MySwitzerland. (2013, March 27). *BBC: Spaghetti-harvest in Ticino* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVo_wkxH9dU	• Real or Fake?
• RIDE Channel. (2015, October 22). *Tony Hawk hoverboard 2.0 – Back to the future day* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCZiEtduSQg	• Too Good to be True?
• CBC. (2011, December 7). *Rick Mercer: Rick's rant: The war on fun* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKtqHm_ygu0	• Ranting not Raving
Articles:	
• Mosekilde, A. M. (2012, October 16). *Who makes the news?* Retrieved from https://www.mediasupport.org/who-makes-the-news/	• Who Makes the News?
• Hertz, B. (2017, June 5). Wonder Woman's Patty Jenkins is the hero Hollywood won't admit it needs. *The Globe & Mail.* Retrieved from https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/wonder-womans-patty-jenkins-is-the-hero-hollywood-wont-admit-it-needs/article35202097/	• Whole Class Discussion
• Teotonio, I. (2017, June 4). Teaching kids to think critically is crucial for their future. *The Toronto Star.* Retrieved from https://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2017/06/04/teaching-kids-to-think-critically-is-crucial-for-their-future.html	• Whole Class Discussion

What follows is a conversation that weaves together direct quotes and snippets of conversation that emerged over my final days in the classroom (Parr, 2008). While the following conversation might not be linear, it is representative of conversations I observed:

Mrs. S: What do you think it means to look through a critical lens? What do you think it means that all texts are constructions?

Jamal: There's always a base to the text.

Mrs. S: Is it fair to say that the author gives you all of the information you need, fiction or non-fiction?

Leo James: No, because a non-fiction text may not have all the information.

Gabriel: If you are selling a product, you are going to list the positive and not negative components to sell.

Mrs. S: When an author is writing, when someone writes information, does everyone read it the same? No, because you take it in your own way, based on your experiences.

Faheem: I'd say it's biased.

Brooklyn: And based on your experiences.

Mrs. S: I need you to think about that, and when I say I want you to be critical thinkers, what am I asking you to do?

Faheem: You want to think about media in a reasonable, rational, and supported way.

Mrs. S: So now you have to be in control of how you take in that information and what you do with it based on your beliefs and values and experiences. What you see isn't always real. We know that magazines are photo shopped. If you think that what you see when you look at a magazine [is real] then here is your light bulb of the day – companies spend big bucks! You need to be critical thinkers, know that what you see in a magazine is not true; it's not in its purest form. Everything that you read or see you have to question whether or not it's credible based on beliefs, experiences, and you need to be critical thinkers. The news that [you] get, who is the author of that news piece and what bias do they bring? What are the missing truths? What is the missing news? We need to consider the journalist who has written what you read because when you write, you are writing from a different perspective, each and every one of you.

Over the four days, the students discussed the idea that texts are constructions and that what we see within the media is not necessarily truthful or real. To support, Mrs. S played *The Spaghetti Tree*, a hoax video that was broadcasted on April Fools' Day on the BBC in 1957 (see Figure 5.7) where families harvested spaghetti noodles from trees. Mrs. S played a second hoax video where Tony Hawk, a famous skateboarder, tries out a hoverboard (see Figure 5.7). Following both videos, Mrs. S invited the students to consider what made these videos believable and what techniques were used to manipulate consumers? In this way, Mrs. S helped them to understand that, "What you see isn't always real. Advertising companies work really hard at convincing you something to be true when it's not" (Mrs. S). Clearly, these students were making critical connections throughout the conversations.

Observation Day 45: Wonder Woman and Gender Representation in the Media

Toward the end of the inquiry, Mrs. S engaged the students in an important conversation about who writes the news reinforcing that "who is left out and what is not covered is equally important" (Fieldnote, June 5, 2017). To extend this conversation, I shared an article from the Globe & Mail with Mrs. S titled *Wonder Woman's Patty Jenkins is the Hero Hollywood Won't Admit It Needs* (Hertz, 2017). The article discusses the importance of dismantling gender stereotypes and representations within Hollywood, emphasizing how important Wonder Woman is to that endeavour. The irony is that this particular article is written from a male perspective, reinforcing Mrs. S' point that most of what we read about women is written by men. Having this important conversation with the students, Mrs. S helped the students critically reflect on which superheroes they see and read about most often. Batman, Superman, Spiderman, and Ironman were offered as examples. Drawing attention to who is represented in the media, as well as how they are represented, allowed Mrs. S and the

students to work toward understanding who is valued within society, why, and what can be done to challenge and change these stereotypes.

Tale # 5: Truth and Reconciliation Inquiry

"What is true reconciliation?" ~ Mrs. S

This truth and reconciliation inquiry, in a single tale, represents a true act of truth and reconciliation where students come to understand the role they play within this ongoing political and paradigmatic shift. While not intended to privilege any one tale over the other, it did indeed take up more time and space in the classroom as evidenced by the list of resources in Figure 5.8. The tale, captured here, is necessarily more detailed, more nuanced, and more holistic – a true exemplar of the conditions of critical literacy and critical literacy imagination – a true reflection of what happened in this classroom from beginning to end.

Figure 5.8: Overview of the truth and reconciliation resources

Books

- Campbell, N. (2005). *Shi-shi-etko.* Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books Ltd.
- Campbell, N. (2008). *Shin-chi's canoe.* Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books Ltd.
- Wilhelm, J. D. (2008). *The 10 most significant cross roads in Aboriginal history.* Oakville, ON: Rubicon Publishing.

Videos

- The Canadian Broadcasting Corp. (2016, October 23). *Gord Downie's The Secret Path.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/arts/secretpath/gord-downie-s-secret-path-airs-on-cbc-october-23-1.3802197
- Downie, G. [GordDownieVideos]. (2016, October 13). *The Stranger* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za2VzjkwtFc
- Bravofact. (2011, July 5). *Shi-shi-etko* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKErhCGjSDE
- Historica Canada. (2016, June 20). *Heritage minutes: Chanie Wenjack* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_tcCpKtoU0
- CBC News: The National. (2016, October 19). *Gord Downie's Secret Path Album Released* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyckpu7cz2s
- School District 27 Residential Schools and Reconciliation. (2014, July 17). *Canadian history and the Indian residential school system* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-28Z93hCOI
- TEDxTalks. (2014, December 1). *Serena Koostachin: Shannen's Dream* [Video file]. Retrieved from *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4BFRSIcUi0*

Observation Day 46: "Why Are We Coining it the Year of Reconciliation?" ~ Mrs. S

The day began like most others. I signed in at the office and made my way to the classroom. Mrs. S and I took these few quiet moments to catch up. The bell sounded. Students piled in. A once quiet hallway now echoed with the sounds of children chatting, slammed locker doors, shuffling feet, and laughter. Mrs. S and I headed into the hallway to greet the students.

Mrs. S: Good morning Grade Sixes.

Class: Good morning Mrs. S, good morning Ms. Driessens.

Mrs. S: Head on in. Please take out your pink books.

One by one, the students shuffled into the room, taking their seats so our day could begin.

Seated in their desks, notebooks opened awaiting further instruction, the principal's voice echoed over the P.A. system, "Good morning staff and students. Please stand for Oh Canada and prayers." We all stood. Music played over the P.A. system and we sang Oh Canada together as a class. With our heads bowed, the principal offered her morning reading, a beautiful passage about reconciliation and forgiveness. Silently thinking about our own special intentions, we recited the Lord's Prayer, signalling the end of our morning routine.

When announcements finished, Mrs. S walked up to the board at the front of the room and wrote, *What is true reconciliation? Who do you seek forgiveness from?*, which was not her original plan, but she decided to switch directions based on the principal's morning reading. Mrs. S made the decision to abandon her intended lesson and, instead, offer the students an opportunity to reflect on truth and reconciliation in relation to Canada's sesquicentennial. "Why are we coining it the year of reconciliation?" she asked, "and what groups are we speaking about?" My fieldnote documented the discussion well:

> "The First Nations people who were treated unfairly by John A. Macdonald," replied Gabriel. Mrs. S was sure to reiterate that it was John A. Macdonald and many others

> who treated First Nations unfairly. "How are they not treated fairly?" Mrs. S asked. Gabriel and May, respectively offered, "[Their] land was taken away," and they "took their children away and put them in residential schools." Right, Mrs. S encouraged, they took them to residential schools where awful things happened, "their culture, traditions, [and] values were not respected. Their way of living was not respected." Mrs. S continued by saying that the justification for residential schools was about trying to assimilate them into white European culture. "The Catholic church was part of that as well," she admitted. Priests and nuns ran the schools stripping First Nations children of their culture, family, heritage, traditions, and ways of life ... "*It's sad*" was a chorus heard during the discussion. As I sat there listening and reflecting, I was so moved by Mrs. S' decision to have a tough conversation. I believe, as does Mrs. S, that it is so important for students to know Canadian history, but to also recognize and understand the negative or dark elements of our past and the lifelong ramifications this has had on many First Nations people. Mrs. S also connected this with last year's WE Day[11] where they (her and some students) watched Gord Downie perform "The Stranger" and connected this with his work and advocacy for First Nations people. As the students wrote, Mrs. S headed to the library in search of a storybook that she wanted to read to students. She returned moments later with two storybooks in hand [Shi-shi-etko and Shin-chi's Canoe]. (Fieldnote, June 12, 2017)

Sitting in the back corner of the classroom near cozy corner, I was excited to hear what these stories offered students and how Mrs. S would connect them to the larger theme of reconciliation.

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[11] WE Day Toronto celebrates the power of young people as change makers. Established by the WE Charity, WE Day brings together world-renowned speakers, A-list performers, and young people to celebrate and reaffirm the ability to create real social change both locally and globally (WE Day, 2018).

Before she began reading *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005), Mrs. S reminded the class that we "need to be very aware of this part of our history [even though] it's not a very positive part." Confessing that, "if you follow current events, you'll see that First Nations are still fighting for reconciliation; fighting for their land," reinforced that even though residential schools have closed, their legacy lives on. The students listened with rapt attention as Mrs. S read aloud the author's forward:

> For a long time the Canadian government believed that native people were uncivilized and made laws forcing native children as young as four, although generally between the ages of five and six, to go to residential school to learn European culture and religion. Parents were put in jail if they didn't send their children to these schools. Can you imagine a community without children? Can you imagine children without parents? (Campbell, 2005)

Pausing for a moment, Mrs. S invited the students to think about the Grade One students in their own school, as well as their younger brothers and sisters: "I need you to put yourself in their shoes" (Mrs. S).

The Stranger. Following the read aloud, Mrs. S played "The Stranger," the first chapter of the CBC special *The Secret Path.*[12] As they watched, Mrs. S invited the students to reflect on, "Who he is a stranger to?" The ten-song video album, a powerful reminder of what Jamal calls the "darkest part of our history," opened with the following text:

> Between the early 1800s and 1996, over 150,000 Indigenous children were systematically taken from their families. They were sent away to residential schools run by church organizations and funded by the Canadian government. The children were

[12] *Secret Path* began as ten poems transformed into ten songs, which were transformed once more into a graphic novel in collaboration with Jeff Lemire. The entire project inspired *The Secret Path*, an animated film put on by the CBC (Secret Path, 2016).

> forbidden to speak their language and practice their culture – they were forced to assimilate into 'white Canada'. This is the story of 12-year-old Chanie Wenjack. In 1966, he ran away from Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario, and tried to walk home to Ogoki Post – 600 kilometres away. (Downie & Lemire, 2016)

The room was silent. As the song played, we watched Chanie travelling along a set of train tracks in Northern Ontario wearing only a long-sleeve shirt, his body shivering from the harsh cold. Reminding himself of his motivation to survive, to get home, Chanie remembers walking home from a fishing trip in Ogoki Post, stopping for a moment to let the sun warm his face. Returning home, his father, tending to the fire, turns to look at him and smiles. Downie's (2016) lyrics resonated:

> *That is not my dad*
>
> *My dad is not a wild man*
>
> *Doesn't even drink*
>
> *My daddy's not a wild man*

On his secret path along the train tracks, Chanie watched a black bird taking flight leaving behind a single feather in its wake. The feather dissolved into another memory, his nightmarish experiences at residential school. Seated in a chair as locks of hair fall to his feet we watch a priest cutting Chanie's long hair "which often had spiritual significance" (Quan, 2015, para. 7) for First Nations children. Nuns deloused visibly malnourished boys. Priests policed the boys as they showered and dressed for bed. These are Chanie's horrifying memories. As the students see Chanie's living quarters, Mrs. S admitted, "It kind of reminds me of a jail." The video ends with Chanie juxtaposing his two memories as he continues on his path home. Students were disappointed when the video ended and expressed their desire to watch the

entire CBC series. Mrs. S offered to play the series during recess and lunch breaks for those who wanted to watch (Fieldnote, June 12, 2017).

Shi-shi-etko. Prior to the read aloud, the students watched the short film *Shi-shi-etko* (Thomas & Kroll, 2011) that dramatizes Nicola Campbell's (2005) text of the same name, which recounts a young girl's final four days with her family before she is taken away to residential school. In my fieldnotes, I wrote:

> Wanting to read the text on the screen, I moved from my usual corner to an open student desk. While we watched the video, I gazed around at the students ... cries of "that's sad" permeated the room and one student, Justice, turned to her elbow partner, and said, "Why would the Catholic Church do that?" (Fieldnote, June 12, 2017).

Mrs. S followed up by reading aloud the picture book *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005). With only four days left before the truck arrives to take her away, Shi-shi-etko's family spends these days helping her collect memories to take with her:

> *Day Four* – Mama: "My girl, we will not see each other until the wild roses bloom in the spring and the salmon have returned to our river. I want you to remember the ways of our people. I want you to remember our songs and our dances, our laughter and our joy, and I want you to remember our land."
>
> *Day Three* – Father: "My girl, these are the things you must always remember," he said, gesturing to the trees, mountains and water around them.
>
> *Day Two* – Yayah: "'This, my girl, is a bag for you to keep all your memories." . . . . Shi-shi-etko promised herself, "I will remember everything."
>
> *Day One* – "Shi-shi-etko, come inside now. It's time for you to go." (Campbell, 2005)

Following the read aloud, Mrs. S invited the students to "write down, point form, the thoughts that are coming to your mind." Think about what we have spent the last hour talking

about. “Is what the Canadian government doing the right thing? How do you think the First Nations people are feeling about our [sesquicentennial] celebrations?” (Fieldnote, June 12, 2017). Students quickly got to work (see Figure 6.6).

Although unintended, the events and discussions noted above took up the majority of our morning. Gallagher and Wessels (2011) note that, “emergent pedagogy invites the unexpected to interrupt and change the direction of classroom work” (p. 239). Similar to Autism Awareness Day, I was privileged enough to see the power of emergent problem-posing pedagogy as Mrs. S shifted away from her original lesson plan. Mrs. S, aware of students’ authentic connection to, and interest in, these issues, accepted the risk of travelling into the unknown while students mapped the route. She saw a powerful opportunity to teach students beyond the curriculum, to bring the outside world in, and she did not shy away even though this required her to think on her feet and improvise, like quickly grabbing *Shi-shi-etko* and *Shin-chi’s Canoe* from the library. Something that, at least on the surface, seemed incidental demonstrated the powerful impact of both infusing critical literacy into the classroom, as well as the need for flexibility and emergence, as evidenced by the following fieldnote:

> We moved onto the students’ rants but the heaviness of the last hour rested on my shoulders. As someone who advocates for social justice, perhaps advocate doesn’t even do justice to what I mean ... it is part of me; I live and breathe it... I am so grateful to Mrs. S for taking this opportunity to speak with the students, to teach them something beyond the curriculum. Today taught me many things... first, that literacy learning is emergent and you have to roll with the punches and draw upon inspiration wherever and whenever it strikes; second, that young children are fully capable of grasping these very complex, challenging, and problematic social issues; and third, that, despite the gains made within the First Nations’ communities, we still have a long way to go. The

fight, their struggle, is far from over and, as Mrs. S so eloquently articulated today. . . . It is important to educate young people, to help them understand and maybe place themselves in these shoes, even if just for a moment. I truly believe it can go a long way towards eradicating some of the prejudice and uneducated/ignorant stereotypes that still permeate our society. Kudos to Mrs. S – my heart grew a little bit bigger today! (Fieldnote, June 12, 2017)

Observation Day 47: "Imagine Having to Ask the Government to Wear a Dress" ~ Carly

As I walked down the hallway toward the classroom, I was unsure as to whether or not Mrs. S intended on continuing with the theme of truth and reconciliation. The students were so engaged and emotionally connected to both *The Stranger* and *Shi-shi-etko*, I was curious if Mrs. S would allow students time to unpack these deeply complex issues or if, given there were only two weeks left of school, she felt pressured to move on. When I read the words "I am the STRANGER" still written on the board as I entered the classroom, I knew that I had found the answer to my question. The theme of reconciliation would permeate my last few days in class (Fieldnote, June 15, 2017).

I am the stranger. Mrs. S began the day by drawing students' attention back to the message written at the front of the room noted above. Two weeks ago, the students started a media literacy unit intended to help develop their critical lens as both readers and consumers of text (Tale # 4). Mrs. S referred back to the beginning of the unit where she discussed the "need to be critical of the information [they] take in" and her intention to "ask [them] questions to dig deeper [where] the answers to those questions will not be explicit." By asking, "Who is he a stranger to?" Mrs. S provided students with an opportunity to dig deeper, to be critical, and to unpack issues that matter to them.

Following the discussion, Mrs. S played three videos (see Figure 5.8): *Heritage Minutes: Chanie Wenjack*, *The National: Painful Legacy*, and *Canadian History and the Indian Residential School System.* Each one is discussed below.

"Genocide is never good" ~ Jamal. The video *Heritage Minutes: Chanie Wenjack* opened with Chanie running away, remembering his time at residential school, much like Gord Downie's (2016) music video. Through flashbacks we see Chanie's hair being cut, Chanie being thrown into a cellar by a priest when he refused to recite the Lord's Prayer, and ending with his body lying lifeless beside a train track. His story, powerfully narrated by his sister Pearl, resonated:

> Chanie wanted to go back home. It was a thousand kilometres away. They forced him to go to the Indian residential school. More than 150,000 of us children had to go. They wanted to change us. Kill the Indian in the child. It's been called cultural genocide. I survived residential school. My brother Chanie did not. (Historica Canada, 2016)

I scanned the room. The students seemed to experience two emotions: shock and disappointment. I could hear some of them muttering things under their breath; others candidly expressed their disappointment. From the corner of the room I heard Jamal say, "Genocide is never good." Grace captured what was on all of our minds: "I feel really bad for the children that had to suffer" (Student Journal Excerpt).

"One voice can inspire the world" ~ Andy. The second video *Painful Legacy* tells the origin story of Gord Downie's (2016) album *The Secret Path.* In the video, Pearl referred to Gord as "a brother from another mother," a powerful reminder that family is not always biological. The video also spoke about the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund's[13] initiative to foster relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; an example of

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[13] The Downie-Wenjack Fund was established to continue the conversation that started with Chanie's story and support the process of reconciliation and healing through greater awareness, education, and action.

what reconciliation might look like. Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, reminded viewers that, “Once the community of literature I think generally is engaged . . . then it becomes embedded in the character and in the memory of the country even more than any Commission report could ever be” (The National, 2016). Not only did this reinforce the power of literature to affectively involve, engage, and empower readers through critical literacy (McGinley, Kamberelis, Welker, Kelly, & Swafford, 2017), but it also supported Andy’s assertion that, “One voice can inspire the world.” From this point on, the students became more action oriented and committed to not only understanding Canada’s history, but also reconciling it.

“I need you to get the bigger picture” ~ Mrs. S. The final video, *Canadian History and the Indian Residential School System*, provided students with an historical timeline of the treatment of Indigenous communities from 1491 – 2010. In my fieldnotes, I wrote the following double-entry journal:

From the video:	Reactions to the video:
Not going to educate the same as whites because we don’t want them to compete.	“I need you to get the bigger picture” (Mrs. S). This is still going on! You simply need to look at the conditions of schools on reserves to see it … e.g., Shannen’s Dream and Attawapiskat
They have to seek permission to wear their traditional dress.	Think about, “Who was here first?” (Mrs. S)… “Are you internalizing why this is so wrong?” (Mrs. S). “Why is this okay?” (Mrs. S) The student I was sitting next to, Carly, turned to me and said, “Imagine having to ask the government to wear a dress!”
Why did I show you that video?	“I need you to understand why Chanie Wenjack felt he needed to run away” (Mrs. S).

(Fieldnote, June 15, 2017)

It was 10:05 and the students headed out for recess. Mrs. S offered to play more from the CBC special *The Secret Path* and several students opted to stay inside to watch, even though it was a beautiful summer day. During recess, I asked Mrs. S if she was familiar with *Shannen*’s

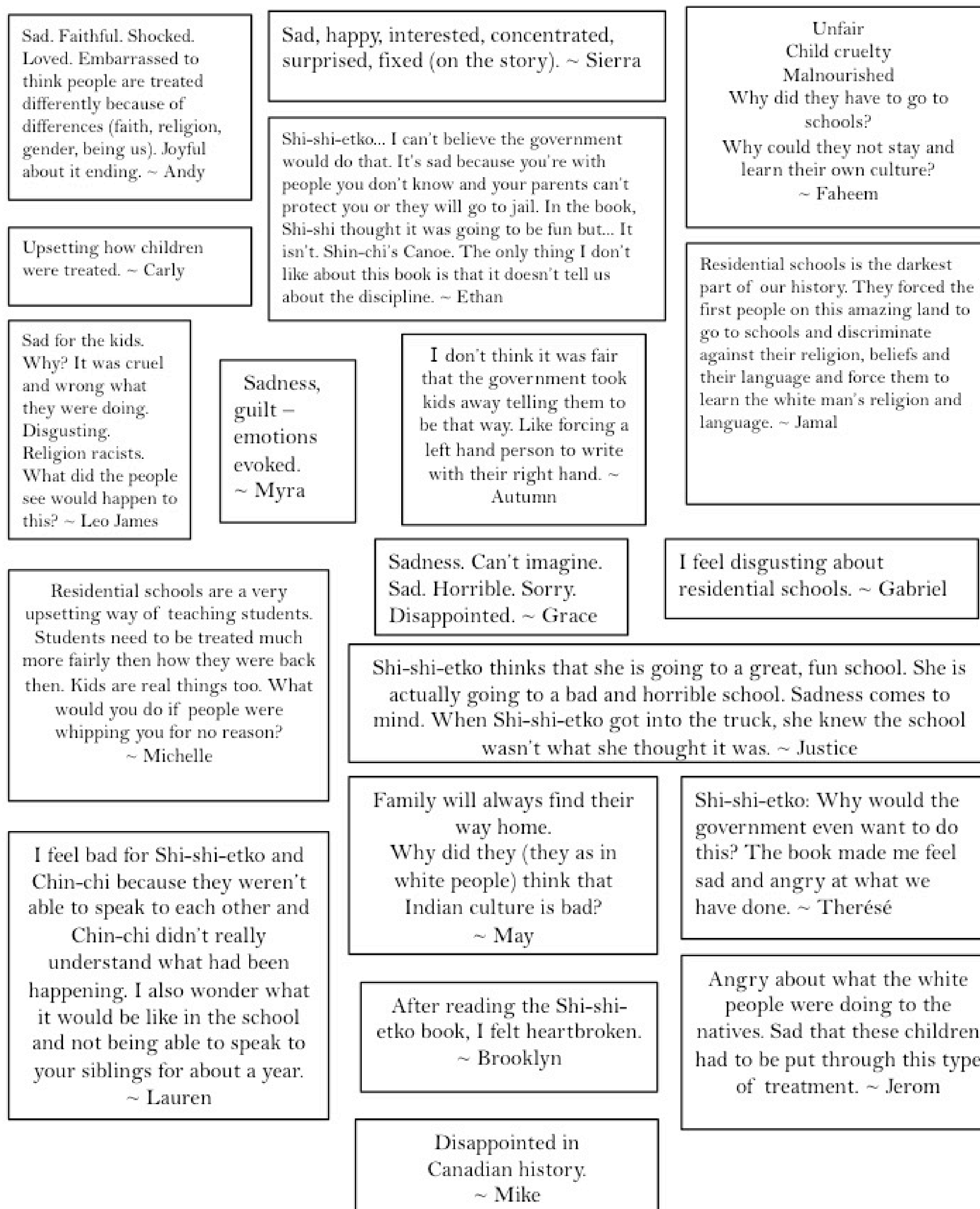
Dream, a movement advocating for high-quality education on First Nations reserves. I explained to her what it was and that I loved the message that "one voice can make a big difference" (Fieldnote, June 25, 2017). She agreed that it was a powerful message to share with students and invited me to speak with them about it on Monday.

Shin-chi's canoe. When the class came back in from recess, it was time to read the follow-up book to *Shi-shi-etko* called *Shin-chi's Canoe* (Campbell, 2008). "Now that you have a bit more background about residential schools and why someone might want to escape, maybe you will come to this story with a different perspective" (Mrs. S). Once again, students were invited to make point-form notes while Mrs. S read.

In *Shin-chi's Canoe*, Shi-shi-etko helped prepare Shin-chi, her younger brother, for his first year at residential school. The story begins with the family waiting for the cattle truck to arrive to take the children away. Pausing for a moment, Mrs. S commented that, "Cattle trucks are used to transport cattle, not people. Right there they're not being treated as people." Shi-shi-etko, having her long braids cut off and her head washed with kerosene last year, asked Yayah to cut off her braids before leaving. When the truck arrives, Shi-shi-etko and Shin-chi's mother squeezed them tight proclaiming, "My children . . . If we could, we would keep you here at home. We would never, ever let you go, but it's the laws that force us to send you away to residential school" (Campbell, 2008). As they arrived at school, Shi-shi-etko tucked a small wooden canoe into Shin-chi's hand as a reminder of who he is and where he comes from.

As the story unfolds, we get a better sense of what life was like at residential school. Shi-shi-etko and Shin-chi, now known as Mary and David, are separated and forbidden from speaking with one other while at school. The children often went to bed hungry, similar to Chanie's depiction in "The Stranger," which the students observed. Students had strong reactions to both picture books (see Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Mosaic of students' journal entries



Mrs. S ended the morning by bringing up another current topic: The legacy of residential schools including suicide crises, deplorable living conditions, and lack of clean water on First Nations reserves. Mrs. S informed the students that, on Monday, I would be sharing with them how a youth-driven movement, Shannen's Dream, made positive social change in the face of great adversity.

Observation Day 48: "Never give up" ~ Shannen Koostachin

Storytelling and reflective writing has always been an outlet for me to both find and share my voice. Over the weekend, I recalled a reflective piece I wrote about Attawapiskat that I shared with Mrs. S who encouraged me to, "Share with the students Monday [as] the lead in or follow up to Shannen's Dream." My personal journal documented my reason for sharing:

> We ask students to share themselves with us – mind, body, and soul – and, even though I am not their teacher, I am ethically obligated to do the same. And yes, it can be scary. . . [but] if you are genuine and open, honest about who you truly are irrespective of the 'stuff' that others see, children will open up to you, they will respond to you, they will open up their world for you to see even if it's just for a glimpse. (Research Journal, February 2, 2017)

Shannen's Dream. The following discussion was recorded and later transcribed:

Mrs. S: Wednesday is Aboriginal Day. I feel, as well as Ms. Driessens' feels, that it is a very important current issue that we should be talking about and that we should educate you on. . . . so I would like you to pay close attention to what Ms. Driessens is speaking to and write down any thoughts or feelings that come to mind.

Sarah: Good morning. We are going to continue talking a little bit about this idea of reconciliation, as Mrs. S said. . . . We both thought that it was important to

show you how the negative impact of residential schools can actually lead to positive social change. So that's the message [today]. Just out of curiosity, who has ever been to a First Nations reserve? Who doesn't know what a First Nations reserve is? It's okay if you don't. So for those of you who have been to it, how would you describe a First Nations reserve?

Ethan: I don't know how to describe it.

Mrs. S: What would be different? What stood out to you?

Paul: Oh, the towns.

Ethan: Well like they didn't have the same houses as us.

Paul: Yeah!

Ethan: They were made of wood, they weren't as big as some of ours because they don't have, that town or whatever doesn't have as much money as Ontario may have so they don't have enough money to give people better houses.

Paul: Yeah, sometimes there are schools that actually look like houses.

Sarah: Today we're going to talk a little bit about what life on a reserve is like and that really ties into this idea of the legacy of residential schools. So some of the things we'll talk about might be somewhat disturbing or upset you, but, again, keep in mind that idea that we can create positive social change even from really negative experiences.

(Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

Mrs. S and I both agreed that we needed to help the students unpack what exactly was meant by the legacy of residential schools. We wanted, however, to end our discussions about reconciliation on a positive note by showing students that one voice can, in fact, make a difference in the world. Shannen Koostachin was a strong role model for the students.

Born and raised in Attawapiskat, she began sharing her experiences about growing up on a First Nations reserve publicly after a decades-old fuel leak closed her elementary school in 2000. Instead of cleaning up the spill, which happened in 1979, or building a new school, the Government decided to build two portables for 400 students. Gabriel's growing critical awareness catalyzed the following discussion:

Gabriel: Wait, was it unsafe?

Sarah: It was incredibly unsafe.

Mrs. S: So, Grade Sixes just to put that into perspective, we're a school of 290. So it's about filling two portables with one and a half of us. . . . I know some of you don't enjoy coming to school, but you take it for granted that you get to come to a classroom with air conditioning. It doesn't feel like air conditioning some days, but a classroom of only 27 students, you're not being shoved into portables of 400 students, that you don't have to worry that you're playing out in the field there and there might be chemicals that you're stirring up and inhaling that is causing you to be very sick and you have no idea what the long-term effects are.

Jerom: That's, wow.

(Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

Incensed by the Federal Government's response, Shannen began speaking more frequently, eventually taking her fight all the way to Parliament Hill. Shannen and her sister, Serena, eventually moved to New Liskeard, over 600 kilometres away from home, to attend high school. To put this into greater perspective, Mrs. S offered the following comparison:

Are there similarities between the children that went to residential schools prior to 1996 and First Nations youth living on reserves [today who are] receiving an

education in conditions that are less than ideal, and having to move away from their family? We're not talking about postsecondary, we're not talking about making a choice to move away after high school to go and get a university degree. We're talking about a high school education that every child is entitled to. We talked about the rights of a child earlier in Social Studies, the United Nations rights of a child, so every child is entitled to the right of education up to the age of 18 in Ontario, James Bay is in Ontario. How is it that these First Nations youth are not receiving the same type of education to the same standards? Is that okay? And that they have to leave, that's the big piece here they have to leave. We're not talking about 18 year olds, we're talking about 14, 15, 16 year olds today, now, currently. Not back in the early 1900s. This is what's happening now. . . . We're not talking about youth in a different country here; we're not talking about a third-world country. We're talking about youth that live in Ontario. . . . Again, I want you to keep in mind we're not talking about something that happened 100 years ago, we're talking about current events. This is what's happening now and you need to understand that piece and try to put yourself in their position.

(Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

Following our discussion, the students watched a TedTalk, *Shannen's Dream* (TED, 2014), delivered by her sister Serena Koostachin, describing Shannen's life and untimely death, as well as the legacy she created. After the video, I offered students the floor to ask their questions and generate discussion:

Brooklyn: Are they going to build a high school?

Shtom: How old was Shannen when she [died]?

Gabriel: Does the government have a reason why they can fund so much money

towards communities like ours to have, like they're building two new ice pads beside the grocery story. Why are they building that when we have a perfectly functioning arena? And there are not enough schools.

(Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

Gabriel's question catalyzed a whole class conversation about Justin Trudeau's recent visit to Shoal Lake 40, a First Nations reserve on the Manitoba-Ontario border. I explained to the students that this particular community has been under a boil-water advisory since 1997, which means their water is shipped in despite living on the lake that supplies Winnipeg's drinking water. Jerom and Jamal offered solutions that tied together their critical and pragmatic lens:

Jerom: Back to the water thing, when they refused to build the treatment plant, in the long run, wouldn't having water shipped in cost more? Because they'd have to take the water out, put it in trucks, all those workers have to get paid.

Sarah: Think about going to the bathroom in the morning, having a shower, having a bath, brushing your teeth. You don't think about those things, I don't think about those things, I just do it, it's habit, that's my normal. They cannot go into their bathroom and do those things in the morning because they cannot get clean water out of their taps.

Jamal: I just don't understand why Justin Trudeau's spending another $75 million on his military and not spending $1 million on a water treatment facility.

Sarah: It speaks volumes to me about who we value in this country. What do we value? Whose ways of life do we value? So those are the bigger ideas that you need to think about and reflect on when we talk about these issues. And it's easy for us to turn a blind eye. . . But it speaks to the fact that we still aren't

seeing everyone as equal.

(Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

Attawapiskat. The final piece to our discussion that morning was talking about the legacy of residential schools. We discussed the lack of adequate housing, which forced families to live in tents and unheated trailers, higher rates of addiction and drug/alcohol abuse, and issues related to mental health culminating in a conversation about Attawapiskat's staggering suicide rates. For example, from Fall 2015 to April 2016, more than 100 people attempted to take their own lives in this community of 2000. After 11 attempts on one April night in 2016, the youngest of whom was 11 years old, the same age as Mrs. S' students, Attawapiskat declared a state of emergency. I think that really hit home. Jerom asked a question that was on all our minds: "So, they're taking their lives because they feel like there's no point, right?"

As I scanned the room, I knew the students were upset by what I had said. My intention was not to upset them, but rather to bring awareness to these issues with the hope of empowering them to make a change. Proceeding with sensitivity and care, I tried to figure out how to balance reality with optimism and hope (Shuffelton, 2017):

Sarah: These are heavy conversations, I know. But it's very important that you know what's happening… because these are children, and I say children, that are just like you, just like me, just like Mrs. S, but they are not being treated the same way that we are. They don't have the same rights that we do. [But] just like Shannen Koostachin took something very negative and turned it into something very positive, I told you that I am very passionate about this and I find writing is my therapy. When I'm sad, when I'm happy, when I'm frustrated, any emotions that I am feeling, I channel it into my writing and I encourage you to do that, too. So after all of this happened, I wrote a

> reflection on how I was feeling or how I thought maybe the youth were feeling in Attawapiskat and other communities just like it. I hadn't really intended on sharing it with anybody, because I didn't really know what its point was. But, I found its purpose.
>
> (Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

As I read (see Figure 5.10), silence fell over the room. The students hung onto each word I uttered. The emotions they felt were palpable. When I finished, the students clapped and cheered; shouts of "YEAH!" and "YES!" permeated the room (Fieldnote, June 19, 2017). The students' reactions demonstrated how much they valued my vulnerability and willingness to share personally. Leo James and Ethan captured the class sentiment through their own writing:

Leo James: I think the writing was awesome and really powerful.

Ethan: Those words you wrote were ... AMAZING! I wish I could write like that.

It was a powerfully authentic and vulnerable moment for us all. The recess bell sounded and the students headed outside.

Figure 5.10: Attawapiskat reflection

It is with a heavy heart that I write this piece. Perhaps writing is my way of coping, of reflecting, to get my thoughts and ideas out 'there' tangibly, for others to read or simply for myself. This piece represents my internal dialogue, a coming to terms with the realization that we are estranged from one another – foreign, distanced, detached. I am writing because I'm tired of talking (shocking, I know), tired of talking to people who just don't seem to care. Is caring a thing of the past, something we remember through rose-coloured glasses? Maybe I am expecting too much from my compatriots? I'm hoping by the end of this reflection, I have, or at least am closer to, an answer. So, where did my meanderings begin? Or better yet, what has inspired me to write?

Over the last few weeks, I have heard countless tales of Attawapiskat ... some good, some tragic. And whenever these events take place, everyone seems to have an opinion, myself included. Perhaps I feel compelled to write because the reality of the situation hits home. Growing up in a small town in Southern Ontario, not far from a First Nations reserve, I know all too well the deplorable living conditions that many individuals traverse on a day-to-day basis. When I hear of youth, children at that, trying to take their own lives I can't help but think of the First Nations children I have met, that I have watched grow up, and come to care for deeply. Certainly my own experiences growing up, meeting the people I have, have had a significant impact on how I view the crisis in Attawapiskat. And though many haven't had these same experiences or spent time on a reserve, it doesn't excuse you from looking the other way. This is a national crisis and not exclusive to a remote Northern Ontario community. It is wide-spread and, as such, deserving of our attention.

Since the state of emergency was issued, I have heard a lot in the news and my own community that, quite frankly, sickens me. Some will use this as an opportunity to propagate their own racist agenda or chime in with a solution to the problem. But this is futile for we cannot impose our own ideas, ideals, or opinions on a community. This change must come from within. If you see this as an opportunity to perpetuate hatred or racial stereotypes then you are looking through the wrong lens. This is an opportunity for dialogue, to find out from the people living within the community of Attawapiskat what they need, what we can do to help in whatever capacity or context they require. Imposition will be met with resistance, so we need to find out what is needed, first, before we can begin social change.

I write this piece because, ultimately, I care. I have been reflecting on Attawapiskat and the people living within this community and I feel saddened by the fact that young people are trying to take their own lives. What if this was happening within your community? To your sons, daughters, grandchildren, or neighbours. What would you do? Or better yet, what would you expect to be done?

I know what I want and, admittedly, it is idealistic. I want people to care, unconditionally and unapologetically. Children are trying to take their own lives. Isn't that worth our attention? Isn't that worth more than simply turning a blind eye to a very real situation? Aren't these lives worth more?

This is a call to action, my call to listen to their voices with an open heart, without judgment or assumptions, to hear what they have to say, hear what they want and need. Just listen. Listen to their voices, internalize their words, act on what is said. Because, at the end of the day, we are all connected and this connection should compel you to care, to get involved in whatever capacity that might be. Not everyone will feel as strongly as I do, and that's okay. What's not okay, though, is ignorance and inaction. You have a duty to understand this situation, to care about what is happening within this community and others around the nation.

I began this piece with a heavy heart and through my writing I somehow feel a weight has been lifted. Writing is a form of catharsis for me. Maybe no one will ever read the words I've written on this paper. That's okay ... I don't write for you, I write for me. I write to make sense of the world I live in and the people I interact with each and everyday. Because, sometimes I just don't understand my world ... how people can feel so disconnected from each other. Even though I am far removed, geographically, from this community, I am there in spirit because I care and I want you to too. I want you to be angry, feel sad, perhaps even shed a tear. Because from these experiences and through these emotions, we can create real social change, we can reconnect with each other, and regain a sense of humanity. No child deserves to grow up feeling worthless, like the world would be a better place without them, or that no one would care if they weren't alive. Children should wake up excited for the adventures of the day ... their curiosity should be nurtured, they should feel loved, and, perhaps most importantly, they should know that they matter. This is my hope for the community of Attawapiskat and others like it – to know, to understand, to internalize, to believe that you matter, your life matters. And, because of this, I have hope ... hope that things will change, that people will care, that things can and will get better.

Looking at this tale very carefully from beginning to end revealed the ways in which the students took ownership over their own learning and their determination to work toward reconciliation. This tale also revealed that none of this critical learning would have been possible if Mrs. S did not decide to abandon her original lesson plan and allow the students an opportunity to grapple with these sensitive and complex issues. I am continually inspired by Mrs. S' efforts, as well as the students engagement with this particular topic. Once again, I offer

Andy's comments, which continue to motivate and encourage me, taking my breath away each time I read them: "One voice can inspire the world."

Tale # 6: Inventing Critical Literacies

"You will meet teachers who will not foster student engagement ... how are you going to make your learning purposeful to you?" ~ Mrs. S

Observation Day # 49: Student Rants

As part of the *Toronto Star Classroom Connection* (see Figure 5.6), Mrs. S gave students the opportunity to write and record a short rant about any topic that ignited their passion using Rick Mercer as a mentor text. Throughout the week, the students brainstormed, drafted, edited, and filmed their rants that were later shared in class. Figure 5.11 provides a brief description of each student's topic.

Figure 5.11: Students' rants

Student: Topic/Description
Carly: Boys not picking girls for games or sports at recess. Re-told the story of a boy telling her you would need two girls for one boy.
Michelle: Dress code – it is hard to find shorts for school, so girls are forced to wear pants.
Jamal: Students should be allowed to use cellphones at school just like teachers.
Lauren: Cats vs. dogs.
Ethan: The school needs a better playground.
Justice: School rules such as dress code, lack of privacy (e.g., can't put locks on lockers), and fairness (Gr. 3's do not have to follow dress code).
Myra: Students should learn what they want to learn.
Faheem: Indoor recess is unfair.
Shtom: Ranting about rants.
Andy: Homework.
May: Gr. 6s should not have cell phones.
Autumn: Cats vs. dogs.
Hugh Zander: Dress code rules: "Respect comes from actions and words," not what you wear.
Sylvia: Fidget spinners should be allowed – "adults are boring"
Sierra: Guns should be banned
Grace: Bullying
Therésé: No homework. Homework leads to stress and anxiety.
ParaNorman: Fidget spinners.
Mike: Slang phrases.

When the students were offered an opportunity to rant about any topic of their choosing, most of them selected a practice or policy, often related to school life, that they deemed unfair or unequal. Carly, for example, who rarely raised her hand in class and often required accommodations for presentations where she would present only to Mrs. S and a few other students, came out of her shell during her recording, recounting the time a boy told her "you would need two girls for one boy." Outraged by this experience, Carly viewed this as an opportunity to make her mark on the world and disrupt long held assumptions that boys are stronger, smarter, and better than girls. Mrs. S and I were beaming from ear to ear, overjoyed by Carly's ability to convey her politically charged message so confidently and powerfully, a true mark of becoming critically literate.

Several of the students decided to rant about school policy and practices. Jamal, for example, asked, "Why can't we use our phones [at school]?" and maintained that, "These rules are ruining our lives [and] restraining our access to the outside world." Jamal saw the school's policy as unequal wondering, "if these teachers get the right [to be on their phones] why can't we?" Faheem also challenged school policy admitting that, "Indoor recesses stink! I think we should be able to go outside in rain, shine, or below 40. . . . If teachers think they can keep us penned up inside all day and then expect us to be good and sit in our chairs they are wrong!" In this short rant, Faheem not only challenged school policy, but pulled together an argument that married a critical, pragmatic, and humanistic lens. Here he recognized the need for students to play outside, students' rights, and the unrealistic expectation for good, meaning obedient, behaviour prevalent within traditional classrooms.

Similarly, Michelle, Justice, and Hugh Zander ranted about school dress code policy denouncing it as problematic because "it's hard to find shorts for school" (Michelle), unequal because Grade 3 students do not have to follow dress code (Justice), and "over exaggerated

[because] respect comes from actions and words not what you wear" (Hugh Zander). Each of these students held strong beliefs about the way they were treated at school, the way they are made to feel, and the inequitable treatment of some students, and teachers, over others. The students' rants brought to life Freire's (1970) vision of reading the word and world through praxis.

What Can We Learn From These Tales?

Over the course of six months, students began to see the myriad of ways that they could use their voice – to tell their stories, write their feelings and interpretations, or speak their truths. Mrs. S continually looked for ways to support students to become critically literate, inventing and re-inventing critical literacy practices along the way. The tales that compose our classroom portrait are complex and sprawling, drawing attention to Mrs. S' efforts, but also illuminating how students grapple with critical literacy and learning. These tales also demonstrate the complex ways students engage with and make sense of their world, but also their abilities to collectively name their world (Freire, 1970). For Mrs. S' students, it was not necessarily a matter of learning the curriculum, but rather making these important issues visible and being given the permission to question and assert their agency to ask why. Mrs. S' classroom became a space for discomfort

> . . . because learning is not comfortable. It's change, it's pushing against old ideas, it's challenging. There's a lot of darkness in learning, a kind of trying to feel your way through. Educators have the ability to reframe the conversation into, 'Look, this is a powerful experience precisely because it's so uncomfortable.' (Brown, 2016, p. 4)

Mrs. S continually strived for discomfort as both a learner and an educator (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). She saw the potential in her students and recognized the need to push them beyond their comfort zone, to get from where they are to where they can be (Vygotsky, 1986).

Closing Thoughts

Over the course of the inquiry, I observed many instances of students interrogating and inquiring, digging beneath the surface, and problem-posing texts of all types; engaging with real-world issues from bullying to human rights; advocating for social justice through WE Days, hunger strikes, and social justice walks; and examples of the power of emergent, flexible, and discomforting pedagogy. While the observation days described above provide an extended snapshot of life inside Mrs. S' Grade Six classroom, these events were not exceptions despite their exceptionality. Woven throughout each lesson, text, idea, assignment, conversation, fieldnote, field text, and narrative description was Mrs. S' desire to "make [students] think about something that they have not been exposed to… to encourage them, to give them permission to make a change" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). Re-visiting my field texts from the truth and reconciliation inquiry as a way to foreground a discussion of the conditions that support critical literacy (Chapter Six) was two-fold: (1) These vignettes interweave all six classroom conditions from beginning to end; and (2) as Mrs. S observed, "when [students] see relevance to what they are learning, they learn. I think the best example you have is where I went with the reconciliation theme after one of the Monday morning readings over the PA" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15 2017). Spotlighting the truth and reconciliation inquiry allows me to illuminate the optimal conditions of critical literacy by offering examples in practice while simultaneously honouring and empowering my co-travellers.

Chapter Six

Imagining Critical Literacies: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice

By the time she reaches the end of the trail,
she finally knows how to make the thing MAGNIFICENT.
She gets to work. She works carefully and slowly,
tinkering, hammering, twisting, fiddling, gluing, painting . . .
The afternoon fades into evening. Finally, she finishes . . .
It really is THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING.
~ Ashley Spires

Preamble

At the outset of this inquiry, I assumed that the data I collected would easily fit into one of the models of critical literacy detailed in Chapter Two (e.g., Luke and Freebody's (1999) four resources model, Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions framework, Janks' (2000, 2010) interdependent framework, or Lewison et al.'s (2015) model for critical literacy instruction); these are in fact woven throughout my fieldnotes where on the surface, it all seemed to fit. But as time passed, I increasingly felt as though I was trying to force puzzle pieces into places they did not belong. By the time I initiated formal data analysis, nothing really seemed to fit neatly into the published models. I was challenged and motivated to find the missing link, the underlying thread(s) that wove throughout my time in the classroom, my field texts, and my narrative descriptions. Recursive and detailed analysis and reflection reveal what I believe to be six classroom conditions that support critical literacy. This chapter provides a detailed description of my analysis including the conditions and classroom narratives using the thematic tale of truth and reconciliation, described in Chapter Five, that links theory to practice. I chose to re-present data analysis primarily through the truth and reconciliation tale because it

interweaves all six conditions from beginning to end, and did indeed take up more time and space in the classroom as discussed in Chapter Five.

A Roadmap For Our Journey

Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the six classroom conditions that support critical literacy. These conditions are not intended to be hierarchical or isolated in practice, but should instead be viewed as continuously moving parts that inform each another (Shorey, 2008). Like Cambourne's (1995, 2000/2001, 2002) conditions of learning, the conditions that support critical literacy "are particular states of being (doing, behaving, creating), as well as . . . a set of indispensable circumstances that co-occur and are synergistic in the sense that they both affect and are affected by each other" (1995, p. 184). Description of each condition proceeds through three phases that move from general to specific: a) a theoretical overview; b) selected classroom vignettes from the truth and reconciliation inquiry that demonstrate how Mrs. S and the students take up the condition; and c) a discussion of the implications for teaching and learning practices.

Figure 6.1: A framework that supports turning critical literacy theory into practice

Theoretical overview	Classroom vignette	Implications for Teaching and learning practices
Wonder, curiosity, and adventure changes and challenges the direction of learning by allowing for fluidity and flexibility.	*What is true reconciliation?*	Make reflective practice (Schön, 1983) part of your pedagogy; lean into the discomfort of emergent pedagogy; be flexible and responsive to student and contextual needs.
Community and belonging helps learners recognize we are all in this together.	*What do we want our classroom community to look like?*	Trust students by giving them ownership and accountability within the classroom; invite students into the decision-making process; make explicit the importance of inclusion and diversity.
Shared space of freedom encourages inquiry, interrogation, and immersion.	*All students bring different experiences.*	Adopt your own critical stance as an educator; explicitly model *how* to inquire and *why* students should interrogate issues of social justice; explicitly encourage student inquiry and interrogation.
Championing *all* students as capable learners leads to greater self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment.	*You are our youth. I don't want you to forget it, to lose the drive to do something.*	Develop learning partnerships with your students so that they can develop these partnerships with their peers; view learners through a lens of strength and ability; champion students to advocate for themselves and others.
Intersubjectivity and interconnectedness encourages students to set their stories alongside those they are reading, writing, and hearing.	*I need you to put yourself in their shoes.*	Learning must be real, authentic, and hold real-world value; prioritize diverse texts; challenge the status quo by countering dominant discourses and master narratives together.
Being and becoming encourages negotiating a sense of self and world together.	*Who are you? Who do you want to become?*	Invest in students; suspend judgment; provide multiple entry points that support multimodality; nudge students on the edge of their comfort zone.

Note: Adapted from "Conditions for Literacy Learning," by B. Cambourne, 2000/2001, *The Reading Teacher*, *54*(4), pp. 415-416.

The classroom vignettes described below are built on details outlined in Chapter Five. While I try to avoid repetition, to situate each condition I provide the necessary context to

reveal what happened in this classroom from beginning to end. The conditions illustrate the powerful ways that critical literacy emerged within Mrs. S' classroom allowing students to construct personal meaning while simultaneously pushing their thinking, and challenging and changing the world they see. The thread that ties together each narrative, and by extension each condition, was Mrs. S' disposition and teaching pedagogy. In order for critical literacy to be effective and pervasive, Mrs. S needed to understand her core beliefs as an educator (Christensen, 2015), she needed to be reflective and reflexive (Schön, 1983), she needed to be imaginative (Greene, 1995), she needed to be a model of critical literacy (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004), she needed to learn alongside her students, and she needed to challenge her own assumptions and beliefs. Each condition is foregrounded through narrative descriptions and classroom experiences that attempt to balance and blend theory with practice through both a pedagogical (teacher) and pragmatic (student) lens.

Condition 1: Wonder, Curiosity, and Adventure

Wonder, curiosity, and adventure changes and challenges the direction of learning by allowing for fluidity and flexibility.

Theoretical Overview

From selecting a particular text to long-range planning, the choices teachers make matter. Sometimes what matters most, though, is the willingness to remain open to the oscillations of the classroom, to adapt to student needs and interests, to respond to questions by taking students on new and unanticipated journeys or quests. As an educator, to wonder, to remain curious, and to envision learning as embarking upon an adventure changes the direction of learning by allowing for fluidity and flexibility, as evidenced by the following classroom vignette.

Classroom Vignette

When Mrs. S wrote, "What is true reconciliation?" on the board in response to the principal's morning message, not only did she catalyze student learning, but she changed that learning in unanticipated and unimaginable ways. Mrs. S appeared rather comfortable changing her plans on the spot, as she had done in the past (see Chapter Five). Had she not felt competent in her ability to be flexible and think on her feet, I believe the students' opportunities for learning would have been limited and limiting. Dismissing the chance to "bring awareness to relevant current issues . . . at a level that [students] can appreciate and make deeper connections [to]" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017) would have prevented Faheem from asking, "Why did they [First Nations] have to go to schools? Why could they not stay and learn their own culture?" after learning about residential schools. Perhaps Andy never would have written the following:

> If all people are born equal, how come people are discriminating due to gender, religion, culture, [and] beliefs? We live under rules like hate brings hate but why can't we live by treat everyone the way you want to be treated? If that was the case and everyone lived by that rule children wouldn't have been sent off to horrible residential schools where many got their lives taken away trying to escape. Words can't really describe the feelings of myself when thinking of these events.

Prompted by the realization that, even though residential schools closed more than two decades ago, they are still "affecting people even today . . . even after they are shut down" (Jerom), Mrs. S helped the students understand that "this is what's happening now" (Mrs. S) and that this is why we need to pursue this inquiry.

Like Andy, Faheem, and Jerom, Autumn used reflective writing to challenge herself, as well as her peers, to remain mindful and grateful of all the privileges that they have, something

that Mrs. S continually encouraged, as evidenced in Chapter Five. The following excerpt from Autumn's journal demonstrates her ability and willingness to internalize Mrs. S' observation from the final day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry:

> You all have nice warm homes to go to and your parents pay a reasonable cost for food . . . And most of you in here . . . appreciate the luxury, and I call it a luxury, of participating in some extracurricular activities that are extra expensive. I'm sure your parents have shared with you the financial commitment that they have made to dance, to golf, to hockey, to soccer, right?
>
> (Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)
>
> This makes me feel quite sad. Some people in our class ask, "Who in our classroom is rich?" then I replied with "Everyone is in our classroom. Do you appreciate what evolves around you?" It ties into this we don't see how lucky we are to have things in our school like AC, play equipment, lights, no chemicals in the air. We don't appreciate what we have. And that makes me feel upset. (Excerpt from Autumn's journal)

Implications for Teaching and Learning Practices

Teachers the world over follow routines. Mrs. S' classroom was no different. Each week began with reflective writing, which increasingly became a space for students to demonstrate comprehension, unpack complex social issues, and actualize self-efficacy and self-advocacy. Mrs. S used Motivational Mondays to encourage students to take a stance about, and sometimes against, their world in a way that illustrates the power and promise of both reflective writing and critical literacy (see Figure 5.1). The writing prompts from March 6, March 27, and June 12 all deviated from Mrs. S' original plan demonstrating the importance of flexibility within her practice. As evidenced by the above vignette and preceding chapters (see Chapter Five), Mrs. S fully embodied Schön's (1983) assertion that a reflective teacher "entertains ideas for

action that transcend the lesson plan" (p. 332), an essential disposition for wondering, remaining curious, and being adventurous.

In the classroom portrait (see Chapter Five) and classroom vignette noted above, Mrs. S continually modelled her willingness to pursue her own wondering, curiosity, and adventure, helping students to understand that some of the best learning happens spontaneously, that learning must be purposeful, and that learning is "always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said" (Greene, 1995, p. 43). Mrs. S made it a priority to explicitly demonstrate the relationship between inquiring, growth, and lifelong learning as evidenced by the following fieldnote:

> Mrs. S addresses the whole class: "The reason I chose to be an educator is because I love to learn. I'm already picking books for my summer reading to become a better teacher because I'm not the best teacher I can be yet. . . . I introduced Genius Hour to many of the teachers [at this school] but only two teachers do it [because] it veers off the curriculum and takes time away [leaving] many discouraged. But I see great value in it." Gabriel raised his hand and said, "Thank you, Mrs. S." "You're welcome hunny, " she replied. Mrs. S continued: "Some of you don't want to inquire; you don't want to seek out the information. You just want me to tell you the information. But, you won't grow as fast as those who seek it out. . . . [and] you will meet teachers who will not foster student engagement. How are you going to make your learning purposeful to you? . . . If you constantly stay in your comfort zone you'll never learn or grow." (Fieldnote, June 22, 2017)

Not only does this fieldnote give you a better sense of Mrs. S as an educator, but also demonstrates how reflective practice (Schön, 1983) characterized by a sense of wonder, curiosity, and adventure were at the centre of her practice. By leaning into the potential

discomfort of emergent pedagogy (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Gallagher & Wessels, 2011), Mrs. S emphasized the importance of flexibility, which she continually spoke to me about: "As you observed ... teachers MUST be flexible and it needs to be an important piece to their teaching pedagogy ... especially if you are wanting students to be critical thinkers" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017, emphasis in original). The most striking example of the power of emergent pedagogy occurred with that very first question on the very first day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry. From a researcher perspective, I certainly did not expect that a seemingly incidental decision to change her lesson plan would transform into a weeklong inquiry. Today, reflecting back on what I have learned about teaching and learning through this inquiry, I realize that sometimes the best learning happens spontaneously because it is just in time, just what the students need. Mrs. S' willingness to remain open and flexible to both student and contextual needs re-present the necessary components of emergent pedagogy, a prerequisite for critical literacy, which "invites the unexpected to interrupt and change the direction of classroom work" (Gallagher & Wessels, 2011, p. 239). Embracing your own sense of wonder, curiosity, and adventure as an educator has the potential to both change and challenge the direction of learning by allowing for fluidity, flexibility, and spontaneity as demonstrated by the classroom vignette.

The narrative descriptions interwoven throughout the classroom vignette demonstrate the ways in which Mrs. S' students became critically literate and critically imaginative. For example, Andy and Faheem were both able to engage with literacy activities in search of insights and meanings within the stories of *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005) and *Shin-chi's Canoe* (Campbell, 2008), as well as what these stories said about real injustice in the world (Cunningham, 2008). Andy was able to dig deeper into some of the deeply complex and sensitive issues discussed in Chapter Five (e.g., residential schools, truth and reconciliation) by

first pointing out the social norms that often guide and dictate our behaviour, then challenging these norms to promote kindness instead of hate, equity instead of injustice, and acceptance instead of intolerance, values at the heart of critical literacy. Because of Mrs. S' pedagogical beliefs about the need to remain open, responsive, and pedagogically flexible, the truth and reconciliation inquiry opened up space for students to both read and write the word and world (Freire, 1970). Learning shifted from "being teacher directed . . . to being directed by the community" (Shorey, 2008, p. 137), ultimately supporting and being supported by the next condition.

Condition 2: Community and Belonging

Community and belonging helps learners recognize we are all in this together.

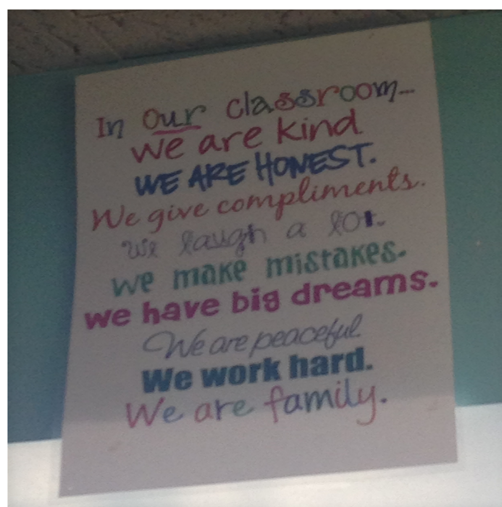
Theoretical Overview

One of the very first things I noticed about Mrs. S' classroom was a poster (see Figure 6.2) that hung on the wall above her desk. I viewed this as her effort to build a classroom community based on love, where love is defined as "a combination of trust, confidence, and faith in students and a deep admiration for their strengths" (Nieto, 2003, p. 208). Mrs. S reinforced the concluding statement of the poster, *we are family*, when she said, "I'm happy to see you. You are my family," on the first Monday following March Break, a gentle reminder of the community they had worked hard to establish.

By trusting students, Mrs. S established a classroom community where students held themselves, as well as each other, accountable. What looked like effortless classroom management was really the result of strong relationships built on trust and mutual respect for a shared space. This type of environment helped students develop greater independence and autonomy, where students came to understand that, at the heart of building and maintaining a community is finding authentic "ways of being together, of attaining mutuality, [and] of

reaching toward some common world" (Greene, 1995, p. 39). Giving students ownership within their community (i.e., students taking on classroom jobs, students helping one another, student collaboration) encouraged them to recognize that we are all on this journey together (Parr & Campbell, 2011), a necessary condition for critical literacy.

Figure 6.2: Poster that hung above Mrs. S' desk



Classroom Vignette

As the students watched *The Stranger* (Gord & Lemire, 2016), I scanned the room. "Why would the Catholic church do that?" Justice muttered quietly to her elbow partner. "Was that a priest that threw him [Chanie] in that school?" "Did they beat them?" asked Leo James. Mrs. S honestly and solemnly answers their questions, "Yes." Admitting that, "the Catholic church was part of that [residential schools]" (Mrs. S), while not necessarily revelatory information, did prompt some of the students to reflect on their own faith's values and beliefs. But, because Mrs. S admitted that she, in fact, challenges certain things within the Catholic faith and encouraged students to do the same when things do not sit well (Fieldnote, June 5, 2017), the students within this inquiry felt comfortable asking tough and challenging questions

even if it meant placing their own religious beliefs under the (critical) microscope. By encouraging students to "be critical thinkers in [their] faith journey" (Mrs. S), Michelle, Justice, Brooklyn, and Lauren were able to express their contempt for the Catholic Church's role in residential schools through their writing:

Michelle: Catholic Priest throwing kids. NO! CRAZY PEOPLE ALERT!

Justice: It is worse to even think that the church was a part of working with the government to run residential schools.

Brooklyn: Everyone believes what they believe. There is no right, there is no wrong. You can't do that. It's completely wrong and injust [sic] . . . the thing that strikes me most is that they were forced to practice the Christian religion. I take religion very seriously, believe it or not.

Lauren: I get that people don't always accept other religions or ways of living but why? Why did they go as far as tearing apart families and changing their lives? Aboriginal kids would have never got the chances to listen to their family members stories from the past or to learn the traditions of the Aboriginal people.

Implications for Teaching and Learning Practices

Prior to the truth and reconciliation inquiry, Mrs. S explicitly asked the students, "What are the values in our classroom that are important to us?" and "What do we want our classroom community to look like" (Fieldnote, March 20, 2017)? Posing these questions to the class invites students into the decision-making process where power is decentred, negotiated, and shared (Wessels, 2009), reflective of Dewey (1916, 1938/1997) and Freire's (1970) vision. Valuing students as contributing members of the classroom community provokes "a heightened sense of agency in those we teach, [empowering] them to pursue their freedom and, perhaps,

transform to some degree their lived worlds" (Greene, 1995, p. 48). Teaching and learning for community and belonging helps students become active members where their voices become part of the legacy of the classroom (Johnson & Rosario-Ramos, 2012).

Over the course of the inquiry, I often heard students self-advocating and challenging inequitable practices. Gabriel, for example, incensed over an indoor recess due to extreme cold weather accused the school of "taking away our rights." Hugh Zander, as described in Chapter Five, condemned school dress code policy by articulating that "respect comes from actions and words," not what you wear. But, the most striking examples emerged during the truth and reconciliation inquiry when Ethan, for example, exclaimed, "I can't believe the government would do that," Jamal admitted to feeling disgusted by the Canadian government, and Jerom wondered why the Canadian government "couldn't use that money to buy a new school" for the children living in Attawapiskat. The students' comments, aside from being incredibly complex and insightful, represent "particular ways of doing and being as well as particular ways of acting and talking" (Shorey, 2008, p. 147) that are rooted in issues of democracy and social justice. Mrs. S' students became advocates for self and social change, and it is through these actions and expectations that the students established a moral and ethical classroom code that both guided and supported their vision of a common, perhaps even better, world. Actions that violated this code resulted in "a notch" (Jerom) where a line was shaved in one's eyebrow as described in Chapter Four.

The foundation of Mrs. S' classroom community was based on love, kindness, inclusion, respect, collaboration, and diversity. Students came to know this as a safe space where they could unpack these deeply complex issues, and ask tough, even controversial, questions (see Figure 6.3). Mrs. S helped students develop an appreciation for their own, as well as each other's, individual strengths, which gave students a greater understanding and appreciation of

personal, emotional, social, and academic diversity and sociocultural difference. The students in this inquiry internalized the importance of diversity and inclusion because Mrs. S explicitly modelled it; inclusion became an essential part of her pedagogy. Harkening back to the thematic tale of what does it mean to be unique, Jerom interrupted Mrs. S' lesson during Autism Awareness Day to offer an important reminder:

Mrs. S: When you meet someone who is weird...

Jerom: You mean wonderful.

Mrs. S: Excellent, love it! Let's change weird to wonderful! You have no idea what your friends come to school with, so I'm asking for compassion, understanding, and empathy" toward all. Ask yourselves, "Who am I to pass judgment?" (Fieldnote, April 3, 2017).

By explicitly acknowledging and valuing diversity and inclusion, not only within the context of the classroom, but also its content, Mrs. S established a classroom community where students learned in partnership recognizing that the journey of learning is best achieved through respectful and reciprocal collaboration. Mrs. S continually opened the door for student learning to take centre stage but in a way that "provoked [students] to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. . . . [to] become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds" (Greene, 1988, p. 12). Critical literacy flourished because students recognized and internalized the need to support one another, to respect one another, and to empower one another within the classroom and beyond.

Journeying together as a classroom community through the truth and reconciliation inquiry required a commitment to fostering a classroom environment based on maturity, sensitivity, mutual respect, inclusion, diversity, love, and support where students felt a greater

sense of agency, ownership, and belonging. The students within this inquiry, given the supportive community context, felt comfortable critically inquiring, actively questioning, and interrogating issues of injustice, as evidenced by the preceding vignette. Mrs. S' students became critically literate and critically imaginative through their shared space, a space that moved beyond a traditional classroom into a space of freedom.

Condition 3: Shared Space of Freedom

Shared space of freedom encourages inquiry, interrogation, and immersion.

Theoretical Overview

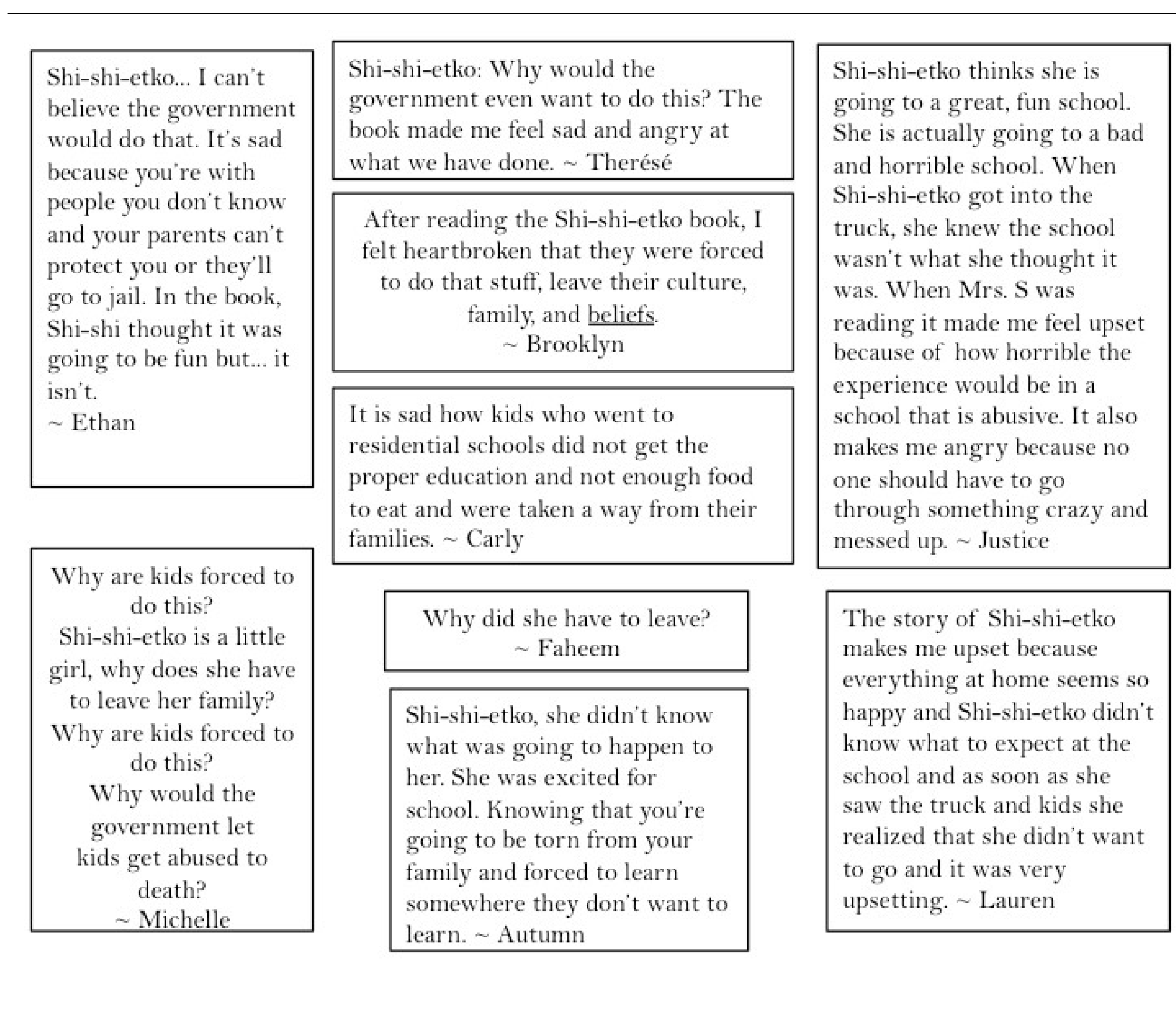
John Dewey (1938/1997) emphasized the organic connection between education and experience. In a similar vein, Mrs. S prioritized lived experience by recognizing that "all students bring different experiences" (Mrs. S) into the classroom (Fieldnote, February 16, 2017). Dewey (1938/1997) also noted that, "every experience is the moving force [whose] value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (p. 38). With a focus on community, the experiences within Mrs. S' classroom moved toward a shared space of freedom (Greene, 1995) where students inquired, interrogated, and immersed themselves in the process of learning, the third condition for critical literacy. Mrs. S and the students continually found themselves "conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation" (Greene, 1995 p. 23). The truth and reconciliation vignette highlights this collaborative search – a search for answers, for understanding, and for meaning.

Classroom Vignette

While Mrs. S initiated this particular adventure as she searched the library shelves for *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005) and *Shin-chi's Canoe* (Campbell, 2008), over the next few days, the students extended her search by trying to come to terms with the narratives within these stories. From the first quick write answering the prompt, "What is true reconciliation?" Mrs. S

continually invited the students to reflect on their feelings, ideas, and interpretations as each story was presented (see Figure 5.8). The first day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry, for example, offered students an opportunity to hear the story of *Shi-shi-etko* (Campbell, 2005). Reflecting on "is what the Canadian government doing the right thing?" (Mrs. S), Mrs. S asked the students to write down what thoughts came to their mind as she read aloud. Figure 6.3 provides a mosaic of students' written responses to the picture book.

Figure 6.3: Mosaic of students' journal entries in response to Shi-shi-etko



On the second day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry, the subject of our discussion turned to Chanie Wenjack's story and the treatment of Indigenous children at residential schools. Following our in-depth discussion (see Chapter Five), students were once again to grapple with these deeply complex and sensitive issues in their journals (Shorey, 2008). Figure 6.4 provides a second mosaic illustrating students' written responses.

Figure 6.4: Mosaic of students' journal entries in response to residential schools

Implications for Teaching and Learning Practices

As a critically reflective teacher (Schön, 1983), Mrs. S knew that, in order for students to effectively inquire and interrogate, she needed to model these behaviours. One of the best

ways of demonstrating her critical stance was through teacher think alouds. For example, while reading *Shin-chi's Canoe* (see Figure 5.8), Mrs. S paused and asserted that, "cattle trucks are used to transport cattle, not people. Right there they're not being treated as people." Explicit modelling, such as this, helped students become critically literate. Students within this inquiry knew *how* to inquire because Mrs. S modelled these habits of mind, but, perhaps more importantly, they knew they *could* inquire because she supported and encouraged their questions, and they knew they *should* interrogate injustice because, through their shared space of freedom and sense of community, they had collectively named their (common) world (Freire, 1970; Greene, 1995). Cultivating a shared space of freedom allowed Mrs. S and her students to learn to "live critically literate lives" (Shorey, 2008, p. 22) by collaboratively working toward a greater understanding of the words that told stories of injustice (see Figure 5.8), as well as the world that produced them. The preceding vignette reinforces Rowe's (2010) assertion that literacy learning is collaborative, participative, contextual, and ideological. Mrs. S used the classroom space to negotiate meaning, imagine critical literacies, and find a place in the classroom and world (Meyer & Whitmore, 2017).

Three emotions emerged within the students' journal excerpts (see Figure 6.3 and 6.4): sadness, anger, and confusion. What we see within this vignette are students coming together through collaboration and critical learning, writing their way to understanding, and inventing individualized critical literacies within a shared space of freedom. The results of teaching and learning within a shared space of freedom illustrate the need to proceed with purpose and intentionality, inquiry and interrogation, and empowerment and engagement where students recognize that "we all have something to teach each other" (Mrs. S). An environment such as this reinforces the reciprocal roles of students and teachers within the classroom community, as well as their capabilities as learners, the fourth condition.

Condition 4: Championing Students as Capable Learners

Championing all students as capable learners leads to greater self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment.

Theoretical Overview

It is incumbent upon us, as educators, to encourage students to fully engage in classroom life by creating a space where everyone feels comfortable sharing "themselves not just their answers to comprehension questions" (Cunningham, 2008, p. 201). Educators can achieve this by abandoning the traditional banking model of education where students are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge, in favour of viewing learners as capable of both knowing, that is reading the word and world, and being known (Freire, 1970, 2007; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). Developing a learning partnership based on mutual trust and reciprocity by accepting the need to journey alongside their students, educators like Mrs. S encourage students to remain mindful of and advocate for their own knowing. Championing students as capable learners, rather than underestimating their ability to have ownership and accountability, leads to greater levels of self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment among students, the fourth condition for critical literacy.

Classroom Vignette

On the second day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry, Mrs. S released responsibility to students when she said, "I need you to get the bigger picture." By giving them ownership and accountability to map their own routes, Mrs. S allowed students to become part of the process of learning. Rather than simply giving students information and facts about Indigenous issues, Mrs. S invited students to explore and share their ideas, perspectives, and voices all the way through the inquiry. Mrs. S supported students as empowered learners (Shorey, 2008) by

scaffolding an important learning opportunity that gave them the right to ask why (Greene, 1995):

Mrs. S: Why is this okay?

Andy: Why didn't it stop sooner?

Faheem: Why did she have to leave?

Therésé: Why would the government do this?

May: Why didn't the Government help the First Nations?

Michelle: Why are kids forced to do this?

Mike: Why are there such dumb Canadians in history?

To know and be known, however, required Mrs. S to move students beyond the *why* to a place where self-advocacy, self-efficacy, and empowerment catalyzed transformational learning, as well as personal and social transformation. The implications of championing students as capable learners with a voice to share and a story to tell are evidenced in the following journal excerpts as students reflected on *Shannen's Dream* (TED, 2014; see Figure 5.8):

Justice: I really like that Shannen did that because it makes it even more inspiring because she is a girl and she never gave up. Girls inspire me the most because it is typical that boys do all of the hard work when girls do it too.

Autumn: I think Shannen's big dream was to let kids be free having [a] bigger place to play and grow. Helping kids achieve their dreams. And by Shannen's Dream she was quoted saying "never give up." How I interpret that, if you have a dream you don't give up, not to care of what the haters think. . . . So what I'm taking from that is you want to make that change then make the change.

Michelle: Shannen's Dream . . . they should do a big donation sale to collect money for schools to get built.

Ethan: Shannen's Dream. It's hard to think that something good can come out of that school. How did they fit 400 people in two portables?

Andy: Very brave of them to express their thoughts and change negative to positive.

While the above excerpts re-present varying degrees of self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment, a connecting thread is the students' belief in both the need for change, as well as their ability to create change. I believe a large part of this is owed to Mrs. S' continual advocacy for students' capabilities as evidenced by the following fieldnote:

> Mrs. S addresses the class: "You are our youth and our future. I don't want you to forget it, to lose the drive to do something." [This was] so powerful to witness . . . I know Mrs. S has worked so hard this year to help students realize their potential, not simply their academic potential, but their potential to make their mark on the world, to make a difference. (Fieldnote, June 19, 2017)

On Wednesday, June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day, the students created a class banner where they traced their hands and signed their names to declare their commitment toward reconciliation (Fieldnote, June 15, 2017). The students also recreated the stained glass window in Parliament that acts as a reminder of truth and healing and is symbolic of Canada's Apology in 2008 (Government of Canada, 2012). Exploring the truth and reconciliation inquiry through multimodality reinforces Meyer and Whitmore's (2017) assertion that, "young children are busy making meaning via drawing, drama, music, movement, construction, and many other modes that contribute to the meaning data pool from which they draw, with each mode influencing the other" (p. 6). As evidenced in Figure 5.8, the students read, talked,

listened, viewed, wrote, and drew their way to understanding. Due to the ethical implications of photographing the students' real names, I could not capture their banner. To honour the students' efforts, however, the banner proudly hung in the school hallway.

Implications for Teaching and Learning Practices

> Mrs. S supports her students to stretch beyond their purview and experiences to see things from another's point of view. She empowers and emboldens her students as activists of social change. She instills in her students the confidence to know that not only are they supported in their learning and can therefore achieve learning objectives, but that who they are, what they say, and what they do MATTERS!!! (Research Journal, January 23, 2017)

This excerpt from my research journal, written on the second day of the research inquiry, illustrates how the themes of self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment emerged from the very beginning. Mrs. S viewed learners through a lens of ability and strength (Shorey, 2008), which, I believe empowered students to have greater control within the classroom by becoming their own advocates for both knowing and being known (Freire, 2007). However, Mrs. S' approach of championing students could only be effective through her own advocacy and willingness to interweave the language of empowerment as evidenced by the truth and reconciliation vignette and classroom portrait (see Chapter Five). What the above vignette demonstrates is how the students were able to know – about themselves and their world – and be known, essentials for feeling empowered and efficacious. Woven throughout this vignette is also one of Mrs. S' core beliefs about teaching: "It's a wonderful part of my job.. the best part of my job.. to empower youth.. to make them think about something that they have not been exposed to. . . to encourage them, to give them permission to make a change" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). Reinforcing the imperative "to do something" not

only empowered students to create change, but also takes an epistemic stance about children's abilities to make "sense of the world, to connect with others, [and] to feel efficacious" (Berman, 1997, p. 28). Mrs. S trusted all students unequivocally and supported their exploration of the word and world (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2004). Doing this, and so much more, helped Mrs. S and her students live their curriculum by tapping into political and social issues that impact and are impacted by their own community (Vasquez, 2003). Students became empowered citizens committed to reconciling social injustice and creating positive social change both now and in the future. Teaching for change and empowerment, fighting for a world that unites rather than divides, connects rather than disengages, were important insights for the students and principles that inhered within Mrs. S' pedagogy. The importance of connection underscores the next condition.

Condition 5: Fostering a Sense of Intersubjectivity and Interconnectedness

Intersubjectivity and interconnectedness encourages students to set their stories alongside those they are reading, writing, and hearing.

Theoretical Overview

Critical literacy asks us to stand in another's shoes in an effort to see the world through perspectives other than our own (Lewison et al., 2002) requiring educators to create opportunities for students to tell stories of

> . . . what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes. . . . It is at moments like these that persons begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another. (Greene, 1993, p. 218)

Greene's (1993) assertion implies an imperative to scaffold learning opportunities where students can make meaningful connections to what they are learning, thinking, and doing.

Within this context, learning must be real and authentic, purposeful, and hold real-world value beyond the curriculum. In the words of Mrs. S, educators must "make the classroom mimic what is happening 'outside' . . . it needs to be real" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). This assertion catalyzed the fifth condition for critical literacy: Fostering a sense of intersubjectivity and interconnectedness where teachers cultivate a learning environment that allows students to set their own stories alongside those they are reading, writing, hearing, speaking, and living (Lewis, 2014).

Classroom Vignette

When, on the first day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry, Mrs. S said, "I need you to put yourself in their shoes" by asking yourself "How do you think the First Nations people are feeling about our celebrations?" she began to help students to place their stories alongside those of Shi-shi-etko, Shin-chi, and Shannen Koostachin, among others. Later that day when she admitted that, "if you follow current events, you'll see that First Nations are still fighting for reconciliation, fighting for their land," she effortlessly brought the outside world into the classroom reinforcing the social and cultural significance of the truth and reconciliation inquiry. When, on the second day of the truth and reconciliation inquiry she acknowledged that Justin Trudeau recently visited the Pope asking him to apologize for the church's role in residential schools, she made learning relevant to students grounding it in their lives (Fieldnote, June 12, 2017). And finally, when she encouraged students to think about "Is what the Canadian government doing the right thing?" she catalyzed student inquiry, interrogation, and critical reflection.

As I reviewed the students' stories and written reflections from the truth and reconciliation inquiry (see Figure 5.9, 6.3, and 6.4), three subcategories emerged that illustrate

the condition of intersubjectivity and interconnectedness: Being grateful (I am...), being emotional (I feel...), and being there (I would...). Each is explored below.

Being grateful: I am. After reading and hearing stories from residential school survivors, like Pearl Wenjack, or learning about the living conditions on First Nations reserves, such as Attawapiskat, several students expressed a deep gratitude for the life they live and privileges they have. Lauren wrote, "I can't imagine being taken away from my family. I wouldn't like not knowing the traditions my family has or even who most of my family is." Brooklyn also shared this sentiment: "I can't imagine what it would be like in residential schools. It's so horrible to hear about how they were treated and our basic necessities that we take for granted are not being met." Andy, Leo James, and Michelle explicitly shared their feelings of gratitude:

Andy: Glad (I am not there).

Leo James: I can't imagine being in either schools and I'm thankful I have a roof over my head, good education and a family that loves me.

Michelle: Hearing about residential schools has really made me realize how lucky I am to be at a nice school where when you get in trouble you just sit in the office instead of getting whipped by people.

Being emotional: I feel. Many of the students had a strong emotional reaction and connection to the stories they were reading. Grace, for example, wrote, "I feel really bad for the children that had to suffer." Carly also expressed this feeling in her journal: "It is sad how kids who went to residential schools did not get the proper education and not enough food to eat and were taken away from their families." Andy, Jamal, and Mike expressed feelings of hostility and resentment as evidenced by the following journal entries:

Mike: Today I am writing about one of the most bothering topics I have witnessed recently: First Nations, residential schools, and Canada's history, as we are celebrating Canada's 150th birthday. Residential schools are the dumbest thing ever since dog purses. I cannot describe my anger in words without swearing. But I'll give you a glimpse of how I feel. The Canadian Government, the supposedly "trusted good guys" are taking the first people ever to set foot on Canada, the First Nations' children, out of their homes to get abused at the CENSORED residential schools!

Andy: Embarrassed to think people are treated differently because of differences (faith, religion, gender, being us).

Jamal: Most often disgust and how these white people could do this to the first people on this amazing land.

Being there: I would. The final subcategory to emerge was an explicit attempt to take up Mrs. S' call to action of setting their stories alongside those they were reading by adopting multiple perspectives.

Therésé: It was so sad. If I were there I would definitely want to run away instead of stay there and get tortured. The torture there is so bad they said, "One of the girls got their braids cut off and her hair got washed with oil fume stuff."

If I were in one of those schools I would try to escape run away leave, I would not like it there they cut your hair and wash it with oil and bad fumes.

Myra: If strangers came to take me away, I would run. I would be scared, but I would run as fast and as far away as I could. I would hide and cry. Self pity. I would be hopeless. The consequences of my action would be great, but I wouldn't be able to deal with it. I would give up. I would not be able to think happy thoughts. Everything would be dark and I'd have no light to guide me. My thoughts would be much like they are now. Dark, clouded, and hopeless. I think I'd take the easy road instead of the high road.

Or I might go willingly and give in to my punishment. I wouldn't try very hard either way. I would be easily programmed and easily taken advantage of. I wouldn't fight. I couldn't fight.

Implications for Teaching and Learning Practices

According to Bishop (1990), stories can provide windows that allow children to see into a world other than their own; the world might be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows can also become a sliding glass door that allows one to walk through and into the story. And when the sunlight hits the window at just the right angle the window changes once more and, where we once saw an unfamiliar world, we see ourselves reflected in this storied world. Engaging with stories in this manner, that is both imaginatively and affectively (McGinley et al., 2017), allows students to enter into worlds that both reflect and refract (Bakhtin, 1986) their lived experiences, much like the above vignette highlights.

Stories have the power to "transform human experience" where we come to "see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience" (Bishop, 1990, p. 1). Teachers need to be critically aware of the ways in which their classrooms, including their students, reflect dominant discourses that risk perpetuating the status quo. Students from

dominant social groups, like the majority of Mrs. S' students, need to hear stories of diversity and adversity so that they come to realize "their connections to all other humans" (Bishop, 1990, p. 1), not just those who look like them. Doing so encourages students from dominant social groups to challenge their own privilege, as well as dominant discourses and master narratives, as evidenced in the truth and reconciliation vignette. This condition of critical literacy develops greater appreciation for diversity and greater empathy toward people unlike ourselves, while simultaneously working toward dismantling inequity and injustice. Living alongside diverse narratives of hope can both inspire and sustain powerful social movements and social change (McGinley et al., 2017), goals that not only inhere within critical literacy, but Mrs. S' classroom as well, as evidenced by my reflection in the following fieldnote:

> It's important for students to recognize that, despite how negative an experience is or how insurmountable a problem seems, change can happen. We can make waves one voice, one person, one story at a time. And that can happen through speaking, writing, thinking, listening, drawing, dancing, acting, anything ... we are all human; blood runs through our veins and that connects us. And our connections, whether we realize it or not, have an impact and hold great power. That is how we make our mark on this world . . . by being part of humanity. (Fieldnote, June 19, 2017)
>
> "I love the analogy here – we are all human" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017).

As I read and re-read students' journal entries from the truth and reconciliation inquiry, they revealed to me the power of storytelling and its ability to provide "opportunities to read, write, tell, and listen to stories that take students out of the classroom and into places where they can engage in dialogues with others about issues and experiences that matter to them" (McGinley et al., 2017, p. 70). Encouraging students to "put yourself in the character's

perspective" (Mrs. S) helped students develop dispositions of empathy by walking in the shoes of Shi-shi-etko, Shin-chi, Chanie, and Shannen. These experiences provided the necessary insights for students to write their stories alongside those they were reading, as evidenced by the classroom vignette. Stories such as those offered in Figure 5.8 were a crucial catalyst for students to "adopt multiple perspectives and understandings, so that places, people, and ideas that were once new and unfamiliar [became *their] places, [their] people, [their] ideas*" (Parr & Campbell, 2012, p. 347, emphasis in original). Entering into these worlds pushed students to develop a greater understanding of both the recursive movement between reading words and the world, as well its impact on their sense of self, the final condition.

Condition 6: Being and Becoming

Being and becoming encourages negotiating a sense of self and world together.

Theoretical Overview

Critical literacy is an embodied social practice that taps into multiple modalities, ways with words (Heath, 1983), and ways of being. For example, we discover new ideas and insights through interaction with the world and others, reflecting on our past experiences, and contemplating what we might want our future purposes and selves to be (van Manen & Li, 2002). Critical teachers must come to see themselves, as well as their students, as "being in the making . . . [by creating] places of learning in embodied terms" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 28) moving beyond delivering a prescriptive curriculum (Parr & Campbell, 2012) to living a critical curriculum (Vasquez, 2003). Within this context, learning becomes more than mere comprehension and regurgitation of facts. It is about truly valuing the process of learning, a process that is more important than its product. By emphasizing this process, learning is about "creating a self, an identity. . . . becoming different – consciously different as one finds ways of acting . . . . [by] hearing different words and music, seeing from unaccustomed angles,

realizing that the world perceived from one place is not *the* world" (Greene, 1991, p. 20, emphasis in original). In taking up this disposition, teachers like Mrs. S design learning opportunities to explore and unpack three fundamental questions: "Who are you?" (Mrs. S), "Who do you want to become?" (Mrs. S), and what do you want our world to look like? This intricate interplay of balancing teaching and learning cultivates a sense of *being* and *becoming* where both teachers and students negotiate a sense of self and world together, the final condition for critical literacy. In order for teachers to make the conditions for being and becoming possible, necessarily involves a deep level of investment in their roles as both teachers and learners, as well as the needs of their students.

As I reviewed my field texts, I realized that in order for the condition of being and becoming to be successful, teachers must have a strong pedagogical belief system to anchor their teaching and learning. In fact, one of the dominant threads woven throughout each condition was Mrs. S' pedagogical belief system and sense of self. While there is no specific pedagogical prescription, for pedagogy must always adapt and respond to both student and contextual needs, my field texts revealed three important qualities of Mrs. S' pedagogy: suspend judgment, provide multiple entry points, and nudge students on the edge of their comfort zones (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). Each quality is illustrated using a truth and reconciliation vignette.

Classroom Vignette

Suspend judgment. Suspending judgment necessarily involves meeting learners where they are not where you expect or assume they should be. Mrs. S values multimodality as evidenced by her selected resources during the truth and reconciliation exemplar (see Figure 5.8) and their respective literacy activities. Beyond her tools and resources was Mrs. S' profound respect for different ways of being, seeing, hearing, speaking, listening, interpreting,

and re-presenting. As Mrs. S confessed, "some want their voices heard ... others just want to listen, and perhaps just learn" but it is essential to "realize that students are all at different places in their understanding of the world around them, and the connections they can make when learning something new" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). Because Mrs. S' disposition and teaching pedagogy supported teaching and learning multimodally, Ethan felt comfortable and confident expressing his learning through writing and drawing (see Figure 6.5) whereas Kaleb and Paul used technology.

Figure 6.5: Excerpt from Ethan's journal

Those words you wrote were AMAZING! I wish I could write like that.

By suspending judgment and providing multiple entry points that support multimodality and student needs, Mrs. S reinforced that "there are different ways to learn, different modalities" (Mrs. S), which are afforded equal status, importance, and recognition within her classroom.

Nudge students on the edge of their comfort zone. Learning is about nudging students outside of their comfort zone, to go from where they are to where they can be (Parr & Campbell, 2012) by creating learning opportunities that "will not only *not* leave them behind but will push them ahead" (Shorey, 2008, p. 196, emphasis in original). Asking students to "put yourself in their shoes" (Mrs. S) by posing questions like, "Who was here first?" "Why is this

okay?" and "Are you internalizing why this is so wrong?" pushed students to critically consider issues related to truth and reconciliation in a way that made students "feel, perhaps a little tinge of discomfort" (Mrs. S). By remaining "mindful of the issues of poverty [and] access to clean water" (Mrs. S), for example, Mrs. S encouraged students to grow in both their understanding of social justice issues, as well as their role in addressing and ameliorating these injustices. "I think that all Canadians should be treated fairly especially the First Nations people. They were here in Canada before any white man and they should be respected for that," wrote Faheem after Mrs. S said, "they were subservient to whites" (Fieldnote, June 15, 2017). After learning about the suicide crisis in Attawapiskat, Gabriel, Jerom, and Jamal had the following conversation:

> Sarah: It costs money to do those things.
>
> Gabriel: I know, but...
>
> Jerom: It costs money to build the portables and get the oil out of the ground.
>
> Gabriel: Does the government have a reason that they can like fund so much money towards communities like ours to have like, like they're building two new ice pads beside the grocery store. Like why are they building that when we have a perfectly functioning arena? And like, there's not enough schools!
>
> Sarah: That's a great question.
>
> Jamal: I just don't understand why Justin Trudeau is spending another $75 million on his military and not spending $1 million on a water treatment facility.
>
> Jerom: So, they're taking their lives because they feel like there's no point, right?
>
> (Transcribed Conversation, June 19, 2017)

Equally critical were Therésé's, Mike's, Brooklyn's, and Jerom's journal entries as they tried to make sense of the government's (in)actions:

> Therésé: I think they were trying to starve them.
>
> Mike: Honestly, I believe the Government is actually TRYING to make life difficult for the First Nations people.
>
> Brooklyn: I felt heartbroken that they were forced to do that stuff, leave their culture, family, and <u>beliefs</u>. Everyone believes what they believe. There is no right, there is no wrong. You can't <u>do</u> that. It's completely wrong and injust [sic]. And forcing them to attend the schools so that the Canadian Government can fix their "Indian <u>*Problems*</u>" or in my words "Personality and culture" is the <u>WORST</u> thing anyone could do.
>
> Jerom: When the Shoal Lake 40 reserve had to have water shipped in because the lake they live on is undrinkable, in the long run, it would cost a lot less to build a water treatment plant than having it shipped in. For example, when they have water shipped in they have to pay for plane fuel, worker and truck fuel to get it in. And Trudeau (Prime Minister) spends over 72 million on army a year, if he spends 50 million on army and 22 million on natives, that would change their lives.

Leo James also mentioned Trudeau's efforts, but remained more optimistic:

> KIDS are killing themselves because they think they're nothing and it's so hard and I can see what they're feeling but I think with Trudeau things are going to get a bit better.

Gabriel, Carly, and May spoke directly to the issues of reconciliation and accountability:

Gabriel: I think that the government should address the issue of teen suicide because there are so many kids who could grow up to be an amazing person with so much potential but because the government is not taking action those lives are lost.

Carly: I think it is unfair how they were treated and I think that the government should have apologized sooner for the residential schools and they should have been stopped sooner.

May: 2008, that was the first year that Canada officially apologized to the First Nations. That isn't that long ago it has only been nine years that Canadians have acknowledged the wrong that we have done towards the First Nations. It was only 21 years ago that we noticed that it wasn't right to move children away from their culture and force them to assimilate to the "white man culture." They forced them to leave their religion, culture and language. Why would anyone ever think that is okay? I feel that we as Canadians have waited to long to ask for reconciliation [meaning forgiveness] from the First Nations.

And finally, Andy, Lauren, and Brooklyn explicitly internalized the overarching goal of critical literacy: We can make waves one voice, one person, one story at a time (Fieldnote, June 19, 2017):

Andy: To think of children ending their lives due to a problem. No problem is big enough that we can't face and fix. We have a voice that can change the world. Change the way people are treated all around the world. We can change the limited source of education all around the world.

Lauren: Just think, kids, the age of 3 or 4 being taken away from their families to learn new languages and a whole new way of living. It upsets me to think that us, Canadians, are taking away children's lives and making them think that things like suicide are the right thing to do since they aren't home living the way they want to and they don't have their families. I hope that we can somehow stop these things from happening.

Brooklyn: People blow the issue off as if it doesn't matter because it doesn't effect [sic] them. I hope to one day change that.

Implications for Teaching and Learning Practices

Teaching is a caring profession involving "helping, encouraging, admonishing, praising, prodding, and worrying about individual students" (van Manen, 2008, p. 5). Tapping into the affective aspect of teaching requires the critical and reflective teacher to make tough choices with both the head and heart: "The choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen" (Brown, 2010, p. 49). It is a decision that educators like Mrs. S make so that they can peel back the professional mask to connect with students emotionally and personally. Classrooms become "nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once . . . [that] pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. . . . [that] resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues. . . . as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility" (Greene, 1991, p. 43).

From sharing personal stories from her childhood to talking about her family, Mrs. S continually let her students share in both her personal and professional life. She chose to be vulnerable, to be real, to be authentic. Mrs. S taught us all the value of relationship building

and what it means to be truly vulnerable by taking risks, as evidenced by the following journal entry:

> I think when you are open and honest, willing to be vulnerable and take risks – and showing your playful childlike side along the way – children respond strongly to that. I am grateful I had the mentors [my supervisor, committee members, Mrs. S, and the students] I do to instill in me the importance of establishing these relationships. (Research Journal, February 16, 2017)

Mrs. S accepted that her teacher role involved so much more than simply making curricular decisions; part of her job, what she called "the best part of [her] job," was helping students "know the world" (Freire, 1985, p. 19). This principle underscored her teaching pedagogy, a pedagogy that was critical and reflective and recursive all at once.

Each field text woven throughout the preceding classroom vignette represents the process of both *being* and *becoming*. Through reflective writing, students grappled with Mrs. S' catalytic questions, "Who are you?" and "Who are you becoming?" in an effort to make sense of the world around them. Mrs. S pushed students from scratching the surface of Indigenous issues all the way through to current reconciliation efforts where students offered practical solutions to real-world problems, like Jerom's solution to spend less money on military services. What we see within the above vignette are how the students came to see themselves as advocates for social justice capable of creating positive social change, important enough to share their convictions, and empowered enough to follow through. In essence, they became critically literate and critically imaginative, envisioning how the world might be different and, as Autumn suggests, "if you want to make that change then make the change."

Closing Thoughts

By invoking Gallagher's (2008) "principle of polyvocality" (p. 71), this chapter illuminates the ways in which each voice and story, including my own, can be woven together into a powerful narrative that reveals six optimal conditions for critical literacy. Each condition is only effective if it is held in constant tension with all others (Janks, 2000, 2010). Thus, all six conditions must be present and working together simultaneously in order to support student and teacher empowerment and engagement, personal and social growth, and transformational learning.

These six dynamic and interactive conditions (see Figure 6.1) support critical literacy and help students become critically imaginative, a concept that is explored further in Chapter Eight. Like Cambourne (2017) suggests, a successful counter campaign has to convince teachers, parents, and policy makers that critical literacy is preferred over traditional conceptualizations. Mrs. S' inquiries and insights, as well as the students irrefutable growth and transformative learning, suggests real possibilities for literacy learning and education. It is my hope that teachers, parents, policy makers, and accountability and ministerial agencies will recognize that critical literacy is the only way forward.

Chapter Seven

A Time to Remember: Situating the Researcher After the Inquiry

"I won't understand what they say," said Marianthe.
"You will look and listen and learn," said Mama.
~ Aliki

Preamble

Where has the time gone? Is it really over? How do I say goodbye? What if I never see these students again? Have I gathered what I need or ought to? What is left to wrap up? How do I prepare the students? Is it my job to do so? How do I prepare myself? Why am I feeling so guilty?

Exiting the classroom was heart wrenchingly difficult. I spent six months with these students and wondered how could I simply get up and walk away? I could not, which is why I spent two extra months with them. The following journal entry captured my sentiments as I prepared to leave:

> Leaving... a dreaded seven-letter word.
>
> **L**ost ... What will I do? Where will I go? What is my purpose?
>
> **E**mpty ... With whom shall I spend my days?
>
> **A**nxious ... Are we already finished?
>
> **V**alue ... Have I done justice to their stories? Have I captured what is meaningful to and for them?
>
> **I**nevitable ... I knew this day would come.
>
> **N**ervous ... But, does it have to end?
>
> **G**rateful ... For the memories we've made, the stories we've shared, and the lives we've lived together. (Research Journal, May 1st, 2017)

Like Scheffel's (2008, 2011) researcher identities (see Figure 4.1), what follows is a description of my final identity within this inquiry, *someone to remember*. This tale is best told within the

context of the inquiry, anchored by snippets of conversation from my scheduled last day. While reading this tale, my hope is that you will feel how I felt, see how I saw, and experience the wonders of this inquiry.

Identity #10: Someone to Remember

About halfway through my time in the classroom Gabriel pleaded with me, "Don't leave!" forcing Jerom to ask, "Are you breaking up with us?" These were hard things to hear. Reflecting on their pleas, I wrote the following fieldnote:

> I knew I wanted to be more than a researcher in class, but I never imagined the emotional connections would run as deep as they do. And while Gabriel and Jerom's comments were somewhat comical, underneath may lay a very real concern that I will be leaving eventually. I'm struggling with this; I'm struggling to imagine my life without them in it. Balance is key – needing to balance their needs with mine, needing to balance time, needing to balance these tensions and emotions I experienced. I'm figuring out still how to do it all. But in a very real way, today demonstrated that I have had an impact – for better or worse – and that my exit will be just as critical, if not more, than my entry. As a researcher who wears her heart on her sleeve, lives and breathes these moments where our lives connected, I struggle to envision an exit where someone doesn't feel disappointed, let down, saddened, maybe like they've gone through a breakup. It isn't just me whose heart will be broken, and I need to find a way to honour this journey, to honour these students and the lives we have lived, shared, and built together, otherwise I will always wonder if I did more harm than good. (Fieldnote, April 6, 2017)

To be quite frank, nothing could have prepared me for the heartbreak I felt when I finally said goodbye. The following fieldnote re-presents the deep and reciprocal connections I made with my co-travellers and is worth detailing at length:

> I walked into the school and signed in as a helpful observer one last time. The secretary inquired as to how I was feeling? "I'm struggling." I headed toward the classroom, looking around the hallway, trying to preserve these last few moments in my memory. Mrs. S was working with a group of students in the library for *Right to Play*. They saw me walking by, began waving and ran out to hug me... "Don't leave" immediately exited their lips as they gripped me tightly. I did my best to reassure them that this was not goodbye, though I feel it fell on deaf ears. "I promise I will visit," became a recurring chorus throughout the rest of the afternoon. "But what if you die in a car accident tomorrow?" asked Brooklyn. She apologized for thinking so negatively, but I understood what she meant. Underlining her comment was a real concern that she may never see me again. Shtom squeezed me as tightly as he could, repeating, "I don't want you to go!" over and over. My eyes welled with tears; my heart broke. What do I say? How do I comfort him, reassure him that this is not the end, but simply a pause? As he hugged me, I wondered, very seriously, whether or not it was worth it... had I never come into their lives, they wouldn't be feeling this sense of ... abandonment? Sadness? Heartbreak? I'm not sure what they were feeling, I can only interpret and assume based on their words and actions. I tried my best to steel myself, prepare myself but I don't believe any amount of preparation would suffice. I knew today would be hard, but I didn't know it would be *this* hard.
>
> I walked the rest of the way to the classroom, replaying Shtom's words in my head... "Don't leave," and "Why do you have to leave?" forever burned into my memory.

My hope was that, even though today was hard, we could celebrate our time together rather than be sad that it was ending. I think I needed that... I needed to see joy and laughter and happiness on their faces to reassure me that I hadn't done more harm than good.

I finally made my way into class just in time for the lunch bell to ring. The students came in, but today was different. Normally they waited for Mrs. S to enter, but today they piled in quickly hurrying over to my corner, each one of them extending their arms, just as they had extended their lives to me months ago.

I had taken their pink books home for feedback earlier in the week and Mrs. S asked that I speak to it as she went and made photocopies. As I handed them back out, I told the students how impressed I was with their reflective writing, hoping to convey how therapeutic and powerful this type of writing could be. I confessed that I knew how difficult speaking about these issues was, but that there is always a message of hope, things are never hopeless even though that is sometimes hard to see. "There's always hope," I tell them one last time, "that one voice, one person, one story can make a difference, can make real social change, just as Shannen did."

I included a special thank you note to each one of them, asking them to take a few minutes to read through. Chaos erupted... "Ms. Driessens, will you sign my book?" One student's request turned into an uproar of students shoving their way toward me, putting a marker in my hand and asking me to sign their book. Gabriel asked me to sign his jersey, admitting it would get him 'serious cred' at his game tonight, and Jamal told me I would be the next Albert Einstein. It certainly made me feel special and loved, and I believe that was the bigger message from them: To know that I have touched their lives.

As I sat at my desk, I was surrounded by keepsakes: A beautiful fairy figurine that Sylvia painted for me, a beautiful plant with an apple decoration (of course!) in a gift bag adorned with pencil crayons from Mrs. S, and a folder filled with letters and goodbye cards from the students. I did not have the courage to look at the letters in class and decided that I would read them when I went home. I wanted a quiet place to sit with their words.

Mrs. S told the class that I had worked really hard on a special gift for them, something that took a great deal of time and effort. She admitted to the students how much she valued me, what I have done for her, as well as them. “Ms. Driessens was supposed to leave at the end of April, but we weren’t ready to say goodbye then, were we?” declared Mrs. S “NO!!!” shouted the class. She told the class that I began this journey thinking I would be observing, but what I ended up doing was so much more, and so much more meaningful because of my efforts. Her and I, she said, not only became collaborators, but friends. She handed me the microphone and I could feel a ball forming in the pit of my stomach...

Thank you for opening up your classroom to me, opening up your lives to me. This journey was more than I ever imagined and I can never repay any of you for your generosity, but I promise I will do justice to your stories and lives. I will honour and cherish the time we spent together, that beautiful moment where our lives intertwined, where you allowed me to become part of your classroom, your community, your family. I wanted to take this moment to celebrate Mrs. S because she does so much for her class and her students, and she is rarely celebrated. I told the class that they have her to thank for these experiences, for this journey because she took a leap of faith, a chance on a stranger she knew nothing about, but saw great value in what I was doing and

perhaps what I might offer her and her class. The class clapped and cheered for Mrs. S! Like always, I wish I could have done more!

My attention turned to the students, their attention fixed on me – some still very curious what lies behind the blurred projector screen – a few with tears in their eyes already. I told them that living in Muskoka has been difficult and I've shared with Mrs. S my struggle of finding a connection to this place. Living very far from home, where my family lives, and not having a lot of friends makes one feel lonely and disconnected from a place you call home. "But now you have friends!" shouts Mike. I smile... as if they read my mind. And then I started here and I found my purpose, I found something that provided my life with so much meaning, I felt like I belonged. I felt connected. And for that, and so much more, I thank you. I told them I was meant to be here. This classroom is where I belonged and that they have breathed life into my research, into my heart, and into my life. I can never ever repay them... but I will always honour and cherish our time together and the memories we have made. Of course, I am welling up at this point, but I persist. Okay, I joke, enough with the mushiness... let's have some fun! Remember last week when I asked you to pick your pseudonym and write something you wanted me to remember about you? Well, that had purpose. I have created a digital memory scrapbook using that as inspiration, as well as some of the things I've learned about you throughout our journey. I explained the slides – they each get two and that I selected a text that reminds me and will continue to remind me of them. "Do you know how much thought that takes?" Mrs. S asked. "She did that for 27 students. That takes time and thought."

Without further ado, we put on *Can't Stop the Feeling* by Justin Timberlake (one of my favourite dance songs) and played the video. The students eagerly awaited their

slides, cheering, laughing, amazed at how much I knew about them and how I knew certain things. More students were crying now and I sat with a few of the girls to provide support and comfort. I wanted them to know how much they meant to me, all of them, how meaningful our time was, how important each and everyone of them is to this journey and in my life. They were so grateful for my gift and I felt it was the absolute best way to honour them, our time, our connections, and to say 'see you soon,' not goodbye. I finished by reading my thank-you letter (Figure 7.1). (Fieldnote, June 23, 2017)

Figure 7.1: My goodbye letter to participants

My Dearest Students,

Words cannot express my gratitude. You opened your lives to me and let me in, a stranger that you knew nothing about; a stranger with questions, curiosities, and wonderments. A stranger who wanted to know more about you, how you think, how you speak, how your voice resonates. That voice transcends time and space, that voice makes you unique, enables you to tell your story, to share your thoughts, to express your own curiosities and wonderments. That is the voice that I will hear forever and always. I am honoured to have shared these moments with you, to see the world, even if momentarily, through your eyes, to walk a mile in your shoes and have you support me along the path. How lucky I am to have been able to do that. And for this, and so many other things, I thank you.

You have made me remember parts of myself that I had long forgot, reminded me what it means to be a kid, and reassured me that it's okay to take risks, make mistakes, and grow. Such wisdom, wisdom that I will live by for the rest of my days, that I will cherish, and that I will honour as I tell our story. And what a tale it will be. You all live such rich and interesting lives and I am honoured to have travelled with you, walking side-by-side in this journey we call life.

You have changed me in countless ways, made me think differently about the world, gave me purpose and meaning, and helped me to understand a little bit more about myself. Each of you have touched my heart, have helped me grow, have nurtured my love of learning, and helped me to understand what it means to be a community, a family, a friend. Our time has been so special, but I know that our story isn't finished. I once read that the sky is not the limit, but simply the view. So my advice to you is to dream big and then dream bigger. The world is waiting for you and it needs you now more than ever. True kindness is giving without ever asking anything in return and you've never asked anything of me, yet have given me so much. I hope that you continue to share your kindness with everyone you meet.

As I share these moments, I am transported back to that final day. I review my fieldnotes through tear-filled eyes. Part of me wants to go back and begin again, much like the students did on my scheduled last day (see Figure 7.2). As I re-read their goodbye letters, though, I take comfort in my approach. I took the time to get to know each student beyond who they were in class. I accepted the need to remain open and vulnerable, to take risks, and to put myself out there as researcher, model, and sometimes friend (Brown, 2010, 2012; Parr, 2011; Scheffel, 2008, 2011). Perhaps some might see my researcher identity as too sentimental and subjective, too involved, but I believe there was no better way for me to have proceeded. Together, we created stories and experiences that reached beyond the traditional role of the researcher to a place that recognized the very meaning of storytelling: To listen, to hear, and to be changed. All along I hoped that the students knew I heard them, that I valued them, that they changed me. Their goodbye letters demonstrated the powerful imprint that I left in their academic and personal lives. I share their collectively constructed thank-you card (Figure 7.3), as well as a few individual student letters (see Figure 7.4),[14] to once again honour our time together, but to, perhaps more importantly, demonstrate the power of being a fully engaged ethnographer. Their written thank yous demonstrated the significant implications of investing in learners through risk-taking and vulnerability, and the truly powerful ways these enhance student growth, self-worth, personal transformation, and empowerment (Brown, 2017).

[14] All students wrote thank-you letters

Figure 7.2: A student 'turning back time' on my scheduled last day

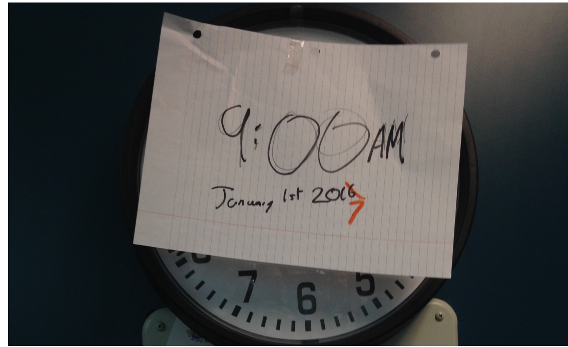


Figure 7.3: Class constructed thank-you card

Thanks for this year ~ Leo James
Thank you for all the help this year! ~ Faheem
Thank you! ~ Hugh Zander
Thank you for being here! ~ Jerom
Thank you for everything you have done for me ~ Jamal
Thanks for everything ~ Autumn
Thank you for being part of Gr. 6~ You are the best! ~ Mike
Thank you very much, Ms. Driessens ~ May
Thank you for being part of our Grade 6 class! ~ Grace
Thank you ~ Kaleb
Thanks for everything. I'll miss you ~ Lauren
Thanks ~ Therésé
Thank you for everything. You are the best ☺ I will miss you ~ Carly
Thanks for all of the useful feedback! ~ Brooklyn
You are the best ~ ParaNorman
Thanks a million, Ms. Driessens! We'll miss you ~ Sylvia
Thanks for the support ~ Myra
You made my dreams come true ~ Justice
You are the best ~ Michelle
Thank you for coming to this class and not any others ~ Shtom
Thank you for giving me the best notes on my work ~ Paul
Thank you so much~~ I will miss you lots ☺ ~ Andy

Figure 7.4: Excerpts from students' thank-you/goodbye cards

Brooklyn: The stars need darkness to shine ~ Unknown author
I am so happy that I have had the opportunity to be a subject of your research, and that you were able to stay two extra months. You are amazing, and so fun. I loved it when you came out into the yard and played with us. Your spirit shall always stay with us. And hopefully our spirits will stay with you.

Jamal: Dear Ms. Sarah Dried-Raisins
I am writing to you because I want to express how much fun I had when you were in our classroom. I had so much fun when all of us had that conversation. I felt like someone finally understood what I meant when I went on my WWII rant. I have learned so many things from you. When I heard that story project, I do think my heart stopped for a minute, but you helped me boost my confidence. And when I heard you were going to read my story, I think my heart stopped again. I have no idea how I haven't had a heart attack yet!

Andy: You have inspired me
You have inspired me to be the best person I can be. I enjoyed you being here and I don't think the back table will ever be the same without you sitting there. With you sitting in the back of the classroom, coming and teaching us about people who are amazing, you just forgot to mention one person that is amazing.... You forgot to mention YOU!! You have inspired me to always be positive. You have so many characteristics such as positivity, kind, helpful, brave, amazing, funny, nice, always smiling, and much more. You will always stay in my heart and I will miss you. I am sad that you have to leave, but I hope to see you soon.

Gabriel: You always committed to showing up
I really enjoyed having you in our classroom. I like how you played at recess with us. You always committed to showing up at school and dealt with us and our silly jokes, and sometimes our bad behaviour. I really appreciated all your feedback so I could improve my writing and other subjects. I am really upset that you have to leave because we had a great half-year. This year went by very fast but I really hope to see you next year. Thanks for everything.

Faheem: You have taught me how to dig deep
Thank you for a great 5 ¾ months! You have given me so much great advice about how I think and how I write. I have learned so much on how to make my writing and thinking deeper and stronger and you have taught me how to dig deep and look for supporting details and descriptive vocabulary.

Shtom: Life-long learning
I have learned that you come to learn also.

Michelle: A goodbye poem
You sat at the back table wondering are they paying attention?
Kids were sitting, screaming loudly. You didn't know what to do!
You sat at the back table wondering, are the kids nice?
Kids were starting to quiet down. You were loving the day.
~ Six months later ~
You sat at the back table, tall and proud wondering, should I go play soccer baseball?
Kids were writing their tests. You thought RECESS TIME!

Mike: A new perspective
Thank you for being here in our classroom! Your presence was truly appreciated. I cannot possibly describe my thanks in one word. You have given me a new perspective on many different subjects, writing included. I also really appreciate all the feedback you have given me over the time you have been here. It has boosted my self-confidence and writing style performance. I have learned SO much from your feedback to make me a better writer. Not only do I enjoy your feedback, my parents do as well! They are always astonished about how nice and supportive your comments are! They'd really wish (as do I) that you could give me some feedback for my future writing.

Justice: School is important
You are awesome! I have certainly enjoyed your company. I love how you agree with me on the equality and rights for women. I have learned from you that school is important and you have taught me to care more! You made me like SCHOOL! And yes, school. I really hope that your university likes this book you wrote because it has all of our class memories and fun. I hope you'll remember us and I am sure you will, but just know that we all love you no matter what happens. If someone is getting in trouble or if someone is hurt, you were always there to help or make us feel better, especially me. If I had to choose my top five favourite teachers and helpers, you and Mrs. S share number one.

May: I can use writing to change the world
You are an inspiration to our whole class and one day I would be proud to accomplish half of what you have already done. You have made our class a better, happier, funnier, more grateful place. I have learned so much from you. You have helped me improve on everything from my knowledge of First Nations and Aboriginal communities to how I can change up my writing to defy all of the stereotypes. But most of all you have made me an overall better person. You are generous, friendly, brave, intelligent, creative, humble, helpful, respectful, caring, loving, and hardworking. But that is only the start of describing you. I have had an amazing year with you and I am already looking forward to seeing you again in the fall (hopefully). Just to let you know, Grace the Dragon was based off someone, her personality was based on you, a strong, brave woman who I think would go the extra mile for someone you care for. We will miss you so much and will remember you until our time comes.

Myra: We wouldn't have known our world without you
Thank you for staying! I think everyone is glad you stayed, especially me. You taught us a lot of valuable lessons from punctuation to real-world problems and how we can help. I am glad you told us about Shannen's Dream. We wouldn't have known our world without you. I also appreciated that you treated us as equals and didn't talk to us as if we were younger children (even though we are) and immature (we're working on it). I know many adults who would talk to us like we were babies, but you treated us as if we were your equals and your peers. Thank you for that. I felt like I connected. I learned so much from you, your feedback, and your passion. Your passion is encouraging and contagious. Not in a bad way though. In a good way that shows us how important something is to you. Your feedback is amazing and really helps others, as well as myself, improve on our piece. And last, but not least, you. I don't have words. You are a great role model and I am glad to have met you.

Mrs. S: This is not goodbye
I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to share the Grade 6 class with you! Not only did we become great collaborators, but friends. This is not goodbye, as I know we will be working together again ☺

Shifting Outlooks: A Reflexive Tale

As I sit outside, I listen to birds chirping, the sun shining down on me as it warms my face. A robin lands in front of me and I watch it, wondering if anyone else has ever gazed upon *this* particular robin? Have they seen its beauty, listened to its timbre, or watched it forage for food? Have they truly observed it for what it is or is their understanding a projection of assumptions or expectations? And in my meanderings I wondered, has this been my approach throughout this inquiry? Have I stopped to *truly* listen to students' stories? Have I listened with what Parr (2008) calls a critical ear to what *they* have to say? Have I cleared my mind, checked

my assumptions at the door, and been present in that moment, and *all* moments for that matter, as we collectively breathed life into the classroom?

Prior to this inquiry, I do not believe I truly appreciated what it meant to listen. Up until today, I have never stopped to truly admire a robin with anything more than a passing glance; a symbol that spring had sprung. *Has this inquiry changed the way I look at the world? Has looking with intensity and curiosity become second nature? How do my eyes see <u>now</u>?* Working with children has most assuredly taught me what it means to appreciate life, what it means to truly live, to see the world as only children do: uncynical yet critical, hopeful and optimistic, truly appreciating things that I have long taken for granted. Children have much to teach us about life and the world if we simply take the time to listen with intent and purpose. They shift the way you think and ask questions unapologetically; they look at life with inquisitiveness and anticipation. Yet, we often do not value the things they have to say, but why? Why must we insist on relegating children to a lower status simply because *we* believe *they* have not reached a maturation point where their views and opinions can be taken seriously? Of course, I entered this inquiry with preconceptions about what children can and cannot do, but I worked hard to remain open, to check my assumptions at the door. I learned that children can do far more than we expect, far more than we give them credit for. They surpass our expectations turning our preconceptions into dust. Mrs. S' students taught me many things, which are interwoven throughout each chapter. But, perhaps above all else, they taught me what it means to be accepted for who I was, not what I did or could do for them. They opened their arms, minds, and hearts to this journey and I repaid this, to the best of my ability, in kindness. In a world that can be so ugly and hateful, filled with violence and turmoil, my days were brighter and my outlook on life was more hopeful because of these students. As I reflected, I realized that my eyes will never see the same and perhaps that is my biggest transformation of all; perhaps that

is what matters most. As I reflected, I began to understand what Mama meant in the quote that introduced this chapter, that to understand my journey necessitated that I looked and listened in order to learn.

Chapter Eight

The Promise of Becoming Critically Imaginative

Knowing in part may make a fine tale,
but wisdom comes from seeing the whole.
~ Ed Young

Preamble

I see your uniqueness, your individuality, that spark that makes you unlike anyone else. I hear you, and the power in your voice makes me want to listen. I read what you write and the stories that you tell, and never want to put any of it down because it moves me, it inspires me; you inspire me. I am not the same person I was when I first entered the classroom. I am forever changed because of you, and for this, and so much more, I thank you. Promise me you will share your voice, honour your experiences, and tell the world your story, because your story, your voice, your experiences matter . . . and you will be the change our world so desperately needs. (Research Journal, February 16, 2017)

I begin my final chapter with an excerpt from my research journal to honour every story, perspective, and voice I have listened to, each moment of inspiration, the laughter and tears, my being and becoming. As I think about how to conclude our journey, I feel disappointed in myself because the stories you have read are just snapshots of what life inside Mrs. S' classroom looked, sounded, and felt like. No matter how poetically I write, I wonder if you can never experience what I did or feel how I felt. While I made every effort to fulfill Van Maanen's (2011) charge to, "adequately display the culture . . . in a way that is meaningful to readers without great distortion" (p. 13), my goal moved far beyond creating a meaningful ethnography for readers to a place where I ensured each participant was authentically represented and heard. I owed this to my participants for their honesty, vulnerability, bravery, risk-taking, generosity, and love. I needed you to hear their voices and be inspired by their

efforts just as much as I was. I wanted Mrs. S to understand the impact she had on her students – past, present, and future – in an effort to empower her and inspire other teachers. Finally, I longed for the students to both realize their potential to make change and witness the change they had already made.

Setting the Stage

Collectively, Chapters Five and Six "represent an opportunity to both see and re-see the data" (Martin, 2017, p. 176). In Chapter Five, I employed classroom mosaics intended to capture and represent as many participant voices as possible. Each mosaic was woven from the stories of my participants punctuated by snippets of conversation or student writing that revealed the power of critical literacy (Parr, 2008). Chapter Six offers six classroom conditions necessary for critical literacy to flourish. This new conceptual framework, built upon careful analysis and interpretation, contextualizes, elucidates, and re-constructs participants' voices and stories through the lens of truth and reconciliation and critical literacy.

This final chapter, imbued with all other preceding chapters, represents the convergence of theory and practice. It is here that I invite readers to recognize the dual nature of critical literacy as both a theoretical framework and a pragmatic disposition or lens. Through this duality, my goal is to offer a nuanced understanding of critical literacy including its significance for 21st century learners (Martin, 2017).

To begin, I revisit the original research questions that catalyzed this inquiry, as well as the secondary research question introduced in Chapter Three with a particular focus on developing students' capacity for a critical literacy imagination. Suggestions for future implementations and further inquiries will be discussed, as well as the limitations of the present inquiry. Finally, I extend the discussion presented in Chapter One about the promise of critical literacy as an alternative lens for language and literacy education and 21st century learning.

This discussion will be embedded within the existing literature coupled with fresh insights from my journey of being and becoming.

Research Questions Revisited

Question 1: A Question of Experience

What are students' and teachers' experiences with critical literacy?

The moment I first stepped into Mrs. S' classroom, critical literacy was present. I did not introduce Mrs. S to critical literacy, though I do recognize that my presence may have made her, at the very least, more aware of her lens as a social justice educator and critical literacy teacher. From using Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech to re-write their vision of a better world to engaging in a social justice walk, to researching the implications of free versus fair trade coffee, as well as "proposing to the U.N. how to make social change" (Mrs. S), and from pursuing the truth and reconciliation inquiry to giving students permission to ask why, Mrs. S rooted her classroom in principles of democracy and justice, advocacy and activism, and social justice and social change. Mrs. S continually encouraged students to use language to question and interrogate power relationships within everyday contexts, to analyze media, to understand the hidden hands that guide social and cultural norms, and to make their mark on the world (Lewison et al., 2015). As Mrs. S writes,

> It's a wonderful part of my job. . . the best part of my job. . . to empower youth. . . to make them think about something that they have not been exposed to. . . to encourage them, to give them permission to make a change. (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017)

By all accounts, Mrs. S is a critical literacy teacher (Janks, 2010). She is interested in how all texts – written, visual, and oral – influence students and provided her students with multiple opportunities to "rewrite themselves and their local situations by helping them to pose

problems and to act, often in small ways, to make the world a fairer place" (Janks, 2010, p. 53). For instance, in April 2017, the students wrote pen pal letters to a group of Grade 6 students in the Philippines. After a few back and forth letters, Myra suggested the class raise money and school supplies to send overseas. This seemingly small act of writing pen pal letters, a staple in most elementary school classrooms, enabled the students to read and write the word and world, as suggested by Freire (1970, 1972), to both interrogate and dismantle inequitable access to resources. In this way, Myra embodied the final dimension of Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions framework (see Figure 2.4) by taking action and promoting social justice, and Mrs. S supported her efforts by modelling her critical stance (Lewison et al., 2015). Mrs. S also helped her students recognize how privileged they are to go to a school with access to technology and resources, embodying a pedagogy of discomfort as put forth by Boler and Zembylas (2003). Mrs. S provoked in students "a heightened sense of agency . . . [that] empower[ed] them to pursue their freedom and . . . transform to some degree their lived worlds" (Greene, 1995, p. 48). For students in this inquiry, critical literacy became their lens through which to view the world. It was not something they turned on and off when appropriate or convenient, but rather how Mrs. S nurtured, encouraged, and supported their learning, as evidenced by Myra's actions. By approaching learning through a critical lens, Mrs. S enabled the students to collectively question the world around them and take social action to promote equity and positive social change. She helped them to see themselves as active and engaged citizens of the world.

After the inquiry concluded, Mrs. S acknowledged that being part of this journey provided her with "greater awareness of the importance of infusing critical literacy into [her] lessons, whether they be language or social studies" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). I found this ironic given my observations. Critical literacy was not something Mrs. S

sprinkled into her lessons when it fit or made sense, but rather critical literacy was her lens, whether intentional or not. She further commented that, based on my observations and fieldnotes, she feels she does "an adequate job bringing awareness to relevant, current issues to the students at a level they can appreciate and make deeper connections" (Teacher Response to fieldnote, August 15, 2017). It is interesting to hear Mrs. S' perspective on her own practice. Perhaps, as an outsider, I was better able to see the extent to which critical literacy emerged on a daily basis, often outside of language and social studies blocks. Clearly Mrs. S valued critical literacy, but is it possible she needed validation to recognize her role as a critical literacy teacher? Or maybe she needed to set aside more time for critical self-reflection? My hope is that, through this inquiry, Mrs. S has developed a reflective lens that honours and celebrates the ways in which she supports students to become critically literate.

Question 2: A Question of Conditions

What are the optimal conditions and characteristics of classrooms that support critical literacy, as well as student and teacher engagement and empowerment?

Critical literacy is not a distinctive instructional methodology or strategy and thus I do not offer a lockstep formula for implementation (Behrman, 2006; Luke, 2000). While I propose six classroom conditions that support critical literacy, it is important to remember that these conditions cannot necessarily be exported into another classroom for "critical literacy needs to be continually redefined in practice" (Comber, 2001, p. 100), and I would add to this, adapted to the context. My framework is not one that is intended to be generalizable, but instead situated within specific contexts (Lewison et al., 2015). Although these conditions supported Mrs. S' students to become critically literate, each condition may look, sound, and feel different within other classrooms.

During the initial phases of data analysis and interpretation, I had envisioned making my data fit within published models of critical literacy (e.g., Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions framework, Luke and Freebody's (1999) four resources model, Janks' (2000, 2010) interdependent framework, or Lewison et al.'s (2015) model for critical literacy instruction). As I progressed, however, I quickly realized that my data was not conducive to, or supported by these models on their own. Through careful and detailed analysis and interpretation, I developed an original framework that supports and transforms critical literacy from theory to practice (Figure 8.1). These conditions are mutually supportive, multifaceted, and move and inform one another.

Figure 8.1: A framework that supports turning critical literacy theory into practice

Theoretical Overview	**Implications for Teaching and Learning practices**
Wonder, curiosity, and adventure changes and challenges the direction of learning by allowing for fluidity and flexibility.	Make reflective practice (Schön, 1983) part of your pedagogy; lean into the discomfort of emergent pedagogy; be flexible and responsive to student and contextual needs.
Community and belonging helps learners recognize we are all in this together.	Trust students by giving them ownership and accountability within the classroom; invite students into the decision-making process; make explicit the importance of inclusion and diversity.
Shared space of freedom encourages inquiry, interrogation, and immersion.	Adopt your own critical stance as an educator; explicitly model *how* to inquire and *why* students should interrogate issues of social justice; explicitly encourage student inquiry and interrogation.
Championing *all* students as capable learners leads to greater self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment.	Develop learning partnerships with your students so that they can develop these with their peers; view learners through a lens of strength and ability; champion students to advocate for themselves and others.
Intersubjectivity and interconnectedness encourages students to set their stories alongside those they are reading, writing, and hearing.	Learning must be real, authentic, and hold real-world value; prioritize diverse texts; challenge the status quo by countering dominant discourses and master narratives together.
Being and becoming encourages negotiating a sense of self and world together.	Invest in students; suspend judgment; provide multiple entry points that support multimodality; nudge students on the edge of their comfort zone.

Condition 1: Wonder, curiosity, and adventure. Wonder, curiosity, and adventure changes and challenges the direction of learning by allowing for fluidity and flexibility. Teachers must be willing to model and pursue their own inquiries, engage in reflective practice (Schön, 1983), lean into the discomfort of emergent pedagogy, and relinquish authority to not only facilitate student learning, but to also allow and encourage students to take learning into their own hands (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). Teaching and learning become "a process of inquiry" (McLaren, 2009, p. 80) that is relevant and relative to students, teachers, and contextual needs. Learning is authentic and meaningful and spontaneous all at once. Embracing your own sense of wonder, curiosity, and adventure as an educator allows teachers to teach with their head and heart by "*feelingly know[ing]* what is the appropriate thing to do in ever changing circumstances" (van Manen, 2008, p. 6, emphasis in original).

Condition 2: Community and belonging. Cultivating a sense of community and belonging within the classroom helps learners recognize that we are all in this together. Learning within a community of practice requires mutuality and reciprocity (Shor, 1992), a sense of togetherness (Bomer & Bomer, 2001), and a shared sense of trust. By trusting students and inviting them into the decision-making process, teachers like Mrs. S provide students with greater ownership, authority, and accountability. All learners must receive these invitations, which form the basis for understanding how to navigate the larger society (Gregory & Cahill, 2009). For example, within the classroom, students learn about power imbalances, identity politics, and what it means to have agency both explicitly and implicitly. Teachers who choose to conform to the paternalistic banking paradigm perpetuate the continual disempowerment of children and the status quo (Lewison et al., 2002; Shor, 1992). Teachers like Mrs. S who favour critically democratic practices, not only reaffirm the inherent worth of students but teach them how to become "thoughtful, committed, and active citizens" (Banks, 2003, p. 18).

Condition 3: Shared space of freedom. Classrooms that are shared spaces of freedom encourage inquiry, interrogation, and immersion. However, in order for students to become critically literate, teachers must model, both explicitly and implicitly, their own critical stance. Similar to Lewison et al. (2015), modelling a critical stance requires teachers to take on the necessary attitudes and dispositions that enable them to become critically literate. According to Lewison et al. (2015), adopting a critical stance entails at minimum four dimensions: consciously engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire, and being reflexive (see Figure 2.7). Within the context of this inquiry, adopting a critical stance also required Mrs. S to become a critically reflective teacher (Schön, 1983). Mrs. S not only modelled *how* to inquire, but also helped students to recognize that they *could* and *should* inquire and interrogate injustices.

Condition 4: Championing students as capable learners. Championing all students as capable learners leads to greater levels of self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and empowerment. Teachers like Mrs. S, who view their students through a lens of strength and ability rather than a deficit model (Noddings, 2005; Shorey, 2008), help to empower students as confident and capable learners. Giving students greater freedom to direct their own learning (Condition 2 and 3) encourages and empowers students to become advocates for both knowing and being known (Freire, 2007). In this inquiry, for example, Earl suggests that, “Mike is probably smarter than [most] adults,” and Andy reminds us that, “One voice can inspire the world” and “We have the power to change the world.” Critical literacy teachers nudge students to the edge of their comfort zones (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986) by opening up spaces where teaching and learning for change are at the heart of it all.

Condition 5: Fostering a sense of intersubjectivity and interconnectedness. Intersubjectivity and interconnectedness encourages students to set their stories alongside

those they are reading, writing, and hearing. In this sense, critical literacy not only necessitates "entertaining alternate ways of being" (Lewison et al., 2015, p. 15) by examining and interrogating multiple perspectives (Lewison et al., 2002; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004), but encourages students to set their own stories alongside those they are reading, writing, hearing, speaking, and living (Lewis, 2014). By offering students opportunities to stand in another's shoes, critical literacy teachers use text to "make visible the workings of racism, sexism, classism, and colonialism" (Pinar, 1998, p. 33) just like Mrs. S did during the truth and reconciliation inquiry. Bringing these stories to the students was critical to their being and becoming. Living alongside diverse narratives of hope like that of Shannen Koostachin and Chanie Wenjack not only disrupted the commonplace by allowing the students to see "the 'every day' through new lenses" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 382), but, perhaps more importantly, allowed the students to engage in praxis by reflecting and acting upon the world in an effort to transform it (Freire, 1970; Lewison et al., 2002; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004), the sixth and final condition.

Condition 6: Being and becoming. Being and becoming encourages negotiating a sense of self and world together. Critical literacy teachers are interested in developing a strong sense of agency within their students (Lewison et al., 2015). Through deconstruction, reconstruction, and composition of text (Janks, 2010; Lewison et al., 2002; Lewison et al., 2015; Luke & Freebody, 1999), critical literacy teachers encourage students to write and rewrite their identities, to vision and then re-vision the world, and to continually reflect on the relationship between the two. They help students to recognize that everything "remains in process, unfinalizable" (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994, p. 74). Freire (1970) refers to this process as naming, "to exist . . . is to *name* the world, to change it" (p. 76, emphasis in original). When Mrs. S asked *Who are you? Who do you want to become?* and *What do you want our world to look like?* she gave the

students permission to name their world. Critical literacy teachers recognize the need to help students find themselves – their beliefs, values, interests, passions, and principles – in relation to one another and the world.

Parr and Campbell (2007) suggest that educators teach students first and curriculum second; doing so requires educators to peel back their professional masks by being vulnerable, taking risks, and sharing a piece of themselves with their students. Developing a sense of being and becoming in students requires that teachers take responsibility for their own being and becoming. Just as one must know where they come from in order to know where they are going, teachers must know who they are both personally and professionally if they are to help students discover the same. In this sense, teachers must develop pedagogical practices that are critical and reflective and recursive all at once.

How to use the framework. If we want to cultivate classrooms that are "nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once . . . [that] pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. . . . [that] resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues. . . . as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility" (Greene, 1991, p. 43), then, like Janks' (2010) interdependent framework, we must find ways of holding all six conditions in productive tension to realize and achieve the promise of critical literacy. Similar to Cambourne's (1995) conditions of literacy learning, the conditions that support critical literacy are adaptive, flexible, and context specific. The framework must continually be evaluated and assessed as needed to ensure it makes sense for learners, pedagogy, and classroom.

Question 3: A Question of Growth and Transformation

How can critical literacy support transformative learning, personal growth, and an increased sense of self-efficacy as an agent of self and social change?

Mrs. S' classroom was rich with authentic learning experiences grounded in critical literacy. When critical literacy replaces outdated traditional conceptualizations, student growth and transformative learning permeate. As Mrs. S observed, "I believe the students showed growth . . . even if we look at when you began in January" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). A big part of their growth was Mrs. S' role as a critical literacy teacher, her ability to model her own critical literacy stance, and her understanding that "when [students] see relevance to what they are learning, they learn" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). Three categories of students emerged in relation to this final research question: a) the (dis)engaged, b) the quiet introverts, and c) the inquirers, described below. It is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive categories.

The (dis)engaged students. These are students who feel disconnected from and disengaged by traditional curricular learning. These are students who prefer the social aspects of learning such as recess or physical activities such as gym class. As educators, it is important to remain open-minded by looking for authentic ways to engage disengaged students. One way to positively contribute to these students' sense of self-efficacy and self-advocacy is by providing them with choice and ownership over their learning (Parr, 2008). Justice, a self-identified disengaged student, once joked that, "I can't remember anything we've learned in the past," even though she had already mentioned learning about Maya Angelou earlier that day. When I reminded her of this fact, she responded, "Yeah, but I only remember the things that are important." Prompting her to expand she responded:

> Because she [Maya Angelou] was the one that is trying, was standing up to things that . . . need to be right. So things that are more, that need to happen . . . are the ones that pop out to me. . . . there's some things that you need to know like about Martin Luther

> King Jr., and then there's some things that you don't really need to know, like how we are learning about music. (Transcribed Conversation, April 20, 2017)

Toward the end of the inquiry, the students wrote one-minute rants about any topic that ignited their passion, as discussed in Chapter Five. Justice chose to rant about school rules including dress code policy and lack of student privacy (see Figure 5.11). Earlier in the month, Justice admitted that she felt the school dress code was "sexist" and targeted girls more than boys, so I was not surprised by her topic choice. What I was surprised by was, when the students wrote the rough draft for their rant, Justice was the first to finish, having written nearly two pages in under ten minutes. Clearly, she had a lot to say. Inviting Justice to learn about trailblazing women, like Maya Angelou and Shannen Koostachin, or write and speak about issues that are important to her, allowed her to authentically engage with the process of inquiry thereby leading to an increased sense of self-efficacy and self-advocacy.

Providing student choice around topic selection, curriculum content, and inquiry projects, to name a few, critical literacy teachers, like Mrs. S, positively influence and engage even the most reticent and reluctant learners, which represents the first of three powerful discoveries of this inquiry (see Figure 8.2): Ensure *all* students believe in their ability to learn, grow, and transform personally in an effort to impact positive social change.

Figure 8.2: Pedagogical learning opportunities for educators

1. Ensure *all* students believe in their ability to learn, grow, and transform personally in an effort to impact positive social change.
2. Ensure *all* students are valued, respected, and heard, not simply those with the loudest voices or those willing to raise their hand.
3. Ensure *all* students are supported in asking (tough) questions, as well as advocating for themselves and others.

The quiet introverts. For Susan Cain (2012), many teachers value students who eagerly raise their hand to participate, verbally add to a discussion, and help keep classroom dialogue flowing smoothly. There were many students within Mrs. S' class who I would classify as extroverted and often perceived as engaged; on the other side of the spectrum are those quiet introverts who, to an untrained eye, might be viewed as disengaged or disinterested. Critical literacy supports these students by developing a greater sense of agency, voice, and confidence as agents of social change and provides multiple entry points to share their ideas, not simply verbally. Within this inquiry, Myra was quiet and contemplative, one of the deepest thinkers in the classroom, yet she rarely participated during class discussions. Through her writing, Myra discovered that she had a lot to offer, but she simply was not comfortable sharing aloud with 26 classmates. For example, in response to the question *For what purpose, and in what way do you want your voice to be used, now and in the future?* Myra wrote, "I want my voice to be used to inform people. To make them understand." Through her writing, Myra became a strong advocate for mental health and wellbeing, dismantling gender norms, and championing equity, culminating in her initiative to raise money for students in the Philippines. For students like Myra, critical literacy provides a supportive environment to write their way through to understanding in an effort to discover their identity and find their voice. Thus, it is critical that teachers ensure *all* students are valued, respected, and heard, not simply those with the loudest voices or those willing to raise their hand.

The inquirers. These are students who ask a lot of questions, who interrogate information, and who understand the importance of investigation. They have learned to navigate the education system quite well. Non-critical literacy teachers would likely view them as good students, because they often defer to adult authority. For these students, critical literacy encourages their questions, provides them with both the process and content for

interrogation, and expands their lenses to consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives. Within this inquiry, critical literacy helped May realize how she can "change up [her] writing to defy all of the stereotypes," allowed Brooklyn to proclaim that, "people have to start to care," and gave Autumn the confidence to request that I "quote [her] on this if you will: 'If you want to make that change, then make the change.'" Critical literacy teachers support inquiring students by relinquishing power and authority within the classroom by adopting the role of facilitator or lead learner of student inquiry (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) representing the final powerful discovery: Ensure *all* students are supported in asking (tough) questions, as well as advocating for themselves and others.

A Framework for Becoming Critically Imaginative

Maxine Greene (1995), an educational philosopher and social activist, suggests,

> To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or 'common-sensible' and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably *is*. (p. 19, emphasis in original)

To answer the question of *How can we nurture students to develop their critical literacy imagination?* we first must understand what I mean by the term. Adding the word 'critical' to imagination is about "teaching [and learning] for change" (Shorey, 2008, p. 186). In this way, becoming critically imaginative weaves Greene's (1995) assertion with my final condition of being and becoming.

Like Greene (1995), Mrs. S believed in the need to "co-create a world that appreciates individual voice and is on a quest for social justice" (p. 52). In this sense, a critical literacy

imagination presents an opportunity for students to re-write, re-examine, re-envision, and re-design their identities, experiences, and worldview by working toward local and global change. It allows students to imagine how the world might otherwise exist and what they can do to positively contribute to that vision. Becoming critically imaginative allows students to not only "imagine the possibilities of change" (Kamler, 1999, p. 212), but to work toward being that change, as Autumn suggests. Teaching and learning for a critical literacy imagination necessitates working toward something; that is what makes it critical.

This inquiry revealed the multiple ways in which critical literacy teachers, like Mrs. S, nurture students' capacity to develop their critical literacy imagination. Figure 8.3 provides an overview of the ways in which Mrs. S nurtured students to become critically imaginative.

Figure 8.3: A framework that supports developing students' critical literacy imagination

Teaching Practice	**Learning Experience Examples**
Critical Questioning: Asking deeper thinking questions that cannot be answered with yes or no.	• Why do we write? • How does this text make you think differently? • Let's think about the internal conflict in Freak the Mighty, what is it? • How will you use words today to be quiet in prayer and shine light on others?
Intentional Text Choices: Selecting texts that are purposeful and meaningful to students.	• *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka • *Seven Blind Mice* by Ed Young • *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle • *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick • *Shi-shi-etko* and *Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell • *Secret Path* by Gord Downie.
Student Choice: Providing students with opportunities to direct their own learning.	• Persuasive essays/speeches • Fantasy stories • Rants • Genius Hour
Student Ownership and Accountability: Reinforcing the importance of being accountable within the shared space; implicitly teaching equity and fairness.	• "Do you see the value to ensure that you have contributed and completed your share?"
Inquiry: Valuing student inquiry.	• Genius Hour • Truth and reconciliation inquiry

Critical Invitations: Inviting students to share and value multiple perspectives.	• "I'm asking you to be critical of what you see . . . what you hear."
Student Journalling: Time set aside daily for students to 'just write.'	• Motivational Monday quick writes (see Figure 5.2).
Valuing Diversity: Recognizing the value of difference.	• "You are at a disadvantage sometimes because you don't live in a multicultural place. . . . We are a very white community."
Texts of All Types: Creating a literacy rich environment that does not simply favour printed text.	• Multimodal videos (e.g., Flocabulary, PowToon, TedTalk, Secret Path), picture books, poetry, art, images, non-fiction texts, novels, etc.
Building Learners Up: Reinforcing the inherent worth of all learners.	• I want to "instill in you that you need to be okay with who you are. And you are the best version of yourself and who cares what others think."

Implications for Teaching and Learning

In an educational system that still privileges reading and writing printed text over reading and writing the word and world, we need to hear "hopeful stories about learning" (Shorey, 2008, p. 204) more than ever. Stories that will inspire other teachers to critically reflect on their practices and dispositions, that will catalyze a principal to discuss school-wide initiatives committed to social action, and that will provoke change within faculties of education. While this story is not necessarily an antidote to fixing existing problems within Ontario's education system, it is an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue that, I believe, can inspire and empower teachers, students, faculty members, administrators, and stakeholders. The practical implications of this inquiry, discussed below, are: teachers must believe in the power of critical literacy, teaching and learning must hold real-world value, critical literacy requires strong teacher-student bonds, critical literacy is not a set of skills, and critical literacy learning is critical.

Teachers Must Believe in the Power of Critical Literacy

The promise of critical literacy can only be fully realized and achieved when teachers take responsibility for working toward equity and social justice. Becoming a critical literacy teacher is not simply adopting critical literacy strategies when they conveniently fit within a planned lesson. Rather, teachers need to critically reflect on their own beliefs, assumptions, and values in an effort to understand their ways of seeing. Taylor and Kabuto (2007) suggest that, "to teach we must first know ourselves, reflect on the ways in which our personal histories influence us as teachers and scholars" (p. 273). To this, I would add the need to critically examine the ways in which our histories, bodies, and experiences perpetuate dominant relations, especially when working with children, by finding ways to continually hold these subjectivities in tension. If we are to work toward the common goal of creating humanizing educational environments, as envisioned by Freire (1970, 1974, 1997) and Dewey (1916, 1938/1997), then, at the core of our pedagogical practices and lenses must be "the intention of improving the life we live in common so that the future shall be better than the past" (Dewey, 1916, p. 191). Time must be set aside for critical self-reflection.

Teaching and Learning Must Hold Real-World Value

Mrs. S said it best, "When students are engaged, when they see relevance to what they are learning, they learn. The best way to do that is to stay current, and make the classroom mimic what is happening 'outside'. It needs to be real, so to do that, you have to be flexible" (Teacher Response to Fieldnote, August 15, 2017). Simply teaching the same materials or texts through the same methods year after year is unacceptable. The world is continually changing and so, too, should teaching materials, resources, texts, and best practices. Teachers need to offer diverse and inclusive representations of the world through texts that embrace multiculturalism, different ways with words (Heath, 1983), and alternative ways of being. Some

teachers might find this challenging when grappling with how to select diverse texts or create inclusive environments. It is a question that requires teachers to critically examine, once again, their own journey, beliefs, values, and assumptions about learners, learning, their roles as teachers, and the world more broadly. If critical literacy is going to replace traditional and outdated conceptualizations of literacy, then what is needed from teachers is a sense of openness, flexibility, and a willingness to lean into the discomfort of authentic learning even with young learners. Some teachers might support critical literacy for older students, but still maintain the view that issues of the adult world should not concern or burden young children. Research, however, has demonstrated the multiple ways in which students, as young as kindergarten, become critically literate.[15] Bringing in rich and authentic learning experiences, regardless of age, ensures that students begin to develop their critical literacy imagination early on. The end result is open-minded students who actively, critically, and naturally read the word and world (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). These students "grow to become lifelong practitioners of critical literacy who question and transform social injustice in our world fulfilling the promise of Dewey's purpose for education – democracy" (Gregory & Cahill, 2009, p. 8).

Critical Literacy Requires Strong Teacher-Student Bonds

This inquiry suggests the need for teachers to know their students beyond the four walls of the classroom. Part of this requires teachers to let themselves be known both personally and professionally. Mrs. S continually invited students into her life by sharing

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[15] See, for example, Christensen, 2011; Comber, 2001, 2004; Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2015; Dunkerly-Bean, Bean, Sunday, & Summers, 2017; Hall & Piazza, 2008; Harste, 2003; Heffernan, 2004; Heffernan & Lewison, 2000; Horn, 2014; Flint & Laman, 2012; Freire, 1970, 1974; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2000, 2014; Gregory & Cahill, 2009; Janks, 2000, 2010, 2012; Jones & Clarke, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; Leland et al., 2003; Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2012, 2015; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2000, 2002; Luke, 2000, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Luke & Woods, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Paley, 1997; Richards, 2006; Shor, 1987, 1992, 1999; Soares & Wood, 2010; Street, 2003; Vasquez, 2004, 2010; Wallowitz, 2008.

personal stories from her childhood, early education experiences, beliefs and values, and family life. Not only does this model vulnerability for students, but also demonstrates the need to connect with each other personally, emotionally, socially, and academically. Mrs. S, whether intentionally or not, embraced an expanded understanding of literacy from a technical skill to a social practice (Street, 2003).

Part of the purpose of developing strong teacher-student bonds is to allow teachers to adapt, tailor, and modify lesson plans and curriculum content to fit learners' needs. The truth and reconciliation inquiry illustrates the need for students to lead their learning, and for teachers to embrace emergent pedagogy and provide authentic learning contexts that interrogate tough, but relevant, social issues. If Mrs. S had simply proceeded with her intended lesson plan, imagine the rich learning opportunities that would have been lost. For example, would Mike and Jerom have criticized the Canadian government's (in)actions, would Brooklyn have admitted her heartbreak, would Myra have confessed to feeling "dark, clouded, and hopeless," and would Andy have realized that, "one voice can inspire the world"? Because Mrs. S was keenly aware of and receptive to her students' needs, I will never know the answer to these questions.

Critical Literacy is Not a Set of Skills

Critical literacy is not a set of skills, despite what the *Ontario Language Curriculum* (2006) might have you believe. Adding skills to the end of critical literacy implies that teaching and learning for critical literacy is about developing specific abilities that enable one to read or write critically. Harkening back to Luke (2000) who viewed critical literacy as "a theoretical and practical attitude" (p. 454), this study suggests the need to view critical literacy as a dispositional framework or lens through which to view the world. For teachers, it is not a question of when to teach critical literacy but how to ensure it becomes the lens through which

you view teaching and learning. Even though Mrs. S only acknowledged the importance of critical literacy during her language and social studies lessons, I observed critical literacy woven throughout daily lessons outside of these two blocks. For example, during a math lesson on data management, the students travelled around the room inquiring about each other's cookie preferences. This lesson was hands-on, interactive, and inquiry-based situated within a real-world context. Similarly, Mrs. S offered students the opportunity to develop a Genius Hour project over the course of three months. ParaNorman chose to design and build a remote controlled car, Brooklyn extended her fantasy story, May constructed a photo essay, Myra composed an original song, Sylvia sewed clothes for her dolls, and a group of boys collaborated to build a model airplane. While I was only able to observe the students' Genius Hour projects on my scheduled last day, my brief observation demonstrated the potential for Genius Hour to weave all six conditions of critical literacy and expand our definition of literacy learning. Critical literacy teachers, like Mrs. S, challenge educators and administrators to reconsider their understanding of critical literacy from a skill set to a dispositional framework or lens through which to view learning and teaching.

Critical Literacy Learning is Critical

Shorey (2008) suggests that critical learning "involves asking questions about power and privilege, and it subscribes to the belief that asking the questions may be more important than finding the answers" (p. 188). One of the dominant threads woven throughout this study was the importance Mrs. S placed on the process of inquiry over its product. Mrs. S invited students to ask critical questions like, "Why would the Catholic church do that?" (Justice), "Why can't we live by treat everyone the way you want to be treated?" (Andy), and "Why are there such dumb Canadians in history?" (Mike) by asking students, "Why is this okay?" In this sense, Mrs. S viewed herself as a learner alongside her students, not the transmitter of

knowledge (Freire, 1970). Part of the role of being a teacher, as Mrs. S alluded to, is the need to stay current and up-to-date. This might require teachers to attend professional development days, independently research culturally responsive pedagogy, and stay informed about current events and popular culture. Teachers are busy, but the ramifications of simply travelling the same path year after year without continual and intentional growth are severe. Mrs. S demonstrated that her own personal and professional learning led to greater self-awareness and, I believe, more authentic learning experiences (Shorey, 2008). Mrs. S showed her students, and you as reader, how to become a lead learner, as well as the benefits of adopting this role. Together, Mrs. S, the students, and I learned alongside each other. These reciprocal relationships collectively pushed our understandings deeper, expanded our awareness, and contributed to our awakened consciousness (Slattery & Dees, 1998).

Complexities of Qualitative Research

Reflecting back on the inquiry process, "I realize that what I consider to be the greatest strengths of this inquiry could also be considered its greatest limitations" (Parr, 2008, p. 209). These include: my positionality, the power and the role of the researcher, the research context, and emergent methodology.

Despite my high level of transparency both during my time in the classroom and in its retelling, ethnographers must explicitly acknowledge, "how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination" (Madison, 2005, p. 9). My researcher lens limits my interpretations, including the decisions that I made while gathering data (Parr, 2008). For example, was I drawn to Justice because of our shared passion for gender equality or did I spend a greater amount of time with Myra because I partly saw my younger self reflected in her? While I remained reflexive of my positionality during data collection, analysis,

interpretation, and re-presentation, a critical question I need to continually ask myself is *Who gives me the authority to make claims about my participants?*

As an adult researcher working with children, the issue of power was always on my mind. While I continually negotiated and renegotiated informed consent, the more time I spent in the classroom, the more I questioned whether or not my immersion made students feel more compelled to agree to my requests, regardless of their true desire. The stories that colour each page within this living document demonstrate the deep connections and lasting relationships built with each student. But, did my level of involvement somehow impact their sense of powerlessness? James (2001) acknowledges that, "children may be vulnerable to the expectations of authoritative adults [to] participate in the research" (p. 255). Despite my reflexive practices and desire to minimize the unintentional effects of power, I still wonder how successfully I negotiated this practice? As researcher, it is imperative to continually interrogate the ways in which we position ourselves in relation to our participants and research by asking "how is my history, my body, my intellectual knowledge, inseparable from my work" (Bhattacharya, 2008, p. 308).

I learned quickly that life inside a classroom necessitates flexibility. Daily disruptions, planned field trips or school initiatives, and, especially in Muskoka, snow days can quickly interrupt data collection. Like Parr (2008), given the contextually specific nature of this particular inquiry, generalizations cannot be drawn or offered to other teachers, students, or classrooms.

Finally, working within an emergent methodological framework required a high degree of flexibility and on-the-spot decision-making. Often I entered the classroom without a research agenda and simply allowed the day, and data, to unfold and emerge naturally. While I see this as one of the greatest strengths of this inquiry, methodologically it poses challenges to other

researchers for this inquiry cannot be replicated to another inquiry site or classroom (Parr, 2008).

Future Research

Every classroom is unique. The breadth of classroom experiences and cultures, as well as the scope of critical literacy, provides numerous opportunities for future research. Critical literacy research reinforces the promise of transformative learning for students and teachers alike by challenging traditional conceptualizations and narrowly defined understandings of what counts as literacy. As I critically reflect on this inquiry, I see several possibilities to expand upon this study.

Explore Critical Literacy within a Diverse Classroom

Mrs. S' classroom lacked cultural diversity. What is needed next is to understand how the promise of critical literacy changes depending on the classroom's social and cultural context and composition. The experiences students bring with them into the classroom very much impact what they do and learn. While I cannot assume that each student within Mrs. S' class had similar experiences outside of the classroom, their social and cultural experiences very much reflect the monocultural demographics of Muskoka, Ontario more generally. Further studies are needed to understand how students living in an urbanized multicultural environment experience critical literacy and how these experiences might differ from the students in Mrs. S' class.

Explore Critical Literacy with Younger Students

While critical literacy has been explored with younger students (see Paley 1997, 2004, 2010; Vasquez, 2003, 2004, 2010, 2017; Wohlwend, 2011, 2013, 2017;), more research is needed to build upon and expand this research. Future ethnographic inquiries could explore how critical literacy looks, sounds, and feels within primary classrooms, which might help to

dismantle the common myth that critical literacy is only appropriate for older students. An expanded understanding of critical literacy across a broad spectrum would help to illustrate the promise of critical literacy for even the youngest learners. It is possible that including young children's voices within educational research will contribute to positive changes within accountability and ministerial agencies such as EQAO and the Ministry of Education, respectively.

Explore Teacher Perceptions of Critical Literacy

Future researchers might also consider an explicit investigation of teacher perceptions around critical literacy. While Mrs. S and I spoke openly about her conceptualizations and understandings, sometimes in dialogue with other teachers, I still do not have a solid grasp on how she defines critical literacy at least in theory. Teachers need opportunities to discuss their own understandings and perceptions. To expand the breadth of this study, I recommend engaging more teachers through collaborative inquiry or action research.

Explore Critical Literacy Within Teacher Education Programs

It might be interesting to investigate critical literacy within Faculties of Education. For example, what are teacher candidates' experiences with critical literacy? How does one's understanding of critical literacy evolve from pre-service education to in-service teaching? Critical literacy, as this study suggests, is incredibly complex. It is not prescriptive nor does it follow a set methodology. Following pre-service teachers into their teaching careers would provide us with greater insight about critical literacy, and the ways in which it is adopted and adapted. This type of future research could contribute to developing teacher education programs designed to meet the diverse needs of 21st century learners using a critical literacy lens.

Just like Mrs. S' students required explicit modelling, so, too, do pre-service teacher candidates. As Scheffel (2008) suggests, "we need to provide them with opportunities to see examples in practice," (p. 236), to question what critical literacy entails, and to critically reflect on their own beliefs, assumptions, and experiences as learners. Providing opportunities for critical interrogation within teacher education programs can reorient Greene's (1991) assertion that

> Teachers tend to set aside their original visions of worlds that would be opened by various kinds of literacy – by imagination, for example, by the capacity to truly *see*, to attend to particulars at hand. Somehow convinced that their professional self-definitions (as well as their own trade jargon) place decided social value upon functional literacy, they scarcely ever ask themselves about the difference literacy makes in various lives. (p. 130)

In essence, we need to find ways of creating teacher education programs that make critical literacy learning critical.

Closing Thoughts

This dissertation tells a collective story – a story of life, love, friendship, vulnerability, risk taking, and transformation. I had the honour of being welcomed into a Grade 6 classroom that, for six months, became my home. I learned to love 27 students and their indefatigable teacher like they were my family. In much the same way I began this journey, I end it with hesitancy and reservation. As I write these final words, part of me does not want this journey to be over. It is hard to come to terms with the finality of it all, almost as though I am turning my back on my participants. Like Shorey (2008), this inquiry has taken me far deeper inside myself than I expected travelling. It has forced me to consider my power and privilege, to truly listen to others, to take risks, to believe in myself, and to embrace my being and becoming. I have

learned more about myself during this inquiry than all journeys leading up to this point combined. To say it was transformational is, quite frankly, an understatement. The imprint of my participants will forever be in my heart and on my mind, which is perhaps why it is so hard to finally say goodbye.

These participants have entrusted me to tell their stories, stories that inspire and propel my future self. Mrs. S has instilled in me a renewed sense of optimism about the future of education. The students, our most valuable asset, have strengthened my optimism for a fairer, freer, more socially just world. Together, this inquiry demonstrates the significant contributions of one teacher, 26 students, and one extraordinary classroom. In the turning of each page, I hope you have looked and listened and learned from our story. And as I say goodbye one last time, I leave you with the same farewell message I offered my participants:

> *And so I leave you with some sage advice from my friend* Dr. *Seuss: Although our journey has ended and you may feel saddened, don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened.*
>
> *I thank you, I'll miss you, but I will never forget you.*

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Appendix 1: Parent Letter of Consent

Participant Information Letter and Consent Form for Parents of School-Aged Children

Your child is invited to participate in a research study entitled: *Storytelling and Ethnography: Exploring Critical Literacy in the Classroom* conducted by Sarah Driessens, PhD Candidate in the Schulich School of Education, Nipissing University. Questions or concerns can be directed to [redacted] (Dr. Michelann Parr, Faculty Supervisor, Nipissing University).

What is the project about?

This project takes place during regular classroom instruction and is intended to explore and advance our knowledge of critical literacy within the classroom and explore strategies that empower and engage students. Specific objectives include:

- To provide evidence-based strategies that can be used to support literacy and critical literacy education, student and teacher engagement;
- To explore the way in which engagement is viewed by teachers and students;
- To explore, share, and showcase students' and teachers' experiences and stories as they relate to critical literacy in particular and classroom life in general.

Why should my child participate?

Your child will have the unique opportunity to explore meaningful and relevant information related to critical literacy that empowers, engages, and supports your child's learning. Through collaborative research, your child will have an opportunity to explore and respond to personal experiences related to literacy events and activities in the classroom with the goal of developing and showcasing their unique strengths and talents. You will have the opportunity to support and discuss the goals of this project with your child.

What am I asking your child to do?

I would like to join your child's classroom as a helpful observer during the morning or afternoon, approximately 1-3 times per week from January to April 2017. If you consent to your child's participation, classroom observation via helpful observer and informal conversations will be used to develop an in-depth portrait of classroom life. During this time, I will observe and actively participate in the classroom, taking notes and photographs when appropriate to capture the natural events of the classroom (e.g., stories, drawings). Data will be gathered through field notes, journalling, and informal conversations with your child that naturally emerge within the classroom. In addition, I would ask that your child keep a research journal in an effort to capture both formal and informal conversations, ideas, thoughts, etc., that relate to literacy events and activities. Time spent on journalling will be negotiated with the teacher, and ideally embedded in your child's day-to-day educational instruction. I might also

ask your child to talk to me about what they do in class, their reading preferences, and how they feel about reading; I may ask to audio-record and then transcribe conversations. They will be invited to review transcripts to check that I have accurately captured their words. I will also become a member of their Google classroom so I can explore their reading and writing with more depth. I will not evaluate or assess your child or their work.

Will we have access to the findings?
The school and board will be provided with a summary of the project as well as access to any publications arising from the study (i.e., summaries, research papers, journal articles, or presentations).

Will people know who I am? What about privacy and confidentiality?
Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Only raw data will contain your child's name; this will be held in locked storage accessible only to myself and my supervisor. Because your child will be part of a collaborative research team, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. I will, however, assure your child's privacy and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms that disguise participant identity.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your child at any time. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or participate in tasks (e.g., journalling) that he/she finds objectionable or which make him/her feel uncomfortable. You may withdraw your consent at any time without consequence or explanation by emailing Sarah Driessens at [redacted]. If you choose to withdraw your child, any data gathered will be subsequently withdrawn from the study and destroyed. Because this is a four month project I will assure myself that you are continuing to give your consent regarding your child's participation and understand your rights to withdraw.

Other important information.
If there are students who refuse to participate and/or parental consent is not obtained, no direct questioning for the purposes of this inquiry will occur with those particular students. While general observations may be used to contextualize the classroom environment, no direct information will be obtained from a student for whom there is no parental consent or student assent.

Statement of Informed Consent to Participate in Research

As the parent or legal guardian of the child participating in this research study, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do, and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw him/her from this project at any time; and that steps are being taken to protect my child. I have read the *Participant Information Letter and Consent Form* and have had any questions, concerns, or complaints satisfactorily answered. I have been provided with a copy of this letter.

Name: Date:

Signature:

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Ethics Administrator, F307
Nipissing University
North Bay, ON P1B 8L7

Appendix 2: Student Letter of Consent

Participant Information Letter and Consent Form for Junior/Intermediate School-Aged Children (Grade 4 to Grade 8)

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: *Storytelling and Ethnography: Exploring Critical Literacy in the Classroom* conducted by Sarah Driessens, PhD Candidate in the Schulich School of Education, Nipissing University. Questions or concerns can be directed to [redacted] (Dr. Michelann Parr, Faculty Supervisor, Nipissing University).

What is the project about?
We will explore empowering and engaging ways to enhance critical literacy in the classroom.

What's in it for me?
You will benefit by developing unique strengths and talents in an effort to promote inclusion and diversity at your school.

What do you want me to do?
I will ask you to talk to me. I will listen to your stories, actively participate in the classroom, take the occasional photograph (e.g., stories, drawings), become a member of Google classroom, audio-record our conversations, and/or make notes about what I see and hear, and how this makes me feel. ***What if I don't want to participate?*** You may refuse to participate, decline to answer a particular question, refuse to participate in discussions that make you feel uncomfortable, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Will people know who I am? Is what I say private?
Because you will be part of a collaborative team, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. I will treat what you say and write as private. I will assure your privacy and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms that disguise your identity.

What happens to all the information after the project is finished?
I will keep all information, pictures, or audio recordings in a locked cabinet or password-protected computer

What if I still have questions?
I am going to read through this letter with you in class. You will be able to ask questions at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you understand this letter and that you have had the opportunity to have all of your questions answered by myself.

Statement of Informed Consent to Participate in Research: Junior/Intermediate Students

As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw at any time, and that steps are being taken to protect me. I have read the *Participant Information Letter and Consent Form* and have had any questions or concerns satisfactorily answered. I have been provided with a copy of this letter.

Name: Date:

Signature:

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Ethics Administrator, F307
Nipissing University
North Bay, ON P1B 8L7

Appendix 3: Classroom Teacher Letter of Consent

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Participant Information Letter and Consent Form for Classroom Teacher Participants

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: *Storytelling and Ethnography: Exploring Critical Literacy in the Classroom* conducted by Sarah Driessens, PhD Candidate in the Schulich School of Education, Nipissing University. Questions or concerns can be directed to [redacted] (Dr. Michelann Parr, Faculty Supervisor, Nipissing University). ***What is the project about?***
This project is intended to explore and advance our knowledge of critical literacy within the classroom and to explore strategies that empower and engage your students. Specific objectives include:

- To provide evidence-based strategies that can be used to support literacy and critical literacy education, student and teacher engagement;
- To explore the way in which engagement is viewed by teachers and students;
- To share students' and teachers' experiences and stories as they relate to critical literacy in particular and classroom life in general.

Why am I asking you?
As teachers, you spend a great deal of time with students. You are aware of students' strengths and areas for improvement. Your observations, knowledge, and expertise are paramount in helping me understand your students. You will have the opportunity to support and discuss the goals of this project with your students as we collaborate and construct meaning together.

Why should I participate? What are the benefits?
You will have an opportunity to provide your thoughts and views about literacy, critical literacy, and student engagement.

What am I being asked to do?
I am asking to join your classroom as a helpful observer during the morning or afternoon, approximately 1-3 times per week, though this is flexible depending on your needs. If you consent to participate, classroom observation via helpful observer and informal conversations will be used to develop a collaborative and in-depth portrait of classroom life. During this time, I will observe and actively participate in the classroom at your request, taking notes and photographs when appropriate to capture the natural events of the classroom (e.g., stories, drawings). Data will be gathered through field notes, journalling, and informal conversations with you and your students as they naturally emerge. In addition, I would ask that both you and your students keep research journals in an effort to capture both formal and informal conversations, ideas, thoughts, etc., during our time together, though this is not mandatory. If you consent to journalling, any time spent on this task will be negotiated with you, and ideally embedded in your day-to-day educational instruction. You may also be invited to participate in two formal interviews (at the beginning and ending of the project) that may take up to 60 minutes.

During the interview, I may ask you to reflect on questions similar to the following: What does critical literacy mean to you? What does engagement mean to you? Do you think critical literacy is important? What role do you see critical literacy playing? Interviews will, with your permission, be audiotaped, transcribed, and shared with you for additional comments or clarifications.

Will I have access to the findings?
The school and board will be provided with a summary of the project as well as access to any publications arising from the study (i.e., summaries, research papers, journal articles, or presentations).

What if some of my students do not consent?
If there are students who refuse to participate and/or parental consent is not obtained, no direct questioning for the purposes of the inquiry will occur with those particular students. While general observations may be used to contextualize the classroom environment, no direct information will be obtained from a student for whom there is no parental consent or student assent.

What about confidentiality and anonymity?
Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Only raw data will contain your name; this will be held in locked storage accessible only to myself or my supervisor. I will assure your privacy and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms that disguise participant identity.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate, decline to answer a particular question, refuse to participate in discussions you find objectionable or make you feel uncomfortable, or withdraw from the study altogether at any point in time. Your participation has no effect or impact on your employment status and participating is not tied to school or board obligation.

Statement of Informed Consent to Participate in Research

As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw at any time, and that steps are being taken to protect me. I have read the *Participant Information Letter and Consent Form* and have had any questions or concerns satisfactorily answered. I have been provided with a copy of this letter.

Name: Date:

Signature

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Ethics Administrator, F307
Nipissing University
North Bay, ON P1B 8L7

Appendix 4: Conversation Starters During Focus Groups

Conversation Starters

1. Do you like to read/write?
2. Is reading fun/enjoyable?
3. Why do you read (e.g., to escape, for fun, learn new things, etc.)?
4. What do you like to read?
5. What do you like to write about?
6. Do you think reading and writing are important? Why or why not?
7. What does it mean to have power? Be powerful?
8. What does engagement mean to you?
9. If I said that texts are constructions, what do I mean? Do you agree or disagree with me?
10. When you read, do you think about what the author wants you to know or think about?
11. When you read, do you think about how the story could be told differently? For example, how could you tell the story of Cinderella/The Three Little Pigs/Sleeping Beauty differently?
12. When you read, do you think about the voices that are missing? In Hatchet/The River, did you want to hear someone else's voice?
13. What do you like to do in class when you are allowed to do anything you want? Why? (i.e., Genius Hour).
14. How does reading change the way you think? For example, when we read the True Story of the 3 Little Pigs, how did that change your understanding of the original story? Do you like reading books that make you think differently?
15. Do you think texts (i.e., books, magazines, movies, etc.) are neutral and balanced? How do texts serve different interests?
16. What do you learn about yourself when you read and write?
17. How do your attitudes, opinions, or actions change when you learn about something new?
18. How can texts (oral, print, and multimedia texts) help you imagine a brighter future?
19. How can texts (oral, print, and multimedia texts) help you think about a utopian society (ideal society) that you would like to reach or a dystopian society (where everything is bad) you'd like to avoid?
20. Why is it important to learn about people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Maya Angelou?
21. Do you think texts (oral, print, and multimedia texts) featuring minority and diverse characters are important? How might these texts help students from diverse backgrounds especially minority students (e.g., non-white, non-gender conforming or LGBTQ students)?
22. What would you do to change an attitude or opinion of someone you find unjust or unfair?
23. Have your views about reading changed? Please describe.
24. Describe your experiences with this inquiry. What did you like/dislike?
25. What does it mean to read from diverse and multiple perspectives?
26. How do you think you can make a difference in your classroom? School community? Local community? The world?
27. How might you use literacy or text to help people who you think are treated unfairly?
28. How can literacy/text make a difference in the world?
29. Why do you think it is important to be critical of texts including books, movies, advertisements, magazines, etc.?

30. How do literacy activities like reading a storybook (e.g., values assignment), writing a poem (forgiveness or bullying poem), or writing about a Maya Angelou quote help you learn about real-life issues like forgiveness, diversity, inclusion, bullying, racism, tolerance, etc.? Is this something we should be doing more of in school?
31. What does the word bias mean? What biases do you bring as a reader?
32. Do you like to connect your learning with worldly connections?
33. What would Seven Blind Mice look like if it were only from one mouse's perspective? How would this change the story?
34. "Knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole." What do you think this means?
35. Can stories reinforce or maintain our biases or stereotypes? How can they also push us beyond them?