

**Literacy on lockdown:
An ethnographic experience in English assessment**

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Thesis presented to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies,
University of Ottawa

For completion of the degree of
Master of Arts (Education)

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Submitted on: October 5, 2011

Acknowledgments

I cannot thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. David Slomp, enough for his unconditional support for my work, in this and in other fields. I arrived with many ideas but would not have been able to focus them without Dr. Slomp's guidance and particularly his passion for good literacy teaching, which has been fundamental to my evolving identity as an academic and as an educator. He lit the way forward.

My members of committee, Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Dr. Awad Ibrahim, have also provided fundamental guidance and support. I want to especially thank them both for involving me in their work with local high schools, which has inspired many parts of this thesis and will continue to drive me as I pursue further studies and work. Attending their classes has been a huge privilege and I am continually inspired by their commitment not only to education but to humanity.

In any project, one can only hope to be in the presence of a team of people who are innovative, energetic, supportive, and who embrace difference. I feel blessed that my previous and current experience took place in this type of team. Thank you especially to the EIP family: Zaw Zaw Aung, Paw Mu Sha, Cho Cho Aung, Matthew McAteer, and finally Patrick Kearns and Saw Thwee, two human teachers who are so brilliant and inspiring, I must return to the Thai-Burma border to work with them again.

Thanks for the steadfast support from my amazing housemates at the Imperial Palace of Somerset and Kent: Mike Wilkie-Johnson, Karrie Zych and Duncan Read. Home is where the heart is and I am leaving a huge piece of my heart behind.

Finally this work would not have been possible without my family and the most important people in my world: Craig, Rekha and Sean Toomey.

Abstract

This research explores literacy as a medium for deepening student's awareness of their world and the impact of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Standardized testing is analyzed as a fundamental paradigm to our school culture. Ethnography is explored as a method for describing one group of students and their teacher as they prepare for the OSSLT.

The findings conclude that the test occupies time, dominates definitions of literacy and undermines student and teacher agency. The conclusion considers reasons for why we seem to accept a testing paradigm that may be a direct affront to democratic practice in schools.

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Prologue

My experience was in a refugee camp, a large percentage of which was populated by children. To get to the relative safety of the camp, children travel by any possible means: by themselves, with adults they may or may not know, with groups of other children. They travel to escape poverty and war and to go to school. This research is inspired by that place, a home of malnutrition and shoddy healthcare and limited education, extortion and exploitation and hope and song and sun. Having lived there for two years I find myself struggling now to reconcile the worlds I know: the refugee camp and the free world. I struggle with the idea that children there die from bad water and here, we actually spend money on plastic bottles of marketed drinking water though our taps run clean and fresh. This research is inspired by the incredible gap between these worlds. It questions whether we in Canada consider our privilege and freedom in our pedagogy, and whether or not we engage that privilege in our education system. Inspired by those who travel through unspeakable circumstances to seek out a better existence, I question whether education here facilitates our own students' travelling through experiences. This research was inspired by people like Khun Wei, who survived childhood and an advanced English class, and who despite having less than a 100 m radius to travel in today (lest he be caught out as an illegal immigrant and deported back to his war-torn homeland), has travelled widely in his thoughts and interpretations, and can at least look out of a window he may never be able to climb through.

Two Vignettes

The following vignettes represent pivotal moments that have shaped and influenced this research. Collectively they help to outline where and why this research began, and the point of view it takes. With the first vignette we begin in the

middle, in the Ontario classroom in which I was graciously allowed to do my research. For the second vignette I rewind four years back in time and travel 12 000 km to the Burmese refugee camp in which I learned most of what I know about learning, language and literacy.

A mirror and a mystery. Enter Mr. Apple's Grade 10 Applied English class, its walls papered with student-generated art, glossy posters focused on planetary surfaces and far-flung solar systems, Monet paintings, ethereal nature scenes and large pieces of Bristol board with headings that include: *I am Proud of my Work*; *Steps of the Writing Process*; *Why learn to think?*; *Test-taking Tips*. My personal favourite is a large black stick figure with a lock for a head and the words *Conformity Hazard* underneath it. The desks each sit squarely facing the long chalkboard at the front, six rows of six exactly, and there is a TV at the back of the class. This room is home to twenty-eight 15 and 16-year-olds, all from the same neighbourhood, uniform, more or less, in their khaki pants and white shirts and religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. They trickle in, looking slightly hot and bothered after a long week of test preparation. It's Friday, just after lunch, the day after the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), April Fool's Day. I'm perched at the back of the Mr. Apple's class, in my usual chair on the left. The board has: *Today-- Reading Test* scrawled diagonally across it. Mr. Apple stands at the front of the class, smiling his usual welcoming smile, waiting for the students to notice this April Fool's joke he's posted for them. I wonder briefly how many other Grade 10 English teachers are playing this very trick on their students across the province. Minutes later, the students are in their chairs, waiting with a discipline that exemplifies a class culture that is structured, stable and calm. Mr. Apple's eyes are glinting with mischief,

causing me to laugh quietly, as he gestures to the board and asks the students, “ok you ready for your reading test?”

Moans and groans fill the room, followed by vehement protests from some of the more outspoken students. Then they realize their teacher is chuckling and someone shouts, “Ooooooh, April Fool’s guys!” With that, class has begun. Mr. Apple asks the students how the test went yesterday and people mumble a series of synonyms for the word “horrible.” No one, including the teacher, seems to want to talk much about the OSSLT. After three months of intense preparation, it’s finally behind them.

Mr. Apple explains, “We are looking at reading skills,” and writes a series of words on the board: *predicting; questioning; inference (reading between the lines); summarizing; making connections; evaluating; visualizing*. The class goes through the definition of each in brief review. Then Mr. Apple announces that we are going to read a crime story, a mystery. Enthusiastic comments cross the room. Someone asks, “Can we do a debate? We haven't done one in awhile.” Mr. Apple explains that we will debate in another class and presents what he calls a “K-W-L chart” on the board as a strategy for understanding the story.

K- what do you know?

W- what do you want to know?

L- what have you learned?

He uses a long and complex method for splitting the students into groups. It involves all the students standing up and forming two long lines. For about a minute and a half, everyone gets up and moves, which feels refreshing. The students then rearrange desks and sit in groups. Half of the story is distributed, printed in giant font on a single piece of paper. Mr. Apple says: “use the wealth of knowledge available to

you. You have all read mysteries before; use the techniques you've used in the past and the K-W-L model to solve this mystery.”

The students are relaxed, happy to be sitting in groups. Some are reading the story; others are making a good impression of doing so while they talk to one another, doodle in notebooks, surreptitiously text message, play app games on Blackberries and iPhones. Mr. Apple writes on the board: *Identify the reading strategy you used to solve this crime. Explain how this and one other strategy assisted you in this task.* The students are to work together in their groups.

I read the story, in which a 13-year old girl is snatched up from the side of the road, transported far away, tied up and left alone in a shed. Before her phone battery dies, she manages to call someone on a cell phone and tell them about a sign she sees on the side of the highway. The students are told to fact-find. No one in the class speaks about the terrible eeriness of this story and the fact that this is probably the worst nightmare anyone could have. No one reacts to the story. Its terror and brutality are summarily passed over. The students are told to use “specific reading strategies”... not to “just read.” They are to answer three comprehension questions and solve the mystery. The detectives working on the case figure out where the girl is by determining she used a mirror in her makeup case to see outside. The students are supposed to find this clue before the end of the story, which is why we are instructed to only read half of it. But the students, slouched and distracted, or laughing and interacting with one another, are only half interested. Mr. Apple’s voice floats over the room as he reminds the students to “use the strategies...” but I realize that today, of all days, the day after the literacy test, he is weary.

Forty minutes go by and we discuss the happenings of the story, but no one can determine how the detectives solved the case, or if someone did “solve” this

mystery, they are not coming forward with their guesses. Mr. Apple seems tired of calling for someone to answer so I smile at him, pull my own compact mirror out of my purse and walk up to the front of the class to show how the highway letters on the sign she saw would have been reversed. All the while I feel the cumbersome weight of my presence, my role as researcher disrupting this class environment at the very same time as I've tried to flow seamlessly into it. Mr. Apple thanks me and remarks that everyone feels tired today, and I respond emphatically that I understand. Moments later, he asks the students to hand in their written work, a few sentences answering comprehension questions. No one has done it, and it's almost the end of class. The students are told that they must finish these questions before they are allowed to go, and they must rearrange their desks too. Voiced lamentations match the heaving sighs of desks being moved, and then pencils scurry fiercely along the surfaces of blank loose-leaf. The bell rings; the pencils move faster. Brows furrow and teeth grip bottom lips. Then one by one the students smash down the led tips of their pencils for a final punctuation, grab their bags, run to the front of the class to pass their teacher their work, and leave the room.

Efferent versus aesthetic. In her work around literacy and learning, Rosenblatt (1970) makes a distinction between efferent reading: finding facts, and aesthetic reading: the lived experience of the text. In the latter, the reader begins simply by reading: by experiencing first, and looking at the literary forms later, so that “the young reader’s personal involvement in a work will generate greater sensitivity to its imagery, style and structure; this in turn will enhance his understanding of its human implications” (p. 53). Watching this class proceed, I couldn’t help but wonder whether an emphasis on frameworks first- on strategies and terminologies to structure the student’s reading- hindered rather than helped the student’s experience of the text.

Perhaps this was why the students did not solve the mystery and appeared more or less disengaged from the events in the literature- until at the very end when they were made to scrawl out some answers in order to be allowed to leave the class. Though the story itself might have been engaging, and the notion of reading a mystery was originally met with enthusiasm, an overemphasis on frameworks and reading strategies undermined the simple pleasure of reading itself. The students did not direct their own reading and learning and missed the point of the story- or worse, they simply didn't care about the point of the story. The ambience of the class went from enthused and exuberant to forced and flustered. My experience of this Canadian class strayed dramatically from my experiences teaching abroad.

Khun Wei's monologue. For two years I lived and worked in Umpiem Mai refugee camp, which is a stone's throw from the border of Burma, inside Thailand. It is located an hour and a half's drive from any town and is high, high up in the mountains, with a population of nearly 20 000 refugees from neighbouring war-torn Burma. I taught at a school for young adults aged 18-30, and everything I know about teaching I learned there. I invite you now to go back in time with me to find the place again... to the grimy, soaked, slip n' slide terracotta mud paths embroidered with buttons of halved bamboo branches and pebbles and plastic bags and bones from recently-slaughtered animals and other detritus of human activity. My flip flops make suction-cup sounds as they step over those paths, which zipper through thousands of chaotically-clustered homes on stilts, little reed and bamboo dwelling-places not four meters squared with their leaf-thatched roofs, their posters, paper and plastic sheets stapled on the walls and their little burning coal stoves emitting pneumonia-promoting black plumes of smoke. Grandmothers not 45 years old lean languidly on their porches and smile as they watch me struggle up the hill under the turquoise sky with

its burning orange sun. Tiny toddlers wearing filthy t-shirts and nothing else play with sticks in the mud among the clucking chickens. Goats bleat, cows moo, motors from generators whir, people whine. I shuck off my muddy shoes before walking, hunched, through the narrow halls of the dormitory for women. The smooth thin planks of wood bend beneath the weight of my steps, cooling my bare feet. I sit on my bed, a colourful reed mat bordered by a few rolled-up blankets. I am home.

Our school is called the English Immersion Program (EIP). It is a yearlong program comprised of accelerated English language training, heavy-duty humanities courses and practical job skills trainings which allow students to easily stream into the workplace after a year. Above all else, the school promotes leadership, empowerment, and a safe environment in which people coming from very difficult walks of life can nurture academic, interpersonal and job skills. Participation at the school is a very intense learning experience for all. With five staff- two from overseas and three from Burma- for sixteen students- all under 30, all living together in dormitories- we adapt our teaching styles and curriculum to the needs of each student, working closely together to ensure crossover between courses. We co-teach and observe each other's classes. We hold weekly meetings to discuss everything from curricular changes to the dinner menu. We live on refugee rations. We work ourselves and our students hard: six hours of class time a day, four hours of homework. Rigour is a word often spoken. We enforce total English immersion five days a week, except in classes where other languages are necessary, in order to help students reach a level of excellence in their English. This is, after all, a language program, and our English learning courses are broken down into four parts: Reading, Writing, Speaking/ Listening and Grammar. Mastery over language is held in high esteem.

Khun Wei, 18 years old, five feet and two inches of steely muscle, dark brown skin and thick black hair, is of Pa-O origin and had been living on the border for only a year when he heard about EIP and applied for the program. Like most of our students he fled a hill tribe village deep inside Burma, leaving his family behind. Upon application to the program his English was extremely weak but he met our other criteria: he's from a minority group which has to be represented at the school under its mandate; he possesses excellent references, previous working experience and an amicable personality. Still, he had only a Grade Eight level of education, compared with others in the class who had been to University, or had been teachers already. Khun Wei can barely read and write, let alone speak English. He has a lisp. He barely uttered a word during the first few weeks of the school year, and people began remarking that not only could he not speak English, but his Burmese was also terrible. He admitted that because there were a couple of Pa-O dialects, his Pa-O was also weak, or whatever one means by weak when one is speaking about language. Was his accent too thick? Did he lisp when he spoke? Was his grammar shoddy? Did he forget his words? Was his vocabulary too simple? I didn't know which errors he made, which straw-and-thatch assemblages of words offended the metaphorical concrete structure of "correct" language that overshadows us all. I chose to see him, the person within the language, a person with a unique language waiting to come out. As my "weakest" student he became my toughest challenge, the one who demanded more of me and my teaching practices. I became determined to find his voice.

I use the speaking/listening class as a venue for what I consider, in the Freirian sense, to be "real" speaking: not the vocabulary or the perfect pronunciation, nor even the sentence structure and correct verb tenses, but the names of things according to their owners, expressions of life through individual's interpretations: their ability to

communicate. To get there, I've decided to use the "art" in "articulation." We've drawn scenes on posters, painted music, sculpted synonyms out of pipe cleaners. Mostly though, we're going to improvise and act. I feel this improves the use of a foreign language because it promotes thinking on one's feet, trying new words, and laughter. Today, one month into the school year, we're going to do monologues. I want to hear everyone's- especially Khun Wei's- voice.

I assign the monologues to the students, explaining: "they can be about anything at all, there is no wrong way to go about it, but they have to be a story with a beginning, middle and end. Please introduce yourself with your monologue's title and begin." Everyone looks on with bated breath as Khun Wei slowly swaggers to the front of the class. Wily and shaking, he slicks back his hair, stretches his arms wide and smiles at all of us, and bellows: "GOOSE AFTHANOON!!!"

There's a pause so quiet you can hear a pin drop. For a moment everyone seems unsure of what to do. My heart feels like it's springing out of my chest. And then, the roar: laughter blasting through the row of seated students, becoming more voluminous with every moment that passes as Khun Wei stares us all down intently. "Thank you" he says, completely deadpan, in a helium-high pitch, inducing more side-bursting titters from his audience. "Now, be quieth, my show wi sthart." Now the little outbursts of laughter turn nasal as we try to hold it in. "My show is tithled, 'In my village.'" ("What?" I hear students around me say—"In my village" others chime in.)

Khun Wei acts as himself at seven years old in his village. He walks around hungry and every adult he meets tells him to do this or that chore. He is very bored and very hungry and the more chores he does the more bored and hungry he becomes. The meanest adult in the town is the village chief, who yells at him and makes him do

laborious tasks around his house and garden. Finally the village chief leaves his home on some errand, and little boy Khun Wei sneaks in and steals money. Excited, he grabs a friend and goes to the local fair where they buy candy and play games. All of this is acted out without a single prop on a cement floor in the middle of our classroom. He speaks in broken English with an endearing but crippling lisp. Yet, Khun Wei's body language- his wiry limbs, his expressive fingers handling invisible objects, his facial expressions, all translate the tale with utter perfection. We are mesmerized by this legend from his past life that builds tension and character so real to him he succeeds in making it real to us.

Little boy Khun Wei returns home from a great night at the fair, his belly full, his pockets full of prizes. He enters his dark home and his father is there, waiting by candlelight. At this point in the skit Khun Wei begins to act as two characters: his father, tall and hunched with age, and his seven-year-old self, squat, agile and playful. Shifting flawlessly between postures, Khun Wei re-enacts the conversation: his father asks him ominously where he has been. Little Khun Wei responds: out with friends. His father asks: where. Little Khun Wei answers: in the forest. His father says he is not dirty enough to have been in the forest. Also, the village chief was robbed today and looking for the culprit. Little Khun Wei answers meekly: what a pity.

At this point the peals of laughter have dissipated, and we are in suspense. Every terrifying moment of childhood I ever had when getting caught doing something I knew was wrong comes bubbling up. I don't feel afraid like I was then- just reminded, engaged in the old feeling. I do, however, feel afraid for the Little Khun Wei, who is looking increasingly guilty and who suddenly spills some candy out of his full pockets, and the scene comes to its climax. Gasping, we watch as Khun Wei's father towers over him, furious, and begins to batter him with two fists. Then,

just as quickly, Khun Wei reverts to Little Khun Wei, cowering on the floor as he receives the beating. Khun Wei enacts this scene, which has one actor on both sides of a royal pummelling, with a perfection and nuance that can only be achieved by someone who has experienced something of this nature time and again. Yet watching this scene, and its young victim being exaggeratedly and creatively tortured via choking and slaps, punches and ear twists and hair pulling, the audience suddenly finds itself once again overwhelmed with teary, abdomen-toning hysteria: this scene is funny, not dark; it is entertaining, not depressing. Khun Wei takes an unpleasant life experience and names it: he expresses it and in doing so turns it into something he can objectify, control, ridicule and ultimately conquer.

Khun Wei's ability to translate his experience for us, despite his lisp and his fractured English, was an act of communication. His wild gestures, sound effects and ability to bring us into the mood with him through timing and suspense represented, for me, an authentic act of writing. Later the students would write out the synopses of their monologues on their own, then work in small groups to edit for grammar, sentence and paragraph structure. But they got there, first, by performing, by communicating and writing through their actions. This was a way of using multiple mediums to facilitate a deeper understanding, and it worked because the texts were student-generated and thus represented things the students really cared about and truly wanted to communicate with others. Not to be underestimated was the fact that it was an enjoyable experience, full of laughter, fun and joy.

Chapter 1. Introduction: What's in a Name?

I realized, upon returning to Canada, that in a way everyone at EIP was extremely lucky to be working in an environment where no one had control over our pedagogy but us. Though the students I worked with came from what here would be interpreted as extreme poverty, there was richness to our system. We were in a refugee camp, which the community nicknamed “the beautiful cage.” Its green hillsides and grazing animals and frolicking children were fenced in with barbed-wire that betrayed the violent limitation of the place, the immobility of fathers who wished to get out and find work, and the fact that everyone was here because they had no freedom in their own country. Our educational institution was, like its students, stateless, not recognized by any higher governing body, officially ineffectual. Yet this powerlessness was what actually pushed us to work to empower our students. We lived on two paltry meals of rice and curry a day, meat or fish once a week, limited drinking water. Many of our students owned only one pair of shoes, one wool sweater to keep warm in. But those students were safe and away from where they'd come from and had boundless energy and curiosity for learning. Ironically, as literacy teachers working in this environment, we had far more flexibility than any teacher in a Canadian setting where the food and the clothes and the resources are bountiful. We set the standards for our teaching and learning: we shaped our curriculum. Khun Wei may have had a penniless, hungry childhood peppered by beatings from various authority figures; but creatively re-enacting this with humour was his interpretation, his naming. Watching him take control over that situation- his situation- was an emancipatory experience for everyone involved: performer and audience, teacher and student. Moreover, it allowed the student to become the teacher: I was fortunate

enough to learn along with him, unpredictably yet profoundly, in the moment. He became the class clown that day and was very popular among his classmates for the rest of the year. While his English level was comparably lower than that of his classmates, he honed his fluency for expressiveness and contact with other people. He built confidence and helped us all realize that language is not limited to the word. He currently holds a job in media relations, as a multilingual interpreter at a clinic for Burmese migrants on the Thailand-Burma border.

For Freire (2009), lived experiences such as Khun Wei's provide opportunities to name the world and to move toward "a deepening attitude of awareness" (p. 109). Literacy means reading one's world and simultaneously recognizing that one is a part of it. A critical reading- a naming of one's own circumstances- permits the reader to reshape, re-interpret, and ultimately resist. No longer at the whims of the authorities who beat him, Khun Wei's dramatic story- his text- allowed him to relive and question some of the outstanding themes of his childhood. Revisiting or discussing actual life experiences and real events promotes authentic, participatory reflection. Students and teachers, in discussing what is real and how things may have gotten to be the way they are, work as "actors in intercommunication" (p. 131) who speak frankly and truly about the world to inevitably interrogate and problematize power and class relations. For Freire, reading the world means questioning the socio-political conditions in which texts are written, and by doing this in a classroom setting, both teacher and student are supported to become free-thinking agents within a dominant culture. In realizing themselves as active agents within that culture, it becomes an authentic problem for them, and they can become powerful, essential creators of their destinies: problem solvers.

Literacy, in this context, could “enable a human being to become increasingly mindful with regard to his or her lived situation- and its untapped possibilities. The languages and symbol systems we make... ought to provide possibilities for thematizing very diverse human experiences” (Greene, 1995, p. 182). In a Freirian sense, reading and writing come together in the act of naming, and I would posit that this naming is the entry point to critical literacy. When one reads a situation with a vested interest, the result is to rethink, name or write it. So literacy- reading and writing in all their forms- is a tool which works toward people's repression or expression, because it facilitates our capacity to name and discover the world (Freire, 2009, p. 88). To take apart and question one's context is to problematize language, thoughts and actions. The potential of writing is enormous: it opens the way for new worlds. Writing critically can be a social action that offers paths into divergent thinking and meaning-making for oneself and for one's perceived environment, developing one's agency and forcing the writer to think about the way she/he lives (Shor, 1999, p. 13). Writing critically sees “all acts of writing... as socially situated human activities” (Beaufort, 2007, p. 9). It includes the use of student-generated texts and recognizes the value and enormity of the experiences students have which affect their meaning-making (Beck, 2005). Of course, to authentically acknowledge, read and write these experiences requires a complication of language and of thinking: the world becomes multifaceted, reticent, chaotic. Yet only when we allow for a measure of chaos- for few rules and regulations in guidelines for a monologue, for trust that our students will produce quality- can literacy be “a medium and a constitutive force for human agency and political action... [providing] students... the tools they need to reclaim their own lives, histories, and voices” (Giroux, 2001, p. 227). It was with this philosophy in mind that I began teaching at EIP.

When I made the decision to move to Umpiem Mai I was all too aware of myself as a comparatively rich Canadian, traipsing into a refugee camp with a smile on my rosy, well-fed face and one of the world's most valued passports to back me up. I was not a little disgusted by the tangibly colonial feel of it: a 20-something travelling abroad to enjoy a land where fruit falls off the trees and the monsoon moisturizes one's skin, to teach the great global language everyone goes abroad to teach. The fact that I had a University diploma in the Liberal Arts; the airy gratuitousness of such a degree; the blatant bourgeoisie of philosophy; the study of Western civilization and the Abrahamic faiths with all their biased obfuscations, the taken-for-granted nature of their geopolitical and socio-historical creeds: I hated every bit of it. I felt it necessary to present what I perceived to be a conundrum to the students, which I did on the first day of class (rather to their dismay). I reviewed the definition of the word irony. "Isn't it ironic," I asked them, "that you have fled ethnic cleansing but now in order for you to find safety and gain income, to ultimately preserve your ethnicity, you want to learn English, a whole other language, and to preserve your culture, you have to meet people from other cultures?" It was an intense question for the first day of class, but we had no time to waste. I had to ask it because I wanted to know my student's thoughts: I felt that to do any less than explore reality with them would have been a disservice. They had escaped violently repressive worlds. They had no citizenship, no rights. What they did have was the power to express their thoughts. In the absence of material comfort, under the shadow of a dictatorship that has stagnated Burma's economy and commits gross violations of human rights, we teachers could offer no more and no less than a safe and light-hearted environment, punctuated by the reprieve of laughter, and the encouragement

to speak in any necessary medium, to express their thoughts freely and in doing so read the world and step onto the path of solving its problems.

Ironically, as a teacher in a refugee camp, despite all the material and environmental deficits, I somehow had more flexibility than some teachers in a resource-rich Canadian classroom. Despite having the right to free speech in this country, despite our unbounded access to information and ostensibly the freedom to adapt one's pedagogy to the curriculum, teachers are not often encouraged to ask their students: "why are we all here? Who has influenced our being together in this situation? Why should you learn what you are learning?" Somehow, it is taken for granted that students learn what they do. The *why* and *how* are infrequently discussed. For me, the comfort of Canadian culture makes our educational system a little too comfortable in its status quo: the problems our society has may not be as obtrusive, as easily perceived, as those of students in a refugee camp, but they are there regardless. There is always space for problem solving, and though our students have not been pushed to be as resourceful as youth fleeing war and terror, they can be problem solvers too, if we help light the way.

Mr. Apple is an exceptional teacher whose students sincerely like him. He is a teacher passionate about learning with a deep desire to light the way. He is a skilled, experienced and curious educator who reads voraciously in the field and wants to try new strategies. But he does not always have the freedom to do that. I believe that while my English class took place in the shadow of war and chaos, Mr. Apple's peaceful classroom was overshadowed by another reality, the opposite of chaos but just as insidious: the reality of state-imposed control. Like all Grade 10 teachers in Ontario, Mr. Apple must help students pass a high-stakes standardized exam- the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Though in many classrooms this

test is viewed as benign, in Applied English classes such as Mr. Apple's, where the students struggle with literacy, it can have a huge impact on teaching and learning practices. Standardized assessments arguably impose a fractured vision of learning by prioritizing results over pedagogy and subsuming the simple joys of reading and writing into outcomes and expectations (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001; Pearson, 2003). They stress frameworks over fluidity, structure over spontaneity, and most significantly, may cause teachers to "look over their shoulder rather than look their students squarely in the eye" (Pearson, 2003, p. 15). Standardized assessments are meant to control "quality" in the classroom, but, as this study will explore, they may inadvertently control everything, and in the process, they potentially undermine the very quality they seek.

Seeing education through the hopeful eyes of those who do not take it for granted has caused me to fret over a vision of education as anything other than a space of glorious wonder, exploration, problem-solving and critical thinking. The ironic juxtaposition of my two realities has caused me to worry about literacy instruction in Canada, and what could happen when literacy works toward the simplification, or conclusiveness, of language. What is literacy when not embedded in the needs and experiences of our students? What is left to entrust in our students when our reading and writing instruction provides every text, every interpretation or expected response, every framework? What happens when trust is removed from pedagogy? What mysteries are we presenting to our students, what relevance do they have for reality and its struggles, and what skills are we providing to help them solve problems? Does our English curriculum here in Ontario support critical pedagogy, student-generated text, and a connection of the world to its people? My experience at EIP inspired me to explore the current conditions in the Ontario school system which

either support or repress possibilities for questioning. Many historical influences have led to the current acceptance of standardized assessments, and dialogue around this field has often been conflicted. This research project aims to share the personal voices of teachers and students in an effort to shed light on their educational views and their perspectives on what literacy can and should be in relation to the larger institutional contexts of the OSSLT. Its focus has led me to ask three questions.

Research Questions

This study explores the impact of the OSSLT on both teacher and students in one Grade 10 Applied English class. I set out to address the following questions:

- How does preparation for the OSSLT shape the classroom-based literacy experiences of students and teachers in a particular class?
- Does the test promote or hinder a multi and multiple literacies approach to literacy education?
- What effect does the test have on classroom culture in terms of teacher's pedagogical choices and student's literacy development?

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

...what, after all, is demanded of people in an age of random terror, massacres, rapes of the innocent? We are beginning to discover that superior technical competencies, like basic skills themselves, are insufficient in the face of holocausts, famines, budget deficits in the trillions, unimaginable wealth controlled by corporate interests... what kinds of intelligences are required to remedy homelessness and addiction? What do we have to know, what do schools have to teach to overcome divisiveness and group hostility? (Greene, 1995, p. 172)

Having been exposed to an environment where ethnic-cleansing and a stagnant economy force people to migrate, and having come back here to this cool gigantic land, with its free health care and education and sometimes immodest consumerism, I do ask myself daily where the future lies for all of us. What is our Canadian responsibility, as we sit comfortably in our living rooms watching the world happen? As educators in Canada, what are our responsibilities to our students and ourselves? What are our responsibilities to the children and youth living either very far away, or closer than we imagine, who at this moment face unspeakable injustices? The aim of this thesis is to provide insight into the power structures that might prevent or promote a critical questioning of the status quo by students, teachers and school administrators. This research recognizes the enormous role education can have in transforming visions and generating new ideas (Giroux, 1987) and the incredible potential of children and adolescents to think up new things and in the process change our world.

Critical Literacy

High school provides an important opportunity for the critical integration of awareness and skills that students need to understand historical prejudices and conflicts in society; adolescence is an ideal age for people to deepen their knowledge on these issues, which effect how they will self-define in the long run in terms of their own roles and membership in society (Smith & Fairman, 2005, p. 41). Many agree that "young people are growing up at a time when the environment, health, economy, nuclear weapons, and international conflicts are increasingly intertwined at a global level" (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005, p. 107). In order to help young people see themselves as a part of this world, to have global consciousness, they must have opportunities to engage in decision making and to see adults doing the same. They must have time and space to confront injustice and nurture the skills required to deal with conflict; they need occasions "to take meaningful action in the world" (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005, p. 107). I believe that the literacy classroom is a highly appropriate place to make space for this meaningful action: reading and writing, as a natural human function, can open unique spaces for exploring reality. This research keeps in mind the power of critical literacy instruction to facilitate imaginative thinking; the dreaming up of new ideas.

Transacting with texts and ideas, young people can feel empowered in generating their own unique thoughts, texts and interpretation. However, there are many forces at play in our culture of literacy learning. I am curious about forces that hinder or influence creative reading and writing? Children possess the unique combination of a paucity of life experience matched with unbounded intellectual and creative capabilities. Yet, "many young people growing up today, from the poorest to the most affluent, are imprisoned by our culture's obsession with material things"

(Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005, p. 110). People find meaning through consumption in our society, and consumerism imbues itself in all facets of life including schooling: scholastic products nowadays often have synergistic relationships with advertising companies (Hade, 2001). The quest for meaning in this life has become largely tied in with what we materially own, and we are encouraged to find ways to own more. More often than not, schools succumb to the pressure to reflect the market paradigm that supports consumption and disparate corporate practices (Taylor, 2001, p. 185). This can lead to a naive acceptance of a status quo that may be neither sustainable nor humane, and undermines both student and teacher agency by compelling students and their teacher to comply with agendas that exclude their opinions and undercuts their decision-making capacities.

Literacy, in particular, “is taught and learned under the banner of economic productivity and competition” (Brandt, 2003, p. 246). Under the neoliberal economic paradigm, our society views students as consumers of a marketable commodity-education (Apple, 2001), and literacy is one component of that commodity that is particularly necessary for students to consume or acquire. The perspective of education as a commodity whose acquisition leads to more commodities is generally accepted: “people want to believe in the knowledge economy” (Taylor, 2001, p. 177). Viewed as a commodity useful for their future entrance into the job market, literacy becomes a set of skills, a checklist of required standards. This vision of literacy-as-acquirable will always be in opposition to critical literacy, which is literacy created. Thus, this research considers the distinction between literacies that are consumed by students and those that are created by them. In the consumed context, students comply with rules and regulations for reading and writing as they are promoted through the school curriculum, and take for granted the idea that our literacy practices

are simply a means to an end of grade achievement, job acquisition, and joining in with economic norms: "the child does not invent the world, he uses it" (Bruner, 1986, p. 124). Critical literacy asks "what can be done to arouse the young from consumerism and passivity... to surpass what is and to reach toward a better order of things" (Greene, 1995, p. 174). Using children's knowledge and creative thinking as if it were something to be valued rather than shaped, we might create communities committed to each other, and to making the world better for everyone, rather than the individualistic, profit-mongering mindset that currently distracts us from the goings-on of the real world in favour of individual quick pleasure fixes. Recognizing that "our use of language has a constitutive role in creating social reality and concepts of our *selves*... [and that] much of education has lost this sense of wonder and exploration by merely transmitting culture and knowledge" (Nahachewsky & Slomp, 2001, p. 2), critical literacy aims to empower learners for innovation.

In order to innovate, critical literacy must encompass many forms. First, it should include texts which work to "enable students to enter into the needed languages responsibly and reflectively so they can name themselves and name their worlds. Such naming, of course, can never be complete" (Greene, 1995, p. 183). It is this incomplete nature of critical literacy that opens it to multiple mediums. As Rosenblatt explains, meaning resides not in the text but is a result of the reader's transaction with the text in a specific context, time and place. The reader gives birth to a text's meaning through his or her interaction with it (Rosenblatt, 1969). The crux here is that in order to be critical, literacy must be open.

Multiliteracies, Multiple Literacies and New Literacies

Today academics and teachers speak of a variety of frameworks for "new," "multiple" and "multi" literacies. I would argue that the common essence of these

theories is "the [inescapable] fact that we are living through a moment in which literary practices are being fundamentally altered" (Williams, 2008, p. 682). Our vision of literacy has necessarily shifted because of new ways to communicate, but "all literacies work around problems of audience, form and content that shape meaning" (Weeks, 2003, p. 38). Whether we define them as new literacies, multiliteracies or multiple literacies, they are encompassed in critical literacy as long as they encourage the naming of the world through multiple mediums and media.

Multiliteracies are defined by The New London Group as "the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity," (1996, p. 63). Literacy, it can be argued, is fundamentally cultural, and therefore

creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes [so that] literacy educators and students must see themselves as active participants in social change, as learners and students who can be active designers- makers- of social futures. (The New London Group, 1996, p. 64)

Literacy then becomes a juxtaposition of the old, the new, the "norm" and the different: it becomes a space for "cohesive sociality, a new civility in which differences are used as a productive resource and in which differences are the norm" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 69). Using culture and diversity as a touchstone for literacy learning, the students themselves become texts to read, and this promotes a reading of self, society and the world which encourages new notions of civic responsibility, identity, ownership and citizenship. These notions emerge naturally from the coordination of multimodal (integrational/multimedia) texts, visual, spatial,

gestural, audio and linguistic mediums, through which students are encouraged to analyze both the big picture of a situation as well as its meticulously complex, fractioned inner-workings (The New London Group, 1996). Popular culture, produced through as many mediums as are available, is at once the means and the message, and a study of reality means studying the media through which it is produced.

Multiple literacies “shape an image of self which is an effect of continuous investment, reading the world on various intersecting planes, (i.e. school-based literacies, and community-based literacies (local/global)” (Masny, 2006, p. 7). They view the reader/writer as engaged in a

constant becoming, indeterminate and not fixed. Multiple literacies... consider moving beyond, extending, transforming and creating different and differing perspectives of literacies... interested in the flow of experiences of life and events from which individuals are formed as literate. (Masny, 2006, p. 6)

A multiple literacy perspective would encourage students to embrace the novel and the unknown; they are plural; flexible; adaptable and rooted in the life experiences of the reader.

New literacies as suggested by Lankshear & Knobel (2007) are framed by social practices, meaningful content, encodification and discourse membership where participants value and “celebrate free support and advice, building the practice, collective benefit, cooperation before competition, everyone a winner rather than a zero-sum game, and transparent rules and procedures” (p. 228). Unlike the individualistic paradigm supported by the standard test model, in which students complete a test alone and alone rejoice in the result, new literacies embrace a different

way of looking at market models. “Production is based on ‘leverage’, ‘collective participation’, ‘collaboration’, and distributed expertise and intelligence, much more than on manufacture or finished commodities...” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 227). New literacies mix, innovate, and develop new methodologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 229). In doing so they are open to whatever it takes to make meaning out of text, but they value collaboration in that meaningful exploration, so that no text is separate from the world from which it emerged and from the community of circumstances that were required for its existence.

Critical Literacy and the OSSLT

No matter what the terminology, critical literacy for this research means multiplicity, diversity of pedagogy over one-dimensional hierarchies, a reaching beyond our local worlds and knowledges (Greene, 1995). It engages a civic reading pedagogy that is participatory, critical, situated, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, interdisciplinary and activist (Shannon, 2007, p. 225). Transformations take place through the experience of literature. The potential of literacy to empower and to enable learners to make real changes are imperative for an English curriculum that can move forward in time. To practice critical literacy “is to take a moral stand on the kind of just society and democratic education we want” (Shor, 2009, p. 18). It is above all things inclusive: it includes multiple mediums, technologies, texts. Its proponents strongly believe that "to equip a child in any less matter is misguided at best, negligent at worst" (Weeks, 2003, p. 40). Having seen the possibilities that critical reading and writing invites, I wholeheartedly agree.

The OSSLT’s definition of literacy has a heavy influence on student’s and teacher’s perspectives on literacy. A frank and thorough critique into how preparation for this test shapes pedagogy in today's Ontario English classroom is necessary for a

better understanding of whether or not we are opening windows for our student's critical thinking and learning. This research takes the position that "a return to a single standard of achievement and one-dimensional definition of the common will not only result in severe injustices... but will thin out our cultural life" (Greene, 1995, p. 173) and may cripple possibilities for authentically engaging students with the texts they read and write. Yet, our society seems to be blindly accepting a move toward exactly this monolithic, technical model of teaching and learning. An overview of the OSSLT and the factors that have influenced its inception will clarify why and how I chose to conduct this particular study.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide a brief historical context to help explain some of the factors which may have contributed to the ethos and inception of standardized testing in our culture, followed by the paradoxes which accompany this educational paradigm. I will then outline the definition and rationale of the OSSLT as explained by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the agency responsible for its design and administration. I will also describe validity theory, which is paramount to the design of this test. This section culminates in a preliminary summary of the literature surrounding standardized testing and the OSSLT, to be further developed in the findings section.

Brief Historical Background

I believe that four historical factors contribute to our current educational paradigm. First, the notion, from its inception in this country, that education exists primarily to train citizens and produce workers (Osborne, 2001, p. 31), has been a foundational component of Canadian education. This purpose required the establishment of a school board: a centralised, government-appointed body to help supervise research and mandate educational policies. Second, the school board's traditional penchant for bureaucratic order over deeper analysis into the status quo has underscored a historical detachment of schooling from the real world (Walsh, 2008). Third, the view of teaching and learning as a science which can be compartmentalized into identifiable categories that only experts can identify and measure (Milewski, 2010). Finally, the commoditization of the student-subject as an empty vessel to be filled with marketable skills and information links back to the original notion of

schooling's aim to generate workers and may have led to a current acceptance of increased standardization.

The citizenry and the school board. Having an administrative board to help measure, monitor and control standards in public education in North America dates back hundreds of years (Hillocks, 2002, p. 35). Walsh (2008) has written a concise analysis of Britain's establishment of education in Ontario. Canada's education system was inherited from the British and is one of the cultural legacies passed down from that country during the colonial era. In contrast with their own lengthy history of education, British colonialists saw, in the new world, an unprecedented opportunity for better control and organization over the educational system.

The new world gave colonialists an opportunity to establish bureaucracy in the face of complexity. In their view those occupying the new land had to be schooled out of their savage otherness (Walsh, 2008, p. 657). Concrete notions of citizenry had to be instilled to create order over perceived chaos, and school was the perfect venue for this endeavour. In contrast with Britain's more organic educational history, where central planning, command and control could not be possible, the Canadian system seemed to provide a clean slate, and the colonial subject within that system "had to be educated into a new understanding of their citizenship as a function of a cultural and political relationship which was defined by the imperial power" (p. 645). At the time, the population of Ontario shared a confluence of ideologies with the Irish, mostly based on a sense of solidarity in response to the "otherness" of French Canada, Protestant Upper Canada, and the republican separatists to the south (p. 649). An Irish Board was established to help govern education in Ontario. Hence, the notion of what it was to be a "citizen" in Ontario was endemic to decision making around schooling. The Irish Board held decision-making powers over the content of

textbooks and learning materials. Schools would be granted or denied money depending on the use of those textbooks, and use of materials not recommended by the board led to public reprimand (p. 648). A controlling body centered on conceptions of citizenry has been foundational to Ontario's schooling history.

Additionally, Walsh argues that the scholastic worldview historians have proliferated around the education system may provide some insight into how our current educational paradigm has been shaped. Egerton Ryerson, the superintendent of education for Canada West (now Ontario), visited Ireland in 1845 and returned home to write reports on the school system there, which were used to lay the foundation for the Common Schools system of Ontario. These reports contained no mention of the catastrophic famine which was ravishing Ireland at the time and must have had an impact on its education system. That one of the founding fathers of education in Ontario somehow overlooked the social context in which an educational system was being conducted points at best to bureaucratic narrow-mindedness, and at worst to the somnolence of an authority figure in society. However, one hundred and fifty years later, writing on Ryerson's visit, D. H. Akenson, one of the most prolific historians of the Irish and Canadian educational systems and the exchanges that took place between them, was lacking in his analysis of

the power of political ideologies and their accompanying political movements in shaping economic and social events. Thus, his account of the Irish school system leads him to present two crucial and related aspects of Irish nineteenth-century social history- the famine and the decline of the Irish language- as contingent, side issues. (Walsh, 2008, p. 651)

Akenson's failure "to notice the grim irony in this conjecture of human calamity and the bureaucracy of imperialism" points to a historical conception of schooling as disengaged from the world (Walsh, 2008, p. 652).

Education as science. The early 1900's saw a shift in the ethos of educational practice and pedagogy, with increased authority given to scientific manuals, and eugenics movements theorizing on beliefs in the hereditary nature of intelligence (McLaren, 1990; Milewski, 2010). Ontario's Department of Education published a series of manuals which aimed to guide teacher's pedagogy and define teaching practice as a science (Milewski, 2010, p. 341). Increased prestige was granted to university professors and psychologists, who were viewed as experts in pedagogy, children's competence and the science of education, and whose discourses around these matters adopted the presumption of truth (Milewski, 2010, p. 343). What followed might be characterised as a "medicalisation of pedagogy in Ontario... [involving] the attempt to sort and order schoolchildren into various kinds on the basis of an anthropometric normal" (Milewski, 2010, p. 346). While the racist beliefs of eugenicists have dissipated, the vestiges of the scientific vision of education- that learning was as possible to measure as a science of physics (Milewski, 2010, p. 352), remains with us in the practices of educational measurement. Standardized, high-stakes assessments echo somewhat the historical notions of education as science, best placed in the hands of professional specialists: they are constructed outside the school walls and implicate teachers and administrators in their distribution while excluding them from their production. Experts in the field of writing have loudly protested that the notion of psychometricians as authorities of the literacy test undermines teacher's individual judgements and devalues their own ability to assess their student's writing

practices (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010). Regardless, the public seems to have grown to accept this system.

Standards and the educational *crise de confiance*. Significant reforms in discourse through the 1930's, '40's and '50's (Lemisko & Clausen, 2006; Milewski, 2010) welcomed an inclusive approach to education that saw activity-based, child-centered and subject- integrated strategies flourish. These disappeared by the early 1960's, in part because of repeatedly failed attempts at writing successful curriculum, and also due to the appointment of William J. Dunlop as Minister of Education, whose reactionary and paternalistic vision of education erased a few decades of progressive reform (Lemisko & Clausen, 2006). Concerns about education's responsibility to develop human capital intensify during times of financial instability (Taylor, 2005), and over the next few decades, economic recession affected the province of Ontario. Through the 1970's and 1980's both employers and universities adopted a discourse of concerns around student's knowledge and whether students had "the basics." Combined with parent group's concerns about a lack of discipline in schools and teacher's federations speaking of a return to mandatory literacy courses (Gidney, 1999) the stage was set for reforms toward standardization, which have represented "the major vehicle for Ontario's educational reorganization" (Griffith, 2001, p. 83). A centralized, outcomes-based curriculum took root in the early 1980's, under the rationale that it would assure equitable and quality teaching across regions (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 212).

Testing and evaluation are foundational components of education in our culture. Hillocks (2002) argues that as a society, our interpretive framework (or worldview) around schooling is centered on the notion that school works on a system of pass-fail and step-by-step achievement measures. In order to move students from

grade to grade, we must test them for their readiness. In this interpretive framework, school reflects a culture that values tests for their ability to indicate achievement, intelligence, aptitude or all three (Hillocks, 2002, p. 14). Large-scale assessments were developed from the general perception that Canadian schools were failing (Earl, 1999). Some in the public sphere, such as writers for the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, called “for national standardized testing... [without] critically analysing *why*... but, instead, writing with an overt assumption that standardized testing would be good for the educational system (Murphy, 2001, p. 145). The Royal Commission on Learning (1994) pointed directly to a crisis of confidence in the education system (p. 133), and as mentioned earlier these statements are cited directly in EQAO documents (1999, p. 3) as its own *raison d’être*. Not only in Canada, but in the US as well as in the international community, demands for standardization increased, always with the rhetoric centred on a concern for young citizens and the need to direct their learning.

Standards and Paradoxes

As we will explore in the findings of this research, the move toward standardization in Canada and elsewhere has been characterized by a number of tensions and paradoxes. These include: existential and methodological crises over the uses and purposes of education; the tenuous balances of power between government, schooling administrations and the diverse communities they serve; and conceptions of values such as equity, fairness and efficiency.

Paradoxes in purpose. Strong calls for standardization contrasted with Deweyan notions of learning through experience, which continued to be held in high esteem. A new Common Curriculum was drawn up in Ontario in the 1990’s, and did attempt to emphasize subject integration in the name of better learning practice. However, its dual emphasis on outcomes as well as integration between subjects led it

into a self-fulfilling paradox: knowledge was subjective, yet something you could also receive and procedurally evaluate (Katz, 2000). Political and organizational mishaps at the time also paved the way for muddled pedagogical policy (Paquette, 2001). Compelled to respond to a quickly changing world, the character of debates around curriculum content transitioned from concerns over globalization and education's place within it to a robust paradigm of "rigour" (O'Sullivan, 1999). The Ontario government's professed commitment to a more equitable educational system deteriorated in the face of an elaborate new system of accountability and "quality assurance" (Paquette, 2001). This paradox represented a paradigmatic struggle between political perspectives around education: on one side, the educational system has to satisfy capitalist demands for production; on the other, it is supposed to represent democratic values (Spencer & Briton, 1994). Another tension represented here is between the epistemic vision of "knowledge as fundamentally uncertain" (Katz, 2000, p. 133), or something that we may come to discover, versus the patriotic, economic ideals of training the young mind, where "teaching [is] an exercise in telling (or showing), and learning an exercise in remembering" (Katz, 2000, p. 137). Eisner (2005) distinguishes between two concepts of schooling: a business, production-line concept characterized by quality-control and order, and a concept prioritizing inspiration, imagination, interpersonal relationships and discovery. In the latter, education is fluid; the learner's curiosity takes precedence; and interest in the learning experience is intrinsic. In the former, which is the model promoted by standardized testing, education is lock-step and automated. Eisner argues that the push for test scores undermines creativity and the freedom to explore, and hence results in an ultimately lower quality education.

Centralization undermines community autonomy. Standardization has coincided with the enhanced centralization of school board governance and the removal of power from localities. In the 1990's, aiming to "increase efficiency and reduce costs by combining administrative and support services... Ontario amalgamated 129 school boards into 72 district school boards" (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 214). The restructuring, which came largely from business-oriented bodies, affected relationships between schools and family-oriented, community bodies which traditionally have laid the foundation for successful schools (Griffith, 2001, p. 85). Power was all but removed from most parent councils, which had advisory, but no real decision-making authority over policies at any level (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 215). Funding trends across localities also saw a shift in governance. Community decision-making over local taxation, which traditionally had aimed to allow for local jurisdictions to fund specific needs of their schools, were repealed in favour of standardizing budgets per-pupil with the ostensible aim of enhancing equity across regions. This approach has been criticized for not taking into account the variety of environments in which schools exist (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 215). These key removals of power from parent/community councils may inevitably lead to a lack of input and insight from the very people who create and benefit from school services. Community identities have no space in a centralized system. Increased centralization, in the guise of "fairness," means that governments can actually intervene and manage district finances and operations (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 216). This removes decision-making powers from the communities that best understand their schools' contexts.

A centralized funding body has the potential to make mistakes over what programs need money and where, but there are further consequences for the systemic

removal of power and responsibilities from organizing bodies such as parent/teacher committees. Arguably, they may cause the government to regard those who do have organizing power (districts and school boards) as having a higher degree of accountability for fiscal spending, rather than educational quality, which in turn positions “schools and districts as units of accountability (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 218).” The view of schools as places of measurement and accountability is ubiquitous in the EQAO documents (EQAO, 2011). It was also evidenced in the 2003 attempt at legislated teacher-testing, which was cancelled due to its overt insinuation that teachers are inefficient (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). This connotes a devaluing of teacher’s autonomy and professional practice as well as a general push towards more accountability and testing. In addition, the introduction of Bill 160, or The Education Quality Improvement Act, in 1997 removed Principals and Vice-Principals from teacher’s federations which have placed them in possible opposition to the teachers with whom they work. Many of the significant reforms created by Bill 160 have been labelled as undemocratic (Griffith, 2001, p. 89). Ironically, its entire rhetorical paradigm has been saturated with verbose ideals of equity and fairness.

Equity or Economy?

The notion that identical school experiences will provide fairness is a myth because it fails to take into account student’s backgrounds, life contexts and the myriad differences between students (Schorr, 1997; Dei & Karumanchery, 2001). This paradox becomes clearer and more important when considering the funding policies of provinces.

Moves toward accountability have been saturated with cynicism over the integrity of standardized testing. Murphy (2001) uses the analogy of product control in a store to show that regardless of regulations, “there is still variability among the

products... [so standards are] neither a guarantee of uniformity nor of excellence [and] do not capture the fullness of learning and may not even capture the adequacy" (Murphy, 2001, p. 147). The main idea behind standards is to enhance equity by creating a level playing field for all (Holmes, 1980); however many scholars argue that they exacerbate power imbalances and that "identifying testing as the measure of intellectual competence benefits the testing industry, promotes an individualistic and competitive society, and sustains the status quo" (Novinger & Compton-Lilly, 2005, p. 202). Measures taken with the ostensible intent to create a more equitable learning environment are not grounded in authentic discussions of equity, but rather lean toward a more market-oriented worldview. Scholars have argued that Bill 160, with its push towards the view of education as a product churning out learning commodities, was a concrete move in the direction of "the marketization of education in Ontario" (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001, p. 194). Under the umbrella of using the educational system to mobilize the economy, Bill 160 prioritized the acquisition of marketable skills on the part of students over their personal needs, interests and abilities. Its many effects have included the establishment of the EQAO.

The language used around education in Ontario today avoids critique of the institutional structures that deliver education while using banking analogies such as: *consumers, beneficiaries, products, productivity, motivation and investments* (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001, p. 197). The move toward standardization in literacy may be in part a response to a changing global economy (Dei, 1996), and the "increasing association between literacy and economic viability" (Brandt, 2003, p. 245) in a world where "... we are encouraged by our government leaders to think of ourselves as consumers" (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 73). Arguably, this vision of student as consumer promotes the notion that schooling is about meritocracy: achieving grades

and moving from one level to the next. The meritocracy paradigm subsumes authentic inclusivity and a system that prioritizes difference, community, social justice and real equity in favour of a reductionist, market model of education favouring individualism (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001). The meritocracy paradigm promoted by standardized testing belies the great North American myth that regardless of social class, socioeconomic background and skin colour anyone can achieve, and everyone is competing on the same level.

Another paradigm is embedded within the notion of meritocracy: the linear vision of learning and comprehension (McGill-Franzen, 2005, p. 368). The lock-step design of testing assumes that students will simply learn according to a checklist and neglects the variety of contextual factors integral to the human experience. Tait (2009) problematizes the rhetorical assumption that raising standards would automatically raise educational quality, arguing that this assumption rests on the notion that teachers merely transmit knowledge and students receive it. In a yearlong study of elementary school teachers, she concluded that teachers experience a wide range of human tensions in their practice such as: class momentum versus individual needs, curricular time constraints versus meaningful connections, and means versus ends of their actions. Tait concludes: "standardized test results focus on ends only, disregarding the means towards those intended ends, and as such, can be said to dehumanize the learning experience" (2009, p. 150). Here the scientific view of educating denies the day-to-day challenges, the multifaceted needs of students and the interpersonal and intuitive professional requirements of teachers.

Questionable results. Across the world the standardization of examinations is a growing trend, shifting teaching practices and local policies, despite the tests giving any solid evidence of really ameliorating education for children (Novinger &

Compton-Lilly, 2005, p. 198). Yet, high-stakes tests have become a central component of students' schooling experiences in America, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Booher-Jennings, 2008). Messick points out that there is a perception of standard tests helping countries to keep pace with one another (1994). Yet, scholars everywhere have contested the dominance of high-stakes assessments. Carter (2006) protests that state-administered tests "treat literacy as though it were neutral, autonomous, and completely portable... [and are] also wildly unfair" (p. 95). No one can conclude that the standards, tests and accountability, which increasingly motivate school practices (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005), are really effective.

From Australia to Canada, scholars have described increased standardization as onerous (Carson & Clay, 2010, p. 165) and undemocratic (Ricci, 2004). Scholars from the UK have argued that a deceleration of classroom pace and expectations are necessary for critical pedagogy and for teaching for deeper understanding, and that standard tests promote a powerful performativity discourse that dominates pedagogy and undermines teachers who wish to teach for critical thinking (Williamson & Morgan, 2009, p. 17). Neumann, Fischer & Kauertz (2010) discuss the German educational philosophy shift that took place upon implementation of what they deem is a US- influenced national assessment program. In German tradition, education is *Bildung*. Meaning creation, image or shape, *Bildung* signifies a linking between philosophy and education and is the lifelong personal process of cultural maturation: a harmonization of mind and heart. Upon implementation of the National Education Standards in Germany, education adopted a much more scientific, result-oriented paradigm.

US scholars have presented the loudest protests of all, stating that an accountability system "fails to take into account the complex and dynamic nature of

education and represents an inappropriate oversimplification of educational outcomes and their measurement" (Johnson, 2008, p. 1). McGill-Franzen (2005) notes that much of the research on reading and writing tests have been done by the test developers themselves and "may risk overlooking critical dimensions of teaching and learning" (p. 367). Scientifically-based reading research has actually accelerated and increased emphasis on accountability rather than best practice and disconnects research from practice (Invernizzi, Landrum, Howell & Warley, 2005, p. 610). Standardized testing, in avoiding all that cannot be "neatly defined" (Greene, 1995, p. 11) can contribute to the separation of school and society, decontextualizing school by representing a false reality: that what's on the test matters more than what's going on in the world. Many have called for a more balanced view of literacy, which would resist deterministic answers to complex questions (Heydon, Hibbert & Iannacci, 2004). Siegel (2006) declares "federal and state educational policies ... place severe limitations on what it means to be literate, and, thus, on who can be literate... with schools being held on a monomodal, autonomous view of literacy" (p. 75). An emphasis on "the basics" draws the critique that "student's education is being watered down because of testing policies" (Assaf, 2006, p. 166). Experts argue that the field of literacy is vaster and more complicated than proponents of standardized testing make it out to be.

The power of writing is that it facilitates the "naming of alternatives" and opens oneself to possibilities; "viewing the public from a private point of view" (Greene, 1995, p. 107) and hence empowering oneself to critically question what one observes. However, standardized testing agendas often restrict student observations to narrowly, pre-thought-of dispositions and definitions, subverting the learner's point of view to a graded or measured process. US writing experts have described how the

testing culture is becoming increasingly technocratic, with the statistical machinery of psychometrics being pushed forward as a way to test the greatest number of people in the least amount of time (Huot, 2002). With accountability frameworks around writing becoming increasingly technological, and “writing assessment... predominantly constructed as a technological problem requiring a technological solution” (Huot, 2002, p. 144), test developers lean toward an increasingly scripted, right-or-wrong culture of assessment in which diversity and innovation are strongly discouraged. Huot expresses extensive concern over how the technocratic push toward writing assessment puts “people who have little or no knowledge about the teaching of writing or the administration of writing programs... in positions of power to decide how reading and writing programs should be assessed” (2002, p. 172). This removes responsibility from teachers of literacy, hinders their opportunities for innovation and devalues their importance in the teaching and learning process. Pearson (2003) argues that rhetoric and policies which insist that we assess “reading and writing in their atomistic aspect... [disregard and disrespect the importance of] teachers and teaching” (p. 14). Rather than focus on improved teaching methods that spotlight student-centred discussions, complex problem solving and higher-level thinking, teachers turn to the test as a, “premise for new arguments about how to teach the course, what material to include, how to organize it, how to make assignments, and so forth... in most cases, the courses involved become regressive” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 13). The worst case scenario is that teachers might begin to teach directly to the test at the cost of critical thought (Hillocks, 2002, p. 204). Similar concerns have been raised with regards to the OSSLT.

The OSSLT

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) was established in 2002 as an official province-wide requirement for High School graduation. It is considered a high-stakes test because the law requires that all students in Ontario pass it. It is comprised of separate reading and writing tasks and designates up to three hours for its completion. While it is normally written toward the end of the year in Grade 10, students may defer writing the test or they may rewrite it if they don't pass the first time (Radwan, Reckase & Rogers, 2010, p. 3). The OSSLT is administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), an independent provincial agency funded by the government of Ontario. It aims to provide educators with “objective, reliable information about student achievement so that they can intervene appropriately to foster improvement” (EQAO 2009- 2010 Agency Report, p. 4), and works closely with educational measurement specialists (psychometricians), to develop and evaluate the validity of its assessments. In the following section I will summarize and discuss the content of a sample test provided by the EQAO. See Appendix A for an actual version of the test described.

Content of the OSSLT

The Sample Test Booklet published on the EQAO website (2011) is a practice test to be used either as it is, or to be modelled upon by schools themselves, to practice for the test. The first page gives detailed instructions on how to take the test. This includes how to fill in multiple choice question boxes and reminders to write legibly. The test is split into six sections. The first section is entitled A: “Reading.” It contains a four-paragraph story written about a solar car that broke records for its distance travelling. Following this are five multiple-choice questions that require simple comprehension of the text. The next section requests that the student explain,

within six lines, why the solar car project is a good learning experience for the students involved. It instructs students to use specific details from the text as well as their own ideas. There is space below the six lines for a rough draft, with instructions that emphasize nothing written there will be graded. Section B, "Writing," is comprised of five multiple-choice questions that check grammar and writing skills. The first tests for capitalization; the second, punctuation; and the final three assess sentence construction skills. Section C, also "Reading," contains a history of the Stanley Cup in 17 lines. Following this are six multiple choice comprehension questions and a short answer question, again in six lines, in which students are to state the main idea of the text with one detail from the text to support their claim. Section D is a writing task in which the students have six lines to name a person they admire and explain why. Section E contains another writing task: students are given a picture and a headline, and are told to write a news report of their own creation. The picture in this sample is of three students sitting around a computer with the headline, "School Receives Computers as a Reward." There is one complete page on which the students may write. The instructions remind students to outline: who; when; what; why and how. The final section, F, another reading section, contains a story about the manufacture of jelly beans. It is 21 lines long. The students, once again, have six comprehension multiple-choice questions and six lines to write a short answer stating the main idea with one specific detail to prove their point.

All of the texts used in the sample exam are either written specifically or adapted for EQAO. They are short, simple and do not contain much emotion, much like the answers expected of the students. They do not invoke aesthetic reading. Basic factual comprehension outweighs higher order thinking because it is easier to accurately test and measure. Understanding on this test mostly means recall.

Individual creativity, interpretation and voice, when required, are limited to a predetermined amount of space. The writing style promoted on the test narrows possibilities for expressing original ideas into a predetermined format. The EQAO describes the literacy skills tested on the OSSLT as follows:

In the writing component of the test, students are given multiple-choice questions and are asked to write two short responses, a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion and a news report. Through their responses, students demonstrate their ability to communicate ideas and information clearly and coherently and use conventions appropriately (grammar, spelling, punctuation and usage).

In the reading component of the test, students are expected to read a variety of texts (narrative, informational and graphic) and demonstrate their understanding of directly stated information and ideas. They are also asked to make inferences and to interpret by connecting the meaning of the texts to their personal knowledge and experience. (EQAO Research 2011, p. 3)

No one can argue that these are important literacy skills. However, they do not address the most basic characteristics of critical literacy: openness to new media, student-generated texts and engagement with texts that are relevant to student's actual lived experiences. The "variety of texts" described do not even begin to cover what a multiple, new and multiliteracies curricula might include.

The limitations of this test are clear: it tests for comprehension and some grammar skills, but there is little to no critical thinking required for the answers. The focus is on efferent rather than aesthetic reading, and though "the capacity to sympathize or to identify with the experiences of others is a most precious human attribute" (Rosenblatt, 1970, p. 37) that might be exercised through reading, this

capacity is not promoted by this test because it focuses largely on basic comprehension or recall skills. The texts given are emotionless and do not provide opportunities for the reader to enter into the behaviours and experiences of others, to exercise their “ability to understand and sympathize with others [which] reflect the multiple nature of the human being” (Rosenblatt, 1970, p. 40). Students are handed texts rather than generating them; where popular culture or social justice issues are touched upon, they are limited to comprehension-based, multiple-choice questions and to a few simple sentences pointing out a “main idea.” The test is designed in a way that will make it easier and more efficient to grade, which makes sense for an exam that is uniformly issued to thousands of people. However, we must question whether this efficiency should be more important than critical literacy.

The EQAO’s Accountability

The EQAO openly states that its preponderant concern is “to investigate and report on trends that will enable the agency to continue to report useful information to educators and the public in a world-class manner” (EQAO Research, 2011, p. 1). This seems to prioritize accountability over education. The EQAO clearly notes that accountability is its primary reason for existence:

Ontario’s provincial testing program was created in 1996 in large part because parents and the public demanded more accountability and called for an independent gauge of children’s learning and achievement. As a result, EQAO was established to administer province-wide tests to every student in the public education system. (EQAO, 2011, p. 2)

In its 1994 report, The Royal Commission on Learning uncritically applauds one of the first large-scale standard reading and writing assessments in Ontario as a way to authentically measure learning (p. 149). The EQAO makes repeated reference

to this report in its own documents, citing for example the declaration: “it seems obvious to us that the public school system is responsible to the public, and owes it to the public to demonstrate how well it’s doing with our children” (EQAO, 2011, p. 3). Of course public education is responsible to the public. However, implied in this statement is that the public education system would not hold itself accountable for its own performance, or is not succeeding in “children’s learning and achievement,” and hence needs to prove itself. Many questions might be raised over what “responsibility to the public” actually entails, to which we shall return in the conclusion of this study.

The Royal Commission on Learning report's positive view of the EQAO seems much more concerned with the need for public accountability in education than in the learning process. The EQAO cites this report throughout its own documents as a way to justify its own creation and demonstrate success in its test design. In one document, the EQAO quotes The Royal Commission on Learning’s reasons for why the assessment has positive effects including the length of the test and that the test is “a genuine assessment of performance” (EQAO, 1999, p. 3). However, there is no qualification given for this statement. EQAO documents list studies with statistics like: “88% of parents consider the provincial testing program important... 74% believe EQAO results are used to improve education quality... 69% believe provincial testing makes the education system accountable to parents and taxpayers” (EQAO, 2011, p. 3). These statements are based on opinion surveys but do not provide any evidence of whether or not the test’s construct is sound or that the test is actually improving teaching and learning. Nowhere in the document does the EQAO point out the potential for these discrepancies. Other worrisome statements stir up optimistic notions of student achievement, while actually referring to accountability measures, and not to educational experiences: “continuous improvement is fuelled by constant

transparency and reliable data” (EQAO, 2011, p. 4). Despite scholar’s warnings that “it is possible to increase test scores while at the same time diminishing education” (Ricci, 2004, p. 357), the assumption made in the EQAO’s rhetoric is exactly the opposite: improved test scores automatically mean improved instruction and education. EQAO’s largely optimistic presentation of itself is worrisome when one considers the evidence that the construct validity of the OSSLT is not sound.

Educational Measurement and Validity Theory

Validity theory is a framework used by test designers to evaluate the quality of a given test. Those who design the OSSLT are accountable to validity theory. Throughout its publications and website, the EQAO acknowledges their accountability to validity theory. However, an examination of whether or not the OSSLT truly satisfies validity theory has problematic results. In this section I will explain the concept of validity theory and construct validity, and then outline the challenges to construct validity as they relate to standardized testing in general and to the OSSLT specifically.

Validity theory. Validity refers to the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support both interpretations and actions based on test scores (Messick, 1989). Specialists have made considerable effort to develop validity theory so that it is relevant, accurate, and inclusive, and their writing has remained practical about the limits and potential consequences of validity (Kane, 2006). Over time validity theory has evolved to emphasize the central importance of construct validity, which aims at a big-picture integration of any evidence that may pertain to the interpretation of the meanings of the test scores (Messick, 1989). Validity theory intertwines content, criteria and the perceived consequences of testing, in the guise of

extrapolating the most meaningful possible use of test scores. In order for a test to be valid, it must measure what its construct officially intends.

Messick (1989) points out two major challenges in construct validity: underrepresentation and irrelevant variance. In underrepresentation, the test construct fails to include important dimensions of a given subject. Certain literacies not included on the OSSLT are examples. Irrelevant variance implicates factors which are extraneous to the construct but which may influence test scores. For this study, irrelevant variance takes into account things outside the OSSLT's construct that nonetheless have an impact on a student's performance on the test: examples include socioeconomic status, culture and ethnicity. Finally, all tests have unintended consequences, and “a threat to validity that might otherwise be ignored... becomes a serious concern if it is shown to have a systematic negative impact on some group” (Kane, 2006, p. 55). According to Messick (1989, 1994), a test's validity is challenged when negative consequences can be linked to construct flaws.

The educational measurement community points out that test designers must pay attention to construct flaws- and potential ensuing consequences- of their tests.

In education, as in medicine, there is an obligation to avoid doing harm if it can be avoided. Therefore, [there exists] an obligation to consider any negative consequences that can reasonably be anticipated and to weigh them against the potential benefits before adopting the test.

(Kane, 2006, p. 56)

The EQAO writes at length about its uses of construct validity theory in its test designs. It argues that the validation of its own tests must incorporate a number of considerations. These include: the rationale or purpose of the assessment; whether or not the test draws on appropriate theories of learning for its particular area of

curriculum; equity and bias, or whether the test discriminates unfairly against a particular group; and finally the consequences of the test on both individuals and organizations (EQAQO, 1999, p. 4). Unfortunately a review of the literature reveals negative findings in all these areas, and brings the test's construct into question. The purpose or intent of the test may not be realized for all students. The underrepresentation of certain types of literacy calls into question whether or not the test adequately draws on theories of learning from the field. Finally, irrelevant variance may threaten the equitable nature of the assessments. All of these factors may lead to negative social consequences for test-takers.

Construct validity. A high degree of construct validity occurs when the construct underlining the test maps perfectly onto the construct as defined in the literature and the curriculum it is linked to (Kane, 2006). Though perfection in anything is nearly impossible to attain, it is important that researchers study the degrees of validity. Lock's (2002) study revealed grave discrepancies between what the large-scale assessment programmes he examined intended to measure and what they measured in actuality. The readers' sub-skills, or variables between readers, play a significant role in determining a reader's competency and ability to perform well on standardized literacy tests (Alderson, 2006). Two important variables manipulate the validity of standardized literacy tests: the linguistic features, organization and topic familiarity embedded in the test, and the formal or content schemata, metalinguistic knowledge and metacognitive strategy applied by the individual readers. The construct of a test is inherently flawed when it becomes a measure not only of the reader's potential prior knowledge of a text, but also of that reader's ability to take a test (Alderson, 2006). Language and cultural variables can pose threats to the construct validity of standardized assessments (Murphy, 2007). Factors such as social

status and culture, which are varied and diverse in the real world but static on the test, also contribute to its flawed construct. Literacies left out of the test also lead to construct flaws.

Underrepresentation. Despite the field's increasingly sophisticated understanding of language and cognition, "the assessment field, firmly rooted in an objectivist tradition, has been slow to attend to the implications of these advances" (Murphy, 2007, p. 228). Audio-visual and computer literacies, for example, have been totally excluded from this province-wide examination despite being two of the most important mediums for communication today.

Contemporary literacies are broader and more diffuse than the linear, static, culturally and linguistically limited concept of literacy tested by the EQAO. School literacies include all communication that interfaces with encoded text of any sort as well as social and cultural practices; these are larger than those selected for gate-keeping assessment in Ontario schools. The EQAO does not fairly test the spectrum of children's literacies. (Lotherington, 1994, p. 317)

The construct of standardized tests fail utterly with regard to multiliteracies, which demand that learners today be independent thinkers, flexible and able to work in diverse contexts (Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey, 2003). The test should take into account alternative notions of literacy (Pinto, Boller & Norris, 2007). The single-minded definition of literacy for which the OSSLT tests students does not match with the diverse and multiple literacies they are growing up with. A narrow vision of literacy that promotes "old basics" hinders students' capacities for learning in the modern world and is a costly, cumbersome impediment to good teaching (Kalantzis et. al, 2003). A vision of "basics" and "minimal standards" may miss other

competencies students have, thus underrepresenting their full range of literacy skills (McGill-Franzen, 2005, p. 369). Scholars have argued that the construct of the OSSLT in particular presents a narrow vision of literacy, which today is multimodal and much more complex than it might have been merely one generation ago (Ma & Klinger, 2000; Rogers, Ma, Klinger, Dawber, Hellsten, Nowicki, & Tomkowicz, 2000; Klinger, Rogers, Anderson, Poth & Calman, R, 2006; Cheng, Fox & Zeng, 2007; Volante, 2007). Student opinions are necessary to understand which literacies, for them, may be underrepresented on the OSSLT.

Irrelevant variance. Irrelevant variance takes into account all the external factors influencing student success on an exam. Socioeconomic status and social capital have a thorough, systematic influence on success in school and act as strong predictors of student achievement (Greenwald, Hedges & Laine, 1996; Caldas & Bankstone, 1997; Willie, 2001). Family income and parental involvement have been put forward as possible obstacles to the validity and relevance of the test. Bloomquist (2009) summarizes a number of studies which conclude that there is a disparity in school readiness between the children of middle and working-class families. Poverty and class inequities present a number of challenges, both for the students and their teachers: the former are twice as likely to drop out of High School than those from the middle class (Ryan, 2002), and the latter, at substantial risk for greater stress than teachers in middle class contexts (Gerstl-Pepin, 2006). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and/or those outside the mainstream culture, may come from families who have negative perceptions of education in general, which affects student success or failure on standardized literacy tests in particular (Ma & Klinger, 2000).

Discrepancies in cultural knowledge and inclusiveness may play a role in student success on standardized exams. Gee's (1989) work shows how language is stringently linked to culture. Cultural contexts and conceptualizations are either set apart from the test, or focused on one culture. Language proficiency and culturally embedded concepts cannot be withdrawn from the basic construct of the test (Storey, 1997), and as a result the process of taking the test is itself a matter of cultural familiarity or "metaliteracies." Students who have the "home advantage" of parent support (McGill-Franzen, 2005, p. 369) may be more likely to succeed on tests that represent one particular culture. Hence conflicts of language and culture might pose a direct threat to assessment validity (Murphy, 2007, p. 228). While the test's construct may not be entirely culturally relative, the presence of even the slightest need for intrinsic knowledge on the part of the test-taker throws the validity of the OSSLT into question. Undertaking a content review of the test, Kim & Jang argue that it is difficult to tell which sub-skill is supposed to be the most "salient" among the multiple skills the test measures: hence, for culturally-varying groups, there results a large discord in knowing what the construct is actually measuring (2009). It has been well-documented in the United States that standardized, monocultural examinations lead to detrimentally one-sided educational experiences for students outside the native- English culture (Olson, 2007). Without being "in the know," any student might struggle with innate elements of the test. The Applied English class context with which this study is concerned is a potential example of such a subgroup.

Consequential validity. Long before the OSSLT was developed, educational measurement specialists called for a deeper look into the social consequences of standardization (Messick, 1989). Validity theorists are becoming increasingly concerned with the necessity of analyzing the social consequences, whether positive

or negative, of high-stakes tests especially: “as the stakes associated with an assessment go up... the need to document the procedures being used and to provide backing for the warrants being applied increases” (Kane, 2006, p. 50). What students draw from the test is imperative to understanding its validity: “the value implications and social consequences of a test make up the consequential basis for validating a test” (Murphy, 2001, p. 155). Using this logic, researchers can argue for, “an ethics of assessment [that] would focus on the relationships among those affected by the assessment.... in terms of the broader social and political implications for writing assessment” (Lynne, 2004, p. 130). Test validity and social values, “are intertwined and... evaluation of intended and unintended consequences of any testing is integral to the validation of test interpretation and use” (Messick, 1994, p. 13). The social consequences of a test, therefore, must be considered to demonstrate its validity. Test users in particular should contribute to this analysis (Taleporos, 1998) because “they presumably know the intended outcomes, the procedures being employed, and the population being tested, and therefore, they are in the best position to identify the intended and unintended consequences that occur” (Kane, 2006, p. 55). An account of these consequences, told through the voices of students and teachers, is vital for the educational measurement community to make informed decisions about test design and for analyzing validity because these tests may directly affect the “rights and life chances of individuals” (Cronbach, 1988, p. 6). Tying teacher's and student's personal critiques of the test to the theory from which it emerged presents an ethical imperative to the measurement community which they have themselves requested.

While the EQAO states it has based its constructs on extensive field testing, numerous scholars have pointed to the questionable nature of using construct validity (Murphy, 2001, p. 151), and have recommended that “given the amount of talk,

money, and energy expended on accountability in education in our current era, assumptions about how accountability policies operate in practice need to be systematically questioned and analyzed both theoretically and empirically” (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 226). Murphy (2001) uses the analogy of product control in a store to show that regardless of regulations, “there is still variability among the products... standards are neither a guarantee of uniformity nor of excellence” (p. 147). Educational measurement specialists have themselves argued that while the field of theory behind test design is rich, the practice of applying the theory to the tests themselves is impoverished (Brennan, 2006). This may be the case with the OSSLT, which has drawn critique from parent and teacher communities as well as from educational experts. The EQAO pays lip service to validity theory but when it comes to the social consequences of the test, which are imperative for understanding its level of validity, little work has been done. It matters not that a certain percentage of parents are satisfied with the test; though from a public relations standpoint this may be a good thing, this tells us nothing about construct validity.

The OSSLT and Its Critics

On one hand, the OSSLT might provide information which can lead to change in policy and eventual system improvement; on the other, it has met with significant criticism from parents, teachers and administrators (Adams, 2003; Klinger et al. 2006). Teacher's associations all over Ontario have protested the usefulness of the OSSLT, declaring: “the tests really provide very little information about the achievement of an individual child” (Ontario English Catholic Teacher's Association 2002, p. 19). The Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario (ETFO) has strongly condemned the EQAO and its “Report Cards,” which they view as disembodied, analytic accounts of schools (Nicholson, 2010). ETFO has complained that standard

tests cause undue student stress and fail to address the whole context of the individual child (Stone, 2009). It has bemoaned the 30 million dollars put toward standardized assessments, which it claims would be better used to support teachers in the classroom (CNW, 2009). Many scholars have made a case for how in-class, teacher-led assessment practices do better to further the learning of students than do standardized examinations (Earl, 2003; Kalantzis et al, 2003; Volante, 2007).

Despite widespread concern over the varying challenges the OSSLT poses for student learning and teacher's teaching methods, standardization and accountability is on the increase (Klinger, DeLuca and Miller, 2008). Researchers point to the need to look extensively at the multiple levels of effects individual contexts might have on student achievement on the OSSLT (Rogers et. al, 2000). Many have recommended that accounts of the stakeholder's (student's and teacher's) views on high-stakes exams be taken into consideration to improve the interpretations of the validity of these tests (Ryan, 2002) because "how students make sense of test items and situations is at the heart of validity" (Murphy, 2007 p. 236). The high-stakes nature of the OSSLT makes student voices all the more relevant: "although there are few consequences for educators, schools, or districts for the quality of their performance in the delivery of educational services, there are consequences for students linked to their performance under provincial learning standards" (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 223). In a truly democratic sense, student and teacher's voices are necessary to clarify how this test affects teaching and learning.

Numerous scholars have recommended that "educational reform policy is best informed through a critical reading of actual classroom practices (e.g., questions of curricula, pedagogy, and instruction) [which] must be a starting point for developing policy" (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001, p. 205). I have designed this research according

to this recommendation. This research attempts to clear the way for teacher's and student's voices, who despite being the test's greatest stakeholders have had few opportunities to share in the debate around the OSSLT.

Chapter 4. Methodology

I chose to conduct an ethnographic study on a single classroom. This section outlines the context in which the research was done while providing reasons for the choice of methodology. Methods used in data collection and analysis will be summarized.

School and Context

The data for this research was collected in an Applied Grade 10 English class in a High School located in rural Ontario, in a historic town with a population of about 3500. I observed the 75-minute English class, which contained 28 students, daily over a period of six-weeks. This research began two weeks before the class sat the OSSLT and continued for a month after the test. The teacher who offered me the opportunity of joining his class was very enthusiastic about the research. He proffered in-depth knowledge and opinion on the subject matter, along with articles and class materials to contribute to the data. In addition to his academic participation, his generosity of spirit and hospitality in inviting me into his class were imperative to the success of the research. It is not easy to have a stranger “in people’s daily lives... watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions... collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 2). Throughout my days at the school I was all too aware of myself as an outsider, smiling ear to ear as I scribbled furtively into a black notebook, covering over the writing when one of the many class monitors or students walked by me. I became concerned about Mr. Apple’s cognisance of my presence in the class; teaching is not easy in the first place, let alone with an ethnographer in the room.

Ethnography

I chose ethnography as a methodology for this study because it seemed the best way to enter into the research with a tentative attitude (Wolcott, 2001). Ethnography permitted me to approach the class with “an open mind, but not an empty head” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 6), and to seek some balance between being an active participant, a privileged or a limited observer (Wolcott, 1999), preferring instead to recognize that there are costs and benefits to participant observation to which I must be highly sensitive. I hesitated to limit myself to one role or another. This influenced my decision to write an ethnography, in which I become the major research tool, often faulted for being “biased, inattentive, ethnocentric, partial, forgetful... incapable of attending to everything at once, easily distracted, simultaneously too involved and too detached... but what better instrument could we ever devise for observing and understanding human behaviour” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 157)? As qualitative research, ethnography provides space for the evidence to be derived socially, not statistically (Wolcott, 2001, p. 158). Ethnography also allows for the kinds of synechdocal (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and pastiche (Marcus, 1998) methods of writing which this research design requires. It gives one a practical, insider’s view through its descriptions and observations while also using a multi-stranded variety of data sources to compile information and analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 24). Situating this study within a particular paradigm will allow me to further elaborate on how it has been constructed.

This research is situated in an existentially postmodern era “powered by the widespread feeling that the conditions of social life... are undergoing a fundamental transformation, a breakup of the world order, systemically conceived, into fragments

that have not yet assumed new, readily identifiable configurations” (Marcus, 1994, p. 384). Our notions of “culture” and social groups are being transformed and

we must learn to grapple with a more complex sense of “the local,” viewed not as some distinct, internally coherent cultural entity- a community, a neighbourhood, an ethnic group, a school, or a classroom- but as “everyday” intellectual and ideological projects... associated with sets of social relations organized both within larger, more global processes and in response to immediate, everyday exigencies. (Eisenhart, 1999, p. 462)

Foucault explained that truths as we once knew them are ultimately subjective, relativistic discursive practices that we can no longer ascribe to a priori knowledge or presupposed, common meanings (Foucault, 1972). Concrete ideals and impressions about culture once taken for granted have, in the light of Foucault, been turned on their head and “we can no longer conceive of social groups of people with a culture that is clearly bound and determined, internally coherent, and uniformly meaningful. Consequently we are on shaky ground” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 17). Rather than view this new, admittedly shakier terrain as a menace to one’s moving forward, it is my contention that we may use it to position ourselves in the middle of a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2004) in which a deeper understanding can emerge from a continual waking up from largely presumptive cultural messages (Doll, Wear & Whitaker, 2006, p. 165). Loosened from their harnesses, truths are now contextual, historically positioned, and must be mutually respected and kept in play as necessary elements of a whole rather than excluded from one another (Haraway, 1985). Ideology does not, for this research, “signify an avowed doctrine. It is rather the loosely articulated sets of historically determined and determining notions, presuppositions, and practices, each implying the other” (Spivak, 1981, p. 673). Both

metaphysically and practically, people today are bearing witness to “changing conditions around the world... associated with new patterns of migration, wealth, work and leisure. In schools, we see some corresponding changes” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 17).

In many ways, the common public school can be viewed as an embodiment or central institution of the public and of democracy in practice (Rose, 2009, p. 6), where ideologies are understood in the permeability of cultures that rebound in our day to day lives (Eisenhart, 2001). Ideologies are embodied in our common sense meaning and practices, and so “to understand ideology at work in schools [we may] look as much at the concreta of day-to-day curriculum and pedagogic life... as... at the statements made by spokespersons of the state or industry” (Apple, 2001, p. 139). This concreta can be viewed as “discourses, meanings, materials, practices, and group processes” (Willis, 1981, p. 59) making up the culture of a given classroom. These processes, practices, or points of intersection will help provide a more robust vision of what is happening (Wolcott 1999) while resisting assimilation into absolute truths or generalizing assumptions.

I chose to conduct research on a single class as a way to be on the ground, “closer to the daily consequences, organizational norms, broad-scale ideologies” (Rose, 2009, p. 16). Educational systems do not occur in a vacuum, separate from politics, popular culture and specific geographical and economic contexts (Nespor, 1997). The effects of the outside, larger-world context on the everyday lives of students and teacher in an average English classroom cannot be overemphasized. Delving into the culture of one class was the starting point, and I have taken care not to over-generalize the life of that classroom and the people in it. As the researcher situated in the midst of a given, interpreted culture, I recognize that a critically

reflexive self-other relationship is reliant upon my consistent consideration of the intersubjective and subjective standpoints of everyone in the classroom, including myself. Culture for this study is a complicated, multifarious production: a circuit of rituals, routines, systems of meaning-making and interpretation, where external and internal conditions simultaneously affect the actors within it (Carspecken, 1996).

“The value of ethnography as a social research method is founded upon the existence of such variations in cultural patterns... and their significance in understanding social processes” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 8). While objectivity is unachievable, critical reflection leading to a more complex discovery of the class culture is not (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I have sought to tell the story of the student's and teacher's experiences with preparing for this test over a two-month period and to represent how this one classroom's culture is influenced and mitigated by the OSSLT.

This research embraces ethnography as a holistic research strategy for analyzing “information from of the insider's, or emic, perspective, but also to make sense of all the data from an etic, or external, social science perspective” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 11). Ethnography provides space to acknowledge that participation in a context is always going to be characterized by tension, in which we must necessarily take heed of all perspectives (Haraway, 1985), yet there can only be one author. Because research itself can be nothing more or less than an act of interpretation, “to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies... is not possible and, therefore... the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side are we on” (Becker, 1968, p. 239). I want to be very clear that I have multiple subjectivities quite beyond my own control (Peshkin, 1988), and I am conscious of the Achilles' tendon of the researcher; that “we fall into deep sympathy with the people we are studying” (Becker, 1968, p. 240). My personal

attachment or sympathy for the context about which I write is ultimately a matter of “fidelity to the phenomena under study” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 6). I tried to remain conscious, even wary, that my own perspective on the situation about which I write is always rooted in interpretation, and the way I interpret meaning changes with the mood and the moment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 7). It would be a great mistake to assume that the interests of the subjects with whom I work and my own personal beliefs are simply aligned; rather, this research aims to “struggle to produce... unexpected connections and thus new descriptions of old realities and... to critically displace sets of representations we thought we knew, or at least could name” (Marcus, 1994 p. 391). Due to its intrinsic flexibility, ethnography is an ideal method for walking that uneven line along subjectivities, shaky or shifting notions of truth, ideology and culture, and the attempt at a compassionate and just representation of others.

It is important to note that as a quest into the literacy classroom in particular, for its storytelling possibilities, ethnography may be the method best suited for reading the world. I have sought here to account for an interpreted reality with “a constant interplay between the topical and the generic” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 34), to balance my own findings from the field with theories found in the literature (Lareau, 1987). I have intertwined the research with stories from my own experience and journal observations. Literature resonates; the story, when it offers a way “to read the world through a multiplicity of consciousnesses” (Greene, 1995, p. 58), offers more than simple analysis. Ethnography makes space for the kind of imaginative writing that may invite a “dialectical and continuous crosshatching of ideology and literary language... that slide[s] without a sense of rupture into an active and involved reading of the social text” (Spivak, 1981, p. 677).

A multi-sited ethnography that recognizes the fluidity of its context can best depict and interpret the complex experiences of the participants of this study, which aims to “articulate the porosity of boundaries rather than looking the other way in the interests of methodology or research design” (Pierides, 2010. P. 189). I have used multiple sources to provide as rich an account as possible: the participants’ shared narratives, their observable behaviours and other related research from the field. Hence the study is a blend of voices: my own, the participants’, and those of other researchers. It is reflexive, open and messy (Marcus, 1994). The fields of research encountered here are divergent and will require pastiche: “the thorough mixing of modes, meanings, styles” (Marcus, 1998, p. 54). New, multi and multiple literacy theorists, ravished by the possibilities of the arts, the borderless imaginations of children and radical democracy, ponder the meanings and mechanisms of language while they attempt to adapt to the breakneck pace of technological advancement and changing global realities. Educational measurement theorists- in particular the administration of the EQAO- utilize bureaucratic and technocratic accountability frameworks to justify test design constructs and budget spending. Both camps are deeply political, ideological and riddled with worries for the future. Likewise, parent and teacher groups bellow and debate and are characterized in myriad ways by the media. These viewpoints have all been represented here, though they should be secondary to the education system’s most important stakeholders: students and teachers. With a cautious awareness of the ventriloquism that can occur when a researcher represents the voices of her participants (Fine, 1992), I have attempted to reproduce their perspectives as accurately as possible. Finally, there was myself to contend with; after all, that “we are part of the social world we study... is not a matter of methodological commitment; it is an existential fact” (Hammersly & Atkinson,

1983, p. 145). My voice and worldview permeated every level of this research, which was a journey into the heart of the class illuminated by my dreams for a better way. I did not find what I expected to at the start. Grounding myself in the unique cultural/ideological environment of this one Applied English class, I was able to pull apart and identify some of the tensions that illustrate my findings. The following section will outline the method used for getting there, with a brief description of the particular challenge I faced in gaining access to the school.

Method

During my six weeks of visiting the school, I situated myself in the heart of the classroom and took extensive field notes to describe both students and teachers in their natural setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Observation was no more or less than interpersonal interaction (Angrosino, 2001). Symbols and rituals that emerged during data collection facilitated metaphorical interpretations of the data used in the writing process (Swatos, 1998). I collected three types of data. The primary one was the interview, as it gives voice to the participants and provides multiple planes of perspective (Fetterman, 2010). The second is the research collected from outside the classroom, in the various fields described in the previous section, with which I have matched and contrasted findings from the interviews. Finally, journal notes taken in class provided descriptions and context for writing this research.

Challenges to access. This research was theorized for a year prior to the writing of the thesis proposal. Many components of the thesis were inspired by a community service project I assisted with at a High School. I worked with a group of Applied Grade 10 English students and had the privilege of getting to know them, their teacher and their classroom context for three months. We worked together on a multiple literacies unit that included reading poetry and working with computer

software. This unique opportunity provided some of the inspiration for this project, and the vestiges of my initial proposal remain in the title. I worked with the class toward the end of the school year, and the teacher and I intended to continue working together the following year while the class prepared for the OSSLT. This particular teacher had a vested interest in research around the OSSLT because her class struggled with it. The class context included students from low socioeconomic contexts with a high failure rate on the OSSLT. The teacher had many ideas for the research and expressed her desire for participation to the school's Vice-Principal, who also expressed excitement for the research. Despite having forged a particular relationship with the school, and despite their interest in participation, the school board refused the project proposal. It took the school board several months to respond to my ethics proposal, and rather than alert me of their initial decision via email, they chose to send a letter in the post, adding yet another week to a crucial time in the school year. This presented a major setback to my research timeline. My experience with the High School was fractured and the teacher participant disappointed. This revealed that despite a student researcher's special efforts to nurture a relationship with a particular school, teacher and context, a given school board may not value these efforts, but rather will select or reject research projects based on their own values. While I was extremely lucky to find a new class and teacher who were equally interested in engaging in this research, my experience raises questions about the nature of research in schools, ethics processes and the decision-makers who influence those processes.

Data collection. I conducted three interviews with the teacher: one at the beginning, one at the halfway point, and one at the end of the research period. Each interview took place during the lunch hour, in the classroom, and lasted from twenty-

five to forty-five minutes. They explored the teacher's vision of his student's progress, the OSSLT, and teaching and learning in general. During the first two weeks the teacher had lent me books and materials related to standardized testing and teaching methods, and we often discussed these as well. We had a number of informal discussions on the same topics outside the interview times, and I recorded these as best I could in retrospect. Often after the interviews, once the recording had stopped, Mr. Apple offered some invaluable information. In one case, I switched the recording back on, but in another I was forced to type what he'd said from memory.

I conducted three one-hour focus group interviews with a total of five students who were very enthusiastic about the research topic and joined the interviews repeatedly. All participants and their parents signed Ottawa University consent forms. I requested they volunteer themselves, rather than their teacher selecting them, which would have posed “a grave danger that the data collected will be misleading in important respects, and... is essential to a reflexive approach” (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007, p. 104). Repeat interviews with the same participants provided richness to the study and greater possibility for reflection on the part of the interviewees (Carspecken, 1996). I used a semi-structured, informal and retrospective style of questioning (Fetterman, 2010) that considered two elements of student learning: first, whether or not students saw subject matter as relevant to them, and second, what they perceived to have learned (or not learned) in that time period. The students' perception of both me and the type of research I'm doing was instructive (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007, p. 176). While highly receptive to having an open conversation with me as well as with one another, the students were at a loss for words over some aspects of the research. I found the silences in the interviews to be highly revelatory and this shall be discussed further in the findings section.

I did all the transcribing for this research myself. During the transcription of the interviews, I took care, in some instances where there were no words, to jot down the actions and gestures of the students in my notes, marking these into the transcriptions in italics.

I took regular, raw data journal notes during each class in order to record my own reactions and observations. While much of the content of these journal entries did not make it into the findings section, they were imperative for my professional understanding of the characteristics of the research setting, and provided information for the observation stories provided to help illustrate findings from the interviews. These journal notes gave me insight into the nature of the problem to be investigated, and allowed “the search for universal law [to be] rejected in favour of detailed descriptions of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and of the social rules and patterns that constitute it” (Hammersely & Atkinson, 1983, p. 8). The features or incidences I picked out from my long hours of observation of the internal goings-on of the classroom helped to contribute to an external, synthesized description of the natural class culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Additionally they helped me to connect and contrast my own thoughts with research from the field.

The names used in this research have been changed. With the counsel that they not choose names that have a connection to them, the students who participated in the group interviews chose their own pseudonyms: Bob, Chelsea, Chris, John and Tom.

The English teacher who generously offered himself up for observance and participation in the research is named Mr. Apple. His colleague and friend, a philosophy teacher who took no part in this research other than sharing the same classroom, and thus infusing the setting of our story with a wonderful diversity of

philosophical learning materials, I named Mr. Birch. The teacher who entered each class just a little bit late and left just a little bit early every day, referred to himself as the "unemployed teacher," and worked as a support staff for Mr. Apple, I call Mr. Cedar. Finally, we had a few technology aides to facilitate and guide the computer learning: I shall call one Mr. Douglas and the other, Mrs. Elm.

Coding and analysis. The data was analyzed according to a phenomenological, emergent coding system which was inclusive, coded in multiple categories and iterative so that nothing was missed or excluded (Becker, 1968). I read through both the teachers' and the students' interviews initially and took notes on recurring themes. I separated out each interview into paragraphs, or units. As I read them I placed them under a coded category. Each time one unit went under numerous codes (this happened a number of times), I copied and pasted. Finally I went through the codes again along with notes I had taken during and after the interviews, and looked for empty spaces. I looked for places where there were gestures, especially long pauses, and I highlighted notes I'd typed like, "laughter;" "teacher comes in with coffee;" "long pause" and so on. Here are the codes that emerged in the order that they will be presented in the findings:

- The dominance of time
- Applied students
- Anxiety and stress
- Caring
- Trust
- Home literacies
- Technology- in and out of class
- Multiple literacies

- Workplace and future educational goals
- Irrelevant variance
- “What the board says”
- Student agency
- Teaching strategies
- Rotary and Collaborative teaching
- Future research

I placed the codes apart from one another and combined them with other relevant evidence from the study, so that “ideas are used to make sense of the data, and the data is used to change our ideas” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 159). I was reflexive through every stage of the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 28). Going back and forth between research in the field and my own findings adds richness and a thorough, rounded complexity. I was mainly seeking a more complex understanding, through all the themes revealed, of how social circumstances shape personal paradigms (Wolcott, 1999). I do not present all the codes listed here as explicit subheadings, but rather have integrated them into sections relevant to a smooth fusion of my own findings with research from the field.

Chapter 5: Findings

Observation Stories

These stories were created from my observation notes and aim to illustrate some of the tensions caused by the preparation for the literacy test, which will be discussed in the findings section. I hope that the thick description provided here will help provide setting and context.

The Beginning.

Nine days to go. It's ten days before the OSSLT and the day of the school-distributed Mock Literacy Test. I sign in at the front office of the school. I settle into a chair and listen to the ticking of the clock on the wall, enjoying this moment of total calm before the bell rings. It rings, and moments later Mr. Apple enters the office to meet me. With his usual blast of passion-energy, he bustles me through a hallway filled with uniformed teens. Voices ring and clamour as the students swap greetings, information about homework due, handshakes, hugs and kisses. Locker doors shriek and squeak, swing and slam, and we dodge elbows and sometimes flying objects while wading through the crowd. The air is aromatic with body odours and perfumes. Mr. Apple pauses here and there to speak to a student, to say a friendly hello, to remind someone to remove a baseball cap. This burly, smiling, salt-and-pepper 48 year old reverberates with love and motivation. Walking with him, one feels they are in the presence of someone who has found his calling in life and takes his profession very seriously. Constantly bursting with ideas about how to teach English, his arms are full of books and articles related to the subject of my research and he shows me these, pointing out his highlighted points, while we hurdle through the thick dispersing crowds of students.

Entering the classroom Mr. Apple introduces me to his colleague, Mr. Birch, who he refers to as "another wonderful teacher." Mr. Birch is packing up, having just finished teaching his Philosophy class. Along with a Math teacher I never meet, the two teachers share the room and have a harmonious relationship: Mr. Apple remarks that Mr. Birch, being the senior of the two, is a sort of mentor to him, offering teaching advice whenever necessary. Over the weeks I'd notice these two bringing each other coffees and donuts from the nearby Tim Horton's. Mr. Apple sits me in a chair behind his desk, at the left front corner of the room, and perches next to me so we can discuss an article he is reading until the class starts. As more students enter he takes attendance and I enjoy the learning-friendly ambience of this classroom.

The surface of the teacher's desk is covered completely by stacks of books; printed handouts; a laptop; a printer. Tacked on the wall next to the desk is a coding system for marking philosophy papers. There are at least 40 two-letter codes forming notations for things like, "fallacy," and "stereotype." There is a large shelf that sits in front of the desk with a great big plant on top of it. Its stripy green and white leaves spread, octopus-like, around their black plastic pot. Suspended above the plant there is a plastic blow-up globe with the word "kids" printed in lime-green bubble letters across the middle of the Atlantic. A miniature imitation satellite wobbles earnestly next to this planetary pantomime.

The board stretches all the way across the front of the classroom. A bronze crucifix hangs above it, squarely in the centre, and on each side of this there is a line of small rectangular paintings, all depictions of nature: a green forest; a mountain in the desert; a sunset-pink mountain range; a snowy mountain peak; dense flowers hanging in a jungle; a snowy pasture. On the right-hand side of the board is an

announcement section. *It's happening here* is printed in bold letters on white paper cut out in a cloud. Under this sign are four rectangular papers with headings:

Announcements

Math

Philosophy

English

Faint layers of erased chalk dust are smeared beneath each one. There's also a large colourful *Math Club* poster in this corner, I assume because the Math Club meets here. Along with the posters, paintings, pictures and student-generated art, the class decor contains posters meant to induce critical thinking. One is a comic where two people sit on opposite sides of an island. Across the island they have drawn a thick black line, and written underneath the drawing are two words: *human nature*.

The students trickle in and Mr. Apple repeats over and over, "deep breaths, deep breaths." There is a calm, perhaps subdued feeling in the room as they sit for their practice OSSLT exam. Mr. Apple hands these out, placing the stapled packets face down on each desk, and instructs the students to "not open them yet." About half the class is not present today: they are writing downstairs. Mr. Apple remarks that the absent students have been "identified" with ADD, LD or other special needs. Mr. Apple finishes taking attendance and tells the students they may flip over their booklets.

We watch the students work while whispering more about the article that so fascinates this dedicated teacher. It is about rotary teaching, or "looping," a tactic Mr. Apple firmly believes in. Pausing for a moment, we meditate to the sound of scribbling pens, to the scene of rows of students quietly reading and writing. Suddenly Mr. Apple passes me a note written on a yellow slip of paper. It contains a

single sentence scrawled in blue: *note the girl crying while taking the test.* I look around. Indeed, there is a girl crying uncontrollably but quietly while she answers her questions. Mr. Apple tells me that, “yesterday a number of kids were breaking down and sobbing from anxiety over the test.” The girl looks up and Mr. Apple nods at her; she leaves and returns a few minutes later, a little calmer. Later on, Mr. Apple would tell me that during the actual exam, this particular girl “was composed, she was focused, I didn't see any signs of anxiety, so I guess she was properly prepared for the test.” I wondered why the OSSLT seemed so daunting to this student that it caused her to become anxious enough to cry.

Six days to go. It's 9:32 am and class has begun. The teacher's aide is here today, and sits in the back of the class, in a chair next to me. Mr. Cedar is a young man whose often-clasped hands betray his pensive nature. He has been at the school for years and knows all the students and their learning styles. He provides backup to Mr. Apple on a regular basis, circulating the class to help with work, managing students who become unruly. It's Earth Hour day today- everyone is supposed to spend an hour thinking about the environment- so we are sitting without lights on. There's not a window in the class but somehow, enough light permeates the class to allow us to work. Mr. Apple tells the students that the results of the Mock Literacy Test are not yet back because the Principal is “plugging them into the system.” He has a student hand out big rolls of paper and asks that everyone get into collaborative groups to finish working on the story, *On the Sidewalk Bleeding* by Evan Hunter. Each group is working on one “element of a short story,” and Mr. Apple refers to the board to help them recall what these are:

Elements of a Short Story

Conflict

Character

Plot

Point-of-view

Setting

Theme

“Remember your acronyms,” Mr. Apple tells the students: “CCPPST.”

The students have already found quotes in the text to justify the elements they chose, and are peer reviewing and editing. They have, according to Mr. Apple, “two minutes to discuss and two minutes to copy what’s written into binders.” He reminds them, “look at your title pages. Are you organizing your work? Remember everything should have a title.”

Suddenly, the whole class stands up. It takes me a moment to realize what’s going on, and then I notice that the school Principal has entered the class. She is a handsome woman, exuding a perfect balance of kindness and authority. She has come to speak about the upcoming OSSLT. The students are invited to sit.

The Principal tells them to come in on time, rested, and with breakfast in their bellies. She explains there are no periods Two and Three on that day, that the test will be administered at 9 am, and after 75 minutes they will get a break, during which time they can go the cafeteria and have a snack. The Principal explains the location of the test and in soothing tones notes, “it’ll all be over at 11:30.” Then she assures them there are signs that everyone in this class is ready for this test, and hands back the Mock Literacy Test, exclaiming, “Don’t just look at your mark, look at how you got your mark.” Now she and Mr. Cedar are circulating the classroom, speaking with individual students, making observations.

“The dialogue section was the most challenging.”

“Did you use full names in the news reports?”

“Did you make paragraphs?”

“Did you include full details? Check.”

After a few minutes they resume their positions in the class- the Principal at the front, Mr. Cedar in his chair at the back- and the Principal asks if any students have questions. Seeing that there are none, she proceeds to deliver a very motivating speech, including adages such as, “you are our best advocate; don’t forget to review; take a pause if you’re tired then you get back in the test; go back over it; be a self-directed learner.” She uses a metaphor: “why do Ethiopian runners run so well? Because they practice in low Oxygen. How many of you have had breakfast today? It’s the same thing.”

There ensues a long lecture, from all three adults, about the importance of eating breakfast and getting the right sugars.

“We are trying to have everyone as prepared as possible,” says the Principal, “I’m proud of you. It’s only a few more days.”

She goes over, once again, the general rules of the exam (how much students need to pass; what the rules are about leaving the room) and pointers (use a cheat sheet; watch your timing; studies have shown that those who write in pen get better grades.) I have written in my notes: *this test is serious business!*

By this time half an hour has passed. After the Principal leaves we resume looking at the elements of the short story, but the mood has changed: we are distracted; we are thinking about the 31st of March.

One day to go. I enter the big glass double-doors of the school moments before the bell rings. The first thing I see, before the hallways flood with bodies, is a

row of yellow papers with lists of names and room numbers and a heading in bold capital letters: *ON-LINE STUDENTS REPORT FOR LITERACY TEST*.

Now the bell whirs through the air and people tall and short are flung all around me. I immediately overhear talk of the literacy exam. Entering the class there is a definite feeling of tension in the air. The students are all in their chairs as the second bell goes off and almost simultaneously the Vice Principal walks in. He is young and friendly-looking as he perches on a desk at the front of the class and begins a bona fide pep talk: “Tomorrow’s game day, time for practice!” Taking on this coach-style tone I can see that the students really connect with what he is saying, and they listen carefully as he goes through a bright green sheet of guidelines he has had someone hand out. These include things like “absolutely no technology in the room” and, “leave your water bottles on the floor.”

The Vice-Principal speaks about the dialogue questions in the text, which students had a particularly difficult time with. Concluding his speech, he appeals to the students for their very best effort. He notes: “we want to get this over with and stop hearing about it, right?” After nearly half an hour he leaves and the students begin working on one last section of a sample OSSLT, in which they are made to express “in dialogue” how two characters feel about each other. Mr. Apple says in encouraging tones, “we want to look at your ability to express using evidence.” The students are placed in breakout groups of about three people each and are to practice “prewriting,” which for these purposes means pulling out three adjectives to express how one character feels, matching the adjectives with quotes, and then looking at how to fit those into the six lines provided on the test. I circulate from group to group and encounter a pair of girls who are doing nothing at all. “We don’t have to take the test” they explain. Some students seem quiet and resigned as they work, others chat and

joke and work sparingly. Some students seem to take pleasure writing, with painstaking perfection, on clear sheets of overhead to present to the class: “he thinks she is haughty because she taps her pencil on the desk. He thinks she is old because he gasps at her age.” I have written in my notes: *going through each group’s answer I can’t help but notice this is UNINTERESTING.*

With minutes to spare we compare a few answers. Mr. Apple then goes through a handout titled “OSSLT overview.” The last thing he says to the class before the bell rings is: “there will be people on site from the Ministry auditing us, walking up and down the rows: don’t let that bother you.”

The Middle.

Monday. It’s muggy and hot and the students beg to go outside even as they enter the class and sit in their seats. Their requests are abated somewhat by a simple sentence from Mr. Apple, busy taking attendance at the front: “we’ll have a visitor today.” Waiting patiently for said person to arrive, the students learn they are starting a new story: *The Lottery Ticket* by Anton Chekhov. They are told they will be working with the computer program Inspiration, a revelation met by enthusiasm. Mr. Apple writes on the board:

You will use the Elements of a Short Story and Apply them to The Lottery

Ticket:

CODES-

Characterization- “Ch”- yellow highlighter

Conflict- “C”- red(pink) highlighter

Setting- “S”- green

Themes- “T”- blue

Debate: “Does money buy happiness?”

Form your opinion

Evidence

Explain

The phone rings. It is “the visitor” and he is lost. While we wait, Mr. Apple teaches a grammar lesson on “Independent and Subordinate sentences and how to use commas.” He uses an actual cinder block as part of his demonstration: “between the I (Independent) cinder block and its Subordinate bricks, there is a space that makes a g and what does it look like? A comma!” The students sigh with delight.

The guests arrive: Mr. Douglas is a technology specialist, and Mrs. Elm, who works at the school already and knows the students, his attendant. There is also one other lady in the room but no one explains who she is- she seems to be helping Mr. Douglas. While he sets up the computer and projector the students are encouraged to start their debate. They debate for a minute or so and then Mr. Douglas has his first slide out. Titled, “The Inspiration Program,” it contains a picture of dollar bills, an equal sign and a happy face. Underneath this are two hands, one with thumbs down and the word “NO” and the other pointing thumbs up with the word “YES,” with an arrow stretched between these and the words “money happiness” above it. Mr. Douglas explains the program: “Inspiration is an electronic tool, used to build a mind map.”

The class begins brainstorming all the ways money can buy happiness and Mr. Douglas types these onto the screen. As we compile the list some nuances are pointed out: University tuition can make you happier; people with muscular dystrophy need money to buy medication. Someone mentions something about Aboriginals but we pass over this. We move to the “NO” camp and the students speak of family time, friendships and how young kids sometimes play with the box a Christmas present

came in rather than the box itself. All of these examples, generated by the students, are placed on the screen, and then Mr. Douglas displays the text of the story on the big screen. The teachers collectively agree that “since Inspiration can read the story, let’s try it out.” Mr. Apple reminds the students that “after this, we will go through the text for the codes listed earlier in the class.” Mr. Douglas switches on this application and the computer begins to read. Thus ensues the worst rendering of a page of text I have ever endured. The tone of the computer is flat, even, and robotic. There is no pitch; no dissonance; no variety between the words of the language. Almost all of the text takes the form of a dialogue between a husband and wife, yet there is no variance between the voices of the characters and the third person narrative; no pauses indicate tensions or timing; the tonal gradations of communication bred from tens of thousands of years of human evolution. For me it may as well have been the sound of five sharpened fingernails running down the face of a blackboard. I looked around the room and noticed some of the students blocking their ears while others stared numbly forward. Every ounce of my teaching self cried out for a human interpretation of this text. Why, why weren’t the students reading this? How did no one notice how strange this was? Looking beside me though, I could see that Mr. Cedar was also red in the face, tweaking with irritation. The final ten minutes of class, spent “coding,” were a blur.

Friday. We spend the whole week studying *The Lottery Ticket* using technology, with Mr. Douglas and Mrs. Elm in addition to the other teachers. Every day it is the same. Students look onward from their desks and pass around a remote control mouse to highlight “codes” based on the Elements of a Short Story framework. The teachers at the front control the colours and the class. Finally on Friday the students are to begin working on their final piece for this: they are to use

Inspiration themselves to draw “character maps” using the evidence they have extracted from the story.

We enter the computer room with its three rows of forest green tables, on which rows of Dell laptops sit open in front of black swivel chairs. At the front of the class there is a huge whiteboard, and in the middle of this there is a Smartboard. Above this is a rolled up projector screen. On one side of the whiteboard, instructions are written to help the students log into this particular file in the Inspiration program. The room is hot and about to become muggy. Mr. Apple is particularly unenergetic today and raises his voice to a student using a Blackberry: “turn off that technology!” Turning to me with a grin he remarks, “kind of ironic huh.”

The many teachers in the class are helping the students to log on, log out where necessary and log back in, find the specific drive they are supposed to be using, load the software, load their files. This is a long process and some students begin their work much earlier than others. Once the students have begun, it takes time for them to figure out what exactly they are supposed to be doing. Mr. Apple zig zags the space as he helps everyone load in and begin. Mrs. Elm exclaims, “the technology is here to help you, not distract you, so if it’s doing the wrong thing...” and trails off as she crosses the room to respond to yet another raised hand. One student is listening to the computer read the story in its robotic pitch. She is giggling hysterically, clutching her cheeks. Low drones of flat-toned, jumbled computerized voices penetrate the room as a number of others begin playing the story. Each of the adults are now working one-on-one with a student.

The students’ task is to call up the quotes in the story they highlighted for “character” and to place these in a graphic chart that is already designed for them. The chart has a big animated human head in the middle of it, under which the word

“character” is written. Three arrows shoot out from this head in different directions. Each leads to the same graphic: a book on which the word “trait” is written. Jutting out from under this book there is a short arrow leading to a box that says “evidence” in it. So the students are supposed to pick one of the two characters in the story, write their name below the head, then find three adjectives or “traits” they previously identified, using the virtual yellow highlighter, and then use one or two quotes from the text to justify each of these traits with “evidence.” Afterwards Inspiration will turn this graph into text. Mr. Cedar and Mr. Apple remark, “The beauty of this program is that you can transfer a mind map into a rough draft.”

Some of the students are struggling with the Inspiration software and have asked for help from peers or teachers. Others are halfway done. Some seem to be finished and are doing something else completely. I glance at the girl beside me, who has found a way to modify the graphic icons used for “character;” “traits” and “evidence.” She has changed the face into a clown with a big purple afro. She has modified one of the books to a fish tank and has moved the evidence box into a thought bubble, which she stretches out and shrinks, entertained and distracted at the same time as she injects this tiny aspect of her own creativity into the task at hand.

The End. On my last day at the school, the class is beginning to read *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson: the story of Helen Keller and her famous teacher Anne Bancroft. Mr. Apple and all the students are extremely excited to start reading this play. The students shout out, “Can we act it? Are we gonna act it?” Mr. Apple writes ten comprehension questions on the board and lets the students know that they will have to answer these questions first: “ladies and gents, I don’t like to start a play like this.... there were 19 plays for 28 students. Normally I’d have printed these questions out first and we would have started with some sketches, but we’ll have to

answer these together instead.” The students look through their books. Some volunteer to walk up to the board to write the answer to the questions:

- *Title:*
- *Author:*
- *When was the play published?*
- *How many pages are in this play?*
- *How many acts are in this play?*
- *What award did this play receive in 1960 (on Broadway)?*
- *What was wrong with Helen?*
- *In your own words, explain the quote on the first page.*
- *Turn to page xiii- what is the setting of this play?*
- *If you had a choice, which ability would you choose to give up (seeing, hearing)? Explain.*

We pass over the first eight questions with great speed, and question number nine causes a bit of a fuss as Mr. Apple notes: “this generation doesn’t know their Roman numerals.” After explaining these, the class gets into a massive debate over the one question to which there is no set answer: number ten. The class discovers only three people would give up hearing. This begins a rollicking debate around why hearing is more important, and what senses are more valued in society or what we perceive as personally imperative for our lifestyles and why that might be so. The students bring up all sorts of experiences from their personal lives: examples of friends who have limited eyesight; music they simply could not live without. Mr. Apple interrupts after a while. “Ladies and Gents,” he says, “that’s what I find tough in class. We’re good at expressing ourselves in oral, but not in written. So, pen to paper, write it down.” Hushed whispers permeate the room as students continue their

conversations while writing. One student shoots up his hand and renews the conversation with a simple point about seeing-eye dogs. Mr. Apple accepts the moment and responds to him, setting off another long stream of conversation throughout the class. I have written in my notes: *everyone so intrigued. What a universal topic! Not a single kid not engaged.* It seems that we could go on forever bringing up colourful examples and reasons for our thoughts, but the bell rings.

Findings

Throughout the weeks I observed Mr. Apple's class, my impression was of a group of people trying their best in circumstances heavily influenced by the tested items on the OSSLT. Three major themes emerged from my in-class observations and interviews, and I interpreted all three as tensions between forces. These tensions were further illustrated in the literature and research done in similar studies. The data is presented as pastiche, with Mr. Apple's and the student's voices woven together with those of other researchers in the field as well as with my own. The findings are interwoven and interrelated with one another but are presented in a more or less linear way. In the following paragraphs I will provide a brief overview of the findings prior to presenting them in detail.

The first tension had to do with time spent on test preparation. Preparation for the test had fully occupied the classes' time leading up to the test. Activities centred on test preparation focused on efferent rather than aesthetic reading: the reading experience was framed mainly around an extraction of "evidence." A drill-and-practice, lock-step approach fragmented the learning experience. Mr. Apple felt that this was the only approach he could use for an Applied group given the short amount of time. The pressure to pass caused both students and teacher to feel stressed and anxious. A tension arose in Mr. Apple's teaching as he struggled with the best

practice teaching strategies he wanted to use and those he felt were important for the test. Even after it was over, the OSSLT continued to influence in-class activities, revealing its effect on the definition of literacy for this class.

The second tension I interpreted involved the definition of literacy as represented on the test. Possibilities for free-flowing, transactional experiences of reading were distracted by frameworks and compliance with rules. New, multiple and multiliteracies were reduced to supports for basic comprehension skills promoted on the OSSLT. Use of software and computer technology centred on the idea of "finding evidence in the text to justify one's answers" and conformed to predetermined frameworks such as "The Elements of a Short Story." Writing was narrowed to answering questions according to given formats. Students did not view their home literacy practices as important for school, leading to a tension between "real-life" and "schooled" literacies. Students were seldom given the option of taking initiative to suggest or generate class materials and simply went along with their teacher's instructions, leading to the third and final tension.

Student and teacher agency was affected by the OSSLT. Test preparation shaped student's and teacher's identities as learners. The high-stakes nature of the exam gave the class the impression that they were under surveillance. The teacher's professionalism and independence was brought into question. His disciplinary expertise in the field of literacy was undermined by the test. The test was an outside force that mitigated the personal exchanges between students and teacher. Student's opportunities for self-expression and relating stories to real-life felt narrowed and rushed. Rather than viewing themselves as agents of change, critical thinking and creativity, students and teacher alike had to conform to a test administered by a higher-power "Board." In-class practices that subsumed critical thinking and

transactional reading into a seeking out of basic facts may have influenced some students to take an apathetic view of their learning and literacy practices within the English class context.

Time Quantity and Quality

The OSSLT affected both the quantity and quality of in-class time. Class time leading up to the test was entirely devoted to OSSLT preparation: Mr. Apple affirmed his class practiced for the test, "100 per cent of the time... the lit test dominated much of the curriculum... the first two months actually [we did] nothing but the literacy test." Mr. Apple and the interviewed students expressed frustration at feeling pressured to prepare for the OSSLT in a short amount of time, and also at the ways in which they were spending their time. Bob exclaimed, "Mostly we just did the package and it was all grammar and punctuation it all took long! It was all paperwork, like... we weren't doing anything but reading and writing."

In his similar study of an Ontario High School, Ricci (2004) also found that the test thoroughly shaped in-class practices, and that time was explicitly used to motivate students for the OSSLT (p. 350). The week before the OSSLT, the Principal and Vice-Principal visited the students, on two separate occasions, to speak about the test, motivate the students and remind them of some of the rules and procedures on testing day. These visits disrupted and occupied class time. The impression for students here is that at the levels of the classroom, school administration and the school Board, preparing for the OSSLT is paramount. However, preparation for the test required class practices that were negatively viewed by both teacher and students.

Drill-and-practice teaching. Mr. Apple spoke of being worried that he might be training his students for test-wiseness rather than good English skills (Assaf, 2006, p. 163). During one of our interviews, he pressed Kohn's (2000) book into my hands

and echoed some of the concerns therein: that perhaps he was not "getting a valid picture of learning... [but rather] a reflection of students having been drilled relentlessly to beat this particular test" (p. 25). Though experts have argued that reading requires total immersion, concentration and flow (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 722), OSSLT checklists encourage a constant shifting from one thing to the next (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001). Mr. Apple noted that he had begun, "the short story unit [but] I had to quickly put that aside and deal with these [test] skills." Practice for the literacy test interrupted other important areas of English study to cover low-level test skills (Assaf, 2006, p. 164). Mr. Apple explained, "the systematic approach to the test, it's just, 'get it done,'" and expressed his unease with a learning environment centred around ticking off items on a checklist. The sentiment was that teachers must teach to the test and are "turned into drill sergeants, removing any opportunity for students to play an active role in their own learning" (Khon, 2000, p. 25). This sentiment was expressed by certain other Ontario teachers in other schools. Ricci's (2004) study revealed teachers who were very frustrated at having to "drill" students constantly, and lamented what they saw as wasted weeks spent going over school board and EQAO material (p. 354). Instead of "a pedagogy of immersion and critique, literacy instruction... is generally reduced to the mastery of facts, grammatical rules, and basic skills" (Powell, 1999, p. 28). Though he noted he'd rather not be spending class time in this way, Mr. Apple perceived drill-and-practice to be the best way to prepare the class considering their context as Applied English learners. Gesturing to the checklist of skills to be used for test preparation, he explained:

This Grade 10 Applied group just put me behind the 8 ball. It's a very weak group and I felt obliged, obligated to make sure that they were ready for this

test so we drill, drill drill, I tried some different ways of learning, I tried visuals, I did the collaborative, but... this [checklist of skills on test] drives my teaching.

When under pressure, teachers tend to, "default to formulaic writing materials to prepare students to meet state standards" (Carlson & Clay, 2010, p. 165) despite these drill and skill practices not being the best way to help students learn to write. Mr. Apple explained that he simply did not have enough time to prepare a group he had met only a few months before for a test they would struggle to pass using all the strategies he thought best according to his experience: "these students show up on your doorstep and yeah, they have a lot of weaknesses. So, you're doing your best to try all the different strategies to embed it and get them to a point where they pass."

Stress, anxiety and high-stakes. Both the students interviewed and Mr. Apple pointed to stress and anxiety as the most negative aspects of test preparation. Mr. Apple was adamant that, "there's a lot of pressure on the teacher, especially in High School... I have felt a tremendous amount of pressure this year, with this." The high-stakes nature of the OSSLT caused the atmosphere of the class to feel more rigid and risky than necessary. Though Mr. Apple could acknowledge that "learning is enhanced when children are actively involved... [in a] risk-free environment" (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 726), the overwhelming pressure to "just get the students through the material," as he described it, outweighed student's active involvement and decision-making powers. While the environment felt like a safe one, with a nurturing and kind teacher, the implication of risk is always there as it is fundamentally embedded in the notion of the high-stakes test.

The necessity of using lock-step and drill-and-grill practices leading up to the test took much of the fun out of learning for the students. John noted that, "definitely

after the literacy test, like after all the pressure's gone, it's definitely more fun in this class 'cause we're like acting, we're getting up and doing stuff." Bob spoke of debating being his favourite thing to do in class "because it promotes laughter." Likewise, Carlson & Clay (2010) make an argument for why fun should be incorporated into every class and encourage teachers to "expand their pedagogical imaginations" (p. 169) to engage their students. It would seem self-evident that fun, laughter and imaginative creativity be a part of every high school class. However, they are not possible when a class is struggling with checklists of rigid test preparation and anxiety over failure.

The students also maintained that the high-stakes nature of the OSSLT had caused them anxiety. They describe the lead-up to the test day as characterized by a fear of failure and a pressure to pass. Adjectives they used to describe the weeks of test preparation included "upset," "worried," "stressed." John explained:

the test, it wasn't really fun, it was more nerve-wracking, 'cause [our teacher] kept saying that you gotta, you gotta get this, you're gonna fail, you're gonna fail, and I know it was true but... it's not making it any better by telling us if we don't get passed, we're gonna fail.

The fear or threat of failure here is used as motivation for students, rather than their own drive or authentic engagement with the curricular material (Khon, 2000).

Significantly, some of the school's techniques used to prepare the students added to the anxiety they felt. The school designs its own "Mock Literacy Test" to be given just days before the test (much to the dismay of the students I interviewed), and according to Mr. Apple, it is much more difficult than the OSSLT. Mr. Apple would later show me the results of the Mock Literacy Test, and with visual frustration explain, "Only seven pass out of 28. There's something wrong with this system."

From his perspective, making the Mock Test harder than the real one would only cause more anxiety, which had the intention of jolting the students into working harder on the OSSLT. This plays into a high-pressure culture where fear of failure, rather than a passion for learning, may be what is used to motivate students to work (Khon, 2000). Though students had been taking standardized tests "for their whole lives," Mr. Apple noted, "the issue I think with [the OSSLT in particular] is it's connected to their graduation: whether they graduate or not. So I think breaking it into smaller tasks would be nice." Despite his anxiety, Mr. Apple felt confident that it was the timeline and the way the system was programmed to have students prepare at the last minute, and not the test itself, that was the main reason for anxiety. Mr. Apple noted that because he only had two months to prepare the students, he felt constrained to the skills exemplified on the test. After the test, he explained, he planned to do more debating and movement, but felt generally that there was little time to incorporate these teaching strategies even though he felt they were the best ones. This caused significant tension for his class planning.

Tension between best practices and test practices. Test preparation can disrupt and stymie teachers' goals of keeping students engaged, whether or not the teacher is aware (Rex, 2003, p. 38). The gap between preferred teaching and learning strategies and those perceived to be best for high-stakes assessment preparation has caused some scholars to request teachers stop drill-and-practice in favour of better teaching strategies (Higgins, Miller & Wegmann, 2006, Caughlan, 2008). Time constraints led to a tension in Mr. Apple's teaching.

Despite his deep familiarity with the discipline and his wish to use a variety of teaching strategies, Mr. Apple felt constrained by the time given because he'd been introduced to a brand new class in January:

Given the time- you know, all kinds of visuals would help to teach punctuation, but in two months... it's very systematic...with its approach here at the school.. You know that book I showed you, that book is very systematic in its approach. Every week we had to do one thing or the other, and so I found that was just a little, uh... it conflicts with their way of learning.

Pressure on teachers to balance a number of concerns and objectives in their pedagogy often occurred at the cost of the strategies that best support teaching for understanding (Perkins, 1993). Mr. Apple explained that the time limitation hindered him from teaching strategies that would help students connect the work they were doing for the test to their lives as a whole:

Tapping into the prior knowledge and then being able to read the story and bringing all that luggage in with us, so we really rely on their knowledge, as opposed to "here's a short story, let's read this story." You know, we don't live in a vacuum so we need to draw on what's going on around us and make those connections.

The stress of teaching to the test and meeting standards limits teachers to lock-step procedure rather than opening up classroom discourse to the big picture (Carr, 2007). Mr. Apple construed a disconnect between activities the students did to practice for the test and the activities they enjoyed such as debate, explaining that in a debate, you come up with arguments to prove a point, about a person for example, and on the OSSLT, you are required to come up with three points to justify your position on a certain character in a story. Though the students have already worked through building arguments in a debate, Mr. Apple feels they don't make the connection between what was both challenging and enjoyable in the class and what needs to be done on the test. They view it, in Mr. Apple's words, as "a checklist. You know, kids

have it down: just get it done." Rather than view characterization as enjoyable, its necessity for the test made it simply something to be knocked off a list for students. The pressure to complete checklists and get every aspect of the learning for the test "done" subtracted from strategies the teacher perceived as being more engaging and enriching for student learning.

During class, the students asked repeatedly if they could act out texts, which can be an excellent way to promote both fluency (Tyler & Chard, 2000) and critical reflection (Safer & Harding, 1993). We also teach students the power of language when we give them real reasons to write, and real audiences to hear their words: writing is most liberating when students write from their own experiences (Edelsky, 2006). This includes the opportunity to act out a textual interpretation in class. At the dawn of our modern English language, Shakespeare's plays were recreated by both high and low society. Today, we make movies out of novels, and also novels out of movies, simply because people like to experience stories on many mediums. Acting out texts is a legacy of the English language and of literacy in general: some of the oldest texts of all time were designed to be interpreted by a group of actors and then consumed by an audience. Multiple levels of interpretation take place in this multimodal reading of a text, which utilizes the body and its movements, the voice and its fluctuations. Important aspects of literacy are lost when students cannot actively take on a text. An English class which denies this fundamental aspect of literacy- that texts are brought to life in unique interpretations- is missing out on some of the greatest opportunities available for learning. Mr. Apple spoke of wanting students to act out texts in class but also asserted he simply would not have the time to do so.

Without the opportunities for exploring texts in multiple mediums, definitions of literacy were narrowed. The in-class activities students engaged in while preparing to sit the OSSLT contributed to specific views of what it means to be a reader and a writer.

The OSSLT Dominates Student Definitions of Literacy

Knobel & Lankshear (2006) contrast two divergent mindsets: what they call the “physical-industrial mindset” and the “post-physical, post-industrial mindset.” The former values individual intelligences: notions of “truth” are paramount; expertise and authority is located in individuals and institutions; spaces are enclosed and purpose-specific. This mindset is comparable to the linear, Cartesian perspectivalism discussed by other scholars in relation to our literacy worldview (Gallagher, 2010). In the post-industrial/physical mindset, space is open and fluid; authority and expertise are distributed and cooperative; and intelligence itself is shared and collective (Knobel & Lankshear 2006, p. 81). Through my interviews and observations of Mr. Apple's in-class practices, I concluded that the OSSLT promotes the physical-industrial mindset.

When asked for their definitions of literacy, every student I interviewed replied, "reading and writing." Encouraged to expand this definition, the students responded with direct examples of types of reading and writing they were currently practicing in English class: short stories; newspaper articles; opinion pieces. Tom's definition was somewhat more extensive: “basically information that's recorded... news... short stories you never really think about but there's information in that.” When asked if they could think of any kinds of literacy other than “reading and writing,” they had no response. It was only when I initiated a more in-depth conversation around literacies used at home and the possibilities of multiple mediums

brought into the classroom that a real conversation began around the various ways a person can "read and write." This ongoing conversation- it arose, in some form, in all three focus group interviews- revealed a deep tension between the schooled literacies promoted by the OSSLT in this class, and student's uses of multiple literacy mediums at home. Most of the literacy practices students engaged in at home are not represented on the test. Home-based literacies included: reading the newspaper; watching the election debate and the news; watching TV; art and graphic design; composing original music and playing instruments; reading blogs; surfing the internet and social networking. Students use different literacies at home than at school, but more importantly, their in-class activities which prepared them for the OSSLT had a direct influence on what types of literacy they valued. The students were hesitant to conceive of definitions of literacy that varied from the basic, "reading and writing." While Mr. Apple's definition of literacy was broad, he insisted that he could not stray too far from the OSSLT's version of literacy due to the pressure to help students pass.

Despite there being a breadth of research and scholarship on multiple, new and multiliteracies, the students did not identify these as important for the literacy classroom. Multimodal methods of learning were excluded from consideration. These findings confirmed what Sanford & Madill (2007) observe: "although the learner who has technological knowledge is increasingly advantaged in the world, schools are not quick to adopt practices that embrace new texts and new ways of interacting with texts, e.g. visual, multimodal, and interactive texts" (p. 287). Rather than look at literacy as simple "reading and writing," literacy might include technologies, fine arts, music, drama, and any kind of coding system that renders texts into forms that are captured and transportable, including letters and the alphabet but extending far beyond that (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007a, p. 5). Scholars have

suggested that we look at literacy as a family of practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007a, p. 4) and at literacy learning as situated within communities of practice or discourse communities, rather than individualized universals where learned truths exist only in the mind (Carter, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). While multimodal literacy practices have always been engaged by children and are a key part of literacy learning (Siegel, 2006, p. 65), the OSSLT excludes both the opportunities literacy might afford if it was seen as a family of practices, and not just “reading and writing,” as well as the context and experiences students personally bring to a particular story or piece of writing.

Texts are contextual; to understand any text, we require the context behind them; not only the history or nature of the setting, but also through various methods of reading a text, which might be considered as a multimodal, developmental experience. When I am reading and imagining a text, I engage all five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch- as those senses take on the writer’s description. I also use my past experiences and memories of environments similar to the one I envision in a book. All of these are negotiations, orchestrations of developments I have undergone from the beginning of life as a communicating human (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984); all are a result of the massive repertoire of multimodal understanding I possess at the tips of my fingers and off the top of my head (Dyson, 2001). This is why arts, technology and other mediums used to read the world promote multiliteracies, which allow students to look at reading and writing as within a situated cultural condition; and the mediums that culture uses as the best tools with which to understand one’s culture (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). After all, “literacy is not a set of autonomous skills, but a varied collection of purposeful practices firmly situated in social and cultural contexts” (Caughlan, 2008, p. 120). Looking at the

background of a given text and how it relates to a student's self and society would be a starting point for putting a text in context and making it relevant to students. Yet, the literacy promoted by the OSSLT seems to tap only into an immediate and basic comprehension of simple texts at hand. Finding evidence from the text directly, and not one's own life, represents the minimalistic way in which students are encouraged to make sense out of a text, regardless of expert's insistence that the learner should be the meaning-maker and social actor, using their "well-stocked semiotic toolkits" to make meaning from and breathe life into a text (Siegel, 2006, p. 69).

The practices of drawing information from a single short written text, answering a list of comprehension questions and finding "evidence" in the form of a simple quote taken directly from the story is a direct affront to critical literacy. Critical literacy requires deconstruction, reconstruction and social action, combined with multiple perspective texts (Clarke & Whitney, 2009). In a short paragraph on a car wash, where is the reader? Where is the expansion of meaning of the text via the injection of a self, a reader's own interpretation, or a connection made between the text and things happening in the real world? One sentence relating the text to the world or the reader's opinion does not suffice. Hours spent referring to examples within a written text and copying out answers in the "space given" narrows student's view of what is important in literacy learning and practice. Nothing indicates this more clearly than the fact that the only time students and teacher spoke of new, multiple and multiliteracies, it was in the context of their usefulness for passing the OSSLT.

Multiliteracies reduced to supports for basic skills. The interviews revealed students to be highly skilled in a variety of literary practices. They possessed multiple literacy skills they could not identify under a definition of

"literacy." The test is undoubtedly shaping, for this class, student's notions of literacy and which literacies matter for school.

Literacies used at home, though the students didn't term them as such, included a variety of different types of technology, reading and art. Tom plays many instruments and composes music on special software including a program called Finale Notepad. Chelsea is an artist who sells her art online via the Deviant Art website. She seemed delighted to speak of her Facebook activities and her work on Deviant Art: "I draw... also, like, you can write stories and poems on it... this is one of my latest pictures." Chelsea produced a colourful, cartoon-like drawing of a pair of horses running side by side and the words *I love you* ballooned between them. I told her sincerely that it was "awesome" and moved on to Chris, who reflected: "well, usually I just look up stuff on the internet, info, videos, just whatever I find interesting... stuff like, um, well, I sometimes research a couple of things like what happened in past times, history mostly, things like that." John declared:

I read novels and the newspaper, I don't plan on writing in the newspapers but I just like reading them... now I am reading Frankenstein by Dean Coontz. I read the newspaper because it keeps me up to date, so every day, I read it... the Ottawa Sun, mainly.

These interviews took place in April 2011, in the middle of an election campaign. Tom seemed keen to note,

I really like, uh, looking at newspapers, and also the internet, mostly for politics, ummmm, it's probably just one of my favourite things to do, just, research the internet for politics... I'm really excited about the learning... about what everyone has to offer, because as soon as I cast my vote, give it in, it's gonna be... like it's over now, five years, or three.

I asked Tom if he'd watched the Leader's debate. He had, and so had John, who declared twice: "I can't wait to vote. It's so exciting!" Asked later why he was excited, John couldn't really say: "actually, uh, I don't know... yeah, I don't know I'm sorry I don't know exactly why I am excited to vote, I just am. I can't wait!" One would never know, from their in-class practices, that these students were so enthusiastic about the political outcome of their country. Though scholars have made it clear that "literacy learning involves learning multiple types of literacy practices that are differentially useful in various contexts, and literacy learning and literacy practices are not separate from people's identities" (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 726), the students could not identify their own personal practices as valuable for English class. Other researchers have had similar findings: students have "significant interactions with complex texts, though many of these were not sanctioned in the school setting" (Ma'ayan, 2010, p. 646). I spoke with the students about a variety of multimodal literacy practices to inquire whether or not they thought these might be included in a definition of literacy.

When I asked the students if they considered playing video games to be a form of literacy, everyone was quiet except Tom, who pondered, "well, it's basically recorded information given to you so you can understand something, so I'd say it would be literacy."

The students had a hard time articulating how social networking might be a kind of literacy, though most of them used social networks on an almost daily basis.

The students listened intently as I described what a graphic novel was. They'd never heard of one before, and Chelsea, the artist, exclaimed, "That sounds pretty awesome." Asked if they would even consider drawing and fine arts as part of

English class, the students replied they were not sure it would work. John pointed out he feels art is

...really something everyone has to agree on, that's why I think it's something that needs to be done individually so that the whole class enjoys it, so I think you'd have to do it individually, on your own, so you understand it more.

Later on, he makes a similar argument for reading short stories individually, revealing an underlying tension between reading engaged at home and in school:

I just like reading... individual reading, of short stories where you read on your own. But in English class... when we read it together... I think I understand better when I'm doing it on my own... it's just the way I learn.

I interpret John's statements as influenced by a literacy test where everyone receives the same questions and are expected, more or less, to give standard answers. John could not fathom how an activity as necessarily variegated as art could be practiced in class because he is habituated to doing identical activities practiced all at the same time, such as answering basic comprehension questions. Traditional school assessments cannot measure student's unique skills (Ma'ayan, 2010), therefore skills such as art do not factor into something that might be valued in class. John's use of the term "understanding" is interesting. Does he mean that going at his own pace affords better opportunities for understanding? Does understanding mean a transactional, engaged experience with the text? Either way, it does not seem to mean the recall and basic extracting of information that often exemplifies comprehension on the OSSLT.

The students bellowed with laughter when I asked them whether they thought they should be exposed to music in English class similarly to how they are exposed to technology. After a brief but excited discussion about everyone's favourite type of

music, the students agreed that music is not included in English class because, as John declares, "everyone likes their own type of music, so if one person puts on their type of music and everyone else doesn't like it they're gonna ask them to turn it off." In speaking about their opinions on music, the students seemed more engaged and more passionate than they ever had when speaking about the texts on the literacy test. Once again, the personal nature of music listening seemed to be a hindrance to learning in a classroom of students habituated to finding the same answers, the same pieces of evidence, and the same quotes to justify that evidence.

Students were at an almost complete loss for examples of how they might use the Internet in class. The end of this excerpt reveals how Bob attempts to alter his initial "reading and writing" definition of literacy, adding a word- speaking- then "forgetting" what he was getting at.

Nisha Do you guys use the internet a lot... do you read online?

Chelsea Yes! I live off the internet.

Nisha Do you think it should be somewhere in English class? Do you think it would be helpful? Or should it be outside of class?

(There's a long pause as everyone reflects on this question.)

John It depends what we're using.

Chris I can't really say for certain.

Bob I think it'd be, um I think it'd be somewhat helpful... I think it would help somewhat, like, I'm trying to think of the things it would help with, but I can't think of any, but I know it would help somewhat with the things we're doing.

John mmm, it would help with typing skills, because not many people know how to write nowadays, they mostly type.

Bob Heee hee. Can I change my answer for the first question? Uh, English- speaking English, for the definition of literacy, I changed it... (*mumbling*) I forgot what I was gonna say.

Chris (*also thinking*) Mmm.

Bob seems to be struggling with a new definition of literacy when he thinks about using the Internet. Perhaps he has in mind the collaborative style of reading and writing that blogs offer, or the constantly changing nature of information on the Internet; perhaps he was beginning to think of how more than just reading and writing goes on in the World Wide Web, which also incorporates music, video, and a range of other media. We don't know what Bob was about to say, because he lets it go. This is perhaps the first time he's had the opportunity to think of the Internet as an access point to literacy... but he can't think of how it connects to what he does in English class.

Uses of multiple literacy mediums in class were viewed as supports for basics taught on the literacy test, and this ethos persisted long after the completion of the OSSLT. Three weeks after the test, students described their class activities as follows:

"We learned a lot about the nouns, adverbs, verbs, adjectives and how they correspond with each other."

"We were making paragraphs."

"We were working in the lab on uh... different uh, reading and writing skills and also the short story on the computer like making graphs and webs that we could- [show] how each part of the elements are related."

The notion that stories are made up of puzzle pieces that somehow fit neatly together, rather than as mottled; explosive; contextualized, inspired perspectives of authors and interpretations of readers, seemed to dominate these student's views of

reading. Rather than a critical approach where reading “tap[s] all sorts of circuits in reader consciousness” (Greene, 1995, p. 186); and helps the reader to use “unreality” to think about social realities with an enhanced, more prepared vision (p. 187), frameworks and texts referenced themselves. This general influence of the test becomes more complicated when one considers how easily the students accept these constant practices regardless of the variety of literacies they engage in at home, and regardless of personal areas of interest and social realities. More significantly, students could not identify why they were learning the particular reading and writing skills they named, revealing a substantial disconnect between school-tested skills and their lives.

Schooled literacies not relevant to life or jobs. Students were confident they had attained skills but could not identify exactly what they would be using them for. Chelsea noted that it would help with her writing, which she does at home. Under his breath, barely audible, John theorized that it would help with speech. Speaking about one of the software programs in class, Tom was adamant that he had learned something he didn’t know before:

Kurzweil is gonna stick with me because I wondered forever about how to be able to write something and how to be able to have my computer say it to me, there’s so many inconveniences that way, so it helps dramatically.

Though Tom has a positive perspective on a technological skill learned in class, it is not a critical literacy skill.

Students could not equate the literacies used in English class with those they engage in at home, other than in the vague sense of "using technology," which to the students fell somewhat short of real computer training, focussing once again on fragmented skills required on the literacy test. John observed:

through the week we've been using technology which I like because it's more into tune with what's going on around us, and uh- but the stuff we're doing with technology, like, how to write a paragraph, you would have to know but, most people already know how to write a paragraph and some people might have done bad on it, but that means they just don't really care.

Other students pointed to the usefulness of technology in supporting skills needed for the test. Chelsea explained she enjoys using the program Inspiration because "that actually helped me a lot on making the paragraph, and it also helps me study those parts [elements] of a short story." Tom notes, rather interestingly, that he loved using technology in class because it gave him the opportunity to peer edit and "be the teacher." In this case the use of multiple literacies did facilitate an opportunity to engage student voices. However Tom equated this peer editing opportunity as an exercise in what he called "pulling out the mistakes." Chelsea's experience with peer editing had a different twist from Tom's, which she frankly explained.

Oh, my partner Bob did not do much... yeah all Bob did, was like he said that I had a good um, topic sentence and I had good evidence and for one thing he said he found it a bit sexist, 'cause I was like... "another trait of this typical woman is being forgetful."

The two students had then had a friendly argument over why that comment seemed sexist to Bob. Chelsea's final comment reveals a spontaneous, authentic discussion between peer editors: Bob reacted to Chelsea's use of stereotype and the two had a conversation. Yet, the value of this discussion, which may have opened the way for students to respond genuinely to one another's writing (Powell, 1999, p. 113), to exchange ideas and complex perspectives on gender stereotyping, was devalued and passed over. Interestingly, Tom had spoken of being inspired by peer editing

because it allows him to be the teacher: this, however, he equates to "pulling out mistakes." Chelsea, on the other hand, had a feeling that "Bob did not do much" when he identified an *idea* in Chelsea's text as being flawed. Where the skills taught in the class can be seen as serving only the fragmented components of peer edit, opportunity for conversation was lost to the pursuit of completing tasks.

Mr. Apple remarked that using the computer to cut and paste student work into one paragraph, then having the whole class peer edit that paragraph, was very advantageous. In Mr. Apple's following comment one really gets a sense of how an authentic example of student-generated work builds confidence and seems personally relevant in the English classroom.

What I did was compile from the student's work... then you have a real exemplar that's been generated in the classroom. Not in Toronto, not in some agency or body somewhere else, you know, here in the classroom, "this is what Level Four looks like." And an example we helped contribute, we helped develop... and let's go through some of these and start to develop them independently.

The use of technology here did open up opportunities to do something new and different in English class, but the feeling of being overshadowed by "Toronto" and the OSSLT still lingers.

Though they had difficulty relating uses of multiple literacies to their day-to-day English routine, the students spoke of feeling delighted when schoolwork strayed from the regular read-and-write. They brightened up when talking of debating and "acting things out." Students saw "debates" as one of the most engaging activities in class. Tom explained: "I just, I love expressing my opinion... however, on writing I just feel as if I'm not expressing it fully. So, I just kinda like jumping into the class."

Chelsea piped in, "you feel more involved," to which Chris replied: "I'd say it's a great way to express an opinion on, like, whatever you're thinking about." John identified in-class debating as a way to release energy and stress and to laugh:

If there wasn't any laughter in class, or any excitements, then... you know, a day without laughter is a day wasted, and I don't think it would be nearly as exciting or fun... I would be really sad without laughter.

Questioned about the topics of debates students were looking at in class, Chris answered, "well, currently we're looking at short stories, and the conflicts in them," and Tom piped in, "we did a debate on cats and dogs." Debates in class were lively, student-generated talks meant to introduce texts and conjure up prior knowledge. However, the debates I observed, for example the one about whether or not money buys happiness, were curiously not included in the ensuing writing around those texts, which stuck to the practice of "identifying elements of the short story."

A conversation around what other in-class practices were important and enjoyable had the students talking about movement, "because people need to stay healthy... [due to] growing obesity... there's a lot of fat kids around here." John stated:

well, something I'd really like to see, I guess, is movement... um, I like to move around, I don't want to sit in once place for so long, um, the whole class just sitting. So yeah just, I guess, move around, and learn while we're moving... some people want to be active... or they need to move around to express themselves.

Chris piped in: "yeah. I'd really like to do a play in class." This statement was met by nods and grunts of approval, but when I queried why they do not do plays in English, the students declared that only drama class was for plays but, John protested,

"they don't have drama in Grade 11... it stops in 10." My ensuing question, "why do you think it stops?" was met at first with a frustrated-sounding "I don't know" from John, and following that a few theories offered by the students which reveal that they have internalized the habitual methods of schooling to the point that they cannot envision a new way. Chris remarked, "maybe because there's less people who are interested in moving around by the time you get to Grade 11..." and then after a pause, he gestured to the objects in the classroom and said, "maybe it gets harder to move these things out." John agreed with him: "you've got to move all the desks."

A conversation about using technology and art in class led John to explain why he thought they were important:

like to express creativity and, they pretty much help um, uh, well one, raise your grades and two you get um, um, sort of like an understanding, of socializing, and you learn a few new things along the way... it is, it's also a way that could help you in your career choice.

Here the notion of raising one's grades is ingrained as the primary value of technology and art in class, but the student does also make a link between new and multiple literacies and future jobs.

The students all had concrete conceptions of their future jobs and goals. John is planning to be a chef, while Chris has his heart set on, "anything to do with electronics development and testing." Chelsea felt certain she'll end up doing, "something with either art or horses."

Tom stated, "I wanna be a math teacher and a French teacher," and Bob explained with mathematical precision:

to make money, I'm gonna be doing electrician apprenticeship, but what I really wanna do is, as soon as I get my license for electrician, uh, apprentice, I guess you could call it apprenticeship, uh I wanna go to college for astronomy.

I noted that the students had difficulty connecting the literacies they already engaged in at home with the jobs they aspired, although for some the two were closely related. Chelsea expressed that she was confused: "I don't *know* what I want to do... I don't know [what literacies I need]." After suggesting that for art she may need to know artistic software, she stated, "well, I already know those." Chris theorized: "well let's say I need to be a computer programmer, or animator, well I would need to do some studies in the visual arts, and do some stuff like that." Tom explained with disarming clarity what literacies he knew he needed, and the extent of self-learning he had done already to learn them:

I guess for me, for computer programs I'd have to learn things like, uh, Finale Note which allows you to write your own music... Audacity which allows you to take recordings... well, actually many of the things I already have learned, like in my free time I learn it, it just makes me go into music, and also reading, whenever I conduct I always have to look at the sheet music and look at the notes so that I'm able to say... and to look at the full score and see the whole page all at once... once you look at a score it's really just, um it comes naturally, uh, that really is, I guess, it comes naturally, at least to me.

Asked which skills practiced in their English class would help most for future jobs, the students listed essays; use of the computer; grammar; sentence structure; vocabulary for things like setting up a resume; and reading and writing skills. John, who had initially related the usefulness of having the Internet in class to giving

students typing skills, did broach the subject of needing more technology training in English class:

I think that students should be learning as we're getting more advanced in technology, so, in English.... you would be typing, instead of... I dunno, using devices like iPads, instead of reading and writing with pencils, kind of like, using the computer more. And, our future jobs... most jobs, now require typing, like working in an office... they should [catch up with using technology] 'cause usually in jobs nowadays, you always need a computer. Like [even] if you're a mechanic or for landscaping. I think we should be learning more of what we might be doing in the future, and more stuff that relates to us like realistically, like, with the newspaper article, like, unless you're gonna be writing a newspaper, you don't really need to know that. And the same with the opinion piece. You're not gonna use that.

When I pointed out that you are always going to have to express your opinion at some point in life, John replied: "yeah but most people have that skill already without trying so they, they can express their opinion without, without having to learn that." John seemed baffled by the content of his English class, which he could not relate either to the multiple literacy skills he engages already in his life or to the jobs he will have in the future.

Many scholars have argued that schooled literacies are simply not keeping up with literacies that will be needed to facilitate future jobs and prepare students for the future. Reading and writing alone does not necessarily lead to better jobs-- many factors play a role in employment (Powell, 1999, p. 15). Rosenblatt (1970) argued that we need to consider the age-related concerns and goals students have in addition to their academic goals. Carter (2006) points out the need to

take out-of-school literacies seriously and... to find the intellectual rigour and rhetorical sophistication embedded in rhetorical spaces that extend beyond the academy... especially those spaces rarely understood to have anything to do with the kinds of writing students are expected to do at school. (p. 99)

It was clear in the group I interviewed that these teens have great ambition and myriad goals, literacies and interests outside those applied in class. Without speaking to them about their personal dreams and interests, how can school ever seem relevant to their lives and experiences?

Real versus schooled literacies. A key educational issue around literacy assessment is that it focuses on the deterministic, rather than on the possibilities literacies can open, causing many to become “distressed by the extent to which schooling has been reduced to the task of ensuring that all young people master ‘literacy,’ narrowly defined as encoding and decoding alphabetic script for the purposes of accessing information” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006, p. 84). Computers and the Internet should be seen as a portal for ongoing education (Knobel and Lankshear, 2006). The Internet is a portal to the world, and the absences of its use in class should be considered a narrowing of possibilities, not just for literacy learning but also for critical thinking. As Greene (1995) points out, “our discussions of standards and curriculum frameworks and outcomes still have not touched seriously upon the matter of our purposes as a society” (p. 170). Lankshear and Knobel explain the dialectical relationship of literacy to reality.

There is no practice without meaning, just as there is no meaning outside of practice. Within contexts of human practice, language (words, literacy, texts) gives meaning to contexts and, dialectically, contexts give meaning to

language. Hence, there is no reading or writing in any meaningful sense of each term outside social practices. (2007a, p. 2)

Some might argue that literacies on the OSSLT aim to reveal that students have “the basics,” but, “curricula should be aimed at the highest knowledge level in every field... [not] at stifling student creativity and critical thinking in favour of a pre-established transmission of limited knowledge” (Ricci, 2004, p. 357). In the case of the students interviewed, not only was the definition of literacy narrowed to the point of shutting the door to new possibilities, but their imagination around what they could do in class was diminished as well. Some of this occurred to the complete bafflement of the student: in John’s case, not learning things he would use in the future presented a real conundrum.

Similar research has found teachers making distinctions, with their students, between the “real curriculum” and the “EQAO” curriculum. Teachers assured students that they were preparing explicitly for the OSSLT and afterward they would be able to do things that were more engaging (Ricci, 2004, p. 358) and contrasted tested literacies with “real” ones (Rex, 2003). This type of distinction reveals the teacher as caught up between her or his obligations to the school board, implying, for the students, a sort of acquiescence or lack of agency on the part of the teacher, who juggles the needs not only of the classroom but also of the schooling administration, the board and the government.

Siegel (2003) argues that once students are removed from their “schooled” notions that multiliteracies such as drawing or drama wasn’t “real work,” they could better see themselves as literate subjects capable of initiating a deeper understanding into texts (p. 71). Scholars such as Adler-Kassner & Harrington (2002) and Carter (2006) note the distinction students make between writing and *being a writer*: despite

fluent engagement in a wide breadth of literacies at home, students still self-identified as not writing well because of their schooled experiences. Powell argues that "schooled literacy has... legitimated certain ways of producing and taking from text, while marginalizing others... it has emphasized superficial features of language, thereby denying access to the linguistic experiences that would enable the acquisition of secondary discourses" (1999, p. 29). For Mr. Apple's class, it was not possible to work these secondary discourses, or skills other than those needed for the OSSLT, because time was of the essence.

Unfortunately, the discrepancy between "real life" and "schooled" literacies seeped into various aspects of the student-teacher relationship. Student experiences and capacities to shape class practices were hindered by the prescriptive nature of the OSSLT, which was administered by a teacher who had no choice but to push the class to pass. This affected student's perceptions of their teacher and disrupted opportunities for authentic dialogue between teacher and students.

Student and Teacher Agency

In this section I will discuss how the OSSLT's influence on the class atmosphere contributes to a minimizing of student and teacher agency and shapes student and teacher's identities as learners. This leads to social consequences which bring the validity of the test into question. For this research agency implies an openness or freedom for using one's own judgement and ideas in order to expand and enjoy the learning process. New, multiple and multiliteracies open doors for agency because they accept multiple conceptualizations of texts, worlds and ultimately of people. Much like Khun Wei's performance was accepted and enjoyed by everyone regardless of his thick accent or English vocabulary level, agency for students and teachers could mean the spontaneous "trying out" of new things based on their own

personal life experiences, beliefs and opinions. Agency accepts and encourages a variety of learning styles because people are diverse, work differently in different settings, and thrive on opportunities to initiate diverse and new ideas and structures. The OSSLT minimizes this sense of freedom and independence in a number of ways, but most tangibly in the way it suggests to both students and teacher that there is one failsafe way of “doing” literacy, and that this one method should be adhered to.

Teacher Agency

Standardized testing policies influence a sense of surveillance or the feeling, for students and teachers, that they are being watched; as a result, the OSSLT may have influenced Mr. Apple’s view of himself as a professional. He felt frustrated by structural school policies which he perceived to negatively affect or increase challenges for his teaching for the OSSLT. These elements may have shaped or manipulated teacher-student dialogue.

Surveillance. Good teachers accept “the responsibility to keep their knowledge current... [and] must possess a disposition for lifelong learning” (Pearson, 2003, p. 15). Mr. Apple was this sort of teacher. He recognized, and explained to me several times, that passion for a profession is what drives good work, and that “adults who consistently do excellent work, and students whose learning is most impressive, are usually those who love what they do, not those who seek out a way to escape a punishment” (Kohn, 1999, p. 22). However, his stress over the test betrayed a sense that he was being held accountable to something other than the students in his class and their personal learning.

As previously described, Mr. Apple revealed that he felt incredible pressure to have the class pass the OSSLT. This pressure led to stress and anxiety for him and was possibly caused by the consequences a teacher faces for of passing or failing a

class, which “include shame or pride... and formal labelling of schools... firing principals, closing and ‘reconstituting’ schools, and financial rewards for ‘successful’ schools” (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 222). The test swayed his teaching direction and methods, which illuminates how educational measurement policies can shape the pedagogical experience. As Ricci (2004) notes, “the control of schooling is concentrated in the hands of those that create the tests and therefore direct the schooling” (p. 359). The high-stakes nature of the test suggests that teachers are being supervised; standardized curricula are one way to engage in “more efficient surveillance and control of teachers’ and students’ behaviour” (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001, p. 105). Students and teachers have little say in how the tests are designed, which feels undemocratic. Worryingly, when teachers are torn between accountability measures and doing what is right for their students, they often choose accountability, leading to a change in their level of expertise (Assaf, 2006). Mr. Apple’s perception of teacher’s expertise illustrates how standardized testing may influence his vision of the teaching profession.

Teacher professionalism and the OSSLT. Mr. Apple spoke at length of the importance of teacher’s responsibilities to their students. He noted that it was difficult to speak of the teaching profession and other teachers because, “there’s a sense of responsibility, a sense of, uh, blame, so I want to be careful...” He explained that he saw the literacy test as a valid way to be sure that teachers remained professional and in practice: “if the teacher's willing to step forward, kids tend to learn the program... sometimes I say teachers should be in construction for awhile.” He is a teacher who believes in putting in the extra work needed to help students, and emphasized the importance of

...spending an extra few hours with the students with homework. We have a lot of teachers that do that mind you, but there are some teachers who say, “this is my time, union contract says this many minutes” and so on.

He expressed his frustration with teachers who make less of an effort.

[In the teaching profession] we are assessed every five years, the unions have negotiated that with the boards and everything else so we're assessed every five years. Um... I don't want to paint the profession, but there are some teachers that are very relaxed in their profession, vocation, I mean this is a vocation, we're committed to other people... and consequently we should be professional enough to continue our education... to remain current, to get out to conferences sometimes, to try different things, so I think that's important and I think teachers need to challenge themselves sometimes. I think the test is important for that reason alone, because without this snapshot of what's happening within the education system... all of this should be happening within the system anyway. So we need this test to say, is it happening or isn't it. Are our kids literate or not?

Mr. Apple accepts the construct of the OSSLT without question to the test's validity. His notion that teachers need to be motivated or assessed by a test may reveal his perception that teachers are incapable of coming up with their own materials for study, or need a test to make sure they have properly taught their students. It seems logical that teachers should be able to facilitate success in their students on an exam such as the OSSLT. The problem arises when teachers are encouraged to teach to an exam which may be poorly designed. We have seen that the definition of literacy promoted by the OSSLT is narrow and in turn narrows student's views of themselves as literate beings. The effect is similar for teachers.

By not promoting an active engagement with the content of the OSSLT, this test contributes to a de-skilling and disempowering of teachers: “the work of teachers has been formalised into what they ‘should know and be able to do’” (Doecke et al., 2010, p. 82). At worst, standardized tests “would reduce the profession to the technocratic enactment of a carefully scripted program, one in which teachers do precisely as they are told” (Pearson, 2003, p. 15). The fiscal efficiency for which this exam is lauded (EQAO, 2011) follows a market paradigm that views students as consumers (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001). Teachers are seen as line workers in this paradigm. Rather than be explorers of language and literacy learning, pioneering new and creative pedagogies for their communities and plundering the gold-mine minds of their students, teachers are painted as workers on a predesigned assembly line. With no space to make changes to the design, their expertise and experience- along with that of their students- goes unnoticed. In some cases Professional Development days are spent preparing explicitly for the OSSLT (Ricci, 2004, p. 353), so that the test’s administration becomes the new “professional development.” High-stakes standards and outcomes “coerce teachers into emphasizing the dominant culture of power” (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001, p. 108) so that “teacher’s working lives have become narrowly defined by the metanarratives of marketing and political agendas” (Heydon, Hibbert & Iannacci, 2004, p. 319). Some experts worry these metanarratives will contribute to changes in the teaching profession.

A marketplace model... weeds out those who cannot produce results...
[upholds] the policy of championing test scores rather than program
completion as the primary pathway to a credential... the policies we are
currently implementing will lead to a generation of teachers who pay homage
to externally imposed standards rather than to the needs of children and their

families as the primary criterion for determining what students do in their classrooms. (Pearson, 2003, p. 14-15)

Dominant agendas promoted by high-stakes tests impede balanced literacy practices which value the certainty of simple test answers over student-generated materials and critical literacies. Literacy teachers who are experienced, knowledgeable and inspired, such as Mr. Apple, would find ways, regardless of these obstacles, to use some of the multimodal and student-generated practices they know to be best. However, Mr. Apple argued in detail that there are other structural barriers in place.

Rotary teaching or looping. Rather than become deeply involved with a given subject and group of students, Mr. Apple was given only two months to prepare a brand new English Applied group for the OSSLT. He was very frustrated with the rushed, drill-and-practice teaching methods he had used but felt that given the circumstances of having only a short time with a new group, these methods were the only way to prepare the students sufficiently for the exam. Referencing an article by Thompson, Franz & Miller (2009), Mr. Apple spoke at length with me about the importance of collaborative and rotary teaching, in which the same teachers teach their best subject to the same group of students in a school year after year. Mr. Apple argued passionately that his biggest 'bone to pick' with the system as he sees it is, "consistency with the teacher." He believes that Grades Seven and Eight, "should be rotary...there's so much growth going on in those two years, but [in Grades] Nine and 10... Consistency with the teachers would [also] help." Mr. Apple often made reference to his own daughter's education and his frustration with the system as a parent:

They now have a Math teacher teaching my daughter English so I now have a kit of remedial English to teach at home. Um, he's not equipped; he's blatantly told administration that, as was the case last year, we had a Math teacher teaching Grade Nine English, and she vehemently complained, saying she wasn't equipped to teach English, but they placed her where they need teachers. So, I am not equipped to teach math, but I am sure they could put me in a Math classroom.

Mr. Apple's frustration with what he perceived to be the administration's unwillingness to understand his position was revealed in many instances. Speaking about different schools and school boards he's worked for, he asserted, "Grades Seven and Eight should be rotary... we had a Superintendent who disagreed with that completely... uh, it was a mistake." As a literacy professional, Mr. Apple worried that

the Board says that [the literacy test] is supposed to be dovetailed into your units, so, some of the teachers teaching science are given the same packets and told to integrate literacy into the science unit. That's great, however... again you have a science teacher teaching literature. So, I gave one... teacher a package of the grammar and punctuation that is, uh, presented on the test, and the teacher wasn't sure which ones were the correct answers. So again, that's a science teacher, that wasn't her specialty.

Despite research showing the positive impact of having teachers who are experts in a certain discipline teach a group they are very familiar with (Thompson et al., 2009), in Mr. Apple's view, the school board gives unfounded instruction to teachers who are not sufficiently capable of integrating literacy skills into their classroom subjects. Preparing a brand new class in a short time period was contrary

to Mr. Apple's understanding of good teaching practices. Having teachers teach subjects that are not their area of expertise dismisses the "deep disciplinary knowledge" (Pearson, 2003, p. 15) of those who practice the subject they are most passionate about. This caused anxiety for him as he recognized that what he knew to be best practices for his students were not those required for the test preparation. Significantly, this may have affected the in-class dialogue of students and teacher.

Dialogue between teacher and students. The dialogue between teacher and students shapes the learning culture of a class and the ways in which students become oriented to their own possibilities for participation into "collective academic knowledge" (Rex, 2003, p. 33). If the "teacher's language mediates student understanding" (Murphy, 2007, p. 368), then the result of a teacher taking on the language of a test could be that the student understands the test to be of the highest value in a given pedagogy. Teachers are compelled "to comply with their restricted role as their work has become increasingly controlled by prescriptive policies and programs" (Powell, 1999, p. 41). One unintended consequence of this is that skills valued on the test, often outcomes-based and defined as "grading" or the "filling up" of frameworks, seeped into class practice after the test was over. Yet, "what the learner does... requires the teacher's [unique and spontaneous] response... Outcomes, thus, cannot be fixed in a single direction" (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001, p. 108). Rigid, lock-step instructional practices occupy the class psyche and practice despite the fact that teaching by nature opposes such rigidity.

Olson's (2007) study revealed that standardized tests negatively affected classroom practice by pressing teachers to adopt constricted and reductive high-pressure teaching practices that disproportionately controlled student's class participation. When a checklist is prioritized, alternative gateways into learning are

closed and the class environment becomes depersonalized: the teacher's concerns about student's knowledge, needs and skills are reduced, leading to an unequal balance of power between the student and the teacher because the student's knowledge counts less than the teacher's: the teacher is the "knowledge authority" (Olson, 2007). The "Board's" promotion of this rushed, checklist-based test preparation demonstrates how standards-based reforms exemplify a "dominant logic of capitalist society [that reduces] relationships between people to relationships between things... instead of recognising their presence within their lives, teachers are forced to treat their students as bundles of discrete skills and capabilities to be measured" (Doecke et al., 2010, p. 95). This can lead to a worst case scenario where the teacher has fully adopted the role of what Freire (2009) would have called "the knowledge transmitter" and students are posited as controllable, absorbing beings whose personal backgrounds and capacities for thinking creatively are ignored.

Differences in individual interpretations of texts, with the view that texts might be implicated in relations of power and that certain forms of knowledge get privileged over others, constitute a basis for reading critically. When teachers and students begin to recognise and to deconstruct those differences within socially and historically situated sites of power/knowledge, they engage in reflective and transformative practices. In this context teachers and students can appropriate school-based discourses as a basis to engage in discourse practices that transform social inequities in the classroom, in the community and in broader segments of society (Masny & Ghahremani-Ghajar, 1999, p. 91). Reading and writing critically "is reflective and reflexive; involves questioning received knowledge and immediate experience with the goal of challenging inequality and developing an activist citizenry" (Shor, 2009, p. 8). Limiting opportunities for students and teachers to engage in their own

spontaneously-generated discussions minimizes the connection of texts to real life, personal opinion and experience, and positions students as passive rather than active participants in their learning- and perhaps more broadly, in their communities.

In the context of outcomes-based frameworks, where language and dialogue is mediated by an outside source, we narrow the space for relationality, reciprocity and mutuality (Greene, 1995, p. 99) as teaching tools. The OSSLT promotes a perception of literacy as based in gradable deficiencies and presented through a prescribed curriculum. This devalues a more personalized education style where the dialogue between teachers and their students form a basis for conscious reflection on life experiences, and reading and writing practices come about spontaneously and communally (VanDeWeghe & Reid, 2000). Prescription-style teaching stifles possibilities for classroom conversation leading to “critical teaching [which is] not a one-way development... [but] rather, a critical process... driven and justified by mutuality” (Shor, 2009, p. 9) where the students can be teachers, teaching others about their own learning. Preparing for the OSSLT compelled Mr. Apple to teach in a one-sided, outcomes-focused fashion at the expense of a more mutual, reflexive teaching style. The resulting class culture missed the powerful learning opportunities afforded by student-generated texts and conversations.

Student Agency

The learning environment promoted by high-stakes testing erodes teacher-student relations and decreases opportunities for diversity and student-generated learning (Rex, 2003). As we have seen, the teaching and learning influenced by the OSSLT continued to shape class practices after the exam was over and continued to have effects on student’s and teacher’s behaviour. Preparation for the OSSLT required students to write straightforward

sentences connecting their own opinions to short, undemanding texts, through the single pen-to-paper medium. Despite the multitude of literacies the interviewed students engaged with at home, they did not interpret these to be important for school. This may be a result of their exclusion from class planning: by not asking students to contribute class materials or ideas, we imply that the literacies they have are insignificant, as was shown in the interviewed student's narrow definitions of what literacy is. Students could not value their own real-life literacies as school skills. As Macedo and Freire (1987) pointed out: “the intellectual activity of those without power is always characterized as non-intellectual” (p. 122). Thinking back on Khun Wei and his monologue, I recall the most important thing about that day was that in listening to him, considering his story and laughing with him, we as a class *collectively legitimated* what he was trying to say, thus empowering him to say more in the future. This is what a critical literacy class, aimed at *conscientization* (Freire, 2009), should be: students are positioned as meaning-makers and encouraged to use diverse methods to engage with text so that an expansive learning experience can take place (Siegel, 2006). Through transaction with texts, literature can be a means of expanding one’s knowledge of the world (Rosenblatt, 1970). What happens when texts used focus only on basic comprehension and avoid the world altogether?

In Mr. Apple’s class, I observed that choosing texts for students and focusing exclusively on frameworks and matching “evidence” to one-word “characteristics” rather than student experiences suppressed possibilities for critical teaching, “a praxis that begins from student generative themes and then invites unfamiliar reflection and unfamiliar connection of the local to the

global” (Shor, 2009, p. 11). The texts promoted on the test emphasize simple reading skills over the real world. In her study of a literacy classroom Ma'ayan (2010) found that “gangs, violence, and sexuality were all considered taboo within the middle school setting” (p. 648), leading to a loss of opportunity for real, authentic dialogue and discounting the student’s “knowledge, experience, and interest base” (Ma’ayan, 2010, p. 649). The hidden curriculum here may be to teach the student that their interpretations of real-life issues do not matter, at least for school. Depersonalizing and/or narrowing the learning experience is not an intended result of the test's construct, and so reflect unintended consequences. I considered this as I observed Mr. Apple’s class reading *On the Sidewalk Bleeding* by Evan Hunter.

On the sidewalk bleeding. *On the Sidewalk Bleeding* is a story about gang violence. The students read the story and were placed in groups. They were instructed to identify all the “Elements of a Short Story” and justify their answers using direct quotes from the text. I entered the class as they were peer editing this work in small collaborative groups. I sat with a group of three students who were trying to find three quotes. The story was about a teenage boy, just about their age, who'd been stabbed in an alleyway by another boy. The theme was around senseless violence and gang mentality. The students had identified this theme, but were having trouble explaining their examples. They had trouble explaining why or where this story could happen, and displayed little reaction to the story despite its gruesome theme. One student queried whether such violence really happened in "real life."

Later, during a group interview, Chelsea noted she felt the choice of that particular text was "very negative." I highly doubt that the point of reading that story was only to have a singular negative experience with it, but

that was what the student took away. Her statement on the story led us into a conversation around other student's opinions on it. Bob stated, "Seeing a kid lying on the sidewalk bleeding isn't something you see all the time," to which John replied: "in the past there used to be gangs."

Bob agreed, "I know but they're not here... definitely not in [*name of his town*]! In Detroit yeah..." This statement was punctuated by laughter, but no further discussion ensued over why he thought gangs came from Detroit. I assumed it was rap music but there was no opportunity to ask.

Where was the connection of this story to real-life for these students? How were they to become engaged in a story they couldn't see reflecting on themselves? What background knowledge had been engaged to promote an interest in the story- what other texts, such as lyrics from rap songs, might have been used to speak of this text? Greene (1995) explains that fiction interests people when it pushes them to discover new things about themselves (p. 95). Without a vested interest in *On the Sidewalk Bleeding*, how could these student readers "become entangled with the character's thoughts and perceptions [causing them to find themselves] conscious of questions and concerns buried in [their] ordinary experience" (Greene, 1995, p. 98)? At what point has preparation for the test subsumed those very personal, enlightening experiences one has with text that can make reading so special?

Greene (1995) argues that the value of stories lie in their "capacity to move readers to imagine alternative ways of being alive" (p. 104). When student readers become "personally present to what they see and hear and read... [they] develop a sense of agency and participation" (Greene, 1995, p. 104). For me, the student's ambivalence to the story demonstrates their misunderstanding of gang violence. Not only do they have trouble relating the learning to their real lives, but an authentic

conversation around the realities of violence in other people's communities has been missed. By not talking about what the gang fights might mean in a real-world context, no one has discussed or questioned the cause-effect relationship of the problem of gang violence as it exists in the real world, lending it a quality of normalcy and inevitability. I worried this could be an example of how "lessons about conflict... are often lessons normalizing violence and coercion" (Smith and Fairman, 2005, p. 43). I couldn't help but feel here that without relating this story to the world, or at least trying to engage the students in a conversation that went beyond just finding the plain facts, something was missing. Just as with the mystery story described at the beginning of this paper, which also involved a tangible act of violence, the student's reaction to the reading was overshadowed by a framework of demands, not a fraction of which was student generated. A test-influenced framework took precedence over a critical literacy approach.

The "Board" and its administration. Though a topic such as violence may open up opportunities for students to learn more about themselves and the world and thus truly expand the meaning of the text, teachers may not necessarily feel comfortable speaking about controversial topics due to the very real fear of being fired (Ma'ayan, 2010). Teacher-generated materials may feel contentious, so that the hidden curriculum becomes the fact that the teacher is not allowed to speak or must comply with "the Board." Over time, under this control, teachers may begin to see themselves as passive subjects of a structure more powerful and knowledgeable than they.

During both interviews and in-class observations, Mr. Apple, his students and both the Principal and Vice-Principal continually referred to "the Board." Other references to this "Board" included "the Ministry" and "the folks in Toronto." One

got the impression that “the Board” was a great external power looking down on them in their little classroom.

The notion that "knowledge is determined and legitimated by experts outside of the classroom, and the teacher assumes the role of managing the transmission of that knowledge" (Powell, 1999, p. 31) has existed, as mentioned earlier, since the dawn of the modern education system here in Canada. In this scenario, teachers "are figured as lowly practitioners overseen by a ruling scientist-researcher class" (Gallagher, 2010, p. 81). The work of teachers reinforces centralized curriculum and dominant culture over specific community needs and contexts.

Increasing centralization of governance, curriculum, and prescriptive education has cast more central education authorities into the role of quality-control agents responsible for setting policy, goals and performance standards and for monitoring local compliance and performance in reference to centrally determined criteria... professional support is provided... in the interests of provincially defined and/or aligned goals and standards. (Jaafar & Anderson, 2007, p. 217)

The school's administration may reinforce this quality-controller view of teachers. The visits of both the school's Principal and Vice-Principal to Mr. Apple's class in the days leading up to the exam showed the administration is at a minimum complacent, and also supportive of, the “Board” and the OSSLT. Helping the students to pass the exam was presented as a team effort between students, teacher and their school's administration (Ricci, 2004, p. 354). I couldn't help but wonder where the critical reflection was over the usefulness of the test; the effects, both psychological and cultural, it was having on this classroom; and where the space was for student opinions and observations.

If there is a rigidity and ineffectiveness in the current school system, it is in part due to the failure of administrators to use their power to address issues that could enhance learning opportunities and educational outcomes for all youth. (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001, p. 200)

In the case of Mr. Apple's English class, the school administration acted as promoters, and not critics, of the test. Neither teacher nor administrator ever brought up the notion or possibility of the tested items on the OSSLT being irrelevant to real life or lacking in critical thinking. This lack of criticism implies, for the students, an unquestioned acceptance of the test.

In a similar study of an Ontario high school, Ricci (2004) revealed that the administration instructed teachers not to criticize standardized testing as a whole in any way (p. 345). It was assumed that the test was well-designed and improvement could be made just by looking at the results of the test. The EQAO had a huge influence on the Board's decisions, and Ricci noted that whenever new data was released from the EQAO the Board scrambled to put together new action plans and reports. Ricci exclaimed: "the time, man power, and money spent on putting these packages together, unfortunately, takes away from other more important endeavours—setting up democratic schools, for instance" (p. 352). Furthermore, local media disseminated test results without critique, implying full support for the test (p. 345). Ricci also found there was a culture of secrecy that surrounded the test, as only the principal had access to its results (p. 346). In Mr. Apple's class this aspect of privileged knowledge or secrecy existed in the dissemination of the Mock Literacy Test: the Principal brought the results in for the students to observe in class, but they could not take their tests home.

The number of people involved in teaching, test and curriculum design makes it difficult for students to know exactly who the teacher is (McGill-Franzen, 2007, p. 369). There moments in Mr. Apple's class when Principal and Vice-Principal occupied time and space to promote the test underscores their approval of the OSSLT, which suggests to students that their teacher, along with them, are following the rules handed down from "the Board." In this way, in addition to affecting teacher's views of their own professionalism, standardized testing may influence student's perceptions of their teachers.

Referencing "the Board," Bob commented that "the teacher has to teach what they are told to." The other participants nodded in agreement with him. One might ask what impression a student will have of his or her teacher if that teacher is just doing what they are told, and not creating things especially for their class and students. Teachers are our children's role models. How do we promote student's agency when we show them that their teachers must systemically conform to some nameless higher power?

Conformity. When asked how they would use their time in English class if not to prepare for literacy test, I was met with shock. Students insisted they could not envision a class in which they did things, "other than what we are doing now." Their shock revealed how rare it actually is for someone to include them in the process of thinking about their curriculum and their own in-class activities. Despite having expressed frustration at what they did day-to-day, and even noting they couldn't see it as relevant to their present or futures, students hesitated to think of alternatives to the status quo. When I asked them, "If you had the choice to do whatever you wanted in English class, what would you do?" Bob replied, "probably this... it's English class so probably we'd do this same stuff." John gave examples of reading short stories for

two or three weeks at a time. When I wondered aloud: “what would you *want* to do?” I was met with dismay. The students thought for awhile. John tried to brainstorm but wasn’t sure: “well... I think listening to the teacher talk while you write isn’t very exciting... I’d love to...” As he trailed off into deep thought, struggling to envision another way, Bob suggested they should integrate more types of literacies into the class and be able to choose their own texts:

[We need] more options. Um, for the stories and stuff like that, like, looking back on the technology [question], I think there should be, um, websites available, um, like for homework, like I’m saying, maybe there’s a website that you can choose your own short story, because it relates to the stuff... ‘cause the short stories we get, they’re not interesting at all and if they’re not interesting we lose track and that’s why most of us don’t get it done, so if there was more variety, I think we would do more.

Chris remained staunchly aligned with the status quo, arguing he likes the topics of the stories he reads in class.

Well, I’d say... if you ask me there’s a point where we should just leave English the way it is ‘cause we get a thorough understanding of stuff like reading the newspaper articles, writing opinion pieces, reading skills and writing skills... whatever has to do with English... I think that the short stories we get in English class right now, I think they’re pretty interesting, because, they have uh, they still have interesting topics.

Brainstorming further on the topic of whether English class should stick with the status quo (Default) or change the class content, students expressed either a disinterest or a distrust of doing anything differently. Tom noted:

I think I would go Default with everything, because if we're choosing everything it can get very disorganized quite fast, especially if everyone gets to choose their own specific, like thing to do if every individual person does something different for an assignment, the teacher... well, it's going to take forever for the teacher to mark it.

The notion of changing the status quo seemed complicated for the students. John explained,

I think to plan it out, everyone would have to agree on everything... and for everyone to agree on everything, that would just take so long, so... and if everyone was doing something different, it would just take so long, to just, ask your friend for help, and ... it would be hard... so I guess I would go with the Default.

Chris agreed while momentarily hesitating:

Everything would be going into chaos if everything wasn't uh, organized well enough, or... well actually, well I guess I shouldn't really say that, I guess I should- well we should just keep it the way it is, everything well organized, efficient.

Changing the status quo and giving the students their own say in what happens in school seemed complicated, longwinded and chaotic. Envisioning any alternate way of proceeding in school was difficult for the students, who shook their heads vehemently when asked if on a day-to-day basis they felt they'd been heard. As Tom expressed, "depending on the activity, say, student council gets to organize fundraisers, but normal events or even curriculum is defined by the adults." Tom announced on behalf of all the students that they did appreciate participation in the

research process: "just a general statement over these past weeks, I feel better that somebody's taking the time to be able to know what we have to say."

John was clear about which parts of the OSSLT seemed unnecessary for him, and wanted to address those who he saw as the decision makers personally: "um, no more newspaper article or opinion piece, 'cause I don't think we need those... on the literacy test at least. CANADIAN GOVERNMENT!"

In-class practices affect the consciousness of students and their visions of themselves as learners: "no pedagogy is neutral, no learning process is value-free, no curriculum avoids ideology and power relations. To teach is to encourage human beings to develop in one direction or another" (Shor, 2009, p. 17). What happens when students view themselves as voiceless in the big picture of their own education? Despite the view of teachers and students that accountability policies promote, these learners are not passive line workers. However, in the context of prescriptive pedagogy, where students have little space to negotiate their own learning styles and generate their own texts, their reaction is to invest as much interest in the subject matter as has been given to their own selves-as-learners. Writing on the advantages of virtual spaces for learners; Gee (2003) argues it's easier for students to take risks in a world where there are no social consequences. Conversely, in high-stakes test, where the social consequences of not passing are very great, students find themselves unable to take risks with literacy. The consequences of this might range from students feeling anxious and stressed because of real-life consequences, to a stifling of student creativity and originality, to them not caring at all.

Student apathy. Upon asking the students what they might change about the OSSLT if given the chance, I was startled by a sense of apathy. Bob told me: "I don't really care [about making changes to the test] 'cause as long as I'm prepared for it, I

don't care, if I'm prepared for it." I asked him if he felt prepared for the test and he replied that "after three or four weeks of nonstop [preparation]" he did feel prepared. I queried whether he felt such nonstop preparation was a good way to spend class time and he answered, "for preparation's sake, yeah, but I really don't think we needed to be doing that much. I think it was kind of an excuse, um, to teach us more, in a shorter amount of time, if that makes sense."

Using the test "as an excuse to teach us more in a shorter amount of time" might be viewed as this student's total buy-in of the test. Did Bob view the test as a way to hold teachers accountable? Why might teachers, in his view, need an "excuse" to "teach more"? For me, Bob's theory points to a somewhat cynical vision of his own schooling and of the paradigm of education in general. Why did teachers need "an excuse" to teach anything? Was some outside board required to dangle the benefits of a test over the heads of teachers and students in order to push them toward learning? If authentic exchanges between teacher and student were happening, would anyone need an outside pressure or impetus to "get things done in a shorter amount of time"? Bob went on to declare:

It's a test. I don't really care. As long as I know what I'm writing I could not, I don't even care if it's not interesting, I'll write it and get out. That's my attitude: I'll prepare for it, I'll study for it, but I don't really care.

I asked: "how do you feel about not really caring?" Bob answered: "well, I mean, I care if I pass it or not but I don't care what I write, like it's not the test that matters, it's the score." Chelsea piped in, "I'm like that with every class though" and John agreed:

Yeah, and the literacy test, if it was more stuff that I would care about, 'cause the newspaper articles and opinion piece subjects, they... [if they gave me a

subject I cared about] then I would write much longer, better paragraphs, more detailed than the paragraphs... than the subjects that they gave me.

John's statement emphasizes the irrelevance, for him, of the content on the literacy test. Contrasting this apathetic attitude to our earlier discussion about music, in which the students piped up enthusiastically to express their opinions, I wondered again about the relevance of this test to the student's lives. What purpose does a test serve when it does not, in any way, seem important to those who are taking it?

Youdell (2003) argues there is a hidden curricular component to the OSSLT: it affects the way students actually perceive their own education and identities as potential real-world learners. This component of the hidden curriculum crafts students' identities as learners, providing schemas that affect the way they interact with and interpret the role of schooling in their lives (Youdell 2003). The testing model also promoted a level of superficiality. When options for personal development and engagement were lost, students "performed" a certain version of reality rather than authentically taking part in the class (Rex, 2003, p. 39). This connects to the concerns that Mr. Apple had over whether the students were just learning what they had to in order to pass the test, but not really nurturing a sense of love of language and literacy. Rather than be active agents in their learning, the students conformed to instructions given to them.

A space for disaster? Despite the breadth of research pointing to the importance of experiences with multiple texts and using texts that students can relate to (Carlson & Clay, 2010, p. 166), in-class practices are narrowed by the preparation for the OSSLT, which promotes a rigid vision of literacy. Student voices could not be heard because they were not invited; in turn, students devalued their own literacies and their personal inputs into learning. Interestingly, students did not, could not or

would not question their day-to-day practices in English class. This may have to do with the perception that the government-issued rules of writing were immutable (Carter, 2006, p. 110). Making “the rules of writing... both mysterious and confining” (Carter, 2006, p. 108) excludes student's input into their own writing process and treats writing as a universal norm rather than a contextualized, relevant social practice (p. 119). Individual student's creativity is less valued because it does not conform to the skills expected of them on the standardized test (Ricci, 2004, p. 357). No room was made for alternative summaries and the pieces students summarized on the test were of poor quality (Ricci, 2004, p. 353). Regardless of scholars pointing to the importance of multiple texts and students as meaning-makers, the pressure to pass the OSSLT dominated in-class practice; its high-stakes nature shut the doors, at least for this one class, to multiple methods of learning and teaching.

Frameworks that demand students find the basic facts about a story and not much more make me wonder: where the space is for *disaster* in these literacy experiences, for all the things that make us human and comprise our life experiences. Where is the full range of human emotions brought up by stories; the mourning and the bleeding and the pondering of nonsensical acts committed by humans; the real-life environmental traumas; the controversies and catastrophes humankind takes part in? Where is the space for multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993); where is the emphasis on the learner's pragmatic roles in her/his learning processes (Kohn, 2000)? As Ladson-Billings (2005) points out, "the disappearance of the Aral Sea... probably won't appear on standardized tests" (p. 86). A curriculum that avoids talk of serious issues prioritizes our current habits- sustaining an economy based on consumption and use of the earth as a material resource- as more important than the environment, other living beings and how we interact with them as stewards of the Earth. “Relations to

the environment are mentioned, but sustained attention to the condition of the earth in urban settings, to the destruction of habitats... in the face of expanding urbanization... are insufficiently emphasized in the Ontario curriculum” (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001, p. 108). I am not suggesting that we bombard students with the pressing issues of the world, but when we avoid these topics altogether we may be promoting a hidden curriculum. We may teach our students that these topics don't matter to them, or worse: that even if they did matter, our young people cannot do anything about them. Perhaps it is most significant that we do not invite the students to at least bring up issues about their world they wish they could change. When they are under constant pressure to fill out frameworks and comply with externally imposed pressures, students and teachers miss chances to generate their own topics of interest, and miss chances to bring up issues they find relevant and important for improving their own lives and communities.

A pedagogy which minimizes these opportunities is a direct affront to critical literacy. It seems logical that standardized test measure "basic skills" such as the comprehension needed to identify a theme in a story. But the time taken to work on basic skills outbalances the time spent on deeper understanding, which takes students far beyond the basics (Perkins & Blythe, 1994). Critical literacy would prioritize student's knowledge and experiences and an authentic conversation around student-and-teacher-generated subject matter. We invite the disaster of uncritical thinking when we narrow the space for critical literacy in our classrooms. The basic skills promoted on the OSSLT thus undermine students and teachers' voices and their potential for learning collectively and taking on texts that promote transactional and transformative literacy experiences. This represents a social consequence of the test that brings its validity into question.

Table of findings. The following table represents a summary of the findings of this research as explicated in the previous sections.

Tension / Finding	Key Points	Description
Time quantity and quality	Drill-and-practice teaching Stress, anxiety and high-stakes Tension between best practices and test practices	Promotes rote and rushed teaching Causes significant stress for both teacher and students Teacher felt compelled to teach to the test at the expense of professional judgement
OSSLT dominates student definitions of literacy	Multiliteracies reduced to supports for basic skills Schooled literacies not relevant to life or jobs Real versus schooled literacies	Test focusses on pen-and-paper literacy at the expense of other media Students could not connect test items to real-life situations Students identified a gap between literacies practiced at home and at school
Student and teacher agency	<p>Teacher Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveillance • Teacher professionalism and the OSSLT • Rotary teaching or 'looping' • Dialogue between teacher and students <p>Student Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the sidewalk bleeding • The “Board” and its administration • Conformity • Student apathy • A space for disaster? 	<p>Culture of testing undermines teacher agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test and policies instill a sense of surveillance • Expertise is removed from teachers • Practice and relationships fragmented • In-class dialogue influenced by test <p>Test negates student agency and knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced room for authentic discussion • Notion of “Board” places expertise outside the classroom • Little discussion of alternatives to status quo • Students' agency influenced by test • Little discussion of real-life issues and experiences

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In this concluding section I will illustrate how the findings of this research call the validity of the OSSLT into question. Following from this I will explore the scientific paradigm around standardized testing which may help explain why policymakers continue to support tests such as the OSSLT despite the existence of a large body of research questioning the validity of its design. Finally, this section suggests possibilities for the way forward.

Summary of Findings

I set out at the beginning of this thesis to answer three questions, and this summary responds to them directly. In the sections that follow I will elaborate on some of the consequences of these findings, and also attempt to illustrate epistemological reasons for the testing paradigm in our culture.

How does preparation for the OSSLT shape the classroom-based literacy experiences of students and teachers in a particular class?

Leading up to the exam, class time was overwhelmingly devoted to test preparation. Preparing for the OSSLT outweighed other activities in the classroom. Some students expressed disinterest with these activities but were compelled to comply with the preparation the test demanded, because they perceived that their risk of failure was high. The high-stakes nature of the test placed a lot of demand on both teacher and students. Mr. Apple felt pressured to instruct the class in a lock-step fashion, explicitly following a checklist which he didn't create himself, and hence could not consult the students on. He insisted that this way of learning was not ideal and felt a tension between best practices for literacy learning and for test preparation. All of these factors combined to cause students and teacher to feel stress and anxiety.

Does the test promote or hinder a multi and multiple literacies approach to literacy education?

Though students practice a wide range of literacies at home which would easily fit into new, multiple or multiliteracies frameworks, in class the only type of literacy valued was the one found on the OSSLT. A narrow definition of literacy on the OSSLT devalued literacies students engaged in at home while feeling irrelevant to their real lives, both present and future. This caused a distinction between in-class, "schooled" literacies and other, real-life literacies. Class practices which may have invited opportunities for new, multiple and multiliteracies, such as the use of computer software, were reduced to the frameworks and skills promoted during preparation for the OSSLT. Opportunities for teacher and student to "name the world" together were limited by stress and frameworks or outcomes-oriented reading that distracted from aesthetic reading experiences. This type of reading continued after the completion of the OSSLT.

What effect does the test have on classroom culture in terms of teacher's pedagogical choices and student's literacy development?

Mr. Apple expressed two concerns for his students. First, he was concerned with integrating good teaching strategies that work well for a lower level group; second, he wanted to be sure the group would be proficient on the test and pass it. The second concern implies an acceptance of the OSSLT, despite its promoting what he admitted was a constricting method of instruction which prioritizes passing over his own notion of best practice. The pressure to pass the OSSLT resonated on multiple levels: passing the students was presented as a team effort between the "Ministry" and their school's administration. No one really made space to question the content of the test despite astute feelings, on the student's part, that parts of the test

might be irrelevant. Thus, the OSSLT influenced the literary practices as well as the identities of both student and teacher in this class, because their input was not requested and their voices not heard. This affected student-teacher dialogue in class and posited the teacher as a transmitter of a Board-administered pedagogy. These factors combined to detract student and teacher agency and minimize their potential as empowered learners. While the underrepresentation of new, multiple and multiliteracies are enough to display a serious flaw in the construct validity of the OSSLT, I would contend that the greatest social consequence caused by this test is the undermining of both teacher and student agency in the classroom.

Threats to the OSSLT's Validity

Educational measurement specialists have said that data on the social consequences of this test must include the highly personal and contextual life experiences of the students who actually take this exam and the teachers who must prepare them for it (Slomp, 2008). In the findings I have done my best to represent students' and teacher's discourses around literacy and their experiences with the OSSLT. The EQAO often references validity theory in its literature, but these citations merely pay lip-service to the science of educational measurement. They are not supported by extensive research into student and teacher experiences. This study has attempted to provide data which directly illustrates real-life school experiences.

Messick passionately declares that validity judgements are value judgements. Student's educational experiences, not statistical results, must be of the highest value for policymakers. Validity requires consideration of all possible social consequences of a given test. By taking a thorough look at what happens in schools when the test is being implemented, this research draws on one of Messick's (1989) main concerns about validity: that the implications of test scores extend far beyond their own

intrinsic value. This study has revealed a number of implications for the OSSLT which take the form of social consequences.

Underrepresentation of literacies. One of the biggest concerns driving the study of educational assessment and validity theory is over things left out on tests. Items left out of tests could be unvalued, unattended to and underdeveloped (Messick, 1994). A test that leaves out too much narrows teaching and learning practices, which results in a low degree of validity. In Mr. Apple's class, the narrow definition of literacy represented on the OSSLT influenced the way students and teacher viewed literacy. Perceived time constraints and the way the test shaped student and teacher identities minimized possibilities for activities that promote critical literacy.

Filling up frameworks just for the sake of it flies in the face of what multiple literacies theories encourage, which is the transformative experience of the reader: "for a transformative literacy to be realized, students must believe that their words will be heard, and that the hearing of their words can have the potential not just to inform, but also to inspire" (Powell, 1999, p. 100). In this view, literacy is fundamentally interactive. It requires not only reading for oneself and for extracting the facts from a text according to someone else's framework, but the insertion of student's particular experiences into the text: "when we draw upon student's experiences and imaginations in the writing classroom, we validate their lives" (Greene, 1995, p. 104). Powell (1999) explains that "good literature exposes our common identity; it touches us in ways that reveal our collective human experience. In essence, literature contains universal themes that speak to us all- themes that transcend our differences and help us to see the world through another's eyes" (p. 75). Reading enables "adventures into meaning" (Greene, 1995, p. 100) that permit students to think about reality in different ways and through a wide new spectrum of

characters and personalities. This aesthetic reading style first described by Rosenblatt (1970) might open doors to critical literacy through its "capacity to move readers to imagine alternative ways of being alive" (Greene, 1995, p. 101), but at a minimum, the joy of reading is made available to the students. There is no possible way to measure, via a centrally-planned and mass-distributed test, the highly personal and spontaneous emotions one experiences when one enters a literary world. Because this experience is impossible to measure, it becomes underrepresented on the test.

One example of the test's influence on day-to-day class practice was the study of *On the Sidewalk Bleeding*, where students were encouraged to concentrate on basic aspects of the text, but not to expand on the larger, more profound themes that relate the story to the real world. The focus for discussion was not the real tragedy of a teenager lying dead in an alleyway. Rather, data drawn from the story was meant to satisfy basic comprehension skills, which are much easier to grade as true or false, but seriously underrepresent complex reading skills. This "perceived devaluing of complex skills in favour of component skills in educational testing, and ultimately in teaching," (Messick, 1994, p. 20) should be cause for concern for test designers. Validity theory demands that tests mix real-world with schooled activities (Messick, 1994). However, this study finds that the definition of literacy on the test seemed to widen the gap between schooled and real-life literacies; between school and the world.

There is a total absence of new, multiple and multiliteracies on the OSSLT. When students were asked about literacy they defined it narrowly as reading and writing. Despite having a huge variety of multimodal literacy skills at home, students could not value these skills as relevant for schooling. Technologies used in class were viewed as supports to an efferent, frameworks-based approach to reading. So new,

multiple and multiliteracies are underrepresented on the test and the social consequence of this is that it shaped how students viewed themselves as literacy learners and practitioners. Their personal literacy skills and capacities for creating original work were devalued.

The content of the test is generated by an outside source and is fairly straightforward, uncontroversial, and unemotional. This led to a further narrowing of pathways into critical literacy. Contextual knowledge- how dependant on context a test item is- is one of the most important determining factors in the validity of a test. Tests must balance contextual knowledge with other tested skills (Messick, 1994). It may be this concern with balance which causes the content of the texts on the OSSLT to have a certain basic, simplistic or factual quality. Perhaps the centralized design of the test forces it into a sort of neutrality so that communities all over Ontario will not suffer from a lack of context. Ironically, since practice for the test outbalanced all other activities in Mr. Apple's class, the context of the class became a reflection of the test context. Class activities were centred on skills promoted on the test, which influenced narrow, often decontextualized writing practices. Writing experts maintain that writing is a highly complex cognitive and social process that requires a huge contextual knowledge base (Beaufort, 2007). How can students build this base if their authentic, life-based discussions in class are not promoted?

Irrelevant variance. Another threat to the validity of the OSSLT is the difficulty particular groups of students may have with it. Experts have asserted that "if a test has been developed specifically for a certain population... then it is imperative that the test be used solely for those it was designed to assess" (Invernizzi et al., 2005, p. 613). The Applied level students in Mr. Apple's English class did not

enter the classroom with the same skills toolkit as an Academic English class; yet, they must take the same test.

Another difficulty in a similar vein is the possibility of bias, which the paradigm of standardized testing purports to eradicate or minimize, but which might exist no matter how valid or well-designed the assessment is. The assumptions teachers and administrators make about their student's ability to take the test can influence how they instruct and prepare them for the test (Invernizzi et al., 2005, p. 163). In the case of Mr. Apple's Applied English class, everyone seemed to feel the pressure of passing. The administration, the teacher and the students were all in a state of mild distress over this examination, and whether or not they merited this distress remains unclear.

Stress affected the classroom dynamics and represented irrelevant variance because test makers could not have intended to cause such a fuss for their test subjects. In this case we see a real focus on basics based on the notion that that's what the students needed, whereas in another class the focus might have been on critical or new literacies. Moreover, this heavy focus on the OSSLT seems to have shaped student's perceptions of themselves as learners.

Social Consequences

The biggest consequence of the OSSLT is that it devalued student and teacher agency. The high-stakes nature of the exam placed huge pressures on all members of the classroom which are both psychological (causing anxiety) and physical (taking up class time). This affected the class mood and relationships. Dialogue between students and teacher was affected by the OSSLT. Teachers should do their best to help classrooms reflect student experiences (Compton-Lilly, 2007; Ma'ayan, 2010). By limiting the time and resources they have in class, teacher's opportunities to

actually learn about their students lives and perspectives, which in turn might encourage them to seek out texts their students would find interesting, are limited. By excluding teacher and student-generated material from the test's structure and content, both parties were left wondering how the texts are relevant to their lives and contexts. Students seldom had a chance to integrate their personal experiences and thoughts into their answers; they had no observed opportunity to generate or recommend texts they found relevant for themselves and the class; and they had very little scope to use their own original ideas in their writing.

Finally, the feeling that the Ministry or "Board" was watching down on everyone influenced the way students viewed their teacher and the way that the teacher viewed himself. The teacher was positioned as a transmitter of prescribed policies and pedagogy. His perception of the teaching profession was affected by this, as revealed when he ascribed the test to a surveillance method for teachers. I believe that this has direct implications for the democratic potential of the classroom. Standardized testing removes democracy from the classroom because it reinforces the notion that the teacher and students are not in dialogue, not working together, and not democratic. The teacher is following rules the student must follow; by removing power and flexibility from the teacher, the student is encouraged to believe that she too, is powerless, and she too, must follow a top-down set of rules.

Democracy is not possible where students have no input into their own education and the teacher is viewed as an autocratic power (Carr, 2007, p. 5). The high-stakes nature of the exam led to everyone feeling like they were under pressure to conform to the test in order to satisfy the demands of an unquestioned power. This reaffirms, within today's classroom, traditional notions of "experts" or "authorities" of knowledge who must guide students and teachers as if they were deficient citizens

waiting to be moulded to the demands of power. When the educational measurement community used scientific justifications for such beliefs, they only entrench us further into traditions we've had since the dawn of the education system.

Science and the rhetoric of power. The policies around literacy testing have made themselves amenable to the power rhetoric of science and the notion of flawless linear causality. Science is a power rhetoric in our society today (Zerbe, 2007). This may explain policymaker's limited consideration of the recommendations provided by teachers and writing experts, who have cried out against standardized literacy testing (Gallagher, 2010). An increased use of external assessments has been justified by the notion that science will help alleviate bias (Invernizzi et al, 2005). However, educational measurement specialists have themselves pointed out that though the theory behind validity is rich, its practice is flawed (Brennan, 2006). Science simply cannot accurately measure the transformative experiences afforded by reading. High-stakes literacy tests narrow student's and teachers literacy experiences as a result of their own limited capacity to measure the "complex, multi-faceted relationship between human beings and the world around them than that which is assumed by 'scientific' forms of inquiry, that treat the world simply as an object which is external to us" (Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010, p. 96). Despite mounting research that brings the consequential validity of Canadian standardized writing assessments into question (Slomp, 2008), the EQAO continues to cite statistics (EQAO, 2011) and consequential validity theory (EQAO Research Report, 1999) to justify the design and use of the OSSLT. However, statistics do not tell the story of the day-to-day life experiences of students and teachers.

The educational measurement community takes the paradigmatic position that scientifically-verified literacy tests encourage neutrality and will promote superior

instruction in the classroom (Powell, 1999, p. 25). Policymakers continue to accept the simplistic conclusion that, "if we measure it, it will be taught; if it is taught, it will be learned... Meanwhile, the testimony of teachers- those who actually spend their days with students- were dismissed as a predictable stream of tiresome complaints" (Gallagher, 2010, p. 78). The implication that teachers need a test to guide them toward good reading and writing instruction contains an inherent distrust of teachers as experts in the literacy discipline. Class practices occupied by technocratic, reductive frameworks diminish aesthetic experiences of reading and diminish teacher's potentials to facilitate their student's literacy skills. Significantly, the reductive ethos of the OSSLT may be caused by its very *raison d'être*: in order to increase the efficiency of marking this exam, test designers must reduce literacy to a few simple sentences.

Challenges to scientific thought may be perceived by policymakers as a slippage or shaking of the foundations: a multiplicity of perspectives, of students' interpretations, is seen as a cacophony that will cause anarchy (Greene, 1995 p. 187). I want to explore here how we got to a point where "policymakers may look to science not to have the world revealed to them 'as it is,' but instead to have it revealed to them in the way they imagine it to be" (Gallagher, 2010, p. 80). I believe that since the validity of high-stakes literacy tests have been repeatedly brought into question, the fact that they remain in use has more to do with maintaining certain discourses around what types of literacy are acceptable and what types are not (Powell, 1999; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). The methods by which we discuss literacy experiences are important here: policymakers posit they can attain certainty in measuring reading and writing, while researchers take a much more tentative view (Gallagher, 2010). What I observe is a paradigm struggle that illustrates the delicate relationship between

truth and power, which is comparable to Foucault's analysis of the discourse around sex in the 19th century.

Scientia versus ars in literacy. Foucault (1980) argues that in the 19th century, the scientific community ascribed sex with “an imaginary dynasty of events destined to be passed on for generations... [and] set itself up as the supreme authority in matters of hygienic necessity” (p. 53). While scientists and doctors emphasized the necessity of having “neutral viewpoints,” their bold verbosity on all matters sexual grew along with their deep fascination for categorizing and defining the “medical norms” of the sexual act (p. 53). Yet despite this, the so-called science of sex was

in fact a science made up of evasions... [and an] inability or refusal to speak of sex itself... [it] concerned itself primarily with aberrations, perversions, exceptional oddities and pathological abatements... [it was] more servile with respect to the powers of order than amenable to the requirements of truth.

(Foucault, 1980, p. 53)

For Foucault, this constituted a “systematic blindness” (1980, p. 54) within which “the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful or dangerous... sex was constituted as a problem of truth” (p. 56). This truth was seen as masterfully hidden, a secret buried within a Pandora’s box of scientific fact. It became the job of scientific experts to draw all the deviants and demons out of the box, to categorize and analyze them. Foucault calls this *Scientia sexualis* and contrasts it with *ars erotica*.

In *ars erotica* truth is found in pleasure itself, and pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law (or medical norm) of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by a reference to a criterion of utility (such as producing offspring), but rather, was to be understood and experienced first and foremost in relation to itself. In *ars erotica*, knowledge about sex “must be deflected back into the sexual practice itself, in order

to shape it as though from within and amplify its effects” (Foucault, 1980, p. 57). For literacy, *ars erotica* would represent the transformative literary experience which occurs when readers are “pulled into” texts, so that the textual reality and self merge (Compton-Lilly, 2007) leading to deeper understanding. Like a dance, where “the focus is on process and practice; the skill in the making is embodied in the subject” (Greene, p. 131), the truth can be found in the act. In contrast, *Scientia sexualis* views its subject matter as a “masterful secret” only discoverable via the exhaustive examination of its flaws, a retreat from the spontaneous action, the frank conversation.

Foucault’s comparison of *ars erotica* and *Scientia sexualis* describes the parturition of a knowledge-power relationship, promulgated and propagated by a community of “experts.” In *Scientia sexualis* the discourse around truth becomes privileged and specific, and knowledge, as power, can only be accessed by a specific group deemed expert, for whom all those who do not have knowledge are the subjects of that presupposed expertise. “From this interplay there has evolved... a knowledge of the subject; a knowledge not so much of his form, but of that which divides him, determines him perhaps, but above all causes him to be ignorant of himself” (Foucault, 1980, p. 70). Similarly with educational measurement, only trained experts or specialists can “measure” the truth of the subject matter. These specialists keep secrets at bay from the layperson while simultaneously obsessing over that person’s habits. Students and teachers are excluded from incorporating their own texts into the test: they are forced to conform to a presupposed definition of literacy. Secrecy, high levels of formality and high-stakes associated with the OSSLT causes literacy to become insider’s knowledge, whose mastery is privy to an elite few who enjoy a

status based on the inexpressibility of what they know. Central to this knowledge is the coveted literary artefact.

The [English] profession has an interest in believing in the enigmatic power of the literate artefact- a sort of homage to the solid demonstration of the result of literacy: the script, the printed page, the preserved manuscript, the student's five-paragraph essay. (Stuckey, 1991, p. 35)

The OSSLT, limited to pen and paper and simplistic texts, also pays homage to this artefact and in doing so underrepresents new, multiple and multiliteracies. This underrepresentation holds in place the power of school's administration over knowledge and texts (discourses) that enter the classroom. Alternative discourses or interpretations of literacy are seen as dangerous (Stuckey, 1991, p. 21). Lankshear and Knobel (2006) posit that suddenly integrating the Internet into education is viewed as a threat to corporate educational stakeholders: new literacies would present an "enormous challenge to curricular, social, and political authority in schools" (p. 83). They go on to deplore: "we are distressed by the extent to which schooling has been reduced to the task of ensuring that all young people master 'literacy,' narrowly defined as encoding and decoding alphabetic script for the purposes of accessing information" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 84). For Lankshear & Knobel (2006), the business model of education has more to do with "maintaining schooling as a system of cautions and controls" (p. 84) to which simple teaching and learning are conducive, but truly educating- in the sense of Freire's *conscientization*- is not.

In contrast to *ars erotica* which found its knowledge in the extemporaneous experience of pleasure, where the truth was in the act, open to possibilities, *scientia sexualis* subsumes the truth and the knowledge of it for "a pleasure in the truth of pleasure... a pleasure of analysis" (Foucault, 1980, p. 71). Millions of dollars are

spent on setting up an office dedicated to “Quality and Accountability” whose rhetoric represents “a proliferation of discourses, carefully tailored to the requirements of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 72). The assumptions that “schools are non-political sites in which all belief systems are given legitimacy, and that best practice has been determined through objective inquiry” (Powell, 1999, p. 24) is supported by a powerful scientific rhetoric which itself supports those in power. Left with the impression that their recommendations fall on deaf ears, researchers and experts might conclude that policymakers listen “only to those who controlled the means of (economic or knowledge) production: business leaders and technical experts” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 78). Influenced by a scientific or rationalist view of pedagogy, policymaker’s choices often subsume complexity to linearity so that step-by-step measurement is valued over local discourses and student’s and teacher’s enmeshed knowledge (McMurtry, 2008). These discourses are founded on a conviction that linear reasoning is infallible; how else could we explain why “the skills and content of instruction have been largely determined by individuals who are removed from daily personal encounters with students, and pedagogical practices have become progressively rationalized” (Powell, 1999, p. 30)? The creation of knowledge by the student, through their interaction with texts and personal perceptions of experience, is diminished in favour of verbose references to science. In this way knowledge rests with authorities, supported by structures of power.

Challenges to this research. As with any research, there were many challenges and gaps in this study and they all present potential points of interest for future investigation. This research was centred on the influence of the assessment, not on the curriculum. Further research could be done around possible flaws in

Ontario's curriculum with regards to how it similarly influences in-class practices, what it leaves out and how it mitigates possibilities for critical literacy.

New, multiple and multiliteracies were all grouped together in this research. I made a sweeping conclusion that all these theories open passageways into critical literacy. I recognize that much more could be written about how they do this, which would make up the work of an entirely separate dissertation. Grouping these theories together made it difficult to center the research on one theoretical framework, but I did it in order to showcase the OSSLT's closed nature to any of these cutting edge frameworks for literacy teaching and learning.

The EQAO, besides references to a few of its publications, remains voiceless in this study. In the future one might look more thoroughly, via interviews and visits, at the EQAO's processes and policies and the logic it uses to design its tests.

Many of the challenges of conducting ethnography were mitigated by my voracious reading of literature on ethnographic methodology and my constant self-consciousness about balancing class participation and observation. Some of those concerns were addressed in the section on method and I will not reiterate them, except in saying that the first major challenge to this research was how I affected classroom practice by my presence, and how my own interpretation and bias affected my note taking and presentation of interview data. Six weeks is a short amount of time to enter people's lives, and the lunchtime interviews contained plenty of opportunity for missing data. People may have felt silenced during the group interviews for a whole variety of reasons ranging from shyness, to being interrupted by other students, to a preoccupation with eating pizza. Though I have done my best to avoid misrepresenting what the students and teachers said in their interviews, one can never be sure one has accurately exemplified another person's thoughts and opinions.

Following from this is the biggest challenge for this research: the fact that the very thing that the research ended up being about- student and teacher agency- was also the thing that I felt was missing. This study considered how underrepresented literacies and outcomes-based class practices had a negative effect on student and teacher agency and possibilities for critical literacies; however, it is very difficult to measure what positive effects those may have had if they existed. This presents a challenge to this research, but offers inspiration for future research.

Recommendations: Moving Forward

A lack of focus on and attention to social justice in relation to democracy in education could have a deleterious effect on how students shape their own views during and after their educational experiences, and, significantly, how they engage in democracy. Any discussion on accountability for high academic standards must ultimately consider accountability for democracy and social justice as an integrated component, not an afterthought. (Carr, 2007, p. 9)

Curriculum, assessment and an education paradigm re-designed.

Policymakers are spending large amounts of time, money and effort (Ricci, 2004) on being sure that standardized tests are reliable and valid and that frameworks and guidelines for learning are properly and procedurally laid out for us. Yet, in this study the teacher felt anxiety over, and struggled with implementing the learning required for the exam. There is a serious need to evaluate the impact of a given assessment and how it may influence instructional practices and cause over-testing in classes, reducing class practice to the practice of tests rather than the practice of reading (Invernizzi et al, 2005). I reiterate here what so many have said before me: many current standardized literacy assessments suffer from validity concerns (Slomp,

2008). The time and effort spent on justifying educational measurement might be better spent supporting teachers to design local, contextual assessments that meet the real-time literacy needs of their particular students. Alternate forms of assessment must be promoted, researched, and used (Earl, 2003). This research has attempted to show that the OSSLT's design does not satisfy the demands of construct validity. It presents serious social consequences for students and teachers and should not be a high-stakes exam, at the very least for certain classroom populations.

Assessment and curriculum must be examined, but perhaps it is our whole paradigm around schooling that needs an upheaval. Language instruction is particularly in need of a paradigm shift (Powell, 1999, p. 120), at least from the way it is being conducted in preparation for the OSSLT. Currently, the OSSLT promotes an English pedagogy in Ontario that is so narrow and outcomes-based some scholars have been driven to call it an "implement of cultural repression" (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001, p. 113). Ironically, this condemnation comes at a time when there were never more outlets learners could use for expression.

Caughlan (2008) makes an argument for using the arts, which she posits, "are a natural partner with literacy teaching and learning... visual arts, theatre, music, dance, creative writing- are representations of, and engagements with, the human and natural worlds" (p. 123). Teaching literacy using the arts would incorporate a variety of mediums and the open opportunities for students to transform that media themselves. New, multiple and multiliteracies should urgently be included in our language classes, for they represent Literacy today, and we have only to look to our students to teach us how to use them. This requires a drastic change in how we envision students-teacher relationships, one that was signalled by Freire. It requires a "dialogic discourse that evolves an agenda from the bottom up" (Shor, 2009, p. 12) in

opposition to the monologic discourses promulgated by “experts” who despite, perhaps, meaning well, do not necessarily live in the communities in which they propagate their discourses and cannot solve real-time problems in particular places. They also cannot watch over the world of endlessly multivariiegated texts with which we seem suddenly bombarded, but whose variety, after all, is only as diverse as our own. “In re-visioning teachers and learner(s) during these emergent digital times through a vast hypertext, skein, web, appropriation, meme, quotation, or mash up, certain privileged texts such as mandated curricula, classroom structures, and a myopic sense of authority are relinquished” (Nahachewsky & Slomp, 2001, p. 8). Rather than privilege certain kinds of texts, or certain kinds of people, a literacy class that truly includes new, multiple and multiliteracies opens itself to accepting a variety of learners. Rather than viewing students in terms of where they are deficient and what they cannot do, possibilities would be opened for all the things they can do.

There is hope that this vision of learners- as commodities to be linearly trained step-by-step for one dominant version of literacy- will be overcome by the hopes and dreams of our students; that they will rise above such a learning environment and seek out a better way: “an insistence on a vision of normalized, common reality- to be accepted and mastered by everyone in the same way- will provoke young persons’ desires to transcend, to be (as individuals) the best they know how to be” (Greene, 1995, p. 180). Hope is the first step, but it is not enough. It would not have been enough for students like Khun Wei, whose hopes and dreams will not buy him a passport or a meal. Hope did not get him a job; action did. Change requires action and I want to end this dissertation with a call to action.

School and the world. This research was inspired by my experience teaching literacy in a refugee camp. There in the shadow of a military dictatorship, in a world

too complicated to begin to explain here, our little school aspired to critical pedagogy. Freire wished nothing less for students and teachers than that they have opportunities to "name the world" together- to engage in dialogue that questions and challenges issues that are important to them and to the communities in which they live. Combining and meshing complex ideas and local interpretations, our pedagogy was less concerned with learning as movement, "from a predefined point A to a predefined point B, as rationalist curricula would have us do... [but aimed at] expanding the space of the possible, at both the individual and collective levels" (McMurtry, 2008, p. 276). After all, the very fact of our being there together, in that camp, was already an expansion of the possible.

In our situation, we could not view school as anything other than deeply embedded in a world of circumstances. Yet, simultaneously, for many of the students, spending a year safe and paid for in an academic program was a much-needed break from their reality: they were not at risk of arrest or hunger for the duration of the time lived at the EIP dormitories; they were able to simply sit back and just learn. This was a luxury the students did not take for granted; for my part, my luxury (which I will never take for granted) was to be in the presence of an exceptional group of students who understood, in the most profound sense, the value of education. That one year of schooling felt a little like break from a horrible situation, while at the same time presented a moment to take personal action in fighting against that situation. To fight against a dictatorship that uses education- and the lack thereof- as a weapon against its population (Human Rights Documentation Unit, 2006), our weapon was critical thinking, and that meant asking the hard questions.

As an educator, I felt it was my responsibility to be sure I was asking my students how "education also affects- and is affected by- the wider social, cultural,

and ecological systems in which schools are embedded" (McMurtry, 2008, p. 275). After all, there is nothing apolitical about schooling, and because of its potential to open or close doors to critical thinking, and "because literacy is socially and culturally defined, it carries political implications" (Powell, 1999, p. 24). Literacy curriculum and pedagogy serve as networks through which government can influence our student's ideologies and futures. Systems of literacy are specifically designed to bolster the economy and siphon students into job markets, and "the failure to recognize that schools are political sites is matched by a refusal to acknowledge that underlying any one approach to literacy are historical and cultural influences which, of necessity, impose an ideological cast" (Giroux, 2001, p. 207). In this vein "a discourse that promotes dependency and passivity can have serious repercussions within a democracy, whose very existence depends upon the active vigilance of an educated and empowered citizenry" (Powell, 1999, p. 40). Without a potential for students and teachers to generate their own texts in class- their own ideas, thoughts and questions- we repress opportunities for enquiry-based learning that promotes agency, problem solving and critical analysis of the status quo.

Democracy. Perhaps the most worrisome outcome of a narrowed literacy is the ensuing absence of social justice, from the mouths of students and teacher alike. How can we make literacies relevant for our student's futures if we do not speak, or encourage them to speak, of issues that are important for the future? A pedagogy that nurtures a meaningful democracy, "would work to appreciate and understand difference, rather than promote a standardized test that all students need to pass in order to graduate" (Ricci, 2004, p. 355). If students cannot generate their own texts, they may not come up with locally based concerns for critical reading, and may not create spaces for debate and deliberation. Underrepresenting literacies excludes

students whose skills are not valued within the context of the classroom; this is in itself undemocratic.

Establishing links between schools and the community is necessary for talking about democratic citizenship (Osborne, 2001). The teacher might play a central role in the democratic education process (Carr, 2007); not only as someone who works with students, but as someone who can form links between students, parents, siblings, and members of the educational community, from the librarian to the caretaker to the person designing the OSSLT. The top-down model of “experts” designing and distributing curriculum negates the positive effects communities have when they participate in all aspects of schooling. It also reflects a market model (Apple, 2001). “Rather than parents, students and local communities being seen as consumers in the educational marketplace, they must be seen as equal partners and stakeholders who can work diligently with educators, school administrators, and policy-makers in a collective endeavour” (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001, p. 200). This would both exemplify and embody democracy in the classroom, which is where student’s understanding of their worlds should begin.

Social justice and critical literacy. Scholars suggest that the curriculum “be understood as descriptive rather than prescriptive and as a map to a terrain that can never be exhaustively described” (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2001, p. 112). Such a terrain would encourage educators to let their students navigate curriculum on vehicles of their own design. New, multiple and multiliteracies, which promote and represent a variety of multimodalities, can help nurture opportunities and spaces for speaking and learning about equity, injustice and environmental crises; “the research agenda should consider what it would mean to treat multimodal transformations as a matter of social justice” (Siegel, 2006, p. 73). In the face of regressive social changes,

“reframing our work as social justice may allow us to maintain political clarity” (Siegel, 2006, p. 75). Carter (2006) calls for a “pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity” to combat the return to basics propagated by standards-based movements and to push the definition of literacy to embody power systems, class struggles and critical pedagogy as well as a more practical, rounded vision of what literacy means and encompasses. “Dexterity” contrasts with simple skills acquisition so that students “read, understand, and make use of a variety of linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical cues in ever-changing rhetorical contexts” (p. 100). The aim here is to have “students develop the flexibility and skills necessary to negotiate multiple, always changing literacies” (p. 101). This type of pedagogy would be inclusive, analytical and would subvert inequities by giving students a chance to speak back to them (Carter, 2006, p. 103).

An irony of standardized testing is that it purports to enhance equity while underrepresenting literacies and undermining the agency of learners. Yet, “class inequity is growing, not declining, at a moment when mass education is at its greatest reach” (Shor, 2009, p. 5). This brings into question what role schooling plays in the world if it cannot improve people’s standard of living. Schooling does not promote equity when it assumes that others will teach notions of democracy and social justice- in fact, in separating itself from these causes it renders itself useless in the face of them. Schools prepare people for the future: people who *are* the future. If schools cannot work towards a brighter future, they are simply upholding the status quo and all its power structures.

I would contend that one way forward is teaching for critical literacy: while we cannot expect our students to even begin to solve the world’s problems, they might at least have the opportunity to discuss some of the world’s realities. At the very least, students might begin to question, express, interpret or discuss thoughts about their

own communities. To say that a civics course will cover all these bases is not enough; moreover, it negates the character of democracy itself (Carr, 2007). Social justice becomes fragmented, curtailed to a specific class subject; the ideas it represents are seen as a side issue. Social justice must not be viewed as separate from daily life or something to be put on the back burner, lest we end up with the rude awakening of a dictatorship or of suddenly no longer having control of an education meant to be for our communities. We must make space for a debate around democracy and freedom every day, even though we are not in a refugee camp and despite being foods and materials rich. Just as importantly, we must make space for alternative types of learning and teaching, for student's and teacher's voices to be heard and for their expertise and capacities for innovation to be respected.

For a love of literature. In a thatch-and-bamboo classroom high on a hill in Umpiem Mai, I sit in a circle with sixteen students and shuffle my feet on the cement floor as I listen to someone slowly read. It's a paragraph from John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, which we've just started. I can't remember what season it was, though the weather in that region, challenging as it was, is normally one of the first things one recalls. That day, whether a merciful breeze beamed gentle sun rays through the slits in the walls, whether the sky rained screwdrivers upon the roof, or if the heat was so lethal the air throbbed and the world became a broiler, I couldn't tell you. I was preoccupied with another world.

The dawn came quickly now, a wash, a glow, a lightness, and then an explosion of fire as the sun arose out of the Gulf. Kino looked down to cover his eyes from the glare. He could hear the pat of the corncakes in the house and the rich smell of them on the cooking plate. The ants were busy on the ground, big black ones with shiny bodies, and little dusty quick ants. Kino

watched with the detachment of God while a dusty ant frantically tried to escape the sand trap an ant lion had dug for him. A thin, timid dog came close and, at a soft word from Kino, curled up, arranged its tail neatly over its feet, and laid its chin delicately on the pile. It was a black dog with yellow-gold spots where its eyebrows should have been. It was a morning like other mornings and yet perfect among mornings (Steinbeck 1947, p. 5.)

It was the last paragraph on the page. We stopped for a moment to think.

Then we began sharing reactions to the passage and its lyrical description that so beautifully pulled us into Kino's world, Kino's home. His world was foreign to us, yet entirely familiar, and we travelled there as if down a tunnel inside our own minds, walking down steps formed by nouns and adjectives that called the consciousness of our senses into order and layered richness and depth onto this new fictional world with every sentence. We saw the silent dance of the ants, smelled the corn cakes.

We'd just begun this book and would spend the following weeks analyzing its many themes. The book contains political statements and archetypes; it contains death and destruction; questions about colonialization and religion; ego and failure and family; the ultimate human struggles. Through this story one could locate an almost limitless amount of passages into the real world and one's own home. Those journeys would come. But for today's class, we aimed only to be in the moment with this passage, this little entryway into a world through words on a page. The little ideas therein were just as important as the big ones to come. We remarked on the idea of looking down on an ant-world with the "detachment of god" and what that might mean, the notion of watching a world go on in front of you that is out of your control, while at the same time, with one kick you could smash it apart. This made some of us laugh and others turn serious. It didn't matter what your reaction was, only that you

had one. This was an aesthetic reading of the story, one that prioritized the simple joy of literature and the simple importance of letting students "just read." This was the first step toward critical literacy, which would mean careful thought, analysis of multiple viewpoints, and student-generated perceptions of the text. The first step was simply to be in the moment.

I wanted to go back to that school to end this dissertation, because it is a world that I re-read in my dreams every day, and because that world makes me want to read this one. It is my belief that here in Canada, certain forces drive our education system in a direction that views young people- young minds- as agents of consumption rather than change. I do not have space here to argue why that cannot be a way forward. I can only say that literacy provides the opportunity for students to express themselves and feel empathy with others, and that any pedagogy that promotes anything less than transactional relationships between texts, students and their worlds does a disservice to learners. The capacities of our students to effect positive change are enormous; the potential for the destruction of those capacities, via certain structural implements of power, is unfortunately just as big. Having witnessed firsthand what can happen when power is removed from people and democratic structures destroyed, I cannot accept that democracy here would be left to its own devices, out of the pedagogy, out of the literacy classroom. I hope for more.

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Appendix A: Sample test

BOOKLET

Sample Test Booklet
2010

1

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

SESSION 1

These are the instructions that appear in the actual test booklet.**Read carefully before writing the test:**

- Check the identification numbers of your three documents to see that the final 12 digits all match. If they do not, report the problem to the teacher in charge.
- Check the pages of this *Test Booklet* to see that they are in order. If they are not, report the problem to the teacher in charge.
- Read all instructions before responding to the questions.
- Use only HB pencil or blue or black pen in the *Test Booklet* and on the Student Answer Sheet.
- Attempt all questions. If you leave a question blank, the question will be scored zero.

Multiple-Choice

- Choose the best or most correct answer for each question.
- You must record your multiple-choice answers on the Student Answer Sheet. Multiple-choice answers recorded in the *Test Booklet* will not be scored.

To indicate your answer, **fill in the circle completely**, as shown below.

Like this: ● **Not like this:** ⊗ ✓ ◐ ⊙

- If you fill in more than one circle for a question, the question will be scored incorrect.
- If you wish to change a multiple-choice answer, erase or cross out your answer and fill in the circle for your new answer. Ensure that your final answer is clear.

Written Answers

- For all questions that ask for a written answer, **write legibly on the lined space provided** in the *Test Booklet*.
- For the writing sections, pay attention to clarity, organization, spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- The lined space provided for your written work indicates the approximate length of the writing expected.
- There is space in the *Test Booklet* for rough notes. Nothing you write in these spaces will be scored.

You are now ready to start *Test Booklet 1: Session 1*.

Remember to record all your multiple-choice answers on the Student Answer Sheet.

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

Session 1

Read the selection below and answer the questions that follow it.

Driven by the sun: solar car sets world distance record

On September 16, 2004, the Midnight Sun VII arrived home to the University of Waterloo (UW) to cheers from hundreds of supporters. After 40 days and 15 079 kilometres of travelling, the car had set the world record for the longest journey by a solar-powered vehicle. This distance broke the official Guinness record of over 7000 kilometres set by the Queen’s University solar car in July 2000 and the 2002 unofficial record from Australia of over 13 000 kilometres.

In 1987, the UW established a solar-car project to promote renewable energy in transportation. The first UW solar vehicle circled the university campus. Seven redesigns later, a student team made a car that can circle North America. The Midnight Sun VII rolled through seven Canadian provinces and 15 American states. “We drove through sun, torrential downpours, traffic congestion in the crowded streets of Los Angeles, the vast desert of Arizona, the Rocky Mountains and the open plains. It was an incredible journey,” wrote one team member.

The Midnight Sun VII is a low, sleek three-wheeled car that is propelled by electricity generated only by sunlight. Solar cells that cover much of the upper body of the car convert sunlight into electricity. When the car is moving, the power is sent directly to the motor. When the car is stopped, power is transferred to the batteries.

“We hope that this tour has inspired people to recognize the potential of alternative forms of energy,” says Daniel Yum, the project team manager.



Multiple-Choice (Record the best or most correct answer on the Student Answer Sheet.)

- 1** What was the original purpose of the UW solar-car project?
- A to promote the sale of solar-powered cars
 - B to recruit science students to the university
 - C to build awareness of environmentally friendly cars
 - D to encourage other universities to build similar cars

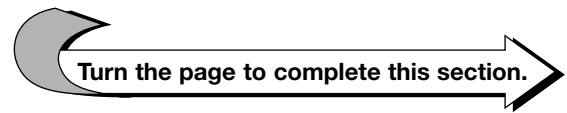
- 2** What happened first?
- F Midnight Sun VII rolled through Los Angeles.
 - G An Australian solar car travelled 13 000 kilometres.
 - H The University of Waterloo started its solar-car project.
 - J The Queen's University solar car set a world record for distance.

- 3** Which word has the same meaning as "congestion" as used in paragraph 2?
- A speed
 - B bypass
 - C detours
 - D buildup

- 4** Which questions are answered in the first sentence of paragraph 3?
- F who and what
 - G what and how
 - H how and where
 - J where and when

- 5** What does the solar-car project demonstrate about scientific experimentation?

- A It requires a laboratory environment.
- B A single creative genius is necessary.
- C Trial and error leads to improvements.
- D Experimental results set world records.



Written Answer

6 Explain why this project is a good learning experience for the students involved. Use specific details from the selection and your own ideas to support your answer.

Rough Notes

Use the space below for rough notes. Nothing you write in this space will be scored.

End of Section A. Continue to Section B. 

Multiple-Choice (Record the best or most correct answer on the Student Answer Sheet.)

1 Choose the sentence that uses capitalization correctly.

- A My cousin from alberta, whose name is paul, earns money by delivering the *calgary herald*.
- B My cousin from Alberta, whose name is Paul, earns money by delivering the *calgary herald*.
- C My cousin from alberta, whose name is Paul, earns money by delivering the *Calgary Herald*.
- D My cousin from Alberta, whose name is Paul, earns money by delivering the *Calgary Herald*.

2 Choose the sentence that has correct punctuation.

- F My friend asked me, have you ever been to Quebec City?
- G My friend asked me? Have you ever been to Quebec City.?”
- H My friend asked me, “Have you ever been to Quebec City?”
- J My friend asked me, “Have you ever been to Quebec City?”

3 Choose the correct option to fill in the blank.

Like his father, the artist George Berthon

- A painted portraits to support his family.
- B his paintings of portraits supported his family.
- C and also painted portraits to support his family.
- D whose famous portraits were painted to support his family.

4 Which is the best way to combine all the information in the following sentences?

**Anna’s assignment is due tomorrow.
She has to work tonight.
She is feeling rushed.**

- F Anna’s assignment is due tomorrow because she is rushing to work tonight.
- G Anna is feeling rushed because she has to work tonight and her assignment is due tomorrow.
- H Since Anna’s assignment is due tomorrow and she has to work tonight and she is feeling rushed.
- J Although Anna has to work tonight and her assignment is due tomorrow because she is feeling rushed.

5 Choose the best closing sentence for the paragraph.

When the Canadian government decided in 1878 to connect Montreal and Vancouver with a railway, it faced a difficult task. A railway would cost a great deal of money to build. Workers had to push through the rocks and swamps of northern Ontario. Tracks had to cross vast stretches of the prairie. It was uncertain whether suitable passes through British Columbia’s mountain ranges could be found.

- A The loans weren’t repaid for many years.
- B Many wondered if these obstacles could be overcome.
- C British Columbia became a popular tourist destination.
- D The United States had built many railways by this time.

End of Section B. Continue to Section C.

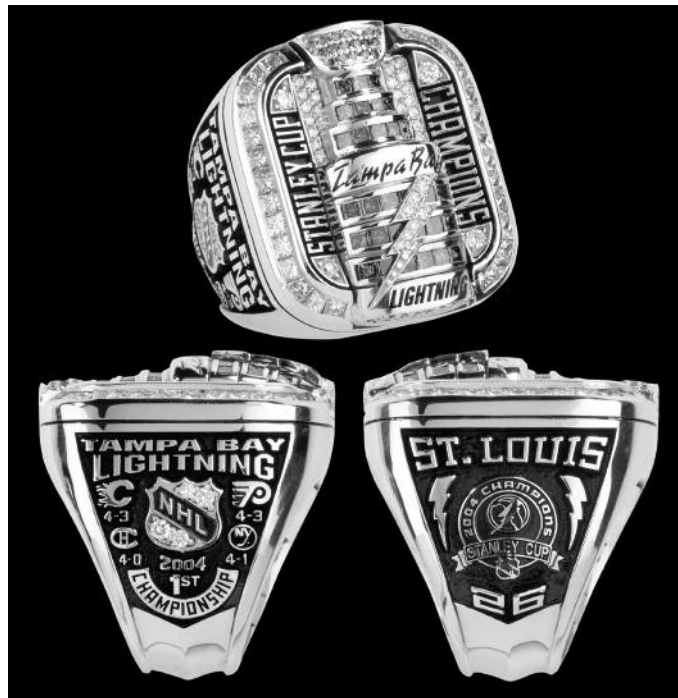
Read the selection below and answer the questions that follow it.

For professional hockey teams in North America, the Stanley Cup is the top championship trophy. It has been a tradition to award rings to Stanley Cup winners for over a century. In 1893, each of the seven players on the Montreal AAAs received a plain gold ring engraved with crossed hockey sticks after they won the first Stanley Cup. Today, championship rings are much more elaborate. Some are appraised for as much as \$30 000. When the Tampa Bay Lightning won the Stanley Cup in the 2003–2004 season, the team ordered gold rings featuring 138 diamonds apiece—including a cluster of rare blue diamonds making up the trophy on each ring. Stanley Cup rings also have great sentimental value. Doug Gilmour lost his 1989 ring that he won while playing for the Calgary Flames. He offered a \$2000 reward for its return, but he never got it back. Some players, however, are willing to part with their rings for a price. Jean Beliveau of the Montreal Canadiens sold his ring collection, raising \$1 million for his widowed daughter and his two granddaughters' education. Others have lost their rings to theft. Tim Horton's 1967 ring was stolen in 1998 and later sold to a second-hand shop for \$500. It showed up at an auction valued at \$35 000, but was removed from bidding after it was found to have been stolen. Whether they are simple or fancy, or whether they are kept by their original owners or not, Stanley Cup rings are prized symbols of hockey victory.

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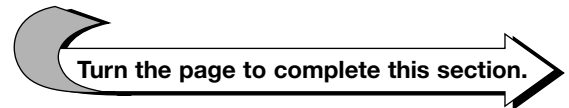
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Adapted from "Lord of the Bling" by Rick Westhead, published in the *Toronto Star*, June 15, 2006. Reprinted with permission. Torstar Syndication Services. Photo: © Hockey Hall of Fame.

Multiple-Choice (Record the best or most correct answer on the Student Answer Sheet.)

- 1** Which word best describes the first championship rings?
- A showy
 - B simple
 - C detailed
 - D sentimental
- 2** Why does this selection include a description of both the Montreal AAAs and the Tampa Bay Lightning Stanley Cup rings?
- F to show that older rings are more valuable
 - G to demonstrate that players value their rings
 - H to emphasize the contrast in their appearance
 - J to illustrate the history of the game of hockey
- 3** According to this selection, what happened to Doug Gilmour's Stanley Cup ring?
- A The ring was lost and not found.
 - B He paid \$2000 to get the ring back.
 - C The ring was stolen and sold at auction.
 - D His daughter sold the ring for \$1 million.
- 4** What is the purpose of the dash in line 7 of this selection?
- F It connects a range of numbers.
 - G It indicates the start of a new topic.
 - H It introduces additional information.
 - J It replaces the words "for example."
- 5** Why was Tim Horton's 1967 ring not sold at auction?
- A It was stolen before it could be sold.
 - B The ring was overvalued at \$35 000.
 - C A second-hand shop bought it for \$500.
 - D The person selling it was not the rightful owner.
- 6** Why do Stanley Cup rings have great sentimental value?
- F They cost \$30 000 to have made.
 - G They are made of gold and rare diamonds.
 - H They are engraved with crossed hockey sticks.
 - J They represent the pride of accomplishment.



Written Answer

7 Summarize this selection. Include a main idea and one detail that supports it.

Rough Notes

Use the space below for rough notes. Nothing you write in this space will be scored.

End of Section C. Continue to Section D. 

Short Writing Task (Answer in full and correctly written sentences.)

1 Name a person you admire and explain why you admire him or her.

Rough Notes

Use the space below for rough notes. Nothing you write in this space will be scored.

End of Section D. Continue to Section E. 

Writing a News Report

1

- Task:** Write a **news report** on the next page based on the headline and picture below.
- You will have to make up the facts and information to answer some or all of the following questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
 - You must relate your newspaper report to **both** the headline **and** the picture.

Purpose and Audience: to report on an event for the readers of a newspaper

Audience:

Length: The lined space provided for your written work indicates the approximate length of the writing expected.

School receives computers as a reward



Rough Notes

Use the space below for rough notes. Nothing you write in this space will be scored.

Write your report on the lines provided on the following page.

Read the selection below and answer the questions that follow it.



Researchers at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) have solved a mystery that has baffled candy-makers for more than 100 years. Confectioners wanted to understand why it takes up to two days for jellybeans to dry before they can be polished. They believed that jellybeans dried as moisture from the outer layers evaporated. Several years ago, candy-makers asked food scientists

5

at Pennsylvania's Penn State University to help find ways of speeding up the jellybean manufacturing process, but the scientists' tests and chemicals ruined the jellybeans. Then, they heard about a lab in Canada that used magnetic resonance imaging technology, commonly known as MRI—often used to detect tumours in humans—to peer inside things like concrete, pharmaceuticals and wood for industrial applications. A Penn State scientist flew to Fredericton and made jellybeans in the lab. For almost three days, UNB researchers took MRI images of the insides of a jellybean, which showed waves of moisture moving toward the centre. Scientists at UNB had figured out why nothing had worked: the moisture in a jellybean travels in, not out. That is why a jellybean centre is moist and why the manufacturing process can't be speeded up—a jellybean takes time to age to perfection.

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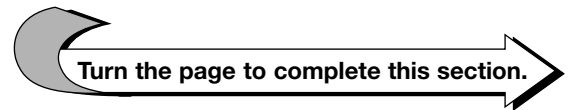
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Adapted from "Secret of jellybean's soft centre uncovered" by David Stonehouse, published in the *National Post*, Saturday, October 23, 1999. Reproduced with the permission of the author.

Multiple-Choice (Record the best or most correct answer on the Student Answer Sheet.)

- 1** Food scientists from Penn State University “ruined the jellybeans” when they tried to
- A add moisture.
 - B improve the taste.
 - C soften the candy’s centres.
 - D perform tests and use chemicals.
- 2** In line 12 of this selection, who is meant by “they”?
- F jellybeans
 - G candy-makers
 - H labs that use MRI technology
 - J scientists at the University of New Brunswick
- 3** Why is the dash used in the last sentence?
- A to make a compound word
 - B to introduce new information
 - C to create a contrast with the first part of the sentence
 - D to emphasize the idea in the final part of the sentence
- 4** From this selection, one can conclude that medical technology
- F is difficult to use.
 - G can have industrial applications.
 - H should be used only by researchers.
 - J should be restricted to medical uses.
- 5** Which of the following ideas links the first and last sentences of this paragraph?
- A Candy-makers need to do more research.
 - B Candy-makers were following the wrong lead.
 - C Candy-makers need a more efficient manufacturing process.
 - D Candy-makers must respect the time factor in manufacturing jellybeans.
- 6** What do confectioners do?
- F They make sweets.
 - G They research mysteries.
 - H They study food science.
 - J They test drying processes.



Written Answer

7 Summarize this selection. Include a main idea and one point that clearly supports it.

Rough Notes

Use the space below for rough notes. Nothing you write in this space will be scored.

End of Booklet 1.

This page has been left blank intentionally.

Nothing you write in this space will be scored.