EMPOWERING THROUGH CONNECTION: STORYING LIVED EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract

This thesis examines the pedagogical perspectives and choices of one educator in her implementation of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) through the teaching of Lori Lansens' (2020) novel, *The Mountain Story*, within the English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) curriculum. By invoking a postcolonial lens, I analyse how the novel is framed, represented, and pedagogically discussed through the inclusion, exclusion, and/or general discussion of minoritized representations that can be found within the Canadian sociocultural landscape.

Through the implementation of narrative inquiry as the methodological framework within this case study, I provide a snapshot of the ways in which teachers seek to empower students and student representations through literature explored within the classroom, contextualized by the lived experiences and values that influence the educator's pedagogical practices, as well as the acknowledgement of my experiences as a racialized woman that informs my lens as the researcher. I situate *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* with a focus on the Grade 10 English curriculum (ENG2D), provide an overview on how the educator has structured their ENG2D course, and review how the educator analyses Lansens' (2020) novel within this course. Additionally, I provide insights into the experiences that inform my lens as the researcher, and then through interviews and purposeful conversations, I explore the multifaceted influences that inform the chosen educator's pedagogical approaches.

There are several themes that have emerged from a holistic analysis of these components, such as: (1) the importance in acknowledging the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived; (2) the roles of institutions, the act of teaching, and morality within education; (3) the entity of the teacher; (4) the reclaiming of identity and language within educational spaces; and (5) empowering difference by working through discomforts. These findings contribute to the importance of empowering difference within the classroom through the critical evaluation of the pedagogical choices of educators and the ways in which these choices are communicated through the discourse and curricula implemented within the classroom.

Key words: curriculum; pedagogy; postcolonialism; minoritization; racialization; narrative inquiry; language; representation; difference; empowerment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Focusing on the Ontario secondary school English curriculum, and specifically the English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) curriculum, this thesis studies the complexity of discourse that follows minoritized characters and narratives within a classroom text through investigating three different perspectives: (1) one English language arts educator, who I refer to as VH, within the province of Ontario; (2) the chosen text and curricular documents used within the educator's teaching of English language arts; and (3) myself in reflection of my past experiences as a woman of colour in the Ontario education system as I too contribute to the landscape in which I will be exploring (Clandinin, 2016). Therefore, it is through this thesis that I will investigate the role of an educator and her rationale(s) by determining her literary choices through interviews and document/discourse analysis. Through the analysis of minoritized characters, I will also investigate whether the selected literature used in classrooms is culturally responsive to a snapshot of our complex Canadian social landscape to ultimately provide insight towards if/how curricular choices encourage or hinder the inclusion, understanding, and empowerment of diverse Canadian narratives.

The following introduction will include facets that contextualize and situate the research completed within my thesis. I provide a genealogy of my study to frame the development of my research. Because I invoke narrative inquiry as my methodological lens, I also utilize the introduction to disclose my personal positioning as a researcher and participant within the research. After contextualizing the foundations of my research and my personal experiences that have influenced my research, I introduce the research questions that guide the research completed within my thesis. Finally, I familiarise the reader with the structure of my thesis to provide a clear overview of the chapters that scaffold upon one another.

1.1 Genealogy of the Study

When I first proposed a study for the completion of my thesis, I intended to observe and analyse a series of ENG2D lessons within a classroom located just outside of Ottawa, Ontario. Within this original study, the original participant and I decided that I would observe her teaching of Richard Wagamese's (2012) novel, *Indian Horse: A Novel*. I planned to gather ample data to express an example of the Ontario secondary school English curriculum by: examining the ongoing debate and canon of novels used within the chosen high school's English language

arts, highlighting the *absences* and *presences* of minority characters and stories within classroom discourse, and evaluating how students are encouraged by the teacher to critically think about racialized experiences in relation to literature through purposeful interviews and focus-groups. However, with the onset of COVID-19 and the difficulties in observing students and teachers within the classroom, I shifted how I would complete this study to more fully engage a connection between the educator and myself as our discussions would be recentred around the chosen novel and my perspectives as a student that has experienced the ENG2D curriculum myself. Unfortunately, the chosen educator was unable to continue her participation within this study, which meant I had to find another participant. Through word of mouth, I was able to connect with VH, who had happened to have taught ENG2D with a diverse group of students but within a suburban school board within the Greater Toronto Area. Without VH, this study could not exist, and I am forever thankful for her participation and openness to engage with my questions with such professionalism and honesty. Additionally, it is important to note that VH is not a static entity, but rather both her and I grow through the dialogic relationship that develops between the two of us. Though VH was not the intended participant for my study, her generous participation speaks to the idea that the questions and curiosities that guided me within the completion of this study could be applied to any educator and their perspectives to further highlight the complexities of intersecting pedagogical and curricular choices.

In our increasingly diverse world, where the call to be anti-racist advocates resounds (see Leveille-Tulce & Hopkins-Walsh, 2024; Reddy, 2024; Yunhua & Budiman, 2024), my study evolved to examine how literature explored at the Ontario secondary school Grade 10 level is framed, represented, and pedagogically discussed by one Ontario secondary school English language arts educator within the context of a course taught within a suburban school board located in the Greater Toronto Area (it is noted that further contextualizing information about the school, school board, and educator will be discussed within Chapter 4: Research Methodology & Methods). This will be analysed through the inclusion, exclusion, and/or general discussion of minoritized representations that can be found within the Canadian sociocultural landscape. To further contextualize my use of "minoritized" within this thesis, I define this term by establishing that while "[m]ajority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 105), to be minoritized means to be "[determined] different from that of the constant" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 105). Moreover,

feelings of being unrepresented and/or excluded from historical, linguistic, and geographical representations impact Canadian students' relationships to their academic context and Canadian citizenship, and this exclusion speaks to the ways in which single-story narratives are damaging towards how students perceive themselves and the world around them (Ibrahim, 2011; Kapoyannis, 2019). This exclusion highlights the need for minoritized representation in literature to be acknowledged as a culturally significant aspect of Canadian discourse to normalize inclusive counter-normative perspectives within mainstream knowledge (Douglas & Poletti, 2016; Goodman, 2011; Tomicic & Berardi, 2018). Therefore, discourse can be defined as "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa, 2006, p. 285). It is also understood that discourse plays a role in the "wider social processes of legitimation and power, emphasizing the constitution of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them" (Lessa, 2006, p. 285). Ultimately, it is vital for Canadian education to deconstruct literature of minoritized identities, their contexts, and the ways in which literature reinforces these representations by way of decolonizing curriculum and recognizing the value of minoritized counter-normative narratives (Asher, 2010; Battiste, 2013; Chavan, 2013; Vaudrin-Charette, 2015).

Predominant Canadian narratives discuss achievements of the racialized White segment of Canadian society, thus alienating vast groups of Canadians who do not identify as White (Creese, 2019; see Stanley, 2010). Serving as the main argument of the research, if the foundations of Canadian schooling are grounded in and perpetuated by colonial values and narratives, there is a substantial risk in disassociating, excluding, and devaluing the experiences of diverse Canadian students who are expected to navigate common Canadian narratives that do not acknowledge and validate diverse perspectives as a legitimate facet of Canadian discourse. For example, when literature discussed within the classroom stems from discourse that establishes Western knowledge as the standard superior model (Hall, 1992; Tomicic & Berardi, 2018), the dominant values and discourse that emerge from these narratives reflect to students that complex and diverse cultures and identities are foreign and inferior to the hegemonic and/or dominant values that are threaded throughout our society (Langman, 2015; James, 2008; Stanley, 2011), which is ultimately demeaning to the complexity of one's lived experiences. Therefore, by critically evaluating the discourse that emerges from linguistic tools used in the classroom

(i.e. literature), my study seeks to explore the notion that multicultural literacy can be evaluated and socially developed through advancing students' abilities to deconstruct normative structures, Eurocentrism, and racist discourses within narratives studied within Canadian classrooms.

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 recognizes that the students within these English classes are of diverse backgrounds, though teachers are expected to ensure students gain an appreciation for "the culture that surrounds, challenges, and nourishes them" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6). This language communicates to educators and students that there is only a singular culture that significantly impacts their life, as opposed to encouraging students to reflect on the multifaceted and subjective qualities of the multiple cultures that exist and impact Canadian society. Unfortunately, as we shall see, the curriculum documents minimally encourage educators to teach students to understand literary texts through subjectivity and representation. While a variation of the specific expectation of *extending understanding of texts* is repeated within the various courses outlined within the curriculum document, the descriptions of these specific expectations do not adequately explore the complexity involved in students developing the ability to make connections between the ideas encompassed within a text and one's "…personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 43, 46, 57, 60, 71, 74, 85, 89). Additionally, the document does not consider the facets that may challenge students in invoking lived experience and personal knowledge that may be contradictory to the dominant Canadian norms, narratives, and discourse that are at the foundations of the curriculum itself. Moreover, it is understood that curricular choices within the classroom are guided by the standards and learning goals outlined within the curricular document itself, while pedagogical choices are the methods and learning environment strategies used by an educator to enliven the curriculum. Therefore, through discussing VH's pedagogical choices in the teaching of the chosen novel, this study provides insight into the intersection that occurs within the dynamic relationship between curricular and pedagogical choices.

1.2 An Introduction to My Personal Narrative

My love of reading and my identity as a publicly educated Ontarian go hand-in-hand as most of my core memories of enjoying literature occurred either during my time as a student within the Ontario education system, and/or within an Ontario public school. I remember

developing an affinity for reading and literature when I began junior kindergarten within a public school located in Scarborough, Ontario. Before I could read independently, I loved listening to the stories that my parents would tell me before bed; the more detail they provided regarding the characters, setting, and storyline, the more I enjoyed the story since the details helped my imagination visualize the story, led me to ask more questions about the morals of the story, and often also gave me a moment to connect to stories that my parents had grown up with. In school, I remember visiting the library with the rest of my kindergarten class, feeling overwhelmed by all the books that I could choose from, almost never being able to settle on just one, and becoming so excited about story time. This excitement continued within other grades and classrooms, since whenever there was a story read in class, it was a chance to learn something new, to have an opportunity to connect to a character's experience, and to vicariously feel the emotions that would run through a storyline. As I continued within elementary school, the curricular expectations changed, and I was no longer only having books read to me, but I would be expected to read the books assigned to me, choose books to read on my own for class, and to write reports on these books to show my abilities in summarizing their plots, identifying the themes, describing the characters, and reflecting on my understandings and opinions that developed from reading these books. Though challenging, I loved that my classroom experiences within the language arts helped to inform my reading of various types of literature since I was always so eager to learn, I was reinforced in my English skills since I always did very well within arts and social science courses, and I loved that reading allowed me to escape to such fascinating worlds where I felt like I was experiencing the plot alongside the characters. My curiosity and fascination with reading resulted in borrowing books from the local library and seeking time to read literature on my own, which is when I began to develop a sense of what I truly enjoyed reading. In retrospect, I had been implicitly influenced in my literature choices since my personal choices developed from the literature that I had read within school and evolved from my academic experiences and exposures.

Before starting eighth grade, I moved to Whitby, Ontario which served as the setting of my adolescence. As I entered secondary school, the ways in which I perceived academics and the world around me began to shift. I began to reflect more on my own space within my world, while also starting to become more anxious about being academically successful as I started to also develop an awareness of the impact my grades would have on my academic opportunities with

secondary school, but also on my opportunities within post-secondary institutions. While I began to give more academic attention to the sciences and mathematics since I had understood that these subjects more desirable within academia, my love for literature and reading continued to stay with me. I began to understand that literature was not just meant to absorb the reader, but literature had the ability to immerse the reader as it would often comment on a human experience, a snapshot of a historical event through a fictional story, and/or expose the reader to an experience that was so different than one's reality. Moreover, immersing myself in literature taught me that there was always something to learn, even if you did not agree with the actions and/or perspectives of the characters. Therefore, I was sure to include just as many arts and social science courses within my timetable since I felt such a strong connection to these subject areas as well.

However, as the egocentrism of adolescence crept in (see especially Elkind, 1967), I began to realize that similarly to the predominantly White student and teacher population of the secondary school I was attending, the stories that I had read did not have characters with a similar background to myself, nor were they described with a physical appearance in which I could identify with as a minoritized woman of East Indian descent who is the first generation of her family to be born and raised within Canada. Additionally, these characters did not portray the clash and navigation of one's familial values against the societal expectations that ran through my social experiences and/or would reinforce generalized experiences that did not speak to the intricacies that I felt I had to weave through as a racialized and minoritized Canadian. Therefore, with now understanding racialization as "patterns of cultural representation knowledge production, and social organization that give meaning to… [the] 'socially imagined' difference, specifically differences attributed to supposedly innate and unchanging phenotypical or cultural characteristics… [thus making] race differences appear self-evident" (Stanley, 2011, p. 8), I can see that my understanding of my own racialized experiences began to develop during this period in my life.

My mother is originally from Guyana and my father is originally from Tanzania, both are of South Asian descent, and after having both immigrated to Canada in the 1980s and meeting in Toronto, Ontario shortly after their arrival, they got married and started their family. With being the first born, parenting me was their first experience within parenthood, which was also their first attempts in communicating their cultural values and beliefs within a community that

differed from the ones in which they have grown. I found that being a female made them want to protect me more than my younger brother and having had their own experiences as a visible minority within the Greater Toronto Area made them also more vigilant as to how I might be treated. Additionally, I believe that navigating their Canadian community for the first time challenged their beliefs and values that they had developed from their respective home countries, but also while parenting children that who were challenged to navigate the cultures and values outside the home that could juxtapose the cultures/values taught within the home.

During secondary school, I felt as though I had to abide by stricter rules than my friends due to the expectations placed on me by my parents, and while it is understood that my parents were looking to protect me from harm within a society that they were trying to navigate themselves, I felt that I could not socialize, engage in extracurriculars, and/or simply play outside as freely as some of my other friends. While I believe that this stemmed from the cultural values and expectations that my parents had experienced themselves, placing the same expectations on me within a different societal context with different social expectations positioned me to navigate between the expectations of my parents and the cultures that have influenced their values within a school setting that did not align with my family's values and expectations. Rather, I learned to navigate my educational experiences and social rules that my family did not embrace at home, such as limiting my social interactions with boys outside of school, not being able to attend sleepovers, and being more limited in how much time I could spend outside the home. Additionally, I would navigate these social rules amongst peers who thought the strictness I experienced was weird, and amongst teachers who I felt could never understand the internal conflict that I was experiencing. Moreover, amongst these challenges, I was also attempting to perform to the highest academic standards within arts and social science classes that expected students to identify with the perspectives, feelings, and actions of characters and figures that were grounded in a social discourse that I could not fully experience myself.

In having to successfully meet different expectations of different people, I had difficulty in finding a space where I could simultaneously be who I was to the people in school and who I was to my family at home. I felt like I was embodying a space where these lived experiences were melting into each other, thus creating who I am today. However, at times, the rationalizing and consolidation of these experiences where frustrating, confusing, and sometimes annoying, and I found myself delving deeper into reading novels to escape my lived reality. By reading, I

experienced characters who were confident in who they were, or characters who were courageous enough to find their confidence, or characters who were noticed and appreciated for their complexity, as opposed to never feeling resolve for feeling out of place, or perpetually feeling misunderstood and unseen. I began to want to be like the characters that I read about, but I am not White like most of the characters I had experienced and I do read of many characters who felt limited by the assumptions and/or expectations placed on them (good or bad) based on their race and/or cultural background. I enjoyed the literature I had read and believe the Western canon of literature provides such a strong historical perspective into the development of both the English language and English literature itself, but as someone who was reading these texts within such a diverse pocket of the Canadian landscape, I longed for characters who looked like me, who thought like me, and who were challenged like me to appear within my readings as well. Consequently, this thesis has grown from my love of literature and the power that words have on all that the mind can imagine, and it is within this thesis that I evaluate the pedagogical perspectives that have the ability to empower students within their minoritized and racialized contexts since it is within these contexts that I had once craved to feel empowerment that I have aimed to explore with this thesis. Therefore, though I include my personal narrative in my methodological approach within this study (as discussed in Chapter 4: Research Methodology & Methods), I also treat my personal narrative as data within my study since my foundational experiences mentioned within this thesis have shaped my lens and participation within this research, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6: Researching the Researcher.

1.3 Guiding Research Questions

The following research was guided by the following overarching question: **Through examining the textual choices of an English language arts educator and the narrative representations stemming from the chosen text, what are the challenges and possibilities that a teacher confronts in seeking to empower students and student representations through their pedagogical choices?** Moreover, to answer this broad question, here are more succinct and directly answerable sub-questions: (1) how does the educator choose classroom texts, noting any considerations towards minoritized representations and characters?; (2) who are the minoritized characters discussed within the chosen text and how are they framed?; (3) when applicable, in what ways do the racialized/minoritized experiences of the teacher impact the

teaching of the selected texts?; and (4) how do I, as both the researcher and a student that has experienced the Ontario secondary school curriculum to be studied, retrospectively and currently receive and make sense of the chosen text and the respective representations of its characters?

1.4 Thesis Structure

The concepts and perspectives explored within the following thesis are meant to build upon one another by first grounding my research within the chosen theoretical and conceptual frameworks, within relevant literature, and within my chosen methodological framework. Therefore, following this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2, I review some of the curriculum theory literature and discuss some of the tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned, curriculum-as-lived, and as-evaluated. Through a postcolonial lens, I also review the facets of decolonizing curriculum and acknowledge established evidence that relates to my thesis. Chapter 3 explores the theoretical frameworks of colonialism, postcolonialism, and the ways in which these frameworks influence discourse. This chapter also seeks to understand how postcolonialism is also in conversation with other theoretical frameworks, such as, but not limited to, critical race theory, decolonial theory, and antiracist theory. In turn, I acknowledge how these theoretical and conceptual frameworks inform my lens within this research. Therefore, the first part of Chapter 4 discusses narrative inquiry as the methodological framework that informs my qualitative research. Supported by my personal narrative and curriculum analysis, narrative inquiry informed my lens within data collection, data analysis, and the conclusions drawn from this data. Within this section, I draw attention to the importance of building meaningful connections within research through the value of storytelling, the ways in which narrative inquiry positions knowledge development, acknowledging the importance of teacher knowledge and narratives, and how narrative inquiry informs my perspectives regarding my role as the researcher. This part of the chapter culminates with the notion that invoking narrative inquiry as my methodological framework allows me to reflect the complexity in developing knowledge through the stories and lived experiences that will be captured through dialoguing with the educator, the chosen literature, and with my own lived experiences. The second part of Chapter 4 explores the research design that I invoked to acquire the data that I then explored within my analysis.

The second part of my thesis contains a document analysis of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) with a focus on the ENG2D course and an analysis of the research conducted. Chapter 5 provides a document analysis regarding *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) with a focus on the ENG2D course. Though I originally wanted to include this chapter as a sub-section within my analysis since it is one of the facets that contributes to my analysis, I decided to explore the curriculum within its own chapter as I believe that a dedicated chapter that summarized the curriculum document as a whole and provided a focus on the ENG2D curriculum would clearly establish foundational perspectives on the curriculum that would thus influence the analysis itself. Chapter 6 builds on my introduction to my personal narrative within this introduction by providing more detailed insight as to the educational and social experiences that have impacted my lens, which ultimately allows me to situate myself as both the researcher and a participant within this study. Because I treat my personal narrative as data within this study, this chapter was originally a sub-section within my analysis, but I decided to allocate my narrative within its own chapter to highlight my lens that I use within the following analysis chapter. Therefore, the analysis within Chapter 7 explores the curricular contexts of the chosen course of ENG2D and the chosen unit about Lori Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, delves into a document and discourse analysis of the chosen novel, and analyses the resulting discourse that emerged from my interviews with the chosen educator, VH.

The final section of my thesis explores the themes that have emerged from my analysis and provides concluding thoughts regarding the research explored within this thesis. Chapter 8 provides a discussion that explores the following themes that developed out of the analysis of the curriculum, the chosen novel, my personal perspectives, and the discourse that I had with VH: the importance in acknowledging the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived; living the tensions between the role of institutions, the act of teaching, and morality within education; the entity of the teacher; the reclaiming of identity and language within educational spaces; and empowering difference by working through discomforts. The concluding Chapter 9 offers a summary of my thesis, in addition to acknowledging implications and limitations of my research, a look towards future research, and my final thoughts on the research completed.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter has outlined my objectives for this thesis, has contextualized the research completed, has provided a personal introductory narrative to give insights into the lens that informs my research, and has outlined the structure of this thesis document. Therefore, this introduction serves as a foundation for the research completed within this thesis, which supported by the following review of the literature.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

To further situate the different elements pertaining to my research interests and any gaps within the literature that will be addressed by my study, I first provide an overview of curriculum theory to situate the differences and tensions between the intended implementations of curriculum (curriculum-as-planned) and the lived experiences that result from engaging with curriculum (curriculum-as-lived). I then discuss the colonial underpinnings that drive curriculum practices today. I also explore how these underpinnings can be deconstructed with postcolonial perspectives to ultimately decolonize curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. I provide a review of significant empirical evidence that questions the motivations behind teaching practices and curricula used within English classrooms. Finally, I highlight the importance of engaging difference when teaching critical literacy that is representative and relevant to the diverse perspectives of the lived experiences of students within their own socio-cultural Canadian contexts.

2.1 What is Curriculum Theory?

With a focus on the educational experience between students and teachers, curriculum theory is "the scholarly effort to understand the curriculum… as 'complicated conversation'" (Pinar, 2012, p. 1) surrounding the intricacies involved in schools as institutions, the human beings shaped within these institutions, and the context in which this schooling occurs (Pinar, 2012, 2015). It is understood that "curriculum is our key conveyance *into* the world" (Pinar, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, curriculum can be defined as "prescriptive content that illustrates what will be taught in a given educational program, who will teach, who will be taught, with what tools and in what context, with what effect, and how learners will be assessed" (El-Astal, 2023, p. 188). However, the study of curriculum introduces a better understanding towards the impact of academic knowledge on how and/or what educators and students value, grasp, and articulate about the world in which we live (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010), as well as how they understand their personal space and identity within one's context. Curriculum theorists are interested in transforming the ways in which we understand the dynamics of knowledge to move beyond singularities and universalities, and towards the complexities of perceiving the world within contextual space-time and cultures (Bell, Connerley, & Cocchiara, 2009; Dillon, 2009; Lopes & Macedo, 2014; Malewski, 2010; Ng-A-Fook, Ibrahim, & Reis, 2016). Within a

Canadian context, “the interpretation and enactment of curriculum is always inherently rooted (routed) or imagined through lived experiences of local geographies in relation to the current cosmopolitan psychic and material realities of the 21st century” (Ng-A-Fook, 2014, p. 28; Sumara, Davis, & Laidlaw, 2001). Therefore, by enacting curriculum with a lens based in one’s lived experiences of local geographies and realities, curricula can support students in answering the questions that are central to both student and Canadian curricula development: “Who am I? Who are we? Where are we?” and “Who are they?” (Chambers, 1999; p. 137, 148).

Established by the seminal works of the Canadian curriculum theorist, Ted T. Aoki, there is a tension that exists between curriculum-as-planned, or framed goals and objectives created by curriculum planners with origins outside of the classroom, and curriculum-as-lived, or the understanding of curriculum based on lived experience and applicability (Aoki, 1993, 2005; Golombek & Johnson, 2017). Curriculum theorists evaluate this tension to deconstruct and reconstruct “subjective experience through academic knowledge” (Pinar, 2012, p. 2), while critically assessing educational experience and discourse to revolutionize school reform as society, politics, and culture evolve (Chambers, 2003). As discussed by Aoki (2024), the pedagogical decisions of educators that are reflected in their teaching methods and instructional design help to connect and address the tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived; this translational space is also known as curriculum-as-implemented. Aoki (2024) argues that by dwelling in the space between both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived, educators can acknowledge the tensions that exist between the two to not overcome the tensions, but to embrace them to thoughtfully approach curricula within one’s pedagogical practices. Therefore, the following sub-sections further discuss curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived before addressing the tensions between the two.

2.1.1 Curriculum-as-Planned

By way of deconstructing curriculum-as-planned to better understand its relevance and applicability within one’s lived experience, it is important to question the nuances that influence how curriculum is established within a Canadian context. Therefore, I explore who and/or what influences the development of curriculum-as-planned, who curriculum is created for, and how it is intended to impact those that interact with it, such as students, teachers, and institutions.

Curriculum-as-planned is often influenced by the current discourse within a society, though it itself is developed to reflexively shape discourse and emerging knowledge as well (Ashbee, 2021). Therefore, it is the responsibility of curriculum developers to cultivate the rhetoric reflected within curriculum documents that echoes the current societal values that they may wish to be captured by a curriculum-as-planned (Kulnieks, Ng-A-Fook, Stanley, & Young, 2012). However, within this responsibility, curriculum developers "produce knowledge on curriculum, are inside curriculum, for they spin off discourse that shapes what it means to think about 'knowledge of most worth'" (Malewski, 2010, p. 16; Knapp & NCEE, 2008). Moreover, curriculum developers must employ exclusionary practices when establishing curriculum documents when determining "knowledge of most worth" as this also means that they must judge which knowledge is not as valuable to the population in which it will shape (Ashbee, 2021; Malewski, 2010). Therefore, as a curriculum developer, one has the power in determining the worth of knowledge, and this power is most often influenced by the surrounding political climate (Musgrove, 1979; Knapp & NCEE, 2008). Though often intended to reflect a "truly democratic educational process" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 494; Green, 2018), schooling and educational practice can become "a means to provide a mechanism for social control in the interest of maintaining a rigid class structure that is essential for a capitalist society" (Kaufman, 1979, p. 72; Apple, 2012). More specifically from a Canadian perspective, Canadian political contexts are often multifaceted due to variances in languages spoken, political views, cultural experiences, geographical contexts, and complex colonial historical influences (Sumara, Davis, & Laidlaw, 2001). In relation to curriculum, the foundations of Canadian curriculum reflect themes of cultural conflict due to "bitter social, political and religious controversies which ultimately have hung on the objectives and content, including the materials, of the curriculum" (Tomkins, 1981, p. 135). However, because Canadian curriculum developers have the challenge of determining the most valuable knowledge within Canadian society, there is no choice but to accommodate theoretical diversity since "history is layered in the present, that language cannot represent experience, and that translation is difficult" (Sumara et al., 2001, p. 158).

Curriculum is created to help guide institutions and educators within each of their respective roles in the implementation of curriculum, but it is ultimately students who are subjected to the curriculum itself (Ashbee, 2021). Institutions are the landscapes that have both historically and presently continue to play significant roles in setting the climate and culture of

implementing curriculum (Paraskeva, 2021). With education having become a compulsory experience for children within Canada, schools "[function] as a political field of socialization that competes with the family and assumes compromises as students adjust to authority" (Paraskeva, 2021, p. 5; Siegel, 1970). Therefore, it is through the implementation of curriculum that schools aim to teach students about what their society deems as important knowledge and their community's social values, structures, norms, and expectations. However, this may overlap with the idea of indoctrinating students into fulfilling a role in a democratic society under the guise of knowledge development (Pinar, 2010). Teachers are the facilitators in which schools are able to convey this information to students, thus situating educators within a space to work through their own schemas, experiences, and knowledge against institutional values (Paraskeva, 2021; Ensley Mitchell, 2023), risking the loss of "their creative, participative capacity" (Paraskeva, 2021, p. 6; Huebner, 1962). Additionally, by being positioned and expected to lead the discourse that occurs within their classrooms from an informed and educated perspective in conjunction to the curriculum (Ashbee, 2021; Boudreaux & Elby, 2020), the dichotomy between teacher and student reflects "a strong inequality of power between teachers and students, which facilitates the shaping of students into the molds imposed by the adults" (Paraskeva, 2021, p. 9). Though this dynamic is intended to teach students about socio-cultural transactions (Donald, 2019), to be "citizens who have a balanced understanding of multiple perspectives" (Kim, 2022, p, 487), and to scaffold on their knowledge (Ashbee, 2021), it is through curriculum that students are also guided to "conduct themselves in ways that bring benefits and economic prosperity to the society as a whole" (Donald, 2019, p. 111). When valuing students in this way (Kaufman, 1979), curriculum, institutions, educators, and ultimately our society encourages competitiveness regarding the productivity of a student within the constraints of societal expectations (Henry, 1963). If "the function of education has never been to free the mind and the spirit of man [sic], but to bind them" (Henry, 1963, p. 77), the curriculum-as-planned of a student's educational and curricular experiences linearly aim to teach and reinforce the idea that a student's value is tied to what they are able to produce (Eisner, 2005), how well they are able to perform according to societal norms and values (Alghuwainem, 2025), how well students can implement what has been deemed as the most valuable knowledge within their educational experiences (Giroux, 2018), and how well students can compete against those amongst them within their place in society (Henry, 1963; Paraskeva, 2021).

2.1.2 Curriculum-as-Lived

As explained above, curriculum-as-planned is meant to control what is deemed as valuable knowledge and discourse (Wooten, 2023), reinforce societal norms and structures (Mills, 2022), and shape students to strive to define themselves within the constraints of what they can produce within the society in which they live (Donoghue, 2008; Han, Robinson-Morris, Wallace, & Eaton, 2023). On the other hand, curriculum-as-lived centralizes the subjectivity of the student within their context and how they are experiencing the world around them to embrace the notion that learning is a continuous dynamic process and the knowledge resulting from this learning is an evolutionary process in itself (Phillips & Ng-A-Fook, 2024). As a practice of self-study (Hendry, 2023; Pinar, 2012), curriculum-as-lived surpasses "predetermined educational goals established by the institution" (Roofe, 2022, p. 5) as the source of knowledge development. Rather, curriculum-as-lived grounds knowledge development within lived experience without being dictated by set expectations (Pinar, 2023; Quinn & Hendry, 2023). As described by Quinn and Hendry (2023), it is through curriculum-as-lived that there is an "attentiveness to lived experiences and meanings, and their significance, as temporally engaged and reflected upon" (p. 26). Moreover, acknowledging the value in learning through our human circumstances is a "critical response to the existential threat of such having been reduced or dismissed in dominant educational thought and practice… reliant upon standardization, quantification, and objectivity" (Hendry, 2023, p. 26). Therefore, curriculum-as-lived transforms learning to move away from "larger societal discourses about whose knowledge and experience counted, and whose did not" (Wooten, 2023, p. 191). Curriculum-as-lived also evolves one's learning and subjective truths to emerge from the experiences and conversations that occur within the classroom, such as between teachers and students (Pinar, 2015, 2023), to understand that there is no absolute knowledge (Hendry, 2023). Moreover, curriculum-as-lived embraces the notion that curriculum and knowledge cannot be standardized since it is through complicated conversation that "invites students to encounter themselves and the world they inhabit and that inhabits them through academic study… [that is] all threaded through their own lived experience" (Pinar, 2015, p. 30; Aoki, 2005). Conversely, it is curricular standardization that silences a student's inner experience and subjectivity (Riley-Taylor & Daspit, 2023), thus removing the spontaneity and self-reflexivity of knowledge development and "ensuring cultural conformity" (Pinar, 2015, p. 31).

2.1.3 Addressing the Tensions

It is important to acknowledge and accept that both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived create tensions within the classroom, such as between students and the curriculum, students and teachers, and even between teachers, the curriculum, and the institutions that set the culture of curriculum implementation (Tran & O'Connor, 2024). However, in acknowledging these tensions, students can make sense of the ways in which they can move through the world by challenging curricular expectations while also reflexively engaging in a profound practice of self-understanding within their own contexts (Gallagher, 2016; Pinar, 2012). A method that speaks directly to weaving through the tensions between curriculum-as-lived and curriculum-as-planned is Pinar's notion of *currere* (Pinar, 1975). Within this method, Pinar (1975) outlines four stages that guides one to orient and ground one's self-study within their curricular contexts to establish a more effective curriculum (Hendry, 2023): the regressive stage (returning to and immersing oneself in a past memory or moment), the progressive stage (an envisioning of one's future), the analytical stage (analysing one's past, present, and future), and the synthetical stage (combining and reflecting on one's experiences and perspectives to develop an understanding of how these experiences have influenced the decisions they have made and perspectives they have had) (Pinar, 1975, 2012; Roofe, 2022). Therefore, it is through reflecting, analysing, and synthesizing one's lived experiences and perspectives that students can mobilize themselves towards self-conceptualization within their curricular contexts. Through inviting personal exploration through the process of *currere* (Kirshner, 2023), an educational praxis is created where academic knowledge is "grounded in lived, that is, subjective and social experience" (Pinar, 2015, p. 20; Wang, 2023; see McClintock, 1971). It is also important to note that the reflections, conversations, and tensions that arise from addressing curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived when actively grounding and threading one's contexts, experiences, and personal histories through curricular experience is not linear, but rather a multidimensional exploration that is constantly in dialogue with an individual's past knowledge, present experiences, and future ambitions (Darder, 2012; Roofe, 2022). Ultimately, it is through one's personification and embodiment of curriculum that both the learner and the educator can move through the tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived (Pinar, 2015; Ashbee, 2021; Woods, 2021; Wang, 2023).

2.2 Curriculum Theory Through a Postcolonial Lens: Intersecting Historical & Contemporary Curriculum Discourses with Postcolonialism

By way of gaining a more complete perspective of how postcolonial perspectives may inform curriculum theory, it is important to first establish colonialism's historical connections within curricula. Educational institutions have been historically used as tools by colonial governments to shape and construct national identities, which results in generalizing colonial experiences and a society that rewards one's ability to fit into colonial ideals that ultimately creates economic gains for the colonizer (Kennerley, 2003; see McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2003). Curricula influenced by colonialism also restricts and reinforces one-dimensional discourses pertaining to race and racialized experience of the colonized (Gulson & Webb, 2013), which is a tactic particularly implemented by Eurocentric colonizers (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000). Though colonialism is an inescapable legacy that is encountered at the foundation of deconstructing and evaluating curricula within colonized societies (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Tikley, 1999; Camilleri-Cassar, 2014), it is through recognizing these foundations, critically reflecting on and embracing the silenced and/or homogenized narratives, and inciting the need of cultural hybridity that allows postcolonial thought to inform curriculum evolution (Smith, 2010). Therefore, the following sub-sections explore the influence of colonialism within the role of institutionalized educational systems, and the ways in which language and discourse have been used by the colonization of curricula to control the marginalized and racialized within Eurocentric ideals. Additionally, I investigate postcolonialism's response in conjunction with curriculum theory in regards to these modes of control to acknowledge the colonial underpinnings within curriculum by way of deconstructing, transforming, and reclaiming a multidimensional space for diverse lived experiences and contexts.

2.2.1 Institutionalized Systems

The use of institutions by colonial governments has shown to be a systemic way to implement and perpetuate colonial values and narratives, to ultimately disempower, silence, exploit, control, and diminish the history, cultures, and lived experiences of racialized and/or minoritized populations (Hojjati, Beavis, Kassam, Choudhury, Fraser, Masching, & Nixon, 2018). It is through colonial education that populations are indoctrinated "from a young age with ways of understanding themselves as culturally worthless" (Campbell, 2006, p. 195). Within a

Canadian context, this was reflected through the horrifying history of the Indian Residential School system. This system exemplifies the colonial process of constructing a means of exerting power over a racialized group, implementing/reinforcing systemic racism, and exploiting populations for the gain of the colonizer through curricula and educational institutions to control (Donald, 2009; Hojjati et al., 2018; Mathur, Dewar, & DeGagné, 2011; Ng-A-Fook & Rottman, 2012; Wane, 2009). It is through Canadian policies like the Indian Act (passed in 1874 and amended in 1985), which is an Act that explicitly guided the implementation of Indian Residential Schools, that allowed a centralized goal to "disempower and erase Indigenous Peoples and their way of life from the Canadian landscape for over a century" (Hojjati et al., 2018, p. 3207). Additionally, Indian Residential Schools also serve as an example of a systemic "colonial mechanism of genocide" (Bell, 2024, p. 215), since it is through the calculated and collaborative efforts between the Government of Canada, educational institutions, and religious entities like the Catholic Church (Burke, Winsor, & Power, 2023) that, under the guise of morality and education, resulted in the genocide of Indigenous peoples and an enduring systemic racism that was and still is imbedded at the foundation of Canadian society and education today.

In addition to recognizing colonialism's methodical use of institutions within a Canadian context to further colonialist control and silencing of First Nation Canadians, as well as other minoritized voices and perspectives, it is important to also acknowledge that these systems are not unique to Canadian history, and that colonization within educational institutions has impacted minorities and racialized populations within countless other societies and cultures as well (Ward, Balabuch, Frodsham, O'Connor, & Nahachewsky, 2023). Similarly to Canada's Indian Residential School history, Australia's colonial history reflects the use of "settler colonial institutions [that] could both control and potentially 'improve' indigenous people, and children in particular" (Jensz & Swartz, 2023, p. 464). It is through the use of Australia's *Central Board appointed to Watch over the Interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria* and under the guise of being concerned about the protection and welfare of Indigenous children, that there was "the forced removal of children from families and communities in an attempt to disrupt indigenous families by assimilating children through institutionalising them" (Jensz & Swartz, 2023, p. 471). Jamaica is another country that has had an exploitive use of educational institutions while being a colony within the British Caribbean (Roofe, 2022). Within the pre-emancipation era of the 1700s, Christian missionaries were responsible for teaching biblical

beliefs to those that were enslaved, while simultaneously teaching the importance of dedicating one's life to obeying one's master (Coates, 2012; King, 1999). This education eventually evolved to the creation of church-founded schools in Jamaica, and elementary and secondary schooling became reserved for the White upper class during the emancipation era of the 1800s (Peters, 2001). Conversely, Black children were able to attend early elementary school that was profoundly influenced by European culture through the guise of advancement and enlightenment, and was grounded in the importance of being submissive, which further dissociated students from their own cultures and lived realities (Peters, 2001). Following Jamaica's independence in 1962, the impact of colonialism and slavery within their educational institutions remained since "the education system in Jamaica modelled that of the British education system with a curriculum that had little relevance to the realities of the Jamaican people" (Roofe, 2022, p. 10; Manley, 1974; Peters, 2001). Moreover, this is a system that continues to be actively reformed through "[questioning] whether values, assumptions and knowledges derived through this process of schooling in Jamaica are a true representation of who we are as individuals and who we are as Jamaicans" (Roofe, 2022, p. 14). Through the examples of Australia and Jamaica, we can see how historical settler colonial institutions have played a vital role in the racializing of populations and how the racialization of these populations continues to have effects on society today. The use of institutions to invoke colonial values and systemic methods of control is something that has and continues to manifest itself within Canada, as well as being a technique of control that has and is used within other societies around the world.

2.2.2 The Control of Language

It is through the policies and discourse embodied within curricula that colonialism dictates normative discourse and attempts to assimilate the Other into the norm, thus extensively colonizing groups of people disguised as a means of liberating the oppressed through submission (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). For example, the English language has been and continues to be used to project power and colonial ideals through one's ability to use standardized forms of English (Fleming, 2015). Fleming (2015) notes that one's English language proficiency is judged on standardized forms of English that have developed from imperialistic "[s]tructures of power and accidents of geography [that have] lead to the privileging of particular dialects" (p. 49). It is through these structures of power that implicitly link one's

English language proficiency and one's ability to "[conform] to the perception of being [W]hite" (Fleming, 2015, p. 48). Additionally, it is those that are judged as lacking English proficiency that are represented as inferior and racialized while those that are deemed to have higher English proficiency "…become closer to the [W]hite imperial centre or, rather… closer to what is imagined as a 'normal' Canadian" (Fleming, 2015, p. 50). Therefore, the colonization of English language curricula, which is the focus of my research, is used as a tool that constructs, embodies, and implements colonial dichotomies concerning social values and norms that often subjugate racialized and minoritized experiences (Mirhosseini, 2018; Pennycook & Coutland-Marin, 2003). For example, within the context of Canada's Indian Residential schools, children were punished, abused, and assaulted for speaking their language as opposed to English (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), which were practices that were condoned and sheltered by the law as a way to "control and delineate" (Chariandy, Crey, John, Nicholson, Nock, Okot Bitek, Reddon, Reder, & McCall, 2020, p. 71) Indigenous lives as savage and inferior in comparison to the modern, civilized, and Christian ways of the European colonizer (Regmi, 2022; Campbell, 2006). By "[masking] the violence of [these] institutions" (Jensz & Swartz, 2023, p. 476) through the façade of existing for the protection and welfare of children, "inculcating children in the language of the colonisers" (Jensz & Swartz, 2023, p. 474) was done in an attempt to suppress Indigenous knowledge, lived experience, and epistemologies (Regmi, 2022). Therefore, colonialism's "direct implications on the knowledge construction and knowledge understanding of the colonised people" (Roofe, 2022, p. 8) was made possible through exerting control over language by stifling the use of Indigenous languages to therefore stop the flourishing of Indigenous cultures and knowledges. Additionally, language was also simultaneously used to reflect to Indigenous children that they are "culturally worthless" (Campbell, 2006, p. 195), inferior to their colonizer, and that Indigenous peoples needed Europeans and Christianity to learn civility, consciousness, and modernity (Roofe, 2022, p. 8).

The legacy of colonialism within educational practices in subject areas like language and literature continues to dictate the removing of racialized and minoritized perspectives to ensure the space for what is considered to be "traditional forms of literacy that focus solely on reading and writing in the dominant language" (Burke et al., 2023, p. 63; Parkes, 2018); this simultaneously "[fails] to recognize the impact on the revitalization of [I]ndigenous languages and the powerful performative pedagogies such as talking circles, blanket exercises, storytelling"

(Burke et al., 2023, p. 63). Literature taught in the classroom is chosen by educators based on their own reading experiences, the texts available within their schools, and the curriculum used to guide the classroom learning (Baird, 2002). However, within Canadian English secondary school classrooms, these texts often belong to the British and American canons of texts which inherently tend to "[privilege] Eurocentric perspectives" (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 79). Ignoring literary texts that are written by and/or portray an array of racial and cultural backgrounds marginalizes and oppresses diverse perspectives through the discourse, or lack thereof, that takes place within the classroom (McBean & Johnston, 2018; Kumashiro, 2002). Disregarding such perspectives only further ensures there is only room for Eurocentric discourse that, through repetition and recurrence, is reinforced to be "a self-evident and natural truth" (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 83) for students during very formative years of education.

Consequently, postcolonialism uses language and discourse as a means to evaluate the hegemonic values and knowledge that are encoded and decoded through curricula (Fairclough, 2010; Hall, 1980). When invoking a postcolonial lens, invoking literature written by and/or portraying an array of racial and cultural backgrounds "[destabilizes] dominant discourses in the West, challenging inherent assumptions and critiquing the legacies of colonialism" (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 80). Reading with a postcolonial lens "is key to providing other avenues of witness to the possibility of living in a world with states and institutions not founded on categorical difference or capitalist aims" (Mishra Tarc, 2025, p. 254), while experiencing postcolonial literature provides an appeal for history that serves as a "powerful [vehicle] for communicating social and cultural difference" (Mishra Tarc, 2025, p. 254). Therefore, it is "important for all students to encounter texts about characters from cultures and backgrounds different than their own" (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 83). Doing so would provide students with the opportunity to intentionally learn and practice to appreciate how characters (and ultimately the lives that they portray) can be both similar and different from the students' own lived experiences, just like the lived experiences of others they may encounter in real life. Additionally, the inclusion of postcolonial literature would also reflect the reparative work needed "to confront colonial discourses" (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 1) that can demean the lives of both characters and students' lived experiences. It is through this reflection and deconstruction that postcolonialism can break down hierarchies found within curriculum-as-planned, as well as

to uncover the multiplicity of thought, knowledge, and culture that adds richness to lived educational experience (Daniel, Boehnke, & Knafo-Noam, 2016; MacPherson, 2010).

2.2.3 Living in a World of Difference

It is the challenge of postcolonialism and curriculum theory to consolidate multiplicity, and ultimately multiculturalism, within a domain that has and continues to advocate for standardized experience and knowledge (Walcott, 2011; Carr & Lund, 2007; Chazan et al., 2011). It is through "the challenge of living with each other in a world of difference" (McCarthy, 1998, p. 24) that it is essential to critically analyse discourse, to question the use of the Western canon of literature in modeling an unrealistic standardized human experience (Berchini, 2016), and to evaluate multiculturalism's immense value in representing alternative forms of knowledge within curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived (Joshee & Johnson, 2007). To genuinely implement postcolonialism in evaluating curricula, it is vital for educators, theorists, and students to acknowledge the genealogy of colonial structures within curriculum policies before deconstructing and transforming curriculum (Greene, 1991; Hojjati et al., 2018). In acknowledging this genealogy, this encourages both educators and students to be *wide-awake* to the social and personal complexities that learners may experience within their own contexts (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). As settlers within Canada, whether in the position of being a student, educator, and/or an institution, it is our responsibility to invoke a critical lens to consistently acknowledge and tell the truth regarding colonial genocide and how these perspectives continue to flow through Canadian education today (Matthews, Gingrich, & Ong, 2023). By way of recognizing that "[c]olonization is part of the history of every Canadian" (Hojjati et al., 2018, p. 3214), postcolonial perspectives within curriculum can reinforce the power in reclaiming the colonized voice through encouraging a profound sense of community, interrelated dependence, and cultural translation to empower difference (Hage, 2000; Vasudevan, 2014).

2.3 Decolonizing Curriculum

By pushing the boundaries of evaluating curriculum through a postcolonial lens, there is the objective to decolonize curriculum for the purpose of reclaiming traditional knowledge and colonial difference as a way to strengthen both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. From a postcolonial perspective, it is understood that knowledge of the past, and of how colonial

discourse is typically used to 'domesticate' racialized populations (Smith & Rogers, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012), is needed to decolonize curriculum and to use knowledge constructively (Coté-Meek, 2014; Ng-A-Fook, 2011; Vaudrin-Charette, 2015). Decolonizing curriculum calls for decolonizing racialized identities and bodies to redefine and reorganize complex models of socio-economic organization, education, and citizenship (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Kanu, 2006, 2011; Mignolo, 2011). Therefore, within the following sub-sections, I address the importance of decolonizing curriculum through the reclaiming of language, as well as the importance of implementing the decolonization of curriculum to ultimately reconstruct the ways in which we conceptualize the world around us.

2.3.1 Reclaiming Language

It is through decolonizing curriculum that language, and the reclaiming of language, is used as a device to deconstruct how we talk to and about racialized bodies, experiences, and identities within colonial spaces (Asher, 2010). This deconstruction incites the implementation of Indigenous philosophies, for example, to realize the importance in critically reflecting on the diversity of human relationships within our natural context (Donald, 2012; Turner, Ignace, & Ignace, 2000), as opposed to using Eurocentric epistemologies to standardize curriculum to exclude racialized positions from educational systems (Gilmour, Bhandar, Heer, & Ma, 2012). Though the forceful implementation and learning of European languages, like English, was used as "a tool to exclude the natives' languages, cultures, and ways of life" (Le, Dong, Tran, & Vu, 2023, p. 448) within colonial societies, using English is central to reclaiming lived realities and knowledges when decolonizing curriculum and education today (Fleming, 2020; Tupas, 2023; DeGraff, 2019). Purposely using English when inserting one's diverse, racialized, and/or marginalized lived experiences and culture allows students to insert themselves within curricula and within an overarching education system that has long "ignored or devalued knowledge which children bring along with them to the classroom" (Tupas, 2023, p. 400; Thomson & Hall, 2008; Gonzales, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2002). In the direction of decolonizing language and discourse of the classroom, Valdez (2020) outlines a classroom pedagogy that encourages students, teachers, and educational systems to impose a critical lens on colonial discourses; it is through "(1) [identifying] and [examining] colonial discourse, (2) [engaging] in anti-colonial vocabulary activities, and (3) [contesting] colonial discourse and writing" (Tupas, 2023, p. 400)

that students, educators, and educational systems are positioned to expose stakeholders to the uncomfortable and violent actions of colonialism, and the enduring impact of those actions (Reis & Ng-A-Fook, 2010; Sahlane & Pritchard, 2023). Applying the stages such as those outlined by Valdez (2020) allows us to "interrogate English and everything that it stands for in our lives by reorganizing our classroom practices, reconstituting our identities, and revaluing and incorporating local knowledge" (Tupas, 2023, p. 404). Ultimately, when the curricular purpose is to teach, learn, and use English, taking steps to critically question and actively engage in decolonizing education allows us to "link our efforts in the classroom with our lives and that of our students which are deeply enmeshed in the messy and everyday struggles against ideologies and conditions of coloniality" (Tupas, 2023, p. 404). While Eurocentric colonialism is understood as the physical and brute occupation with a "sense of a formal system of political domination by Western European societies over others" (Quijano, 2024, p. 73), coloniality is understood as the traces that remain even when colonialists leave, especially in regards to the Eurocentric coloniality of power encompassed within 'the social category of "race" as the key element of the social classification of colonized and colonizers…mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior' (Quijano, 2024, p. 76). In turn, acknowledging the coloniality within the use of English within our educational systems gives way to reclaiming marginalized identities within a language that has a history of being both socially divisive and "a battleground for identity making" (Tupas, 2023, p. 398).

2.3.2 Subjective Reconstructions

Decolonized perspectives call on curriculum to encourage and value subjective reconstructions to critically analyse one's space in society (Dei & Kempf, 2013; Lund & Carr, 2015). Therefore, decolonizing curriculum is to move beyond dichotomizing experiences, and towards questioning the imposed hegemonic discourse (Battiste, 1998), curricula of dominance (Smith & Rogers, 2016; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry, & Spence, 2011), and normative concepts of belonging to realize that these are simply constructions. It is to realize that these structures should not be compartmentalized but rather deconstructed to make room for the inclusion of "memories and significant contributions of members of historically marginalized groups, …[towards] real education [that] enables children of color to recognize the lies inherent in colonialist claims to truth, to be self-determined, and to become instigators of social change"

(Brandon, 2010, p. 131). This does not simplify education and teaching, but rather, invoking a postcolonial lens within curriculum and using decolonization as a lens to deconstruct colonial impositions within education highlights the "pedagogical discomfort" (Ward et al., 2023, p. 26) that exists within education. It is through challenging ourselves and working through this discomfort that allows us to decolonize the social constructions that help to perpetuate "issues related to ethnicity, social inequities, and race… [towards] better knowledge production and praxis by opening up new avenues for change in research methods, perspectives, and epistemologies to promote other knowledges and alternative ways of categorising the world" (Sahlane & Pritchard, 2023, p. 6).

When acknowledging the importance of decolonizing the complexities surrounding social constructions, an example of this would be to also acknowledge that the structures and influence of the global economy, as well as its privilege towards Western cultures and languages are the outcomes of colonialism's legacy within controlling knowledge production and dissemination (Tupas, 2023; Fasakin, 2021). Decolonizing narratives and knowledges that are encompassed through English language usage assist in the deconstruction of the social and economic constructions that ultimately influence curricular contexts and typically favour those that perpetuate Western "native speaker norms and rhetorics" (Tupas, 2023, p. 397), while marginalizing the Other (Salonga, 2015). By invoking non-linear ways of thinking that are "inclusive of the alternative modes of being, seeing the world and reasoning" (Al Tamimi, 2023, p. 422), the power and control that is encompassed within dominant social and economic discourses is dismantled and reclaimed to create space for intercultural perspectives (Al Tamimi, 2023; Mignolo, 2010) and "intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality" (Quijano, 2007, p. 177; Sahlane & Pritchard, 2023). Ultimately, respecting and encouraging the importance of diverse lived experiences through decolonization encourages one to evolve their subjective knowledges based on their own lived experiences and contexts, create their own constructions about the world around them, and reclaim the space within their academic experience to practice this form of liberation from the colonial pedagogical practices that have long restricted the authenticity that is encompassed within marginalized experience.

2.4 Acknowledging Established Evidence

It is important to explore research concerning English literary education with minoritized experiences to contextualize how the significant outcomes from this research may apply to English taught at the secondary school level in Ontario. Within the following section, I review research pertaining to student experience and language development within their educational contexts, the importance of students identifying with literature taught within the classroom, and the value of teacher knowledge and experience within the classroom.

2.4.1 Student Experience & Language Development

In their case study evaluating English education at the secondary school level within seven schools across Canada, England, and Scotland, authors Marshall, Gibbons, Hayward, and Spencer (2018) ask "'where are the voices of the students?'" (p. 4) when examining the purposes of policies and practices of teachers in the teaching of English. Amongst their conclusions, Marshall et al. (2018) establish that teaching English can be a source of empowerment as students gain "large amounts of experience of ideas and language through interpretation and production of communications for all of the main language purposes: [to be] informative, reflective, persuasive and imaginative" (p. 131). As reflected within Marshall et al.'s (2018) work, it is the stimulation of thought, addressing of real experiences, and critical analysis of ideas and standpoints that marks a successful English class. In questioning the motivations behind curricula and teaching practices, Zhang's (2019) case study investigates literacy education on a transnational scale to better understand how human (i.e. educators) and non-human (i.e. curricula) contexts impact the teaching of the Province of Alberta's English curriculum within the context of a Macau school. Zhang (2019) concludes that "Teachers' classroom literacy practices relate creative reconstruction of meanings through multimodality, respectful imagining of others, and their efforts to nurture biliteracies in the transnational education space" (p. 595) and that it is the rejecting of the "universalistic mode of curricular imperialism" (Hansen, 2008, p. 307) that allows teachers to reinvent and recontextualize curricula to celebrate and illuminate the "Other's assets and wisdom in literacy education" (Zhang, 2019, p. 595; Choi & Shin, 2016; Stornaiuolo, 2016; Zhang & Heydon, 2015). Moreover, this provides both teachers and students the opportunity to "dialogically engage with differences, to perceive their own values from the Other's viewpoints, and to re-construct values

in situated interaction and negotiation" (Zhang, 2019, p. 596). In their qualitative study to assess how Albertan educators cultivate language development and literacy engagement amongst diverse groups of students, Kapoyannis (2019) observes 28 English Language Learners (ELLs) within Grades 2 and 3. Kapoyannis (2019) found that it is through affirmations of identity that students are able to make strong curricular connections when studying a text, thus ensuring that educators are able use their instructional design within the classroom to be more receptive to different cultural discourse, linguistic diversity, and the experiences that racialized bodies may endure (Petherick, 2018).

2.4.2 Identifying with the Literature

It is important to establish that curricula as it stands and the media (i.e. literature) used to reinforce curricula is not a uniform opportunity for students to gain knowledge, especially when it comes to the perspectives of racialized and minoritized populations (Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2011; Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019), since racialized and minoritized experiences shape different ways of knowing (Howard, 2010). Rather, if students do not have the motivations or experiences from a dominant perspective to understand the context in which the media was produced (Yu & Geng, 2020), students will not be able to fully engage and identify with that media (Tuinstra, 2019), understand the value of their personal histories and narratives (Bal & Perzigian, 2013), and will perceive that there is a lack of knowledge to gain as the media may seem irrelevant and inapplicable to their personal contexts (Jia, Gottardo, Koh, Chen, & Pasquarella, 2014). In assuming that the knowledge to be gained from literature is uniform and universal, minoritized students would be subject to acculturation rather than having an affirmed identity celebrating their socio-cultural experiences (Jia et al., 2019). This further highlights the importance of recognizing, rejecting, and reconstructing the social constructions embodied in texts (Yang & Tan, 2019). Therefore, the literature supports the notion that utilizing perspectives, teaching practices, and texts that are "continually sensitive to the realities of our dynamic society and international community" (Greig & Holloway, 2016, p. 408) will assist students in developing critical literacy skills to create supportable spaces for the diversity found in lived experiences. Therefore, this ensures minoritized students do not have to negotiate identities within their Canadian contexts (Creese, 2019; Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019; Schroeter, 2019).

2.4.3 Teacher Knowledge & Contexts

Within the interpretation of curricula, the contexts of the classroom, and the curricular choices made when implementing curricular guidelines, it is vital to consider teacher contexts and the knowledge that they bring with them into their teaching practices. Teachers' personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), such as the lived experience and knowledge that a teacher develops outside of school, shapes how an educator perceives their role within the classroom, as well as shaping how the pedagogical work of a teacher is implemented within practice (Clandinin, 1986; Chan & Ross, 2019; Eng, 2021). In acknowledging "that teacher knowledge is informed by experiences lived by a teacher over the course of their careers, and indeed, over the course of their lives" (Chan & Ross, 2019, p. 4), content knowledge does not liken to effective and skilled teaching (Gallagher & Ciampa, 2020). Rather, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between an educator's content knowledge and their pre-existing beliefs, as well as the ongoing and continuous professional development that is needed to support teacher self-efficacy within their contexts and lived experience (Gallagher & Ciampa, 2020). Within their study concerning student teacher perceptions and experiences, Gravett and Kroon (2023) found that reflective practice within teaching is an important facet of teaching. It is through reflecting on their observations and experience that teachers can draw on their experience to contribute to a repertoire of more "nuanced pedagogical reasoning that enables quick decision-making when confronted with teaching challenges and dilemmas" (Gravett & Kroon, 2023, p. 871). Conversely, within their study of evaluating the relationship between students' mental health and homeroom teachers' experiences, Shin (2022) noted that educators who have more professional experience, and who are able to draw from their overall experiences, are more confident in assisting their students in behavioural and emotional challenges. Shin (2022) establishes that it is the enhancement of "teachers' knowledge and skills related to socio-emotional learning" (p. 1384) that is needed to support students' mental wellbeing. Therefore, while becoming a content expert is important to the role of being a teacher, it is the teacher's experience and knowledge outside of course content that also supports the wellbeing of their students. Therefore, in recognizing "the human dimensions of teaching and learning" (Chan & Ross, 2019, p. 70) and in reflecting on their own surrounding, contexts, and practices, educators are also able to better "understand who their students are and how they view and respond to their students— in all of their complexity—to foster learning and growth" (Burke et al., 2023, p. 64;

Pugach, Gomez-Najarro, & Matewos, 2019). It is through an educator's ability "to come to know their own stories" (Carter, 1993, p. 8) that they can then story their experience and knowledge (Huber et al., 2013), as it is "this knowledge [that] is [at] the foundation for developing and implementing curriculum for their students" (Chan & Ross, 2019, p. 6; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

2.5 Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, I provided an overview of curriculum theory, reviewed curriculum theory through a postcolonial lens by intersecting historical and contemporary curriculum discourses with postcolonialism, discussed the importance of decolonizing curriculum, and acknowledged established evidence by addressing relevant research. In providing an overview of curriculum theory, it is understood that while curriculum-as-planned aims to standardize knowledge, discourse, and societal values, curriculum-as-lived embraces the complicated conversation that curriculum and knowledge cannot be standardized since it is through students' inner experiences and subjectivities that knowledge emerges (Riley-Taylor & Daspit, 2023). The tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived exist, and acknowledging these tensions within the classroom encourages both students and educators to move through these tensions by challenging the linearity of curriculum through the reflexive practice of self-understanding within their own contexts (Gallagher, 2016; Pinar, 2012). Moreover, I further contextualized the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived within my review of the literature by intersecting the historical and contemporary curriculum discourses with postcolonialism. To highlight the facets if this intersection, I established the role institutionalized systems have in systemically implementing and perpetuating colonial values and narratives, discussed how a disregard for literary texts that are written by and/or portray an array of racial and cultural backgrounds can marginalize and oppress diverse perspectives, and recognized the importance of implementing postcolonial perspectives within curriculum to reclaim the colonized voice and empower difference. I then acknowledged the objective of decolonizing curriculum to allow the space for marginalized identities to be reclaimed through language within the classroom. I also recognised the importance of providing a space for subjective reconstructions to emerge through respecting and encouraging the importance of diverse lived experiences within the classroom. To further ground the ideas and concepts

discussed within this literature review, I acknowledged established research that discusses how student experiences impact language development, the importance of students identifying with literature discussed within the classroom, and the ways in which an educator's knowledge and contexts impact their pedagogical perspectives and curriculum implementation. Ultimately, the topics discussed within my literature review contribute to the foundations of the research that I have conducted, and it reflects the multifaceted nature of my perspectives that further emerge when invoking my chosen theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks

Serving as a theoretical lens for my thesis, I am choosing to invoke postcolonialism as the main guiding theoretical framework as its characteristics will best support the research I have conducted regarding an investigation of curricula and how it focuses on the politics of minority representation. Therefore, it is important to first reflexively address the genealogy of the term, main tenants, and the ways in which postcolonialism is in conversation with supporting theoretical frameworks that have helped to inform my research.

3.1 Colonialism, Postcolonialism, & Discourse

Before delving into the specifics surrounding postcolonialism, it is important to first establish colonialism, the epistemology from which postcolonialism stems. Conceptually, colonialism can be defined as an approach of "conquest and control of other people's land and goods" (Loomba, 2005, p. 8). However, until recent history (Hall, 2013), this control and conquest was commonly connected to Western European imperialism that forcefully dominated the economies of colonized nations, obstructed traditional cultural and political structures, and exploited human and natural resources for the benefit of the same Western European nations (Gandhi, 1998). Through dehumanizing and objectifying the colonized subject, a dichotomy of domination and submission is created in the areas of race, language, and culture, resulting in the colonial hierarchical perspective that White Europeans are considered civilized, saviours, and superior over those that are non-Europeans, racialized, and what the colonial hierarchical perspective considers to be barbaric (Césaire, 2000; Chrisman & Williams, 1993; Memmi, 1967; Loomba, 2005; Moore, 2019). Lacking the civility outlined by the White European standard disqualified the inferior from both civilization and humanity, and "[i]mperialism provided the means through which concepts of what counts as human could be applied systematically as forms of classification, for example through hierarchies of race and typologies of different societies" (Smith, 2021, p. 28), thus shaping the relationship and power dynamics between colonizers and Indigenous societies. In discussing the relationship between colonizers and Indigenous societies, it is important to also acknowledge the distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism. It is understood that "Settlers are founders of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them," (Veracini, 2024, p. 5), and therefore, settler colonialism is the "transferring of settlers… onto indigenous land… [and] (aim to) make colonized lands their

permanent home and in the process enter into continuous and sustained conflict with the Indigenous populations, whom they (attempt to) dispossess, exploit and/or eliminate" (Englert, 2022, p. 5-6). While it is not the focus of my research completed, it is important to acknowledge the role that settler colonialism has and continues to play as a particular geopolitical expression of the logics of colonialism within the West and within Canada (Anievas & Nişancıoğlu, 2015).

It is through colonial power over discourse that the West and Western knowledge are established as the standard models of comparison in regard to religion, race, language, and social norms, in an attempt to homogenize, degrade, and other the complex identities and cultures of non-Western societies (Bobowik, Valentim, & Licata, 2018; Hall, 1992; Tomicic & Berardi, 2018). Due to its inescapable and horrific histories that can be found at the foundation of societies that were once colonized by Eurocentric imperialism, colonialism has and continues to impact the status quo of social norms, literary discourse, and cultural values found in Western/colonized nations today (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, & Gómez Ordóñz, 2018), which are concepts that I investigate within this thesis. In reaction to colonialism, postcolonialism acknowledges colonialism's role in how we understand societies today, while critiquing and contesting "colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, 2005, p. 16; see also Mignolo, 2011) in an effort to recognize, decolonize, and reconstruct the marginalized discourse of those that have and continue to be silenced by colonial Eurocentric constraints and coloniality (Simpson, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Coulthard, 2014; TallBear, 2013). The lens of postcolonialism perceives colonialism's current presence in racial, linguistic, and cultural discourses that can and should be contextually deconstructed (Meer, 2018; Spivak, 1985). Postcolonialism argues that historical and social structures, and their interconnections, create meaning through the acceptance of people's lives and experiences (Garbin & Millington, 2018), which are too complex to categorize universally (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Here, postcolonialism seeks to examine how discourse defines, shapes, and governs one's development of knowledge within the structures of societal/cultural norms (Said, 1994; Dhawan, 2017; Meer, 2018). Part of this discursive examination, which are themes that I discuss within this thesis, is to expose the power dynamics that can be embedded within a discourse to uncover the hegemonic and dominant values that suppress those who are in conflict with Eurocentric ideals (Pillai, 2012; Davis, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2002).

For Michel Foucault (1972), a discourse is a network of meanings, a structural organization of knowledge or "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). It uses tools like language to structurally transform logic and social interactions. Often, ideas considered to be superior within a discourse that create a binary discourse between right and/or wrong ways of being impact the reality of those interpreting the discourse (Barber, 2018; Henry & Tator, 2002; Mills, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000). If that is the case, Gandhi (1998) argues, postcolonial discourse "directs its critique against the cultural hegemony of European knowledges in an attempt to reassert the epistemological value and agency of the non-European world" (p. 44). Methodologically, postcolonialism uses the deconstruction of linguistic discourse, creating spaces to critique colonial discursive structures and makes meaning from what is excluded from that discourse; what Derrida (1994) calls *différance*. Deconstructing discourse is not about destroying discourses that exist, but rather it is about clarifying the components of the foundational structure of a discourse that communicate power (Lamb, 2013), thus inspiring a reformation of openness to the complexities of colonial perspectives and the consequences that contribute to the ways in which we understand economic, political, and social structures today (Dhillon, 2015). Therefore, postcolonialism looks to represent and validate the multiplicity of histories and narratives of those that have been oppressed under colonialism (de Alva, 1995; Nayar, 2015), to argue that historical/social structures, and their interconnections, create meaning through the acceptance of people's lives and experiences (Garbin & Millington, 2018), which are too complex to categorize universally (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

Postcolonialism aims to deconstruct the themes of Orientalism and the creation of an Other, in addition to representation, language, and literature to explore the impact of discourse in justifying/fueling colonial dominance and postcolonial resistance. According to Said (1979), the originator of the concept, Orientalism is a collection of concepts (i.e. discourse) whose main objective is 'othering' – that is, to imagine, talk about and create an Other as a tool to legitimatize the domination and control of colonized subjects (Said, 1994). The concepts of Orientalism and othering are also tools used by imperialism to systemically exert power and control over epistemological, political, and economic facets within non-Western cultures and societies, thus creating an overarching cultural hegemony that is perpetuated within representations found within narratives and discourse (Said, 1994). In creating a dichotomy of us (the West) and them (the East), Orientalism communicates that the existence of the East is

dependent on the acknowledgement of the West, because without the West, the rest of the world cannot thrive or exist, thus producing complex and binary power dynamics that intertwine the East's existence to the West (Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1992; Said, 1979; Said, 1994). Through studying and creating discourses about the Orient, colonialism disguises itself as modernization while establishing its self-referential position as the holder of "pure" knowledge (Amin, 2018; Bannerji; 2000; Bhabha, 2002; Fanon, 1963). Through a Foucauldian perspective, knowledge and discourse have a mutual relationship where knowledge is created by individuals within the norms communicated by discourse, and discourse is produced by individuals to communicate one's knowledge (Burney, 2012; Delandshere & Petrosky, 1994; Foucault, 1972; Willinsky, 1998; Van Dijk, 2014). Therefore, through exemplifying resistance through the emergence of counter-narratives, postcolonialism argues against essentialism, or the generalized knowledge of an Other, within colonial discourses to recognize the complexity of intersectional discourses concerning gender, social class, (dis)abilities, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989; Friedman, 2017; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Price, 2013; Said, 1994; St. Pierre, 2000; Watt, 2011). Postcolonialism recognizes that by orientalising the East, the colonizer oversimplifies and often racializes the experiences and cultures of the colonized with the intent to minimize their power, inhibit their autonomy, and depersonalize their being (Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1967; Lewis, 2017; Memmi, 1967; Mignolo, 1999). It is through its relation to the Other that colonialism can articulate its own power complex and identity (Glasgow, 2009; Katz, 2018). Conversely, postcolonialism supports the Other's reclamation of one's identity and history through the (re)writing of narratives from the perspectives of the colonized (Said, 1994). Through "the emergence of a postcolonial consciousness" (Said, 1994, p. 96), the reclamation of the Other allows the cultural resistance needed to decentre Europe, to dismantle universalities, and to humanize the colonized through exposing the power and dominance at the foundations of the violence and exclusion used as a means of control towards the colonized.

In choosing to invoke a postcolonial lens within my research, it is important to also recognize some of anti-colonialism's approach on the limitations, tensions, and critiques of postcolonialism, especially within a Canadian context. While an "anticolonial approach challenges the implication of the 'post' in post-colonialism" (Kempf, 2009, p. 26), colonial structures of power, control, and dominance continue to actively impact lives today (Shohat, 1992). As a direct critique of postcolonialism's approach towards colonialism, anti-colonialism

"[challenges] repressive and violent social structures brought into being by new incarnations of capitalist globalization" (McLaren, 2009, p. xv), and "offers a relevant critique of the limitations and complexities of the postcolonial approach, and serves to challenge both the persistence of colonial imposition and the ways in which that persistence is understood and misunderstood" (Kempf, 2009, p. 6). Therefore, anti-colonialism also directly addresses settler colonialism by "[striving] to denaturalise the settler colonial enterprise and to combat settler colonial denial by exposing evidence of colonisation and highlighting the everyday realities of the colonised that uncover multiple loci of power" (Petoukhov, 2023, p. 741). Anti-colonialism strives to support the re-centering of Indigenous perspectives and narratives to "critically revaluate, reconstruct and redeploy culture and tradition in ways that seek to prefigure…a radical alternative to the structural facets of colonial domination" (Coulthard, 2007, p. 456) towards decolonization. While postcolonialism is critiqued as having a nostalgic approach to colonialism through an anti-colonial lens (Kempf, 2009), its ability to support the deconstruction of colonial discourse and structures is vital to the lens that it provides to my research.

3.1.1 Representations, Language, & Literature

Due to its central role in my thesis, it is vital to discuss postcolonialism in relation to representations, language, and literature to explore the impact of discourse in justifying and fueling colonial dominance and postcolonial resistance. Representations are understood as mental concepts (i.e.: language, signs, and images) that create connections between things, people, and experiences which impact our knowledge about the conceptual world. The meaning(s) of representations is/are constantly shifting and evolving since their interpretations are dependent on cultural and social conventions (Hall, 2013). Therefore, it is often those that are in positions of power that have the ability make discourse a reality (Fairclough, 2010; Foucault, 1977; Hall, 1992; Ibrahim, 2011; Karpenko, 2014; Keller, Hornridge, & Shünemann, 2018; Khalid, 2017; Lewis, 2017), though the critical analysis of representations has the ability to expose the hegemonic and/or dominant values that influence subject-formation (Langman, 2015; James, 2008; Stanley, 2011). Postcolonialism recognizes the colonizer's exploitation of colonial misrepresentations that are used to exert power and dominance over knowledge within and about a culture and its discourse to benefit the colonizer (Dale, 2017; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Mullings, Morgan, & Quelleng, 2016). In relation, language is known to shape representations

and thoughts, is interpretive, and can eventually perpetuate beliefs, whether or not those beliefs are morally good or bad (Janks, 2010; Milroy & Milroy, 2012; Wodak, 2012). Under colonialism, language is used as a psychological tool to construct cultural authority for the colonizers (Sitter, 2010), thus depowering and infantilizing the Other (Katz, 2018; Burney, 2012). According to Said (1979), othering is used by colonialists to exert power over non-Western cultures and societies to create a dichotomy that helps to bolster Europe's power, superiority, and authority over its colonized subjects. In turn, this helps to create and fuel the dichotomy between Europe and the Other in "a dichotomy that was central to the creation of European culture as well as to the maintenance and extension of European hegemony over other lands" (Loomba, 2005, p. 43). Postcolonialism encourages understanding towards the subjectivity and interpretive nature of language since "no single system of meaning can work in every place and at every time" (Loomba, 2005, p. 36) but rather can only be understood within the original context, language, and culture in which it was produced. Being the focus of my research, literature and dominant discourse can exist, circulate, disseminate, and thrive due to the institutions in which they are associated, such as the educational systems that we have today (Bennett, 2020). Literature is also used to both echo and intersect dominant values of the colonizer while encrypting the complexities of the gradations and challenges involved in colonial cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002; Brantlinger, 2011; Galafa, 2018). From a postcolonial perspective, a reflexive intersection in literature can appropriate the Other but, through resistance and reclamation of oppressive ideologies, can also upturn and challenge dominant streams of representation (Damrosch & Spivak, 2011). A postcolonial deconstruction of literature recognizes the shift of power towards the oppressed through identifying the effects of colonial discourse but progressing its meaning into a hybridity (Collins, 2018; Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2011), or transculturation (Rama, 2012). Consequentially, cultural identity of the colonized can both acknowledge European colonial repression and provide space for non-European identity to evolve from subjugation to establish the instability in absolute colonial binaries since a static model in understanding the world is unrealistic (Chavan, 2013; Kumasi & Hughes-Hassell, 2017; Puwar, 2004; Vaudrin-Charette, 2015; Vargas Ramos, 2015; Virdee, 2017).

3.2 In Conversation: Connecting Postcolonialism to Other Theoretical Frameworks

To have a fuller grasp of the postcolonial framework I am invoking, as concepts are always in conversation with one another (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), I also look at postcolonialism in conversation with critical race theory, decolonization theory, and antiracist theory as these are the concepts that also influence the ways in which postcolonialism is invoked within my research. Terse in nature, I summarize these conversations in a table that shows their relevance to my research.

3.2.1 Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) offers a framework in specifically understanding the relations between race, racism, and power with the goal of transforming these relationships (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2015). CRT questions how laws perpetuate racial hierarchies, challenges structures surrounding subordination and power relationships, and advances an understanding for inclusion of racial consciousness and counter-narratives of social reality (Capers, 2014; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). CRT and postcolonialism both value intersectionality and hybridity (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017; Bannerji, 2005; Gillborn, 2015), narrative and discourse analysis (Lessard, Caine, & Clandinin, 2018), studying the use of power in silencing racialized voices to reflexively deconstruct racialized hierarchies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023), evolution of social discourse, and acknowledging racialized narratives (Aviles de Bradley, 2015), which are themes of particular interest to my research.

3.2.2 Decolonization Theory

Decolonization theory evaluates the colonial constructs surrounding knowledge to transcend beyond colonial hierarchies with the goal of de-westernizing, reclaiming, and regenerating “the epistemic right of the racially devalued” (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4; see also Chazan, Helps, Stanley, & Thakkar, 2011; Dhillon, 2015; Jansen & Osterhammel, 2017; Palmater, 2014; Swaysewahum, 2014). Decolonization theory, especially when it comes to Indigenous knowledge, not only evaluates how the deeply rooted colonial political values are perpetuated in discourse today, but also assesses how the political nature of colonialism has established superiority/inferiority complexes between the oppressor and the oppressed, as well as and the Othered traditional epistemologies of the Indigenous, racialized, and/or colonized (Alfred, 2023;

Andersen & Hokowhitu, 2007; Battiste, 2013; Carr & Lund, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Nadasdy, 2005; Reilly, 2014; Russell, 2005; Simpson, 2007). For the purposes of my research, intersecting the decolonial and the postcolonial acknowledges colonial history that will allow for cultural and discursive evolution, as well as developing a realistic understanding that societies, cultures, and languages are multi-dimensional and quite complex (Betts, 2004; Ray, 2018; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

3.2.3 Antiracist Theory

Antiracist theory is "utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect" (Blakeney, 2005, p. 119). The antiracist framework roots racism in the "histories of colonial oppressions, colonialism, imperialism, and xenophobia" (Dei, 2013, p. 3), while also acknowledging the relationship between identity formation and the current contexts regarding the internationalization of capitalism (Zanoni, Thoelen, & Ybema, 2017; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016; Weber, Lavine, Huddy, & Federico, 2014; Stanley, 2011). The ideas that "race is identity" (Dei, 2013, p. 3), and that race is a lived experience based in reality, are central to antiracist theory. Antiracist theory recognizes that racism is invented by colonial social constructions and does not have any biological basis in indicating superiority and/or inferiority (Silva, 2007). Though both theories recognize the multiplicity in oppressions (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, language, etc.), that discourse can both subjugate the Other and reclaim intersectional spaces (Puwar, 2004), and the colonial consequence of dominance over racially-marked bodies (Siddiqui, 2011), the motivation of antiracist theory is to bridge the theoretical applications of counteracting racism and the "discursive practice of liberation, naming racism and White supremacy for what they are: oppressions" (Dei, 2013, p. 6). This bridging has greatly influenced my lens within my reading of the curriculum and within my own reflections throughout my research.

The following table summarizes the terms discussed in this section. It serves to further illustrate how these theoretical concepts are in conversation with one another, as well as the overarching framework that influences the foundational structures of my research:

Table 1. In Conversation: Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical Framework	***Definition***	***Foundations***	***In Practice***
Colonialism	Colonialism is an approach of "conquest and control of other people's land and goods" (Loomba, 2005, p. 8).	The control and conquest found at the foundation of colonialism are commonly connected to Western European imperialism that forcefully dominated the economies of colonized nations, obstructed traditional cultural and political structures, and exploited human and natural resources for the benefit of Western European nations (Gandhi, 1998).	Through dehumanizing and objectifying the colonized subject, a dichotomy of domination and submission is created within colonialism in the areas of race, language, and culture, resulting in the colonial hierarchical perspective that white Europeans are considered civilized, saviours, and superior over those that are non-Europeans, racialized, and barbaric (Césaire, 2000; Chrisman & Williams, 1993; Memmi, 1967; Loomba, 2005; Moore, 2019).
Postcolonialism	In reaction to colonialism, postcolonialism acknowledges colonialism's role in how we understand societies today, while critiquing and contesting "colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, 2005, p. 16; see also Mignolo, 2011) in an effort to recognize, decolonize, and reconstruct the marginalized discourse of those that have and continue to be silenced by colonial Eurocentric constraints (Simpson, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Coulthard, 2014; TallBear, 2013).	Postcolonialism perceives colonialism's current presence in racial, linguistic, and cultural discourses that can and should be contextually deconstructed (Meer, 2018; Spivak, 1985). Postcolonialism seeks to examine how discourse defines, shapes, and governs one's development of knowledge within the structures of societal/cultural norms (Said, 1994; Dhawan, 2017; Meer, 2018).	Postcolonialism uses the deconstruction of linguistic discourse, creating spaces to critique colonial discursive structures and makes meaning from what is excluded from that discourse; what Derrida (1994) calls *différance.* Deconstructing discourse is not about destroying discourses that exist, but rather it is about clarifying the components of the foundational structure of a discourse that communicate power (Lamb, 2013), thus inspiring a reformation of openness to the complexities of colonial perspectives and the consequences that contribute to the ways in which we understand economic, political, and social structures today (Dhillon, 2015).
Critical Race Theory (CRT)	CRT is a framework in specifically understanding the relations between race, racism, and power with the goal of transforming these relationships (Delgado &	CRT questions how laws perpetuate racial hierarchies, challenges structures surrounding subordination and power relationships, and advances an understanding for inclusion of racial	CRT values intersectionality/hybridity (Annamma et al., 2017; Bannerji, 2005; Gillborn, 2015), narrative/discourse analysis (Lessard et al., 2018), studying the use of power in

	Stefancic, 2023; Taylor et al., 2015).	consciousness and counter-narratives of social reality (Capers, 2014; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017).	silencing racialized voices to reflexively deconstruct racialized hierarchies, evolution of social discourse, and acknowledging racialized narratives (Aviles de Bradley, 2015).
Decolonization Theory	Decolonization theory evaluates the colonial constructs surrounding knowledge in order to transcend beyond colonial hierarchies with the goal of de-westernizing, reclaiming, and regenerating "the epistemic right of the racially devalued" (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4; see also Chazan et al., 2011; Dhillon, 2015; Jansen & Osterhammel, 2017; Palmater, 2014; Swaysewahum, 2014).	Decolonization theory, especially when it comes to Indigenous knowledge, not only evaluates how the deeply rooted colonial political values are perpetuated in discourse today but also assesses how the political nature of colonialism has established superiority/inferiority complexes and othered the traditional epistemologies of the racialized and colonized (Andersen & Hokowhitu, 2007; Battiste, 2013; Carr & Lund, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Nadasdy, 2005; Reilly, 2014; Russell, 2005; Simpson, 2007).	Decolonization theory acknowledges colonial history that will allow for cultural and discursive evolution, as well as developing a realistic understanding that societies, cultures, and languages are multi-dimensional and quite complex (Betts, 2004; Ray, 2018).
Antiracist Theory	Antiracist theory is "utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect" (Blakeney, 2005, p. 119).	The antiracist framework roots racism in the "histories of colonial oppressions, colonialism, imperialism, and xenophobia" (Dei, 2013, p. 3), while also acknowledging the relationship between identity formation and the current contexts concerning the internationalization of capitalism (Zanoni et al., 2017; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016; Weber et al., 2014; Stanley, 2011). The ideas that "race is identity" (Dei, 2013, p. 3), and that race is a lived experience based in reality, are central to antiracist theory. Antiracist theory recognizes that racism is invented by colonial social constructions and does not have any biological basis in indicating superiority and/or inferiority (Silva, 2007).	The motivation of antiracist theory is to bridge the theoretical applications of counteracting racism and the "discursive practice of liberation, naming racism and White supremacy for what they are: oppressions" (Dei, 2013, p. 6).

3.3 Invoking Postcolonialism within My Research

Conducting research using postcolonialism as a framing epistemology has ultimately shaped the ways in which data was collected, interpreted, and communicated to reflect conclusions concerning discursive meaning(s) (Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008). As the researcher, it was essential to both position objectives and acknowledge personal subjectivities that inform one's perspectives (Carter & Little; 2007; Steinberg & Cannella, 2012; Daniel & Harland, 2018). It was equally important to forsake binaries that have influenced one's personal experiences (Henderson, 2018; Michie, 2013; Richards, 2016). As a minoritized individual myself, postcolonialism encouraged me (as the researcher) to acknowledge and disclose my personal positions to provide a more profound analysis of data, since being a researcher inescapably establishes a position of power as a dominant force in a cyclical shaping of discourse (Thomas, 2018; Clandinin, Cane, & Lessard, 2018; Eisenbach, 2016). This research looks to evaluate how and/or why colonial power structures (especially within discourse) are able to impact the participants' values and the ways in which they think based on personal constructions (Byrne, 2017). Additionally, the conceptual underpinnings of postcolonialism have assisted in evaluating how literature can be used in the "critical examinations of [students'] own complicity in those conventions [that frame their experience]" (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 123). Therefore, the data and analysis within this thesis qualitatively divulges information about the ways meaning is significantly created from the position of the participant (Lessard et al., 2018; Thomas, 2018; Davies, 2004), evaluates the missing and/or misrepresented narratives when subjected to the colonial binary, discredits dichotomy and proves hybridity (Michie, 2013; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2018), recognizes and deconstructs the origins of the power structures that exist today (Rogers, 2018), and promotes critical thinking around representations and discourse towards racialized and minoritized populations (Zanoni et al., 2017). This is revealed by discussing how the historical foundations of these colonial perspectives are limited in their exemplification regarding the individual and collective ways of being in a contemporary, multifaceted society (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). The findings of research organized by postcolonial perspectives communicates points of weakness within the colonial values and rationalizations, speaks to the importance of disrupting dominant norms in the hopes of protesting against such rigid constructs, and highlights the need to reconstruct the ways in which a society excludes fewer dominant perspectives in the construction of supposed absolute truths (Wilson, 2008;

Ahmed, 2012; Mirza, 2015). However, I believe that depending only on a postcolonial framework within my research is unrealistic as it would have limited the opportunities to acknowledge and respect the complex nature of one's experience, contributions, evolutions, and limitations within a context. Ultimately, it is vital to draw from different theoretical frameworks, including postcolonialism, critical race theory, decolonization theory, and antiracist theory, to recognize the multifaceted nature and perspectives that arise within analysis and when intersecting postcolonial perspectives with curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter first provided an overview of colonialism to provide a foundation of the ways in which postcolonialism has evolved from colonialism. I then established postcolonialism as the main guiding theoretical framework of my research by exploring the impact on both colonialism and postcolonialism on discourse. It is understood that postcolonialism supports the deconstruction of discourse to illuminate the importance of representing and validating the *multiplicity of histories* and narratives of those that have been oppressed under colonialism (de Alva, 1995; Nayar, 2015). Consequently, postcolonialism encourages the deconstruction of representations, language, and literature as facets that can justify and fuel both colonial dominance and postcolonial resistance. Moreover, to add further depth to the ways in which I invoke postcolonialism within my research, I briefly explored critical race theory, decolonization theory, and antiracist theory in conversation with postcolonialism. Providing these theoretical framework foundations in this section has allowed me to disclose to the reader the underpinnings within my approach to my research, while also establishing a lens that is used to guide my review of relevant research and literature that also is a significant component at the foundations of my research.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology & Methods

Within this chapter, I establish narrative inquiry as the methodological framework that frames my research methods. While the previous chapter explored the theoretical frameworks that inform the lens of my study, the chosen methodology of narrative inquiry provided a lens for collecting and analyzing the data that informs my conclusions. While other methodological approaches were considered, narrative inquiry was the most fitting lens to invoke within my research due to its ability to support the study and analysis "experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). Sequentially, narrative inquiry has influenced how I chose to collect data and my overall research methods. For example, when contextualizing *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document with a specific focus on the ENG2D curriculum, narrative inquiry supported my close reading of the curriculum in search of threads that relate to the expectations of educators, empowering students within the classroom, acknowledging student contexts and cultural backgrounds, and/or recognizing the ways in which racializations and/or minoritizations impact the teaching of the curriculum within the classroom. Additionally, the facets of narrative inquiry that I discuss within this chapter have guided my decisions regarding which aspects of my own story were relevant to include and/or exclude within this thesis. For this reason, my personal narrative has been treated as both data and a lens in which I perceive the curriculum, the chosen novel, and my interviews with VH within my role of the researcher and as someone who has first-hand student experience of the ENG2D curriculum. Moreover, in choosing what to include and/or exclude from my dialogue with VH within this thesis, imploring narrative inquiry within this thesis guided my emphasis on the stories shared and the observations made within the interviews conducted, especially in relation to those centered on the importance of grounding one's experiences within knowledge development and the impact that teacher knowledge and narratives have on one's pedagogical choices. Therefore, because of the close relationship shared between both my research methodology and methods, I have decided to present them here, within their own chapter.

Within the first part of this chapter, I provide an overview of the foundations of narrative inquiry and explore the facets of narrative inquiry that impact my research, such as the meaningful bridges that are built when invoking storytelling, the knowledge development that emerges from storytelling, acknowledging teacher knowledge and narratives that inform their

pedagogical perspectives, and the reflexive role of the researcher when conducting research. The second part of this chapter discusses the research methods that structure the research conducted for my thesis. Informed by the facets of narrative inquiry that I establish within the first part of this chapter, I provide contextual information on the school and school board that inform the pedagogical perspectives of the chosen educator, provide insights on the contexts of the chosen educator, and introduce my contexts as the researcher. Furthermore, this is followed by a discussion surrounding the structure of the research I have conducted. Therefore, while this will be a lengthier chapter, the methodological framework that I explore within the first part of the chapter directly informs the research methods that I establish within the second part of this chapter, thus creating a well-rounded window into my approach to the research I have conducted.

Part I: Narrative Inquiry as Methodology

The facets of narrative inquiry and its methodological implications encourage a space to value lived experience through a reflexive relationship between the researcher, the participant(s), and the environment in which the research is taking place, thus acknowledging the complexities of knowing while also allowing for more intricate knowledge to emerge (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Therefore, the principles of narrative inquiry and its epistemological implications guide my research methods as it provides a space to respect and elevate the context(s) in which the research is being completed, emphasizes the complexity of participant experience, and encourages me as the researcher to express my positional relationship and experiences with the Ontario secondary school curriculum within my identity as a minoritized woman of colour. More specifically, the act of storytelling and analysis of the narratives and discourse that emerge through the implementation of narrative inquiry within my research allows me to create intricate bridges between myself and the participant. Additionally, bridges are also created between us and the course materials, the chosen literature, the curricular expectations, and the social fabric that creates the backdrop of these connections that occur within education. It is through the appreciation of the complexity of these stories and interactions that I make sense of what is around us (Geng, 2023), which also provides me with the capacity to retell and represent the stories that emerge through these connections that will allow new knowledge and new ways of perceiving the world to emerge (Byrne, 2017).

4.1 Narrative Inquiry: Foundations

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as a collaborative and interactive endeavour between the researcher and participants in (re)living and (re)telling stories, during a period of time and within a certain environment/context, in an effort to study human lives and to honour lived experiences as a fundamental source in developing knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2016; Leggo, 2005; Wells, 2011). Established in the early 1990s as a research methodology mostly used within the social sciences (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), narrative inquiry was first perceived as both a phenomena of using stories to communicate an experience in making meaning of our world and a research method with the transaction of stories (considered as data) between participant and researcher (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; see Leggo, 2008). Therefore, narrative inquiry is established as a qualitative methodology when perceived as "a way of thinking about experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375; see Henderson, 2018). Dewey's (1938/1997) ontology of experience, understood as worldly things and events (both social and physical) that are relationally transformed through its entrance into human contexts while in turn transforming the human, inspires narrative inquiry's value towards inquiring into experience (Hutchinson, 2015; Clandinin et al., 2018). Moreover, this transactional transformation of experience between participant and researcher, and the overall nuances of experiencing, is a process of generating knowledge and humanizing lived experiences that can be represented by and learned from narrative constructions (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Orr, Pearce, & Steeves, 2006; Henderson, 2018).

4.1.1 Building Meaningful Bridges with Storytelling

Communicating knowledge, social contexts, and overall continuity are important characteristics within storytelling that provides a channel for both the storyteller (participant) and the receiver (researcher) of the story to develop a more profound understanding of the depth of one's experiences and identity (Somers, 1994; Young, 2005). While storytelling can be an incredibly vulnerable challenge due to the reflexive self-awareness that can result in the action of telling a story (Macfarlane, 2016; Lessard et al., 2018), the action of storytelling can be a powerful methodological tool in exemplifying that there is no one way to categorize experience as there is no one way in understanding the world (Daniel & Harland, 2018). Rather, it is in the appreciation of both the diversity and similarities of experiences that allow me to study and learn

from the interwoven outcomes of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). Especially in regard to cross-cultural settings and influences (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005), storytelling encourages positive identity learning and formation since the storyteller is able to speak for themselves while reflecting on their personal contexts (Huber, Keats Whelan, & Clandinin, 2003; Wodak, 2012). Additionally, the pluralism of one's stories exemplifies that one's identity can be connected to a context or place (Michie, 2013), while also being "a multilayered, expansive phenomenon always in a state of change" (Hannigan, 2014, p. 3) by perceiving experience through temporality (the past, present, and future), social contexts, and the place in which the narrative inquiry is taking place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is one's experience of a place and/or context that helps to reflexively form one's identity, and thus cyclically forming one's knowledge about social/cultural conventions, and the overall world in which we live (Hall, 1980; 2013). Moreover, through communicating, reflecting, and deconstructing the continuity of a story, a multifaceted perspective on the interwoven layers that impact one's experience of the world emerges, and in turn, how one believes the world experiences them (Hutchinson, 2015; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). Narrative inquiry bridges one's knowledge of the world and of the complexities involved in interpreting the greater meaning of experiences and representations found in stories (Trahar, 2008; Leggo, 2004, 2008), and a bridge that I build within my own research to uncover profound answers to the research questions within multifaceted contexts.

4.1.2 Knowledge Development

We can grasp the development of one's knowledge through creating, reflecting, and critically evaluating narratives to "gain deeper understandings of ourselves, of others, and of the contexts in which we live" (Huber et al., 2003, p. 13; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Lugones, 1987). Knowing and knowledge development is not meant to be linear and/or absolute, but rather the process of knowing is meant to be complex and fluid since the ways in which knowledge is developed and implemented occurs within pluralistic situations and circumstances (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Therefore, when "[p]utting humans at the centre of knowledge production" (Geng, 2023, p. 3), we must acknowledge the "tensions and differences within each of us" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25-26) are what provides us with the opportunity to critically reflect on these tensions (as uncomfortable as they might be). This allows us to grow while also acknowledging that it is the contexts and/or circumstances of a situation that draws out one's

personal practical knowledge. Advancing one's knowledge through the tensions and differences that are encompassed within narratives "evolves over time through sustained conversation and relationships" (Huber et al., 2003, p. 219; Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Turner Minarik, 1993). Therefore, it is through the branching and bridging that is woven through a narrative that we are able to impose our own beliefs and experiences against in order to "construct images of who we are and what we are about, as well as images of who others are and what they are about" (Huber et al., 2003, p. 219). This allows us "…[to] gain deeper understandings of ourselves, of others, and of the contexts in which we live" (Huber et al., 2003, p. 219; Lugones, 1987), and to strive to do so in a dynamic and flexible way towards achieving *wide-awakeness* (Greene, 1991) to the world in which we live.

4.1.3 Educational Contexts: Teacher Knowledge & Narratives

At the foundation of narrative inquiry is the "understanding that it is education that lives at the core of narrative inquiry" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 213; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Because of the enduring process of what it is to learn through stories that are "told, retold, and lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 246-247), teachers are positioned to be at the forefront of students' growth through the knowledge and narratives in which they share within their classrooms. Teacher's storied knowledge contributes to and helps to shape the educational experiences in their classrooms (Carter, 1993), as both teachers and students listen and respond to stories, concepts, and narratives that they explore within a classroom as they come to know the world around them within their own contexts and lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). As "education is interwoven with living" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 246-247), it is vital for teachers to be empowered to "come to know their own stories" (Carter, 1993, p. 8) so they themselves have awareness of how their practical knowledge and the ways in which they communicate their knowledge impacts the "possibilities of growth and change" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 246-247) in relation to themselves and others within a classroom environment (McAdam, 2019). Therefore, narrative inquiry allows for the space to delve into the "becoming" of teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986) and to "[provide] (teachers) opportunities for reflection upon their practice particularly at moments of contradiction and discontinuity to allow novice teachers to begin to reconstruct their narratives of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly,

1986, p. 386), which ultimately shapes classroom experience, curricular understandings, and the knowledge which students carry as they continue to learn and develop their own life stories.

4.1.4 Role of the Researcher

The implementation of narrative inquiry recognizes that to understand an experience and to grasp the development of one's knowledge through a narrative, whether through a statement or a book, "is always more than we can know" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Moreover, it is the challenge as the researcher to analyse emerging narratives (either through thematic, linguistic, structural, and/or visual analysis) to better understand the reflexivity of choices in one's experiences, and the relational impact of one's experiences on the choices they make (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Dewey, 1938/1997; Thomas, 2018). Since this methodology is multifaceted, its use depends on the context of both the participants and researcher, and the complex interactions between these two parties (Boydston, 1981). The researcher becomes a co-participant within this research since observing and listening to the participant within their own lived experience allows the researcher to "co-construct the emerging knowledge… [that becomes] transferable to other persons and contexts by means of reflective self-inquiry of [the researcher]" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15). Moreover, it is vital that the voice of the participant is conveyed within a narrative analysis, especially to maintain some objectivity as a researcher (Byrne, 2017; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2018). Rather, it is the responsibility of the researcher/inquirer to prioritize the voice of the participant to authentically represent the complexities in the participant's knowledge development from their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), since the narratives and the knowledge that emerges from these lived stories cannot be forced into pre-set categories of narrative structure and/or provide a generalizable result (Bleakly, 2005; Edwards, 1997).

4.2 Creating Our Story

For the purposes of this study, the facets of narrative inquiry and its methodological implications provide a space to respect the context in which the research is being completed, the complexity of participant experience, and my positional relationship to and experiences with the Ontario secondary school curriculum within my context as a minoritized woman of colour. Because narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that serves as a lens towards "a way of

thinking about experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375; see Henderson, 2018), my research acknowledges that the transactional transformation of experience between participant and researcher, and the overall nuances of experiencing, is a process of generating knowledge and humanizing lived experiences that is represented by and learned from narrative constructions (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin et al., 2006; Henderson, 2018). Completing a narrative analysis within the framework of narrative inquiry permits the space to explore and acknowledge the presence and/or absence of representations (Byrne, 2017; Hall, 2013), whether through reading a novel, listening to someone else's story, and/or through the reflexive telling of one's own story. Therefore, narrative inquiry is the ideal methodology to use within my research because the narrative relationship between the researcher (myself) and participant (the educator) reflects the continuous development of knowledge through experiential learning and reflection (Clandinin et al., 2006; Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006), while also attempting to account for diverse experiences within a specific educational context (Lin, 2013).

The process of understanding experience is continuous and interactive (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938/1997), and it is the collaboration between myself and the participant that fuels the intentional self-reflection that "informs [my] construction of knowledge" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15; Chan & Schwind, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Lindsay, 2006), as well as a reflection of my identity within this research. Additionally, it is through fictionalization that the participant is able to tell her stories anonymously and that I am able to use an autoethnographic perspective when reflexively perceiving experiences through different lenses (Eisenbach, 2016). The participant and I can abstractly and imaginatively apply knowledge to metaphorical stories to "understand more" (Caine, Murphy, Estefan, Clandinin, Steeves, Huber, 2017, p. 218) about the world in which we live. Therefore, not only are the experiences and stories of my participant disclosed, but I also acknowledge that I too have contributed to and participated in the landscape in which I explore (Clandinin, 2016; Rhodes, 2000). As a co-participant within this research (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016), I acknowledge my role in communicating one participant's stories to highlight to the reader that they are understanding one participants' narrative within the context of my own work and lived experience as well (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Chilcott & Barry, 2016; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2018). By applying the chosen theoretical frameworks to my methodological approach, I reflexively approach the narratives of both my participant and myself

to address how colonial histories have shaped our individual lived experiences, the power dynamics within the classroom, the acknowledgement of our positionality as participant and researcher, and the understanding of our stories alongside dominant discourses, all of which impact my analysis and conclusions that have developed from my research.

Narrative inquiry and the relationships that develop using this methodology are expected to be messy (O'Dwyer, 2004), as this methodology is meant to conceptualize and reflect the authentic disorderliness in developing knowledge and discovering truths through the retelling of diverse stories and lived experiences (Huber et al., 2013). In acknowledging this messiness, it is my intention within this research to convey that "an ultimate or unchanging reality" (Lewis, 2019, p. 16; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) does not exist. Rather, there may be multiple, different, conflicting, varied, and/or evolving realities and experiences that can be discovered in the process of developing knowledge since subjective positions impact the construction of these perspectives (Lewis, 2019; Polkinghorne, 1988; Moen, 2006). Through dialoguing with the educator and chosen literature, I can experience how my personal narrative, in the position of the student, intwines with the novel, the educator, my contexts/surroundings, and my social fabric. In drawing on CRT, it is important to acknowledge that with the inclusion of narratives, counter-narratives are necessary in "exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). For example, there are moments within the interviews conducted for this thesis that challenge me and that I also reflexively challenge through my own racialized lens. Acknowledging counter-narratives allows me as the researcher to "[account] for different ways of thinking and feeling, teaching morals and ethics, and assisting in sensemaking of the self and others" (Teo, 2023, p. 535; Bochner, 2001). Therefore, in also embracing Pinar's (1975) notion of *currere*, a dialogue with the experiences of my past, my present, and how I conceptualize my prospective space in my contexts (future) emerges as I consider and analyse my experience along with my participant's experience by looking "inwards, outwards, forwards, and backwards" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15).

Part II: Research Methods

The second part of this chapter contextualizes the school and school board that inform the pedagogical perspectives of the chosen educator, provides an overview of the chosen educator, and introduces my personal experiences as a student who has experienced the same curriculum

that informs my position as the researcher. Once I establish these facets, I provide a detailed structure of the research that I have conducted and my approach in collecting the data that is later analysed within this thesis.

4.3 The School & School Board

I utilize this section to provide a space for the reader to gain an idea of the student population and geographical components belonging to both the school and school board that influence the teaching of my participant. The secondary school in which VH teaches is located in a small town in Southern Ontario outside of the Greater Toronto Area, which has a population of just under 140,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2021). The school belongs to suburban school board within the Greater Toronto Area. With a population of just over 1,400 students, the school's student population consists of students from the local town, but also nearby towns and hamlets. As per the 2021 Census (Statistics Canada, 2021), the town's residents identify with having Canadian, English, Irish, and Scottish ethnic or cultural origin, though the Census also reflects an eclectic mix of residents that identify with an array of other ethnicities and cultures from all over the world. This diversity is reflected within the school and class population at the time that the study was completed.

4.4 The Educator

Though the details surrounding VH's contexts emerge and evolve throughout our interviews within my analysis (7.4 Interviews with VH), I believe it is important to provide a brief introduction to my participant prior to exploring the research methods of my study. Therefore, VH is an educator in her 40s who is employed by a suburban school board within the Greater Toronto Area. VH was born in a diverse district located within Toronto, Ontario and identifies with having Anglo-Saxon and Jewish heritage, which has influenced the ways in which she interacts with the world, but also with how she believes the world perceives her. Having completed her teacher education within the United States over twenty years ago, VH's teaching experience that followed the completion of her education has been within the Greater Toronto Area. Furthermore, VH has been employed by the suburban school board within the Greater Toronto Area for over twenty years, with having taught at her current school for most of that time as well.

4.5 Positioning the Researcher

Due to the reflexive nature of my involvement within the research, I use this sub-section to further introduce my educational contexts and experiences within Ontario as a student, teacher, and researcher. My educational experiences are largely grounded within Ontario, though these experiences spanned different communities within Ontario. I was born in Scarborough, Ontario, and lived in Scarborough until 2001, which was when I was just over seven years old. At this point, I moved to North York, Ontario in 2005 and attended school there until I was about thirteen years old. Therefore, I attended two elementary schools and one junior high school within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) from junior kindergarten to Grade 7, which is a timespan of about nine years. After moving to Whitby, Ontario, the schools I attended were located within the Durham District School Board (DDSB). In 2005, I attended Grade 8 within an elementary school and grades nine to twelve were attended within a secondary school. Though both districts are located within Ontario and relatively geographically close to one another, the diversity I experienced within one school board was quite different from the other. Within the TDSB, I was one child amongst many children of colour and I also experienced being taught by educators who were from racialized and/or marginalized backgrounds themselves. After moving to Whitby, I became more aware of my skin colour and more aware that my racialized experiences may be different from those around me since most of the people attending the schools that I went to were White, as were the educators. It is important to note that I had moved to Whitby during a time where it was not as diverse or as populated as it is now.

After completing secondary school in 2010, I moved to Ottawa, Ontario to attend the University of Ottawa, which is where I completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) with a Major in English Literature and a Minor in Psychology in 2014, a Bachelor of Education (Magna Cum Laude) with teachables in English and History at the Intermediate/Senior level in 2015, and a Master of Education with a concentration in Leadership, Evaluation, Curriculum, and Policy Studies in 2016. Moreover, while I have academic experiences within Ontario that range across different education levels, I also have teaching experience within Ontario through the practicums completed during my Bachelor of Education degree. More specifically, I completed both practicums within my Bachelor of Education within DDSB at a secondary school in Whitby. In noting that my practicums were completed about five years after graduating from secondary school, the student and teacher populations within the school that I taught at was very similar to

my personal secondary school experience since most educators and students were White as well. More details pertaining to my personal background and experiences as a student within the Ontario education system are further discussed within Chapter 6: Researching the Researcher, since it is within that chapter that I treat my narrative as data and further disclose the facets that influence my own participation within the research.

4.6 Research Structure

The following research has been informed by my past experiences as a woman of colour in the Ontario education system with a focus on the Ontario secondary school English curriculum as the site of my research. Therefore, through interviews with one educator, an examination of the chosen unit that the educator used within their classroom, and an analysis of the chosen literature explored within that unit, I: (1) investigate the role of an educator and their pedagogical rationale(s) by exploring their literary choices through interviews with the educator, which are supplemented by document and discourse analysis; (2) study how an educator's curricular choices encourages and/or hinders the evaluation of diverse Canadian narratives; and (3) inquire into whether literature used in classrooms are culturally responsive to our complex Canadian social landscape. To answer the research questions outlined within Chapter 1, qualitative analyses has been used to establish if and how the hidden curriculum underscoring Canadian English education can be re-conceptualized to explicitly address the challenges that minoritized students may face. Additionally, qualitative analyses have been used to evaluate the impact of dominant values on the ways in which Canadians judge, understand, and conceptualize each other (Daniel & Harland, 2018; Wilson, 2008).

Within the following study, I worked with a Grade 10 secondary school English educator who had taught English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) within a school located in a suburban school board in the Greater Toronto Area. To ensure that all personal and identifying information will be omitted from this thesis, the educator is referred to as the randomly selected initials of *VH* throughout this thesis. VH was chosen due to her eclectic experiences with teaching diverse student populations, but specifically due to her experiences in teaching a variety of literature and courses within the English language arts at the secondary school level within diverse student populations. Upon receiving approval from the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity to begin my research (see Appendix A), I attempted to recruit a

participant through word-of-mouth, and upon getting in touch with VH, I briefly outlined the expectations of the participant, asked if she would like to participate within my study, and she agreed. This study began by virtually meeting with VH to review and sign the consent form (see Appendix B), to provide VH with an overview of the different topics I would like to explore within the interviews that would follow, and to discuss the unit of literature that I analyse, which we decided would be VH's ENG2D literature unit of Lansens' (2020) *A Mountain Story*. However, these interviews were completed after VH had taught her class this unit, and therefore, these interviews were intended to provide VH with the space to have retrospective reflections of her teaching in regard to the curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived within the chosen unit. Upon concluding our initial meeting, VH gave me access to the materials of the chosen unit, as well as to the rest of her ENG2D course materials; I have chosen to provide an overview of these materials within Chapter 7 to provide a contextualization of how the chosen novel is addressed within the unit. This initial meeting provided a foundation in conducting a document analysis of the chosen novel and my overview of the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum documents, as well as serving as a foundation to the interviews that followed. After this initial meeting, I reviewed the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum documents and completed my reading of Lansens' (2020) *A Mountain Story*.

Following our initial meeting, I conducted the first one-on-one interview with VH to gain a better understanding of the different goals, personal approaches, and considerations that were taken in the teaching of the chosen unit. I particularly focused on how VH pedagogically engages with the chosen text. Guided by informal questions (see Appendix C) and purposeful conversation, VH was asked about her personal contexts as a teacher and her lived experiences within her identity as an Anglo-Saxon and Jewish woman, and her understanding of minoritizations and/or racializations to contextualize her perspectives towards the minoritized and/or racialized experiences of students. This led us to explore the ways in which VH perceives student empowerment within the classroom. Supplemented by the first interview with VH, I completed a document overview of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, with a focus on the ENG2D curriculum. I also completed a document analysis of Lansens' (2020) *A Mountain Story* to create a comprehensive understanding of the classroom discourse that stems from reading the literature and how the

discourse surrounding minoritized experiences may and/or may not be understood through the readings and literary analysis within the chosen unit (Fairclough, 2010; Henderson, 2018).

Three weeks after the first interview, I conducted a concluding interview which was also guided by informal questions (see Appendix D). The purpose of conducting a second interview provided both VH and I an opportunity to clarify any of the reflections we explored within the first interview and to address new thoughts that may have evolved from the first interview. The concluding interview also provided me with a space to reflect on the different perspectives and experiences that contributed to my personal reading of the literature and curricular documents, and from the educator's pedagogical lens, especially following the ideas that evolved from the first interview. This final interview also provided an opportunity for VH to further reflect on how she believed her teaching has helped to address the different facets that impact the lived experiences of minoritized students within the context of their Canadian socio-cultural landscape. Additionally, this final interview was meant to provide VH with the space to further reflect on her perceptions concerning the curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived within the unit.

I was able to gather ample data through interviews and document analyses to highlight this educator's pedagogical perspectives within the teaching of a unit explored within an ENG2D course by: analysing the curriculum document that guides the educator in the teaching of the chosen course and unit; examining the selected literature taught within an Ontario secondary school English language arts program; highlighting the *absences* and *presences* of minority characters and stories within a literary analysis of the chosen novel; reviewing the activities and assessments used to support student learning within the chosen unit; and analysing VH's pedagogical perspectives towards the minoritized and/or racialized experiences of students to develop an understanding of the ways in which Ontario secondary school educators seek to empower students within the classroom through the discourse that emerged within the interviews conducted. In conjunction to my interviews with VH and the document analysis completed on the chosen literature and curriculum documents, it is important to note that I also take on the role of a co-participant within this research since it is through my lens that I am observing, listening, and reflecting on the perspectives of the chosen educator, as well as the documents that influence the teaching of this unit (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). As a co-participant, I (as both a student who went through the education system in Ontario and as an English teacher in that system) also

developed an understanding of how curricular choices within a multifaceted context impacts the presence of diverse Canadian narratives that "co-construct the emerging knowledge… [that becomes] transferable to other persons and contexts by means of reflective self-inquiry of [the researcher]" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15). Therefore, within this narrative study and the culminating analysis, I take a ground-up approach where I scaffold upon a document analysis of the curriculum documents and the chosen literature, my interviews with VH, and the presence of my own lens as a student who has first-hand experience with the Ontario secondary school curriculum and education system. The inclusion of these facets allowed me to evaluate how students are encouraged and/or empowered by an educator to critically thinks about racialized and/or minoritized experiences in relation to the chosen literature. Through VH's reflections and through positioning my experience of the unit within the gaze of a student, I was able to study the educator's perspectives, the rationales of what is discussed and/or omitted within the classroom, how and what students are taught, and how students may react to the lessons in the context of curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 2005).

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter consists of two parts that respectively explores my research methodology and research methods. The first part of the chapter establishes narrative inquiry as the research methodology that guides my approach within the research conducted. I highlighted the importance of building connections through the sharing of one's stories, acknowledging the knowledge development that can occur from the sharing of stories, the impact of teacher knowledge and narratives on educational contexts, and recognizing the role of the researcher as an active participant within research. Moreover, the methodological implications of invoking narrative inquiry within my research respects the contexts in which the research is conducted, the complexity of the participant's experiences and knowledge, and my positional relationship to and experiences with the Ontario secondary school curriculum within my personal contexts. The second part of the chapter delved into my research methods by providing insight on the school and school board that are the setting of my participant's pedagogical choices, providing background information on the chosen educator, including insight into my educational experiences with a focus on my relationship with my educational experiences in Ontario, and communicating the research design that I invoked to complete my study. Furthermore, I

established my approach towards my chosen methodological framework and my research methodology to provide a framework as to how I approach my analysis of both the curriculum and the interviews that I explore in the forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 5: Overview of the Ontario Ministry of Education English Curriculum (Grade 10)

Prior to delving into the analysis and outcomes of my research, I would like to first contextualize the chosen course and unit with an overview of the curricular document used to guide my participant in her structuring of the English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) course that is the backdrop of my research. It is important to note that English educators within Ontario must teach to this mandated curriculum, and through the teaching of this mandated curriculum, students must be able to meet the specified expectations outlined within the course curriculum. However, it is also important to acknowledge that English educators in Ontario also have complete control over the ways in which they teach these expectations within the classroom, which is a privilege that VH and I discuss within the interviews. As seen within *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), there are not any approved literature or textual resources, and as explained by VH within our interviews, textual choices are largely based on the availability of texts within a school, which may be influenced by department resources and agendas. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is meant to give a holistic overview of the curriculum document since representing the document within its entirety allows for a complete understanding of the facets that influence the teaching of ENG2D. Providing this overview also provides a lens towards how the curriculum can be utilized by an educator to encourage the inclusion, understanding, and empowerment of diverse Canadian narratives. Within this overview, I first provide a summary of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, which is followed by an outline of the ENG2D curriculum. I also allocate a subsection within this chapter to acknowledge the ways in which both colonialism and postcolonialism are enacted by the curriculum document. Therefore, the following subsections are meant to explore the foundational pillars that ultimately underpin the ways in which the chosen novel is approached and examined by VH.

5.1 Summary of the Curricular Document

The current Ontario English Curriculum was first implemented in September 2007 as a replacement to *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 1999* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), and has been in use since. The document is divided into seven sections: (1) Introduction; (2) The Program in English; (3) Assessment and Evaluation of Student

Achievement; (4) Some Considerations for Program Planning; (5) Compulsory Courses; (6) Optional Courses; and (7) Glossary. Within the following paragraphs, I provide a comprehensive summary of each section while noting the most relevant information to my research.

5.1.1 Introduction

Within the introduction of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the document sets the intention of "[enabling] students to better customize their high school education and improve their prospects for success in school and in life" (p. 3). Within this section, the document discusses the importance of developing literacy through the development of "knowledge and skills in the areas of listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 3), as well as the importance of language development within "students' intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional growth" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 3). In acknowledging language's importance within communicating, thinking, and learning, the document recognizes that language plays a fundamental role in identity development and cultural perspectives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Because language plays a vital role in the ways in which narratives, world views, and learning is structured and explored, the document states that a key element of the curriculum is literacy and language development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Additionally, the document outlines that language is crucial to students' learning in all subject areas within their secondary school education, as well as to their own personal learning and development to further "appreciate the nature and value of a diverse, multicultural society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4).

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) mentions that the "English curriculum is based on the belief that language learning is critical to responsible and productive citizenship" (p. 4). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document also defines a successful language learner as having the abilities to:

- understand that language learning is a necessary, life-enhancing, reflective process;
- communicate – that is, read, listen, view, speak, write, and represent – effectively and with confidence;
- make meaningful connections between themselves, what they encounter in texts, and

the world around them;

- think critically;
- understand that all texts advance a particular point of view that must be recognized, questioned, assessed, and evaluated;
- appreciate the cultural impact and aesthetic power of texts;
- use language to interact and connect with individuals and communities, for personal growth, and for active participation as world citizens (p.4)

In recognizing that Ontario students come from diverse backgrounds, have their own perspectives and strengths, and have varying needs, the document notes the importance of classroom instruction and resources reflecting and embracing the diversity found within a classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, this further allows students to experience ideas and perspectives outside of their own to further "develop their ability to think independently and critically" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 5).

The last section of the introduction outlines the roles and responsibilities of students, parents/guardians, teachers, and principals within the Ontario English programs. Students are responsible for providing the effort in applying themselves within their work, studying, and developing cooperative skills when developing their language and literacy skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Parents/guardians are expected to gain awareness of the curriculum as well. In becoming more familiar with what their children are learning within the classroom, parents'/guardians' awareness of the curriculum will be able to support conversations with their children regarding their learning and progress (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Additionally, in understanding curricular expectations, parents/guardians will be able to better comprehend educator feedback, while also supporting and encouraging their children's learning outside of the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The role of teachers is meant to complement the role of the student through developing instructional strategies that support student learning in line with curriculum expectations and student needs, while also assessing and evaluating student learning with appropriate approaches to ultimately support students in meaningfully participating within their communities and their cultural contexts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Principals are responsible for working in conjunction with educators and parents/guardians to ensure that the curriculum is effectively implemented within the classroom and that resources are available to both teachers and students to ensure that students are as

supported as possible within their educational experience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

5.1.2 The Program in English

This section of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) provides a brief overview of the English curriculum of grades 9 and 10. There is one compulsory course at each grade level (with a choice of experiencing that course within either the Academic or Applied level), with one optional Open course at the grade 10 level, Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing (ELS2O); it is noted that Open courses are suitable for all students as they "are designed to prepare students for further study in the subject, and to enrich their education generally" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). The compulsory English courses are offered at both the Academic and Applied levels for both grades 9 and 10. Academic courses are meant to "develop students' knowledge and skills through the study of theory and abstract problems" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). Moreover, Applied courses are meant to "focus on the essential concepts of a subject, and develop students' knowledge and skills through practical applications and concrete examples… [to] prepare students for success in the Grade 11 English workplace preparation course" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). It is noted that "School boards may offer a locally developed compulsory credit (LDCC) course in English in both grades 9 and 10, which may be used to meet the compulsory credit requirement in English for these grades" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9) (for a detailed breakdown of the English courses offered from grades 9 through 12, click here).

The structure of course expectations that follow within the curricular document are outlined within this section of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Each compulsory course curriculum is divided by the strands of Oral Communication, Reading and Literature Studies, Writing, and Media Studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007); it is noted that the optional course at the grade 10 level, Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing (ELS2O), contains two strands of Reading Skills and Writing Skills, instead of including all four strands. Within each strand, there are overall expectations that "describe in general terms the knowledge and skills that students are expected to demonstrate by the end of each course" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12), specific expectations that "describe the expected knowledge and skills in greater detail" (Ontario Ministry of Education,

2007, p. 12), and a subheading "that describes the particular aspect of the overall expectation to which the specific expectation refers" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12) (for a more detailed overview of the ways in which each strand is structured, click here).

This section of the curriculum goes into further detail regarding the description of each literacy strand that structures the courses within the curriculum. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) highlights that the Oral Communication strand supports students in learning how to listen and speak effectively to be able to explore various ideas and concepts, identify problems, problem solving, and organize their knowledge when they communicate and interact within the classroom and within their communities. The curriculum document then outlines that the Reading and Literature Studies strand supports the importance of effective reading through understanding, analysing, and absorbing the ideas that are communicated through a text to be able to apply what is learned within other contexts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Through reading a variety of texts, students are expected to develop and apply an array of comprehension strategies and vocabulary to ultimately develop their own abilities and interests when constructing meaning and synthesizing information (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Next, this section of the curriculum document situates the Writing strand as being geared towards supporting students' development regarding their confidence in writing and researching to be able to communicate clearly and to effectively use language conventions, like punctuation, spelling, and grammar (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). In exploring different genres and forms of writing, such as "essays, reports, short stories, poetry, scripts, journals, letters, biographies, children's stories, articles, reviews, précis, explanations, instructions, notes, procedures, résumés, and advertisements" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 17), students are able to practice and expand their ability to compose original written work, independent critical thinking, and stylistic skills that prepare students for tests and assignments. Additionally, students are also exposed to the expectations that they may experience within their employment and/or at the postsecondary level. The last strand outlined within *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) is Media Studies, which focuses on media texts and the influence of the messaging, meaning, and art within these tests. In understanding the significant impact that media may have within student lives, students learn to critically think, interpret, and analyse media to "differentiate between fact and opinion; evaluate the credibility of sources;

recognize bias; be attuned to discriminatory portrayals of individuals and groups, such as religious or sexual minorities, people with disabilities, or seniors; and question depictions of violence and crime." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 18). In developing an understanding of the techniques and conventions used in media and the ability to understand the significance of the ways in which media influences our lives, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) indicates that students will be able to effectively implement media to reflect their own ideas, widen the range of media that students consume, and expose students to entertainment and communication career opportunities.

5.1.3 Assessment and Evaluation of Student Achievement

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) communicates that the principal use of assessments and evaluations within the classroom "is to improve student learning" (p. 20). The curriculum document establishes that assessments assist educators in establishing student strengths and weaknesses within the context of a course's curriculum, in attaining a better understanding regarding the effectiveness of classroom programs and practices, and in supporting teachers to appropriately implement the curriculum in relation to student needs towards providing relevant guidance and feedback for students to foster further improvement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). To support classroom assessments, educators are expected to use evaluations to "[judge] the quality of student work on the basis of established criteria and assigning a value to represent that quality" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007; p. 20). In ensuring the use of valid and reliable assessment and evaluation strategies within the context of curricular expectations, it is expected that these strategies are accommodating, fair, based in knowledge and skill, and clearly outline student expectations to "lead to the improvement of student learning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 20).

To further guide educators with assessing student work and development within a framework that incorporates all curriculum and course expectations, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) utilizes an achievement chart that assists educators in "[making] judgements about student work that are based on clear performance standards and on a body of evidence collected over time" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22). The achievement chart outlines four general areas of knowledge and

skills which are meant to frame and organize subject expectations: the interrelated categories of: (1) Knowledge and Understanding (subject-specific knowledge that is developed within a course and the comprehension on its significance); (2) Thinking (the use of planning, processing, and critical thinking skills); (3) Communication (using various text forms to convey meaning); and (4) Application (making connections between and within various contexts) are meant to reflect "the wholeness and interconnectedness of learning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22). Within each category are subsets of criteria that define the respective category, further outlining and guiding educators regarding the facets of student performance within the category that is to be assessed and evaluated (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). When assessing and evaluating students, *descriptors* are implemented within the achievement chart to characterize student performance in relation to each criterion to "help teachers to focus their assessment and evaluation on specific knowledge and skills for each category and criterion and help students to better understand exactly what is being assessed and evaluated" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23). It is noted that the descriptor for each criterion under the Thinking, Communication, and Application categories is the *effectiveness* of the student's performance within these categories, while the descriptor for the criterion under Knowledge and Understanding focuses on the student's ability to demonstrate knowledge accuracy and their depth of understanding the content. A *qualifier* is used to outline the four levels of achievement described within the achievement chart, such as Level 1 (limited; 50-59%), Level 2 (some; 60-69%), Level 3 (considerate; 70-79%), and Level 4 (high degree or thorough; 80-100%). Moreover, a qualifier's use alongside the use of a descriptor comprehensively reflects a description of a student's performance and "[identifies] the level at which the student has achieved the expectations" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23). It is noted that Level 3 represents the provincial standard for achievement within course expectations, whereas Level 1 reflects that a student's achievement falls under the provincial standard, Level 2 indicates that the student's achievement is approaching the provincial standard, and Level 4 shows that a student has achieved all or most course expectations and that the skills and knowledge demonstrated by the student are more refined than the achievements of a student performing at a Level 3 [for further review of the achievement chart outlined within *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) that is applicable to Grade 10 English, click here].

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) outlines that student achievement is to be formally communicated to both students and parents/guardians through the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9-12. Using a percentage grade, the student's achievement in relation to the curriculum expectations and the achievement chart is outlined within the report card that is periodically updated throughout the semester and/or school year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). A final grade is recorded at the conclusion of each course, and a credit is granted when a student is able to achieve a grade 50% or higher (if a student achieves a grade below 50%, they will not receive a credit for the course) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Seventy percent of the final grade is based on evaluations that took place throughout the course for a holistic representation of the student's level of achievement for the duration of the course, while thirty percent of the final grade is based on a final evaluation, such as an examination or final essay (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Accompanying grades within the report card are a record of five learning skills (Works Independently, Teamwork, Organization, Work Habits, and Initiative) exhibited by the student, which is evaluated based on a four-point scale (E-Excellent, G-Good, S-Satisfactory, N-Needs Improvement); these learning skills are evaluated due to their vital role in student achievement within curriculum expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

5.1.4 Some Considerations for Program Planning

The following section provides a brief overview of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) section titled "Some Considerations for Program Planning." This section of the curriculum document discusses the following considerations: ministry resources (click here for the full list); instructional approaches; planning English programs for students with special education needs; program considerations for English language learners; antidiscrimination education; literacy, mathematical literacy, and inquiry/research skills; the role of the school library in the English program; the role of technology in the English program; the Ontario skills passport and essential skills; career education; cooperative education and other forms of experiential learning; planning program pathways and programs leading to a specialist high-skills major; and health and safety in the English program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Though this section of the curriculum does not explicitly impact my research, this section provides perspectives that help to

contextualize the implementation of the Ontario English curriculum within my research.

Instructional Approaches. With the premise that "*all students can be successful language learners*" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 27), the English curriculum aims to support educators and students through high-quality instruction to ensure student success when mastering language skills. When an educator's instructional approach acknowledges student needs, respects student strengths, explains the purpose for learning, encourages the use of prior knowledge, uses differentiated instruction based on the needs of the student, and uses information gained from assessments to plan instruction, educators are able to better encourage students through their thinking and learning, in addition to providing opportunities for students to practice and apply the skills that they are learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Additionally, when an educator's instructional approach acknowledges the complexities that students experience, educators are able to effectively model learning strategies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Exceptional language instruction is expected to include the ability to motivate students to be willing and determined to learn using higher-level thinking skills, to communicate with precision and clarity, and to think critically to be able to reflect, question, and "look beyond the literal meaning of texts" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28) to reflect on "fairness, equity, social justice, and citizenship in a global society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28). Within the document, it is acknowledged that "no single instructional approach can meet all the needs of each learner" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, the document outlines the importance of teachers using student assessments in regard to their personal needs, in conjunction to implementing best practices and proven learning theory, to determine classroom activities that are both appropriate within the context of the classroom and also to incorporate curricular expectations to explicitly address the teaching of knowledge and skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Planning English Programs for Students with Special Education Needs. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) implements the beliefs outlined by Bennett, Wynne, & Ontario Ministry of Education's (2006) *Special Education Transformation: The Report of the Co-Chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education, 2006* within program planning. This implementation intends to ensure that all students have the ability to succeed, that differentiated instruction is effectively used for the needs of any group of students, that instructional practice is grounded in

both evidence-based research and experience, that classroom teachers acknowledge their key role in students' literacy development and within their learning community, and that "[f]airness is not sameness" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28) since students are unique in the ways in which they learn (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). By examining the achievement levels of individual students, educators are able to determine the strengths, needs, and learning styles of their students to both acknowledge the diversity of their students within the educator's program planning, and to also determine if any accommodations and/or modifications need to be made to the curriculum expectations and/or classroom instruction, which is to be documented within a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). For students requiring accommodations only, instructional, environmental, and/or assessment accommodations are used to allow these students to experience the course without changes to the knowledge and skills that students would be expected to demonstrate through assessments and evaluations that reflect the typical course curriculum expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, requiring accommodations only within an English course would not be reflected in the student's IEP. Students requiring modified expectations would have modified expectations that are based on the course curriculum, but with changes to the complexity and/or quantity of expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). These modified expectations are to be measurable, observable, realistic, and specific to reflect the specific knowledge and/skill that the student can independently demonstrate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Modified expectations are to be reflected in the student's IEP to document the ways in which an expectation has been modified; it is up to the school's principal to determine if the modified expectations allow for a student's successful completion of the course and if the student has achieved a credit for the course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). If modified expectations are required within an English course, the learning expectations and achievement levels outlined within the IEP will guide the assessments and evaluations of the student, which will ultimately determine if the student's learning expectations will allow them to earn a credit for the course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Program Considerations for English Language Learners. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) acknowledges that, at the time of the publication, about twenty percent of students attending English language schools in Ontario have a first language that is not English due to students' varying contexts and

experiences contributing to their linguistic heritage. It is also acknowledged that these students bring background knowledge and experience to the classroom that is an asset that supports their learning and contributes to the classroom community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). In noting this significant student population, the curriculum communicates that educators are responsible for students' English language learning, to ensure that their background knowledge and experience are incorporated into the classroom and instructional programs, and to encourage students to bring their first language into the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, students are expected to continue learning their first language as this will be the foundation of students' English language learning in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Within Ontario schools, English language learners can receive support from their teachers through two different programs: (1) English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and (2) English Literacy Development (ELD) programs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). ESL programs "are for students born in Canada or newcomers whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools," (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 31). Conversely, ELD programs are for students that are newcomers to Canada whose first language is not English or is a variation of English that is considerably different from the English used within the classroom instruction found within Ontario schools, and students who have substantial gaps within their education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The curriculum acknowledges that English language learners can build self-confidence during literacy instruction within a supportive and welcoming environment that allows students to make connections between the skills and concepts that they have developed within their first language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, the curriculum recognizes that the oral fluency of an English language learner does not reflect a student's knowledge of language proficiency, such as vocabulary or reading comprehension, since research reflects that it can take five years for most English language learners to develop the ability to use English for academic purposes that is in line with the skill level of their English-speaking peers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). It is also noted that if students are older when they arrive, more support from teachers is needed as these students have more language skills and knowledge that they need to develop (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, the curriculum outlines that it is the shared responsibility of the classroom teacher, the students' ESL/ELD teacher, and school staff to

ensure a student's English-language development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). To support this development, "[t]eachers must adapt the instructional program in order to facilitate the success of these students in their classrooms" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 32). This adaptation can be done through modifying some/all subject expectations so that the expectations are still attainable with the support of the teacher while challenging the students within their current English proficiency level, using a variety of learning resources and instructional strategies, and implementing assessment accommodations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The curriculum acknowledges that while adaptations will decrease throughout a student's English language learning, some program adaptations may still be needed to support the success of students who no longer require ESL/ELD support (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Antidiscrimination Education. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) recognizes that antidiscrimination principles in education are relevant to all facets of school experience since "it promotes a school climate that encourages all students to work to high standards, affirms the worth of all students, and helps students strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image" (p. 33). The curriculum establishes that antidiscrimination principles support both students and staff to respect and understand the significance of diversity within the school community, and within society to ensure a safe learning environment that is free from "harassment, violence, and expressions of hate" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 33). In addition to providing students with the opportunity to critically think about promoting responsible citizenship, fairness, and healthy relationships within society, antidiscrimination education allows schools to communicate and work with the larger community and parents/guardians to foster a school community that also reflects the diversity of wider society and/or the local community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

More specifically, the English program is outlined within the curriculum to reflect the importance of using learning resources that supports the implementation of antidiscrimination education. To support an inclusive English program, the curriculum highlights the importance of invoking learning resources that reflect the diversity of student experience, interests, cultures, and backgrounds by using learning materials, such as literature and media, that have diverse protagonists, provides opportunities for students to explore topics related to their self-identity,

and exposes students to "the historical, cultural, and political contexts for both the traditional and non-traditional gender and social roles represented in the materials they are studying" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 33). The curriculum acknowledges that it is important to include the immigrant experience within the selected texts, stories, and media resources since doing so allows both students and teachers to gain awareness of intercultural communication, while also "[providing] rich thematic material for study, as well as the opportunity for students new to Canada to share their knowledge and experiences with others" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 33). The curriculum also notes the importance of classroom resources to appeal to both boys and girls to enrich the reading environment for both genders (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). In choosing learning resources that are inclusive of diverse lived experiences and that encourage the reflection of varying perspectives, students learn to think and reflect critically within the context of the English curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Also known as critical literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), students learn to detect and identify negative bias, information, and stereotypes within different types of literary materials and texts to be able to critically analyse the information presented, question the status quo, and empower students to delve into concept of power and justice within society. It is also noted that within this type of critical analysis of literature, it is an opportunity for both students and teachers "to explore the social and emotional impact of bullying, violence, and discrimination in the form of racism, sexism, or homophobia on individuals and families" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34). Conversely, it is the role of the teacher to "take into account the potential negative impact of bias on students and use appropriate strategies to address students' responses" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34) and to assist students to link the knowledge they gain within this critical literacy "to messages conveyed through the school's antibullying and violence-prevention programming" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34).

Literacy, Mathematical Literacy, and Inquiry/Research Skills. Though the English curriculum focuses on gaining and developing literacy skills within the context of the English language, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) notes that the English program helps to develop, strengthen, and improve mathematical literacy since "[l]iteracy, mathematical literacy, and inquiry/research skills are critical to students' success in all subjects of the curriculum and in all areas of their lives" (p.

34). The English curriculum supports students' abilities to interpret and utilize graphic texts, ask questions, explore possible answers to questions, locate pertinent information from a range of sources, learn varying points of view, and evaluate information to determine its relevance, validity, and appropriate usage, all of which further reinforce students' mathematical literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

The Role of the School Library in the English Program. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) indicates that the school library is meant to support the building and transformation of students' lifelong learning and knowledge development within the context of our society. In supporting student success within the language curriculum, the school library encourages students to read for both learning and enjoyment, exposes students to diverse literature, provides access to various resources and technology, assists students in developing research skills, and teaches students how to effectively use information that has been gathered through research (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Regarding information literacy and research skills, teacher librarians work in conjunction with classroom or content-area teachers that provide students with the opportunity to locate and evaluate information, utilize information to problem solve and develop their knowledge, communicate information and findings to varying audiences, experience and use various technologies, and to use research and information with responsibility (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

The Role of Technology in the English Program. The curriculum acknowledges that information and communications technologies (ICT) provide tools that can support language learning for students, as well as enhance teachers' classroom instruction and curriculum design to meet the diverse needs of students within their classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). ICT tools such as websites, databases, and word-processing programs can assist students in gathering and organizing data they have collected to present and report their findings, in addition to connecting students with other students, their home, and a larger global community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) acknowledges the importance of students being encouraged to utilize ICT when appropriate to further support their learning, but cautions the risks of using tools like the Internet since students must also learn about the responsible implementation of the Internet while also being aware of Internet privacy, the ways in which the

Internet can be abused, Internet safety, and its potential to be used for hatred.

The Ontario Skills Passport and Essential Skills. The Ontario Skills Passport (OSP) is an online resource that further enriches students' classroom learning. The OSP also reinforces the relevance of learning within the classroom and school-work connections through describing the Essential Skills, identified and validated by the Government of Canada and other international and national agencies, outlined within the curriculum (i.e.: Problem Solving, Reading Text, Measurement and Calculation, Writing, and Computer Use) in relation to the ways in which these transferrable skills can be used within occupation-specific workplace tasks (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). In addition to describing important habits found in the workplace, the OSP is used by employers during students' cooperative education placements to assist the employer in their assessment of the student and to aid the employer in recording the skills and work habits that students demonstrate during their placement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Students, in turn, are able to note the skills and work habits that they have already developed and note skills that they would like to further develop (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Career Education. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) outlines that the curriculum's English courses "prepare students for the literacy demands of a wide array of postsecondary educational programs and careers" (p. 36). This provides students with opportunities to utilize their English language skills to work-related contexts, explore career and educational options as a self-directed learner, requiring students to develop research skills, practice writing, develop the ability to effectively understand informational reading, and work cooperatively with peers when creating oral presentations and/or working in groups to work confidently with others (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). These skills ultimately guide and support students to be able to develop effective literacy skills that impact their employability skills, to develop efficient communication within a variety of contexts, and to be able to complete an array of tasks that are expected to be found in any work environment, regardless of a student's postsecondary aspirations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experiential Learning. Cooperative education and other forms of experiential learning allow students to have opportunities to expand their understanding of employment prospects, knowledge of workplace practices, and their

ability to invoke skills that they have developed in the classroom within real-life events, such as work experience, out-of-school fieldwork, and job shadowing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Within the context of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), educators are expected to support students' learning by sustaining relationships with businesses in the community "to ensure that students have access to hands-on experiences that will reinforce the knowledge and skills gained in school" (p. 37). It is also the teacher's responsibility to address health and safety issues, and requirements within cooperative education and/or in another workplace context, to ensure students have obtained the appropriate skills and knowledge to participate safely (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). When taking part in cooperative education and other forms of experiential learning, students need to understand the importance of setting boundaries to establish their personal safety, which includes understanding their rights to confidentiality and privacy as defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, being aware of their right to work in a setting free from harassment and abuse, and being informed about school policies, community recourses, and reporting processes in regards to all types of harassment and abuse (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Planning Program Pathways and Programs Leading to a Specialist High-Skills Major. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) outlines that, in conjunction with other courses, English courses "provide the academic knowledge and skills important to particular industry sectors and required for success in the workplace and postsecondary education, including apprenticeship" (p. 37) to support a student's participation in a Specialist High-Skills Major (SHSM) program, or in programs that provide pathways to certain apprenticeship/workplace destinations. It is also noted that English, in combination with cooperative education credits, offer the work experience that is essential for SHSM programs and program pathways to apprenticeship/workplace destinations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Health and Safety in the English Program. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) acknowledges that health and safety issues are relevant to language education during out-of-school fieldwork. Therefore, it is noted that it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that fieldwork activities are previewed and planned accordingly to safeguard students' health and safety while they take part in these learning

experiences.

5.1.5 Compulsory Courses

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) outlines the compulsory courses for both grades 9 and 10, including each course's prerequisites, strands, overall expectations within each strand, and specific expectations within each strand to highlight the threads that flow through the curriculum. It is noted that though the focus of my research lies within the English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) course, in order to provide a cohesive overview of the curriculum document, I provide a brief overview of the courses discussed within this section of the curriculum (for a comprehensive overview of the compulsory English courses offered at the grades 9 to 12 levels and for a visual overview of the prerequisites for compulsory courses within the Ontario English curriculum from grades 9 through 12, click here).

English at the Grade 9 Academic level (ENG1D). English at the Grade 9 Academic level (ENG1D) aims to develop the strands of oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy skills needed for success within students' daily lives and through students' secondary school academic experience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This course does not have a perquisite. With the intention to prepare students for English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) course, ENG1D is meant to provide students with the opportunity to "analyse literary texts from contemporary and historical periods, interpret informational and graphic texts, and create oral, written, and media texts in a variety of forms" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 41), with a focus on effective communication strategies. It is noted that as of the end of the 2022-2023 school year, ENG1D is no longer a part of the curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). Beginning in September 2023, ENG1D was replaced by English at the Grade 9 De-streamed level (ENL1W) and "[a]ll references to Grade 9 that appear in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* and *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English, 2007* have been superseded by *The Ontario Curriculum, Grade 9: English, 2023*" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 3).

English at the Grade 9 Applied level (ENG1P). Similarly to ENG1D, English at the Grade 9 Applied level (ENG1P) aims to develop the strands of oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy skills needed for success within both daily life and a students'

secondary school academic experience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This course does not have a prerequisite. With the intention to prepare students for English at the Grade 10 Applied level (ENG2P), this course is meant to provide students with the opportunity to "read, interpret, and create a variety of informational, literary, and graphic texts" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 55), with a focus on communicating effectively, as well as identifying and utilizing suitable strategies to advance students' understanding of texts. It is noted that the ENG1P course expired following the 2021-2022 school year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023).

English at the Grade 9 De-streamed level (ENL1W). Superseding ENG1D and ENG1P, English at the Grade 9 De-streamed level (ENL1W) was introduced in September 2023. This course is based on the same fundamental principles that exist within the elementary program but builds upon these principles (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). This course does not have a prerequisite. This course is designed to "facilitate [students'] transition from the elementary grades to the secondary level" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 9), while also allowing students to develop a foundation in literacy and language that will inform both their future English course choices and post-secondary experiences. This course also expands students' foundational skills and knowledge to support their learning in senior grades, which will "enable students to understand, respond to, appreciate, and create a full range of texts in various forms, genres, modes, and media, including digital and media texts" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 9). This course also provides students with opportunities to evolve their ability to be critically literate learners through connecting personal lived experiences to the experiences of others, while developing transferable digital and media literacy skills within a literacy and language context (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grade 9: English, 2023* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023) notes that within the implementation of the curriculum in this course, teachers are expected to root their assessment and instructional practices within culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) to "provide students with multiple entry points to access language and literacy learning and multiple opportunities to demonstrate their achievement in English" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 9).

English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D). English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) was originally meant to expand on the oral communication, reading, writing, and

media literacy skills students learned in ENG1D, but now expands on these skills as they are explored within the current prerequisite of ENL1W (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023), with a focus on analysing texts from various periods in time, creating texts in various forms, and extending students' "selective use of strategies that contribute to effective communication" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 69). Therefore, ENL1W is the prerequisite to ENG2D, and ENG2D intends to prepare students for the compulsory university or college preparation Grade 11 course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). ENG2D is discussed in more detail within the subsequent subsection of my thesis, 5.2 ENG2D Curriculum.

English at the Grade 10 Applied level (ENG2P). English at the Grade 10 Applied level (ENG2P) aims to expand on the strands of oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy skills needed for success within their daily lives and through students' secondary school academic experience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This course continues to provide students with opportunities to read, create, and interpret a variety of texts, as well as continuing to develop effective communication skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This course's prerequisite is ENL1W and aims to prepare students for the compulsory college or workplace preparation Grade 11 course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023).

5.1.6 Optional Courses

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) lists one optional course within its curriculum: Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing, Grade 10 (ELS2O). It is noted that though the focus of my research lies within the English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) course, in order to provide a cohesive overview of the curriculum document, I provide a brief overview of the course to provide a cohesive overview of the curriculum (for a visual overview of the prerequisites for optional courses within the Ontario English curriculum from grades 9 through 12, click here).

Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing, Grade 10 (ELS2O). Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing, Grade 10 (ELS2O), provides students with the opportunity to improve their literacy skills. This course is an open level course. Additionally, the following are the possible prerequisites for the course: English at the Grade 9 De-streamed level (ENL1W) or the Grade 9 English locally developed compulsory credit (LDCC) course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). The curriculum notes that ELS2O "may be taken to fulfil an optional credit requirement

or the Group 1 additional compulsory credit requirement for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)… [and] may also be used, at the principal's discretion, as a substitution for one of the compulsory credits required in English" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). With reading skills and writing skills as the two strands that flow through the course, the course aims to provide students with additional literacy support that is needed to graduate and assist students in developing essential learning strategies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). To strengthen both reading and writing skills, students will read a variety of texts, "with a focus on locating information, identifying main ideas and supporting details, building vocabulary, and consolidating skills in the application of key comprehension strategies" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 101)

5.1.7 Glossary

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) allocates a chapter within the curriculum document to a glossary that lists definitions and examples that intend to assist both parents/guardians and teachers in utilizing the document. Therefore, the definitions outlined within the glossary further support the understanding of the curriculum documents, as well as provide an additional nuance to the terms utilized throughout *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) (click here to review the full glossary).

5.2 ENG2D Curriculum

Within *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the English at the Grade 10 Academic level (ENG2D) section describes the course as the following:

> This course is designed to extend the range of oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy skills that students need for success in their secondary school academic programs and in their daily lives. Students will analyse literary texts from contemporary and historical periods, interpret and evaluate informational and graphic texts, and create oral, written, and media texts in a variety of forms. An important focus will be on the selective use of strategies that contribute to effective communication. This course is intended to prepare students for the compulsory Grade 11 university or college

preparation course. (p. 69)

Therefore, the ENG2D curriculum is organized within four strands, reflecting the four literacy strands that are meant to be developed throughout the course: Oral Communication, Reading and Literature Studies, Writing, and Media Studies. Each section pertaining to its respective strand lists overall expectations and their descriptions, which are then followed by specific expectations for each expectation listed, a description of each specific expectation, and respective examples and teacher prompts. The following sub-sections note each literacy skill to further support the analysis of the chosen unit to gain insights towards the curricular themes that influence the structure and teaching of the unit, while acknowledging the threads that are woven through each literacy strand and the overall course.

5.2.1 Oral Communication

Within the ENG2D Oral Communication strand of the curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the section lists three overall expectations: (1) Listening to Understand; (2) Speaking to Communicate; and (3) Reflecting on Skills and Strategies. To contextualize the implementation of this literacy skill within an ENG2D course, Table 2 is a synopsis of the Oral Communication strand of the ENG2D curriculum. This table lists the overall expectations of this literacy skill, a description of each overall expectation, and their respective specific expectations. Ultimately, VH had utilized these expectations to build her ENG2D course and the chosen unit (for further details regarding the description of each specific expectation, as well as each specific expectation's teacher prompts and examples, click here).

Table 2. Oral Communication (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007)

Oral Communication	
Overall Expectations	**Specific Expectations**
1. Listening to Understand: listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes	1.1 Purpose
	1.2 Using Active Listening Strategies
	1.3 Using Listening Comprehension Strategies
	1.4 Demonstrating Understanding of Content
	1.5 Interpreting Texts
	1.6 Extending Understanding of Texts
	1.7 Analysing Texts
	1.8. Critical Literacy
	1.9 Understanding Presentation Strategies
2. Speaking to Communicate: use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes	2.1 Purpose
	2.2 Interpersonal Speaking Strategies
	2.3 Clarity and Coherence

	2.4 Diction and Devices
	2.5 Vocal Strategies
	2.6 Non-Verbal Cues
	2.7 Audio-Visual Aids
3. Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as listeners and speakers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in oral communication situations.	3.1 Metacognition
	3.2 Interconnected Skills

5.2.2 Reading & Literature Studies

Within the ENG2D Reading and Literature Studies strand of the curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the section lists four overall expectations: (1) Reading for Meaning; (2) Understanding Form and Style; (3) Reading with Fluency; and (4) Reflecting on Skills and Strategies. To contextualize the implementation of this literacy skill within an ENG2D course, Table 3 is a synopsis of the Reading and Literature Studies strand of the ENG2D curriculum. This table lists the overall expectations of this literacy skill, a description of each overall expectation, and their respective specific expectations. Ultimately, VH had utilized these expectations to build her ENG2D course and the chosen unit (for further details regarding the description of each specific expectation, as well as each specific expectation's teacher prompts and examples, click here).

Table 3. Reading and Literature Studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007)

Reading and Literature Studies	
Overall Expectations	**Specific Expectations**
1. Reading for Meaning: read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning	1.1 Variety of Texts
	1.2 Using Reading Comprehension Strategies
	1.3 Demonstrating Understanding of Content
	1.4 Making Inferences
	1.5 Extending Understanding of Texts
	1.6 Analysing Texts
	1.7 Evaluating Texts
	1.8. Critical Literacy
2. Understanding Form and Style: recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning	2.1 Text Forms
	2.2 Text Features
	2.3 Elements of Style
3. Reading with Fluency: use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently	3.1 Reading Familiar Words
	3.2 Reading Unfamiliar Words
	3.3 Developing Vocabulary
4. Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading	4.1 Metacognition
	4.2 Interconnected Skills

5.2.3 Writing

Within the ENG2D Writing strand of the curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the section lists four overall expectations: (1) Developing and Organising Content; (2) Using Knowledge of Form and Style; (3) Applying Knowledge of Conventions; and (4) Reflecting on Skills and Strategies. To contextualize the implementation of this literacy skill within an ENG2D course, Table 4 is a synopsis of the Writing strand of the ENG2D curriculum. This table lists the overall expectations of this literacy skill, a description of each overall expectation, and their respective specific expectations. Ultimately, VH had utilized these expectations to build her ENG2D course and the chosen unit (for further details regarding the description of each specific expectation, as well as each specific expectation's teacher prompts and examples, click here).

Table 4. Writing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007)

Writing	
Overall Expectations	**Specific Expectations**
1. Developing and Organizing Content: generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience	1.1 Identifying Topic, Purpose, and Audience
	1.2 Generating and Developing Ideas
	1.3 Research
	1.4 Organizing Ideas
	1.5 Reviewing Content
2. Using Knowledge of Form and Style: draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience	2.1 Form
	2.2 Voice
	2.3 Diction
	2.4 Sentence Craft and Fluency
	2.5 Critical Literacy
	2.6 Revision
	2.7 Producing Drafts
3. Applying Knowledge of Conventions: use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively	3.1 Spelling
	3.2 Vocabulary
	3.3 Punctuation
	3.4 Grammar
	3.5 Proofreading
	3.6 Publishing
	3.7 Producing Finished Works
4. Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as writers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful at different stages in the writing process	4.1 Metacognition
	4.2 Interconnected Skills
	4.3 Portfolio

5.2.4 Media Studies

Within the ENG2D Media Studies strand of the curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the section lists four overall expectations: (1) Understanding Media Texts; (2) Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques; (3) Creating Media Texts; and (4) Reflecting on Skills and Strategies. To contextualize the implementation of this literacy skill within an ENG2D course, Table 5 is a synopsis of the Media Studies strand of the ENG2D curriculum; this table lists the overall expectations of this literacy skill, a description of each overall expectation, and their respective specific expectations. Ultimately, VH had utilized these expectations to build her ENG2D course and the chosen unit (for further details regarding the description of each specific expectation, as well as each specific expectation's teacher prompts and examples, click here).

Table 5. Media Studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007)

Media Studies	
Overall Expectations	**Specific Expectations**
1. Understanding Media Texts: demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts	1.1 Purpose and Audience
	1.2 Interpreting Messages
	1.3 Evaluating Texts
	1.4 Audience Responses
	1.5 Critical Literacy
	1.6 Production Perspectives
2. Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning	2.1 Form
	2.2 Conventions and Techniques
3. Creating Media Texts: create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques	3.1 Purpose and Audience
	3.2 Form
	3.3 Conventions and Techniques
	3.4 Producing Media Texts
	3.5 Proofreading
	3.6 Publishing
	3.7 Producing Finished Works
4. Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts	4.1 Metacognition
	4.2 Interconnected Skills

5.3 A Postcolonial Lens on the Curriculum

Through my reading of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, it is evident that the curriculum does not

explicitly make connections to either a colonial or postcolonial framework, nor does the document communicate an explicit drive to decolonize curriculum. However, there are aspects of the curriculum that implicitly include facets that perpetuate colonialism, while also implicitly attempting to embrace postcolonialism within the teaching of English and English literature, all of which are explored within this section.

There are features of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) that speak to the ways in which colonialism is discursively, epistemologically, and structurally embedded within curricular expectations. The curriculum notes that "[r]eading activities should expose students to materials that reflect the diversity of Canadian and world cultures, including those of Aboriginal peoples" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 5), while also noting that "Students also need to become familiar with the works of recognized writers from their own and earlier eras" Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 5). By including the importance of student exposure to Indigenous texts while still grounding students' familiarity with texts written by "recognized writers," the curriculum is implicitly framing the diversity in students' reading activities as exposure and additive to the typical core canon of literature, as opposed to structuring this inclusion as a transformative epistemological shift. Additionally, the curriculum's encouragement of students to familiarize themselves with "recognized writers" encourages the continued dominance of Eurocentric literary value systems, which further embraces colonial continuity in English education. Moreover, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document provides an overall structure around students' individual skills development so that students can gauge their academic potential, individual achievement, and transferrable skills without genuinely drawing upon and giving value to Indigenous knowledge systems that emphasize community knowledge and relationality. It is important to acknowledge that the curriculum introduces the importance of critical literacy by noting that students "will develop the ability to understand and critically interpret a range of texts and to recognize that a text conveys one particular perspective among many" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). However, the curriculum simply creates a space for students to develop the skills to critique instead of taking this as an opportunity to decolonize curriculum through exposing bias and power dynamics by challenging dominant narratives. Therefore, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document's strongest

enactment of colonialism is the absence of acknowledging and discussing colonialism's role in developing the curriculum, as well as the power relations that can be encompassed in language. In not explicitly discussing these facets within the curriculum document, colonial norms continue to be the default mode of knowing by being maintained within what is taught but are also maintained by what remains to be examined when leaving colonial power structures intact.

Based on the language used within *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, the curriculum also implicitly attempts to implement a postcolonial stance that gestures toward inclusion without sufficiently interrogating colonial power structures that are found at the foundations of curricular expectations. For example, each Reading and Literature Studies strand within the applicable courses have a specific expectation of reading for meaning, which outlines that students will read a variety of "student- and teacher-selected texts from diverse cultures" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 45, 59, 73, 88). This aligns with the postcolonial values of decentering a Western canon that is typically taught within classrooms and encourages the acknowledgement of marginalized perspectives. However, it is important to note that the selection of these types of texts is not required to challenge colonial narratives but rather are framed by the curriculum as cultural enrichment, as opposed to being utilized to critique the coloniality within curriculum. Additionally, the curriculum's inclusion of marginalized perspectives through reading a variety of texts is not positioned as central to understanding the lived experiences of Canadians since this acknowledgement is not structurally embedded within the curriculum itself but instead is an optional perspective that can evolve from this specific expectation. Because the curriculum does not directly acknowledge colonialism as a system of power within study and teaching of English, there is no requirement for students to study imperial literature and colonial discourse, which ultimately does not require students to critically question the power structures that perpetuate hegemonic norms through the literature taught. It is also noted that *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document encourages students to embrace critical literacy by analysing different perspectives, biases, and voices that are represented and/or omitted, all of which embraces postcolonialism since this encourages the examination of dominant narratives, the suppressing of colonized peoples, and the importance of representation. However, because the curriculum does not explicitly connect critical literacy to colonialism, the curriculum does not explicitly outline the role of the teacher in guiding students

to apply critical literacy within colonial contexts. While *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document promotes critical thinking, diversity, and student voice, these facets reflect a symbolic and ambiguous implementation of postcolonialism within the teaching of English and English literature. Therefore, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) does not sufficiently challenge the historical and enduring structures of colonialism that shape the language, literature, and knowledge that is studied through this curriculum.

5.4 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a cohesive overview of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), to outline the ENG2D curriculum that is at the foundations of my research, and to invoke a postcolonial lens in my reading of the curriculum. *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) curriculum document consists of seven sections: Introduction, The Program in English, Assessment and Evaluation of Student Achievement, Some Considerations for Program Planning, Compulsory Courses, Optional Courses, and Glossary. In addition to reviewing each of these sections within this chapter, I provided a specific focus on the ENG2D curriculum by reviewing the course's Oral Communication, Reading and Literature Studies, Writing, and Media Studies strands, as well as outlining the overall and specific expectations within each respective strand. I also utilized this chapter to address the ways in which the curriculum document perpetuates a colonial framework while also attempting to enact postcolonialism. Consequently, establishing the relevant curriculum document and the ways in which it establishes the intentions of ENG2D while invoking a postcolonial lens provides a curricular foundation within my analysis of the data.

Chapter 6: Researching the Researcher

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) was first implemented during the same school year that I attended grade 10, which was the 2007-2008 school year, and I have therefore experienced the same curriculum when taking ENG2D myself. To treat my own personal narrative as data as I infer a student perspective when unpacking the novel, I invoke my positioning as a person who experienced the same curriculum that impacts the structure of the chosen unit. Moreover, it is important to first reflect on my language arts experiences within my Ontario secondary school education and weave this reflection into the narrative of my doctoral research. Within this section, I first provide a personal history to contextualize my lived experiences that have shaped the ways in which I perceive the world around me. This is followed by specifically addressing my past experiences as a woman of colour in the Ontario education system that has also experienced ENG2D firsthand. By way of invoking the practice of narrative inquiry, I utilize this section to also include my own biases and understanding of the chosen unit and novel that have evolved from my own personal contexts and experiences. Engaging my perspectives within the analysis is meant to acknowledge my own positioning in reading the novel as well as my positioning as the researcher within the conversations that I have had with VH, since both educators and students have their own backgrounds that shape how literature is taught, read, and understood within one's own contexts. Therefore, this chapter is not only a part of my analysis but serves to highlight the lens that I use within my analysis.

6.1 The Formation of My Family

To effectively delve into my personal reading of Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* from my own minoritized perspective, I believe it is important to first disclose the facets of my cultural, ancestral, and autobiographical contexts since to omit this information would unjustly limit the readers' perception of my lived experiences as a minoritized Canadian-born citizen. To further invoke a postcolonial lens influenced by both CRT and antiracist theory, it is also noted that this section is meant to be a glimpse into the multiple facets that have marked and influenced my lived experiences, since there are countless interactions and moments of learning that cannot all be captured within this section. Therefore, I use this sub-section to disclose the migration history of my family and the ways in which this shaped our language and culture, as well as my

personal perspectives on the ways in which I have navigated the Canadian social landscapes in which I have lived, and the ways in which the facets of these landscapes have interacted with me.

Both of my maternal and paternal ancestors migrated out of India, but to different areas of the world, thus shaping my eclectic personal history and the foundations of the ways in which I understand my family history. Based on the anecdotes and stories told by my father, my father's paternal grandfather migrated from the Indian state of Gujarat to Zanzibar, an island just off the coast of Tanzania. It is understood that that time, East Africa provided exciting opportunities for business and livelihood which is why my great-grandfather chose to establish himself there. My great-grandfather then moved to a small town in Tanzania, got married, and had several children, the eldest being my grandfather. After my great-grandfather passed away in his early 30's, it became my grandfather's responsibility to work and provide for his family. He soon opened a barber shop in Tanga, a town in Tanzania, married my Kenyan-born grandmother who also had Indian descent, and had three children, with the eldest child being my father. My father attended school in Tanga, where he was taught to fluently read and write English and to be orally fluent in Swahili, Gujarati, and Hindi as those were the languages used in his social surroundings and/or at home. My father came to Canada in 1988 with the support of his aunt (his father's sister), and with the hopes to further his education in accounting. Once he arrived, my father worked, met my mother, and strived towards completing his college education.

My mother's family history revolves more around her maternal relatives, as it was her maternal relatives that surrounded her upbringing and were responsible for disseminating the family stories told to my mother. My mother's great-grandmother was the initial generation that migrated from an unknown area in India to Guyana sometime in the late 1800s, since my mother's great-grandmother's father had been contracted to manage sugar cane fields. To our knowledge, my ancestors were not considered to be enslaved but were indentured labourers since they worked for and were (minimally) compensated by wealthier, White businessmen who owned sugar cane plantations that subjected Black workers to hard labour and slavery. Since migrating to Guyana, English became the main language that my mother's family would speak since that was the language instilled on them by their employers. My mother's grandmother (my great-grandmother) was born in the early 1900s and had four children, one of them being my grandmother. Eventually, my grandmother rebelliously married my grandfather, a man who was also of Indian descent and who was known to be quite intelligent and hardworking but suffered

from alcoholism and was absent from my mother's life until her teenage years. My grandmother soon gave birth to my uncle, shortly followed by the birth of my mother. Both my mother and her brother were raised by my great-grandmother, a strong-willed woman who ensured that my mom went to school, but also included my mother within her business of selling bananas at the town market. Moreover, due to their motivation to take care of their family through their business successes, my great-grandmother and mother were responsible for the family's finances and income. My grandparents eventually divorced, and my mother was mostly kept away from her father until he had immigrated to Canada and wanted to sponsor my mom and her brother. My mom came to Canada in 1989, where she found work, met my father, and is now a director at a consulting firm.

6.2 Where am I from?

I believe that my parents' experiences have very much contributed to my perspectives and experiences as their struggles and achievements, and the contexts in which they have lived, have provided a basis for my personal contexts. I was born in Scarborough, Ontario and have a brother who is about four years younger than myself. When I was around 7 years old, my parents separated and divorced some years later. Because my parents did not have extensive assets and were amicable about divorcing, there was not much property to separate nor was there a custody battle. At the age of 8, I decided to live with my father in North York, Ontario since at the time, I felt more akin to him, though I saw my mother and brother almost every weekend. Two years later, my mother purchased her first home in Whitby, Ontario. My mother had communicated to me that she decided to move outside of Scarborough since the area that we had once lived in started to become increasingly unaffordable within the housing market, but also more isolating due to the increasing prevalence of violence, therefore giving my mother and brother a fresh start in a new town. My father and I followed two years after to be closer to them. Therefore, I had attended kindergarten to grade 3 in Scarborough, grades 4 to 7 in North York, and grades 8 to 12 in Whitby. Through experiencing these different communities, I came to realize that the colour of my skin could encourage assumptions about my capabilities, personality, interests, and who I am in different capacities dependent on my surroundings.

When growing up in Scarborough, I did not find that my peers made many assumptions about me since I believe that due to our younger ages, we had not yet learned about the

stereotypes that existed regarding people's cultures and backgrounds, and we easily accepted the diversity within our classrooms. Rather, it was the adults in my life that were quick to racialize and compartmentalize me as Indian, even though I feel that the Indian culture within my family had become more diluted and mixed with other cultures and influences through the passing of generations. For example, from a young age, I had experienced school assignments encouraging young students to reflect and communicate their family history to the class. Such assignments would not have been effective in my personal context as my parents and their relatives had very vague recollections of our family history. When asking my parents about our background, they would identify us as Indian, which would further over-simply and minimize our family's history in relation to both Guyana and Tanzania. At a young age, this caused me to be accepting of being labelled as Indian since that was the way my family perpetuated a simplicity of our cultural identity. Conversely, because of my Brown skin, my teachers also identified me as being Indian since I believe they had limited experience and understanding that people with Brown skin can come from different countries and cultures with rich histories of migration. Therefore, my acceptance of this label was easier than justifying and explaining to teachers my parents' heritage since it became normalized to minimize the complexity of my family history, especially when questioning the limited family histories in which I had access. I found that my parents, though generations away from their Indian heritage, also labelled themselves as Indian and seemed interested in trying to reinforce a connection to Indian culture within our family through attending Indian festivals in Toronto, consuming Bollywood media, embracing typical Indian fashion choices for family and/or cultural events, and reiterating values that they attributed to our Indian heritage. I question why my parents were so interested in doing this. Was it because of the Western discourse that taught them that they must be Indian if they have Brown skin and therefore should behave in a certain way? Was it because they themselves had been influenced by family members to identify themselves in this way? Was it because it was easier to navigate Canadian society as someone less ambiguous and stereotypical? Or was it because this was their way in reclaiming their heritage that they longed to better understand? As I grew up, these questions became more prevalent in my life, and I found that I too had sometimes chosen to compartmentalize myself to better understand my place within society. However, I eventually learned that there would be no correct way for me to exist within my Canadian landscape, nor should there be one label, box, and/or space that could encompass everything that I am.

My social experiences within North York and Scarborough were quite similar, but it was moving to Whitby that brought attention to the colour of my skin and the ways in which the colour of my skin acted like a signal to others around me. It was during my time living in Whitby that made me aware of the racial ambiguity that is encompassed within my parental nationalities and cultures, as this would evoke my peers to make assumptions of my capabilities and/or discount me because I did not fit into a more desirable, typical, and/or more easily understood Canadian mold. For example, when my brother first moved to Whitby at about 8 years old, he was one of the only Brown students in his class. When I moved to Whitby a few years later, classrooms had become more diverse compared to when my brother first moved there; however, I was now thirteen years old and was surrounded by teenagers who were constantly trying to find their place in society as adolescents. Since many of the social groups had started to form before I moved to Whitby, I felt more out of place than I ever had within an educational setting. It was not until I started 8th grade at my new school that I realized the extent to which race could and would impact the ways in which others would try to make sense of who I am. At this point, cliques had fully formed, but retrospectively, I now realized I was still floating around with my other racially ambiguous friends. Though I look Brown and had been raised by parents that I believe wanted me to embrace our vague Indian heritage, I was not Brown enough for our school's "Brown crew," yet not Canadian enough for my peers to stop deducing that "You're Brown so you're Indian" or to stop asking me "Do you speak Hindu?" I found myself trying to explain and justify my background, explaining that my father was from Tanzania and my mother was from Guyana, which often resulted in being asked "Where's that?", "So your dad is Black?", or "Do you mean Papua New Guinea?" (as if I did not know where my own mother was from). Unfortunately, I still find myself in the position of explaining my background today and having to justify my heritage, but instead to adults. While my experience of the Canadian social landscape is a part of the way I interpret my identity and is often included in my explanation of who I am and where I am from, I often receive pushback from the inquirer regarding my explanation when I ground myself to the Canadian social landscape as part of my personal narrative, usually in the form of disbelief that I was born in Canada, that I can speak English (or that I only speak English), or that I have a complex family history (compared to simply being from India), all of which are based on assumptions from just looking at my skin tone.

As an adult, similar interactions and questions that I experienced in my adolescence continue to occur; however, I am becoming more aware as to how my minoritized presence can be exoticized, how it may change the ways others understand or conceive my Canadian citizenship, and how it can impact the ways in which I may belong in Canadian society. In the early years of my undergraduate degree at the University of Ottawa, when I was complimented, I was firstly complimented on my skin tone, how exotic I look, or even looking similar to Princess Jasmine from the Disney movie *Aladdin*; I was being complimented for looking like a two-dimensional cartoon that shared the characteristics of dark long hair and tan skin with me, though I never once walked around with an exposed midriff acting as though I was a Middle Eastern princess. I did not find these interactions meaningful, so they did not last for very long, but being racialized in this way made me feel as though I could only be found attractive based on the way I look, despite my intelligence and/or opinions. Not only was this deeply troubling to me since I wanted to be captivating based on so much more than having minimal resemblance to a sexualized cartoon, but I came to realize that I was being reduced to an archetype that was easily understood within the Canadian society in which I was living. This is one of the many archetypes I have been compared to, and unfortunately, I have found that these archetypes encourage the more ignorant majoritarian Canadian populations to subject real, complex, minoritized individuals to unrealistic and often insulting expectations. This type of exoticism seems convenient in Western society since it allows a rationalization of the belonging of minoritized individuals within Western society, with minoritized individuals who are then expected to be subjected to a fetishized gaze to feel some form of validation and belonging, or even some form of fulfillment for being noticed.

I also want to note that these assumptions based on my skin tone, and the proceeding questions of my heritage, do not only come from majoritarian groups. Rather, they also come from other minoritized groups, sometimes even those who share a similar skin tone to mine. There have been several instances where customer service workers of Indian descent have asked me, “Are you Indian?” and I always take a pause to reflect on the way in which I should answer since, to me, the answer feels more complex than a simple *yes* or *no*. As I have come to be more confident in owning my eclectic cultural and social experiences, my answer has evolved. At first, I would say yes and then explain the birth places of my parents. I found that this answer led the inquirer to assume that I was born outside of Canada, which would then confuse them since they

were not sure as to how my parents would have met since they are from distant continents. Then I began to say no, that I was born in Toronto, but then proceed to explain the birth places of my parents. This answer would often lead to the inquirer insisting that I am still Indian, which would make me feel uncomfortable since I felt like being identified as Indian should be because of so much more than the colour of my skin. India is filled with diverse languages, cultures, and religions, all of which I have never had any first-hand experience of within India itself. More recently, my answer tends to not include *yes* or *no*, but I would say that my ancestors were originally from India, disclose the birth places of my parents, and then state that I was born in Canada. I find this answer either allows for a much more nuanced conversation about my experiences and where I am from, while allowing for a more open conversation about where the inquirer is from since I am not completely compartmentalizing myself, but also not fully rejecting part of my ancestorial identity. I feel as though discussing the complexities of who we are, and where we come from, are important to building connections between one another and opening lines of communication to find those spaces. Because, more often than not, the inquirer within these instances looks elated upon hearing about my heritage, as if they are also searching for where they might belong and finding someone who might belong with them. In these conversations of understanding differences, while also finding commonalities, I think we both feel less lonely in our world where we are trying to find where we belong. However, I think difficult moments occur when the inquirer does not accept your perceptions, differences, and/or lived experiences as your truth, but rather push their preconceived notions and understandings as the only lens in which you can be understood. In the instances where this has happened to me, I found that no matter where I say I am from and/or what I have experienced, the inquirer has already classified me, which I feel detracts from a person's truth, suppresses their complexity, and limits their perceived potential of who they are and/or who they can be.

6.3 What can I say?

English was really the only language spoken at home, though I would often hear my dad speak in one of the several languages he knows over the phone with relatives or with people we would meet while we were out and about. Being from Guyana, my mom only speaks English, though she developed some understanding of Gujarati and Hindi from listening to my dad speak these languages and from watching Bollywood movies, similarly to the ways in which I

developed my understanding of both languages as well. As mentioned earlier, I loved reading from a young age, which revolved around texts written in English; I remember loving story time during class, enjoying any Robert Munsch book being read in class, and being absorbed in a world of illustrations as the stories progressed, like in Phoebe Gilman's (1984) *The Balloon Tree*. I found that I loved plays as well; I was about eight years old when I saw Munsch's (1980) *The Paper Bag Princess* as a play during a 2nd grade class trip, which is still my favorite of his stories. As I grew, I continued to consume all types of English literature both in and out of school, studying Shakespeare or reading Dan Brown's (2003) *The Da Vinci Code*. For me reading served as an escape similar to going to the movie theatre for a few hours and completely forgetting reality.

I had always done well in my English courses from a young age, compared to mathematics, and would often hear from teachers and family members that it was because I am a girl, and girls do well in English language arts and that boys tend to do well in mathematics. This dichotomy is something that we now know to be false and much more complex than this simple notion (see Cyr et al., 2024). However, like many other girls, this notion is something that encouraged my success in the English language arts. This was not only because I was encouraged to succeed in this subject area, but also because it gave me permission to lack motivation in sciences and maths. However, as I continued through the Ontario education system, I realized that I had interests in varying subject areas and it was in my personality to always try to do my best in any subject area. Therefore, while I chose to take a selection of arts and history courses in secondary school, my drive resulted in taking all the mathematics and science courses that I could in secondary school. Ultimately, I chose to include mathematics and sciences courses within my secondary school education since I would not accept that because I am a girl, I was not expected to do well in more male-dominated subject areas. Conversely, though I had often heard that the sciences was often a subject area dominated by men, because I am Brown, my peers and even my family often assumed that I would go into biology and chemistry as these were subject areas that were also dominated by people of colour. Admittedly, I enjoyed the sciences in secondary school, but I did not feel the same passion and emotion for these subject areas as I did with the arts.

I started my undergraduate degree by majoring in History at the University of Ottawa since I had a particular fascination with the European history that I experienced within secondary

school. It is noted that attending an arts program in university was in itself almost a form of protest since I felt like it was expected that I would go into the sciences by the end of secondary school. However, I slowly learned that, while history was and continues to be a personal interest, I was not feeling completely fulfilled in my classroom experiences. After meeting with an advisor, I decided I was going to switch my honours major to English Literature, and as I began to take English literature classes, I again felt that excitement I used to feel when reading Robert Munsch or Dan Brown. It was through my English literature classes that I ultimately learned what attracted me to this subject area: it was the ways in which English literature could capture the complexity of the human condition. Yes, the literature studied at the post-secondary level often had a Western setting and/or was commenting on a particular moment in European history, but because my education had mostly revolved around Western/European history, it felt familiar and, nonetheless, spoke to me. As I progressed within my academic career, I started to notice that most classes were filled with women and very few men, especially in comparison to the Psychology classes I had taken to eventually achieve a minor in Psychology. I also started to notice that I was usually the only person of colour within my English literature classes. My professors and peers never made me feel unwelcomed, but I couldn't help noticing since, outside of my classes, the University of Ottawa campus was quite diverse. I remember reflecting on my academic choices and choosing English Literature as a major and wondered if taking part in these classes sent a message that I somehow supported and/or was comfortable with the sometimes racist ideas, colonial perspectives, and White-centric interpretation of history that some of the literature would convey. However, as I continued to take more specialized English literature classes, I practiced my ability to question and critique the motivations of characters and the overall message that the author was attempting to convey within their story. Being a Brown woman in these classes increasingly felt like a way to push back against the assumptions of my capabilities and interests, but it also allowed me to gain perspectives on Western social history. I was living what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) would call *double consciousness*, which is the ability to know both minoritized and majoritarian perspectives. It was as though the literature I was studying that I developed a snapshot of the ways in which racisms, colonialism, and White idealism were embedded in our way of life as a Canadian. Upon later reflection, physically being in this space and learning these facets of literature felt like the initial steps in decolonizing the literature and history that shaded my way of understanding the world around me, as well as the

ways in which I understood myself within the Canadian social landscape that I have always been a part of.

Though I had grown up in various social contexts and felt as though assumptions had been made about my interests, capabilities, and heritage, it was within adulthood that I had been most questioned on my language abilities. One of the first times was in my 20s when I had the opportunity to experience working in retail. While I would recommend that everyone should experience a retail work environment due to its fast pace, engaging customer interactions, and its impact in learning more about the community in which one lives, this would serve as the first instances where people would publicly question and make assumptions about my language capabilities. I had been working in a luxury French skincare store located in Ottawa, Ontario and had experienced a variety of customers from different areas of the world with different customs, price points, and skincare concerns. I remember having gained my footing in our diverse team and feeling very confident in my ability to engage and connect with customers since I had such positive experiences and feedback from customers. Though most customers were amazing to engage with, we had a few customers that were quite demeaning and impolite, which one learns to manage through learning from first-hand experience. One afternoon, a middle-aged White woman entered the store, and I happily greeted her as I loved to do with every customer; she ignored me, but I thought she may not have heard me. After a few minutes, I approached her to ask if there was anything I could help her find, and she turned to me with a scowl on her face and she started speaking in French. I remorsefully apologized and kindly told her that my French language abilities were limited but I would try my best to help her in any way that I could with the words that I had. She combatively replied, in English, “You speak more than one language, so why can’t you learn French? You must not be Canadian.” Though I had experienced rude behaviour from customers before, I think it is fair to say that I was taken aback; my mind went completely blank since there was a lot to unpack and address in her reply. Why did she assume that I spoke more than one language if I had only spoken a few sentences to her in English? *Because of my skin colour.* I was quite surprised since I was genuinely trying to assist a customer, and my citizenship was questioned because of the perceived language abilities that my skin colour signaled to this person. Conversely, a few years later, I was working a retail position for a telecommunications company in Dieppe, New Brunswick as one of two people of colour on the team, and I had another experience where a customer made assumptions about my language

abilities as well, but with a very different tone and vantage point. As always, I welcomed the customer into the store and asked if there was anything I could do to help him. This customer was a middle-aged White man and was looking for a mobile phone and phone plan. I gladly discussed our options and noticed that he was very focused on me, slightly smiling, and almost examining me, which was somewhat confusing and slightly unsettling, but nothing that I could not work through. While I was getting some paperwork ready for him, he very gently said, "Your English is very good. You don't have an accent at all. Where are you from?" When I answered that I am from Toronto and that English is the only language I speak, he could not believe either statement: he answered by asking "But how could you be born in Canada? You don't speak the language of your people?" From his tone and demeanor, I could tell this customer was genuinely curious about me since it felt like I might be the first Brown person he had ever interacted with. Conversely, I was surprised to meet someone that thought people of colour were only born outside of Canada and that English could not be the only language of a person colour, since this is very much my reality and the reality of many others. And though the attitude of this customer was much more positive than the other experience mentioned above, it made me realize that being in a public-facing position invited unexpected explicit behaviours, assumptions, and expectations about me as a Brown woman that someone would use to frame their understanding of me. Additionally, while I had previously experienced others attempting to categorize me to make sense of who I am within the community in which I live, and while I have personally reflected on the ways in which I fit into my surroundings, these experiences were the first times I had been so explicitly asked to justify my existence, and by people I had no familiarity with. Experiences like these have exemplified to me that the racialization of my skin colour provokes unwarranted assumptions about my Canadian-ness and the ways in which people define what it means to be Canadian, something that I had never questioned since I exist and therefore, my existence proves that someone like me can exist. As Ibrahim (2020) has argued, "our bodies cheat us all the time, what they 'say' is almost always unknown since they "say" things that they do not intend. They say more, or say differently, than they mean to say; something is always in the excess" (p. 9). I had never been so explicitly questioned about my citizenship and language abilities before, nor have I had to justify how and why I belong in a particular space until experiencing moments like these where my body has provoked an external reaction by others.

6.4 Where do I belong?

I feel as though the racializations and assumptions that I have experienced have taught me to question how I contribute to the society in which I live, as well as encouraging me to ask whether or not my contributions and existence within Canadian society are acceptable to those that also are a part of the society in which I live. Within conversations with White people, I have been asked questions about political and social issues regarding people I cannot and should not speak for. For example, I have been asked to comment on the social values of Indian people and on the Muslim religion just because I might look like I might be Indian or Muslim. There have been countless times in which I have been approached and asked, "Where are you from?," and when my answer of "Toronto" is unsatisfactory, I usually receive the follow-up response of "No, where are you really from?" as if my presence within Canada was not natural or definite (Shadd, 2001). It is unfortunate that it is acceptable within our society to approach someone like me and essentially remove them from the Canadian social landscape based on the colour of their skin. The ambiguity of my skin tone, as well as my heritage, is an implicit invitation to be interrogated as to how I have come to exist within Canada, as opposed to accepting that I am as much a part of the social landscape as any of my other Canadian-born peers. By being questioned in this way about my race, attributed to other nations due to my skin tone, and defined based on stereotypical and ill-informed assumptions, I have questioned what it actually means to be Canadian and whether or not I fit within the society in which I have only ever lived. Because I have had to question this, I can only imagine that many other minoritized Canadians have felt the same feelings of ostracization, displacement, and denationalization within a country and community that they call home. It is important to note that the reflection of how I may or may not belong within a space is not based on the validation of others but rather is a response towards how the actions and reactions of others serve as a commentary of the ways in which one's social climate is accepting of the Other. These actions and reactions embolden me to reflexively reflect on how I define and perceive myself, which only furthers my journey in reclaiming myself and my space in moments where my existence seems to challenge a hegemonic social construction of Canada.

6.5 Retrospective Memories of ENG2D

To further reflect on my academic experiences within an Ontario secondary school, I believe it is important to reflect on my personal ENG2D experiences since the memories of this

course are experiences that I have remembered through the completion of this doctoral thesis and serve as a reference point within my conversations with VH. In 2007, I was an Ontario secondary school student in Whitby, Ontario, in my second semester of grade 10, and enrolled in ENG2D. Though there were media and short story units within this course, I specifically remember the larger units of study being George Orwell's (1945) *Animal Farm*, William Shakespeare's (2014) *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the ENG2D Culminating Project, with the latter unit being my favourite of them all. Consisting of six components that accounted for 20% of our final grade, the Culminating Project was designed for students to choose a previously unstudied novel of interest, to analyse the plot, structure, characterization, and themes of the novel, to be able to market the novel to interested clientele. Completed over the course of the semester, this unit was comprised of a Proposal, two sets of Reading Response notes, a Critical Review, a Literary Symbols Portfolio, and a concluding Sales Campaign presentation (see Appendix E to view the assignment handout from my ENG2D class that I have kept). I had chosen Dan Brown's (2000) *Angels & Demons* since I had recently read and loved Brown's (2003) *The Da Vinci Code*, and I thought this unit would be a great reason to continue my submersion into this series of novels. I remember being thrilled for the opportunity to choose the novel for my study. Particularly, I was thrilled that completing this study would happen on my own time, with a novel that I wanted to ready anyway. In retrospect, my chosen novel was far more contemporary than the other literature studied in the course, but was, interestingly, also the most contemporary piece of literature I had studied within secondary school. This unit introduced me to the idea that the study of literature could be outside of the Western canon typically studied within English courses. Also, this unit allowed me to learn that all literature contributes to our understanding of the evolution of English literature, and that there can be autonomy, fluidity, and significance in the ways in which we comprehend and identify with English literature. I was automatically reminded of the memory of this class and this assignment when thinking about the teaching of Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* within an ENG2D classroom. Lansens' novel is also a contemporary novel, and though it was chosen by VH and not by her students, I think that it is interesting that a novel like this is being chosen to be studied within an Ontario secondary school classroom since it would not have typically been included within the course work I experienced during my time in secondary school, unless chosen by the student.

6.6 Chapter Summary

I have utilized this chapter to position my experiences as a person who has experienced the same ENG2D curriculum that impacts the structure of the chosen unit, but I have also provided insights towards the experiences that have shaped me as a researcher and therefore, a co-participant within the research conducted for this thesis. After situating my family's origins, I discuss the varying experiences that I have had in placing myself as a minoritized woman of colour in different contexts within my schooling and within Canadian society. I also examined my experiences with the English language, as well as the ways in which my English language abilities intersect with the assumptions that can be and have been perceived from the colour of my skin. These reflections have caused me to question where I belong within Canadian society, in addition to acknowledging that the intersections that I experienced influence the ways in which I define, perceive, and reclaim myself within spaces where my existence challenges hegemonic norms and social constructions. To further position the lens that informs my research, I also provided an overview of my personal experiences with the ENG2D curriculum. Therefore, this chapter has allowed me to treat my personal narrative as data while providing insights as to the experiences that have shaped the lens used within my analyses of the data presented.

Chapter 7: Analysis

The following chapter explores and examines the themes that have evolved from synthesizing the ENG2D curriculum outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document with the chosen unit that studies Lansens' (2020) novel, *The Mountain Sory*, alongside the vantage points of my positioning as a participant within the research and with the perspectives of VH. By invoking a narrative inquiry methodological framework, this chapter allows me to convey VH's growth and process of "becoming" a teacher (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986), to communicate VH's reflections on her pedagogical choices and practices, and to discuss the ways in which VH's storied experiences shape her personal values and pedagogical perspectives that have influenced the knowledge development of herself and her students.

By way of providing a foundation prior to delving into the chosen unit, literature, VH's perspectives, I first provide a brief overview of VH's ENG2D course and outline the course structure to communicate where the chosen unit fits into the overall structure of the course. To further explore the course structure and to contextualize my reading of the chosen novel, I provide an overview of the chosen unit, the flow of the unit, the assignments completed throughout the unit, and the ways in which student achievement is evaluated throughout the unit. Building on this, I specifically address the chosen novel by providing a summary of the novel, followed by an examination of the explicit and implicit minoritized characters, representations, and themes found within the novel. Upon establishing my reading of the novel, I examine my initial meeting, first interview, and concluding interview with the educator to address VH's experience with the curriculum, the unit, and her personal experiences that influence her pedagogical perspectives and teaching. Therefore, following the disclosure of my own lived experiences within the previous chapter, it is within this chapter that I analyse the chosen unit, Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, and the curriculum through the vantage points of my own lived experiences and of the reflections gathered through VH's perspectives that were communicated to me within the interviews conducted.

7.1 Course Contexts

During a time of curricular change, the English Department within VH's school began to move away from the typical literature taught within secondary schools, such as the works of

Shakespeare, Emily Brontë's (1847) *Wuthering Heights*, William Golding's (1954) *Lord of the Flies*, and Harper Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in order to include literature that is written by a Canadian author, texts that include themes of feminism, and texts that are postmodern. For this reason, these are the facets that were considered by VH within her text selection for her ENG2D course. In collaboration with another educator, VH piloted the implementation of Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, as well as other texts, within her ENG2D course since these texts fulfilled the department's criterion that was to be applied to the selection of course texts. Moreover, this also addresses my guiding research sub-question: how does the educator choose classroom texts, noting any considerations towards minoritized representations and characters? However, though some of the texts chosen for VH's ENG2D course discusses minoritized experiences, VH reflected that in selecting these texts, her focus was on the text's quality and the story's ability to tell a human story, which ultimately allowed these stories to provide representation for diverse backgrounds and peoples.

Prior to delving into the chosen novel, it is important to first contextualize the ENG2D curriculum that is being implemented within the course through reviewing the arrangement of the course itself, as well as the structure of the chosen unit. It is noted that VH structured these units in consideration of her students' diverse cultural backgrounds, which reflects VH's acknowledgement of the curriculum-as-lived as she executes the curriculum-as-planned. VH's curriculum-as-planned approach within this course had a specific focus on the Reading and Literature, as well as the Writing strands within the ENG2D curriculum, though each specific unit also incorporated the strands of Oral Communication and Media Studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). While we do not delve into each unit, it was clear within my discussions with VH that she embraced curriculum-as-implemented when actively teaching her class since it is within those moments that VH could invoke the lived experiences of herself and her students to bridge the gap between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. Therefore, the following sections situate VH's ENG2D course, as well as the facets of the chosen unit. VH's ENG2D was made up of six units: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2017) *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*; the Short Stories Unit; Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*; William Shakespeare's (2009) *The Tempest;* and the Poetry Unit. Therefore, in addition to providing a brief breakdown of each unit, I include my understanding of VH's pedagogical approach to each unit to provide a cohesive perspective of the flow of the course.

***Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*.** The first unit addressed within the course explores Adichie's (2017) *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. Within my initial meeting with VH, she mentioned that started the course with this text to put students in a particular frame of mind so that students can experience a "uniquely human story" where the author is discussing their culture, the author's experiences growing up in Lagos, and the author's experience as a woman within that culture. VH communicated to me that discussing this text within her class had set a precedent in the course for students to empathize and be sensitized to the human experience and contexts to encourage students to be more comfortable with dialoguing in the classroom, while addressing and exploring students' understanding towards the concept of feminism.

The Short Stories Unit. The Short Stories Unit explores Hernando Téllez's (1956) *Lather and Nothing Else*, Jillian Horton's (2022) "The Bicycle" from her memoir *We Are All Perfectly Fine: A Memoir of Love, Medicine and Healing*, Matt Hughes' (1996) *Bearing Up*, Shirley Jackson's (1948) *The Lottery*, and Mona Gardner's (1941) *The Dinner Party*. VH noted that from her experience, students often do not have a solid foundation of knowledge regarding parts of speech and literary devices. Therefore, VH chose to introduce this unit by teaching students these concepts which are at the foundation of the unit but also provides a foundation for student learning within the units to come. VH communicated to me that she picked these stories for the unit simply because these are good stories, while these stories also happen to be written by authors who come from various backgrounds and cultures. By way of showing students that authors often write from experience, this pedagogical choice allowed VH to show students different cultures and histories that have influenced these authors and their work. While stories "coming from diverse backgrounds and diverse peoples" was never the intention for VH, she wanted the stories to meet the criterion of being quality stories that have meaning and communicated stories that students can connect to, which subconsciously meant that these stories would have diverse representation.

***The Mountain Story*.** Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* is the unit that VH and I determined would be the basis of our discussions since it is a novel that has intriguing characters with complex themes that touch upon racialized and minoritized representations that can be deconstructed and examined by the concepts explored within my doctoral thesis (it is noted that further details about the selection of this unit by the educator and myself, as well as the reasoning

behind VH's choice to include this novel within her course's text selection are further discussed in 7.4 Interviews with VH). The overarching motifs of perseverance, sacrifice, courage, and redemption are threaded through the unit to further motivate students to reflect and critically think about the ways in which these concepts drive the human condition. Therefore, after establishing students' foundational knowledge and skills within the first two units, the intention of this unit was to build on students' skills and knowledge as they learned to complete a character analysis, identify literary devices within the novel, address implicit and explicit themes and meanings found within the novel, and to identify and discuss the symbolism found within the novel. The unit concluded with the completion of an in-class five-paragraph essay from a selection of topics about the novel, with included one-on-one support to students throughout the week prior to the writing of the final draft of the essay to ensure that student essays were structured accordingly, followed Modern Language Association (MLA) formatting, and showcased both students' writing skills and their knowledge of the novel (it is noted that a more detailed analysis of the assignments and structuring of the course is discussed in 7.2 The Unit).

The Tempest. William Shakespeare's (2009) *The Tempest* is a play that was examined within VH's course. This unit was structured to expand student skills and knowledge through the analysis of themes and symbolism that are both relevant and relatable to today's society. VH disclosed to me that she structured the unit in the following way: (1) introduce students to the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603) and the influence that this era has had on English media; (2) acknowledge the evolution of English literature by teaching students about Shakespearean terms that have either evolved to be different terms today and/or are no longer used within the English language; and (3) introduce students to the themes of loss and restoration, power, magic and illusion, and colonization that will guide their reading of the play. Through exercises and analyses upon concluding each act, students established their understanding of the play and reflected on Shakespeare's implicit and/or explicit commentaries on the human condition. VH reflected that she also used this play to introduce students to poetry due to the poetic meter of iambic pentameter found within the play.

The Poetry Unit. This unit was taught at the end of VH's ENG2D course. VH briefly discussed this unit with me by indicating that the focus of this unit was to reinforce the skills and concepts learnt throughout the semester. Moreover, if there is enough time at the end of the semester, VH would use her discretion to select one or two pieces of poetry that speak to the

knowledge and skills developed over the semester, with considerations towards the temperament of the class. This unit was implemented to exercise students' ability to identify literary devices, implicit and explicit themes and meanings found within the text, and implicit meanings within the symbolism found within the poetry to then allow students to demonstrate their abilities in creating meaningful reflections about the significance of the text. Therefore, this unit serves as a culmination of the themes explored within the course, as well as the knowledge and skills that students have evolved over the course of the semester.

7.2 The Unit

Within the following sub-section, I discuss the overall unit structure for Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* in VH's ENG2D course, the ways in which VH chose to structure the lessons, the learning goals within the unit, and the assignments and assessments that take place throughout the unit. Therefore, this section provides an overview of curriculum-as-planned that is specific to this unit. Providing an overview of the unit further contextualizes and grounds my reading and analysis of the novel, but also grounds VH's pedagogical perspectives that are explored within the upcoming sections.

Unit Structure. Upon introducing the unit to the students, students were provided with a handout that outlines the skills and knowledge that students have upon entering the unit, the learning goals of the unit, and a set of success criteria that lists the assessments of the unit that are to be completed by the end of the unit. The unit was comprised of 19 lessons that consist of introductory lessons, in-class collaborative reading and discussion, the completion of in-class assignments, and in-class preparation for an in-class essay that concludes the unit. It is noted that in addition to the 15-page per day collaborative reading that was completed in class, which VH describes as *corporate* reading, students were also expected to read 15 pages of the novel per day during the weekends; inclusive of these days of reading, the unit spans about 26 days total.

Lesson Structure. The unit started with two introductory classes where VH introduced the novel, outlined the expectations of students throughout the unit (i.e.: reading 15 pages of the novel per day), and provided an overview of the structure of the novel. It is also within these introductory lessons that VH also introduced the author and the author's experiences/contexts that have influenced the writing of the novel. VH also introduced the setting of the novel since

the environment of the main character is based on the author's travels, but also greatly influences the storyline and character development within the novel.

Outside of the introductory classes, much of the unit was made up of in-class reading that was completed together within the classroom. Within our discussions, VH indicated that she chose to read the novel "corporately" in-class to encourage discussion amongst the class, as well as to encourage critical and reflective thinking regarding the content of the novel. It is through these discussions that both VH and the students could collaboratively substantiate foundational details of the novel, such as the details of the setting, plot, themes, and characters to have analytical and reflective discussions and inquiries as they continued their reading of the novel together and on their own.

During the lessons, VH provided students with in-class time to complete the unit assignments and to prepare for the final component of the unit, which was an in-class essay. Within our discussions, VH expressed that based on her experience, assignments completed during class time ensures that students have the support they need to understand and complete the assignment to best exemplify their skills and knowledge. Details regarding the assignments are discussed in the following sub-section below.

Activities & Assignments. There are several activities and assignments that were submitted over the course of the unit. These assignments were designed to support students' understanding of the novel and also scaffold their knowledge and skills throughout the completion of this novel study. The culmination of this unit was an in-class essay. As noted in the previous sub-section, students were given time in class to complete and submit the activities and assignments of this unit. The following paragraphs provide a chronological overview of the activities and assignments completed by students over the course of the chosen unit.

As an introductory activity to the unit, VH had the class complete a Survival Test. This activity asked students to imagine that they are lost in the wilderness and to reflect on the actions they may take while in a challenging environment. This survival activity allowed students to get into the mindset of some of the significant characters that they will experience within their reading of the novel and therefore, sets the tone of the forthcoming novel study.

The Implicit and Explicit Analysis Assignment tasked students with analysing two quotes chosen from a list provided by VH and/or selected by the student to demonstrate their understanding of both the implicit and explicit meanings of the quotes. Students were also

expected to invoke MLA formatting through embedded citations and a reference list page. This assignment also accompanied a discussion about how to properly embed quotes when discussing implicit and explicit analyses within academic writing with the use of signal phrases. Within this assignment, students were evaluated on: (1) their ability to contextualize and paraphrase the chosen quotations within their explicit analysis; (2) their ability to make connections to the theme, symbolism, character development, and plot; (3) their ability to correctly format and embed citations in MLA format; (4) their ability to provide an accurate and complete reference list within MLA format; (5) their ability to provide an analysis that is free from spelling, grammatical, and sentence structure errors; and (6) their ability to utilize academic diction within their writing. This assignment was provided to students about a week and a half before it was expected to be submitted to allow students to have ample time to complete it during class time and as they collaboratively read the novel in class.

Accompanying a discussion of the plot, setting, and characters, the Setting and Weather Assignment explored the ways in which the setting and weather have a reflexive relationship with the novel's characters through mirroring, complimenting, and/or commenting on character emotions and/or thoughts. The setting and weather equally influence the themes found within the novel. It is through this assignment that the students were introduced to the literary device of pathetic fallacy, which is the assigning of human emotions to a non-human entity, such as the weather. Therefore, this assignment highlighted to students that the weather within the novel plays a significant role in mirroring the emotions and unrest of the novel's characters, and that the pathetic fallacy within the novel provides implicit meaning to the characters and themes of the novel. It is noted that this assignment was assigned to students within the first few days of the start of the unit, which also allowed students to confirm a foundational understanding of the settings and surroundings that the characters of the novel must navigate as the novel progresses; this also allowed VH to assess if there were any gaps within students' knowledge of the novel and/or if there were any clarifications of the novel that needed to be made. This assignment was expected to be completed in class and to be submitted by the end of the class in which it was provided.

The Character Analysis Assignment allowed students to review seven influential characters of the novel. At this point in reading the novel, students had sufficiently read about the novel's most significant characters and had a better understanding of the ways in which these

characters contribute to the plot of the novel. Within this assignment, students were asked to describe the characters and their personalities, note any conflicts and challenges that the characters experienced up until this point in the novel, list character quotations and interactions that they believe were of significance, and note any development, growth, and/or change that the characters had experienced thus far within the novel. This assignment allowed students to critically think about the ways in which these characters actively contribute to the development of the novel, encouraged students to consciously reflect on the character's development as the novel progresses, and provided students with the opportunity to learn how to utilize quotations that support their understanding of these characters. Additionally, this assignment allowed VH to assess students' ability to analyse the significant characters of the novel and students' ability to support their analysis with references to the novel. This assignment was expected to be completed in class and to be submitted by the end of the class in which it was provided.

About halfway through the unit, students were provided with a Theme Review Handout to complete in class. Within this activity, VH and the students worked together to collectively complete the handout as a review of the themes as they unfold. Beginning with a Word Cloud Activity, the class invoked different words that spoke to the themes that the class had experienced thus far in the reading of the novel as a way of brainstorming key ideas and making connections between the themes. The next section of the handout asked students to reflect on what they believe the characters have learnt, to acknowledge the ways in which the characters have grown and/or changed, and to question why the characters may have chosen to act in a particular way. The last section of the handout lists five themes seen throughout the novel. Students were expected to explain each theme and to provide a quotation that supports their explanation of the theme. The purpose of this activity was to help frame the novel for the students, and since this activity is completed as students read the novel, students are able to reflexively review how the themes and characters of the novel evolve as they progress through the novel.

The In-Class Essay Assignment and Test was a summative assessment that allowed students to demonstrate their ability to write an essay that exemplified students' ability to develop a thesis and develop supporting arguments with textual support. The in-class essay was to be completed independently, and at the end of the unit during a 70-minute period of class time. Essay topics, assignment expectations, and the assignment rubric were provided to students

about four weeks prior to completing the essay in class to allow for ample time for students to prepare both on their own time and with the support of VH. With the assignment handout, students were also provided with additional resources to help support their preparation of writing the in-class essay, such as a handout about linking words and a handout about transition words, both of which were aspects that were expected to be included in the writing of the students' in-class essay as per the rubric provided to the students. In addition to essay exemplars that were reviewed in class, VH also provided students with an In-Class Essay Planning Sheet handout that was meant to further support students' preparation in writing the essay. Following the distribution of the essay topics, the students had four in-class sessions to prepare their in-class essay and to complete the first paragraph of their essay, which was followed by a one-on-one conference with VH to review the completed paragraph and a completed In-Class Essay Planning Sheet to ensure that students were prepared and on track for the completion of the in-class essay test. Outside of their time to prepare within class, students were encouraged to continue preparing and planning at home during their own time as well. When the students sat to write the in-class essay, the students were expected to have already outlined the structure of their essay, their thesis, supporting points, examples from the novel, and explanations that support those examples to ensure that the time used to write the essay in class was used thoughtfully, concisely, and efficiently.

Following the completion of the in-class essay, the Metacognition/Reflection Assignment allowed students to utilize various forms of media to reflect on their personal opinions, knowledge, and feelings regarding the representations that these forms of media convey in relation to the novel. Students were provided with time in class to complete the assignment and the assignment was expected to be handed in within two days. Task 1(a) within this assignment asked students to review several different book covers of Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* that were presented in class and to reflect on what these book covers may reveal about the novel, which cover they like the most, the differences between the book covers, and the ways in which they would personally design the book cover for this novel if they were to be designing it themselves. Task 1(b) of the assignment asked students to refer to three different review articles about the novel to make notes on each article, to reflect on whether they agreed or not with the author's assessment, to determine if each critique of the novel is fair, and based on the reading of each article, whether the student was more or less likely to read the novel. Task 2 of the

assignment asked students to reflect on the characters of the novel to determine, within the context of a film adaptation of the novel, who they would cast within each role, what they would change within the film adaptation, and who they would select as the director of the film, and their reasonings. Based on the book cover of the novel that students have on hand in class, Task 3 of the assignment asked students to reflect on who the target audience of the novel is based on the book cover, if they believed that the book cover is an accurate representation of the book, and what they would change about the book cover and why. This assignment allowed students to take a media studies approach to analysing the novel, as well as providing students with the opportunity to further reflect on the depictions of humanity and the character struggles that are portrayed throughout the novel.

The last assessment was the Exploring Voice Assignment. Here, students were invited to view the world through a different lens in order to appreciate different lived experiences and perspectives within a multifaceted society, and to consider how these lived experiences can shape the ways in which we experience the world around us. Because the novel has a first-person narrator, the reader is positioned to understand the experiences of the characters through the lens of the narrator; therefore, this assignment allowed students to continue with this vantage point by practicing their abilities of reading and listening to the experiences of others to gather an understanding of how these experiences shaped the narrator. Using a jigsaw approach, students were assigned a home group where each student within the group took a turn moving into an expert group to gather information about a resource, and to explore diverse perspectives and voices within that resource. Each student then returned to their home group to disseminate information and their reflections of what they learned in the expert group; this was completed in two rounds per group. While in the expert groups, students had 20 minutes to read or watch the resource and to take notes within the expert group; after 20 minutes, students returned to their home groups to communicate their reflections and the meaning(s) they have created from what they have just read or viewed. Students were expected to complete a handout where they reviewed the content within the selected piece, they commented on the form and style of the piece they reviewed, they reflected on the ways in which the piece resonated with the student, and they noted which another piece they would like to review. As outlined in a rubric provided to students for this assignment, students were graded on their ability to effectively identify media conventions, their ability to effectively identify media techniques, the ways in which they create

meaning, their ability to identify the perspectives and/or biases in media texts, and their comments and/or questions they may raise about beliefs, values, and identity.

7.3 The Novel

Based on my experiences with the Ontario secondary school curriculum, as both a student and with an academic background in education, I had not encountered many instances where recent literature was selected within the English curriculum. Therefore, within my first interview with VH, we discussed the ways in which Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* became a part of the list of texts discussed within her ENG2D course. VH communicated to me that upon reading the novel for the first time, she appreciated that "There's a depth to [the novel] that I didn't give [the author] credit for" upon her initial reading of the novel. Having now read and reflected on the novel myself, I feel similarly to VH. Lansens' (2020) novel encapsulates feelings, characters, representations, and themes that speak to an array of human experiences but also is a novel that positions minoritized voices and experiences. Therefore, the following sub-section frames the chosen novel as a curriculum artifact in which I conduct an analysis in relation to the ENG2D curriculum, and is scaffolded upon by my interviews with VH.

The first part of this sub-section provides a summary of the novel before delving into the analysis of explicit and implicit minoritized characters, representations, and themes that provide an undercurrent within the novel that reflects the complexity of the human condition. This sub-section also helps to give nuance to answering my research question: how does the educator choose classroom texts, noting any considerations towards minoritized representations and characters? Additionally, this sub-section also allows me to directly answer my research question that is directly related to the teaching of this novel: who are the minoritized characters discussed within the chosen text and how are they framed?

7.3.1 Summary of the Novel

Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* is a story about survival within the elements, one's survival through the more challenging moments in one's life, and the ways in which the past can influence resilience. The novel is written from the point of view of Wilfred (Wolf) Truly, the main protagonist of the novel, to his son, Daniel, a freshman at Indiana State University. The novel begins with a personal letter to Daniel from Wolf, introducing Daniel to Wolf's personal

survival story that has shaped him to be the man and father that he has become, ultimately communicating to both Daniel and the reader that within this story, “there will be sway” (Lansens, 2020, p. 3) within one’s life. The novel is structured by seven distinct sections following this letter from Wolf to Daniel. Therefore, these sections also support the structure the following summary.

Before. Originally from Mercury, Michigan, Wolf’s mother, Glory, was killed in front of him when he was four years old and he was then raised by his father, Frankie, who became an unemployed, alcoholic, womanizing gambler upon the death of his wife who he loved dearly. When Wolf was 13 years old, Frankie decided to move them both to Santa Sophia, California to be closer to Frankie’s sister, Kriket, and her family. However, this move resulted in them living with his Aunt Kriket within Verdi Village, a mobile-home development locally known as Tin Town due to its “haphazard crust of shacks and shanties, shelter for economic refugees, the mentally ill, and bikers” (Lansens, 2020, p. 11). This was a dysfunctional environment that Wolf never truly identified with.

Day One. The novel jumps ahead to Wolf’s 18th birthday, the day in which he decides to jump from Angel’s Peak, a spot in the fictional Rendezvous Mountains overlooking Palm Springs, to end his life. With his father now in prison due to committing vehicular homicide, Wolf feels truly alone. Once at Desert Station, waiting to take a tram up to Mountain Station, Wolf notices three women who he later learns to be Nola Devine, Vonn Devine, and Bridget Devine. After parting ways after reaching to the top of the mountain, Wolf sets off to find Angel’s Peak, an area on the mountain that he would often visit with his best friend, Byrd, a young Indigenous man that Wolf befriends shortly after moving to Santa Sophia.

Through retrospective reflections, Wolf’s narration discloses that Wolf and Byrd’s relationship evolve through their hikes within the mountains and their relationship begins to resemble a brotherhood and connection that Wolf seems to never have experienced before. However, shortly before Wolf’s 18th birthday, Wolf and Byrd are involved in a near-death ATV accident that sends Byrd into a coma. The guilt from this accident, the lack of emotional and familial support, and the loss of the friend he knew had resulted in Wolf’s decision to take his life on the anniversary of Byrd’s accident.

Upon hiking to Angel’s Peak, Wolf again runs into Nola, Vonn, and Bridget who were looking for Secret Lake to celebrate Nola’s wedding anniversary, though her husband was

recently deceased, and had brought along her daughter, Bridget, and her granddaughter (Bridget's daughter), Vonn. Once convinced by Nola, Wolf agrees to become the Devine's mountain guide in finding Secret Lake due to his experience with hiking the mountain with Byrd. Reflecting on his memories with Byrd while guiding the Devines inadvertently gives Wolf a reason to live and delays his intentions to take his own life. However, as the group continues hiking the mountain, the weather begins to change rapidly and results in them seeking shelter for the night. In their search for shelter, the group finds themselves standing on some unsteady rocks that fall away beneath their feet into Devil's Canyon. This results in some minor cuts on Vonn, the loss of Bridget's sports bag containing some water and granola bars, and Nola breaking her wrist, which they resourcefully splint and wrap to stop the resulting bleeding. After finding shelter within a cave upon falling into Devil's Canyon, Wolf reflects on his experiences that have brought him to this moment on the mountain and witnesses the connections and relationships between the three Devines, the resentment that Vonn has towards Bridget, Bridget's desperation to be taken seriously, and the sharing of their regrets.

Day Two. Throughout the night, Nola's wrist continues to deteriorate, and Wolf wakes up to Nola looking quite pale. Wolf realizes that they need to climb out of Devil's Canyon to continue their journey and draws upon his memories with Byrd on the mountain to guide the Devines to safety. As Wolf and the Devines move through the wilderness, Wolf begins to develop an understanding of each woman's character and personality. Wolf notices that Vonn is experiencing nausea, wearing flip-flops, has a strained relationship with her mother, did not want to come up to the mountain at all, and seemed familiar, as if Wolf had seen her in passing around Tin Town before. Bridget has a bubbly personality, tries to keep a positive outlook throughout the ordeal, is somewhat of a people-pleaser, and persistently continues to look for food and for rescue in collaboration with Wolf. Impacted most by the elements, Nola is the most spiritual and tries to bring everyone together through her emotional strength, though Wolf notices that her health is starting to fail as she becomes increasingly frail.

As Bridget and Vonn search for their lost bag, Wolf attempts to climb out of Devil's Canyon to further assess the area. During one of his attempts, Wolf notices that Nola is no longer humming as she once was and returns to find her sitting in a pool of her own blood. Wolf notes Nola's weak pulse, Bridget and Vonn return when they hear Wolf yelling for them, and they unwrap Nola's wrist to find that it is severely infected. Wolf draws upon the wilderness

knowledge he developed with Byrd and remembers sterasote, a plant that used by Indigenous peoples due to its healing properties. Using their sense of smell to locate the plant, Wolf and Bridget gather the sterasote leaves and stems, grind them down using large rocks to make a paste. They give the paste to Vonn to apply to Nola's arm who wraps it with a brassiere, though it is obvious to everyone that Nola urgently needs to see a doctor. Wolf senses that it will rain that night, which is a welcomed source of water, and they again use the cave for shelter. That night, once Bridget and Nola are asleep, Vonn and Wolf converse and get to know each other. In addition to being the same age, both Vonn and Wolf have a single parent that they resent, which is something that Wolf identifies with when speaking with Vonn. As the night becomes colder and Vonn's toes start to freeze, Wolf warms her toes, resulting in an intimate moment where "[they] watched each other in the darkness, and shared in those strange moments, one of the greatest, strangest intimacies of [his] existence" (Lansens, 2020, p. 198), though their moment was interrupted by hungry coyotes looking for food. Once Bridget awakes and the coyotes are scared away, they all notice that Nola is at her weakest and unable to awaken, though still alive.

Day Three. Wolf wakes up to their third day on the mountain after dreaming of his mother and Byrd, which marks the beginning of Wolf's hallucinations on the mountain. Wolf also wakes to find that the swelling of Nola's arm has gone down, she no longer has a fever, and she seems to be in much better spirits. While Bridget and Nola are optimistic that there will be people searching for them, Wolf becomes more proactive as he concludes that they need to find a way out of the literal and figurative hole in which they find themselves. Through the hunger pains, Vonn and Wolf search the area for a fibrous plant that they could fashion into a rope, and it is during this time that Wolf communicates admiration for Vonn's bravery in changing Nola's dressing. However, moments later, Wolf discovers a hidden half-eaten granola bar that survived their fall. Vonn admits to having secretly eaten half of the granola bar on the first night even though she felt like she should not, but ultimately, her fear of dying had driven her into eating it. Though Wolf was angry that Vonn had hidden this from him, he forgives her but then continues to consume the other half of the granola bar. Having not eaten anything in three days, Wolf begins to cry "…and for the first and only time since my mother died, a beautiful woman [Vonn] took me in her arms and rocked me like a child" (Lansens, 2020, p. 247).

Upon returning to Bridget and Nola, a wave of shame swallows Wolf due to eating the granola bar, but he acknowledges that this shame is something that motivates his need to redeem

himself. However, Bridget notices that Wolf and Vonn are behaving oddly, and Vonn and Wolf both admit to finding a granola bar and eating it. After a moment of disbelief from Bridget and Nola, Wolf encourages both these women to finish the little water that they had collected. Bridget had a small sip of water before Vonn and Wolf, and then Nola takes a sip, as if to indicate that Bridget and Nola forgive Vonn and Wolf. However, Nola indicates that "'Now you [Vonn and Wolf] only have to forgive yourselves'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 250) since their actions would be weighing most on their own consciouses.

Hearing coyotes nearby and motivated to ensure that they all survive, Wolf confides in the women about the dreams he had of his mother and Bryd, and that these dreams have communicated to him the direction in which they should go. He had dreamt that his mother was standing on a fallen pine tree that could be used as a bridge over a crevice and that Byrd had told him to look for a pine tree as this would be the direction to Mountain Station. The women were taken aback and took some time to discuss if this option was something that they should attempt. Realizing that they might be out of time and options, they decide to use the nearby fallen pine as a bridge. Vonn went first, followed by Wolf who also carried Nola across. When it was Bridget's turn, they thought they had heard a helicopter, though instead they were met with a severe rainstorm that washed their fallen pine bridge away. With Bridget stranded on the other side of the crevice, Wolf tries to throw a canteen over to Bridget to collect water, though Bridget is unable to secure the canteen as it fell away into the crevice. The rain stops, Nola is now severely shivering, and as they were trying to collect and consume as much water as they could, they notice that Bridget was no longer on the other side of the crevice. However, with Wolf's focus on getting Nola to a doctor, Wolf leaves Vonn with Nola to scout the area, making it to the top of a slope, gaining a better idea as to their proximity to the Mountain Station, and seeing a lone pine tree that Byrd had shown him in his dream the night before. Still equipped with flip-flops, Vonn joins Wolf at the top of the slope. Wolf gives her his shoes since he felt more accustomed to the cold, and there they see Bridget reappear on the other side of the crevice with a wolf appearing behind her. While the others urge her not to move or run, Bridget cannot help herself and runs anyway, leaping across the crevice, and successfully landing. With Bridget and Nola joining Vonn and Wolf at the top of the slope, the group continue their journey. Nola begins to deteriorate once again and begins to feel weak from hunger, which emboldens Bridget who then tries to attack Wolf for eating the granola bar and believing that he made Vonn eat it too. This

results in Vonn admitting that no one made her eat the granola bar and that the only reason she ate it is because she is pregnant and is within her first trimester of the pregnancy, hence her nausea. With vultures circling nearby, Wolf motivates the women to keep moving, but night falls as they huddle beside a boulder. As the night turns colder, the women fall asleep as Wolf stays awake to keep watch for an animal that they hear circling them.

Day Four. The group survives the night, though they are all severely hungry, Nola's pulse has weakened significantly, and Vonn has begun to cramp and bleed due to the impact the elements are having on her pregnancy. The group shifts in and out of sleep throughout the day, but as it begins to snow, Wolf guides the women to find shelter. As they move further on their journey, they come upon a dead man, who they later learn was Pedro Rodriguez, a man who had gotten lost three months prior while trying to hike the Pacific Crest Trail alone. Though the Pedro's corpse no longer has legs due to scavengers, Wolf is able to find the body's single boot nearby and Vonn is able to find a pink backpack containing a hunting knife, an empty canteen, hot sauce, and twenty mints that they evenly divided amongst the group to be eaten right away.

Wolf and the Devines keep moving through the wilderness, and soon Bridget hears running water. Once they find the dripping stream of water over some rocks and they take turns drinking the water, the vultures once again start to close in on the group, sensing the group's closeness to death. With quick thinking, Wolf uses Nola's soiled bandages as a deterrent by soaking them in hot sauce and throwing them away from the group. Once the vultures taste the bandages and fly away, the group redresses Nola's wound with new bandages and waits for their canteen to fill with water from the dripping stream. The group is then met with a rattle snake. Wolf warns Bridget not to touch it, but she grabs the snake anyway which results in the snake biting Vonn's upper arm. In shock, Vonn faints and Wolf remembers through his time with Byrd that they need to keep the bite below her heart in the event that the snake released venom through its bite. In communicating the importance for the group to continue along the mountain, Wolf takes his boots back from Vonn so that he is equipped to carry her as the group continues their trek. Wolf and Bridget also dress Vonn's wound with sterasote in case it will help. As the sun begins to set on their fourth day, the group finds shelter and Nola instructs Wolf that in the event of her death, that they should eat her to survive like the Andes survivors had done.

Day Five. Wolf wakes to Nola asking him for the hunting knife to end her life, but Wolf reassures her that they are going to make it out alive, though Wolf also notes that Vonn has a

faint pulse and is slowly fading. Noticing that the air feels different, and smells of water, Bridget and Wolf decide to venture up a slope to look around for any possible source of water. To their astonishment, they find Corazon Falls, a remote body of water that very few people have had the chance to see. As they returned to their shelter, Bridget and Wolf look for any possible way to follow the water as this would increase the chances of running into other people. Bridget finds a ledge that could possibly lead down to the waterfall, but Wolf notes that even if he was able to get down, it would be impossible for him to cross a gap between the two rocks. Wolf and Bridget return to bring Nola to view the beauty of the falls. As they watch the water, Bridget notices something moving below; it is someone moving about with an orange vest – Mountain Rescue. They scream for help, jump up and down, and wave their arms to bring attention to themselves, but Mountain Rescue are too far away to notice them. At this moment, Vonn begins to have a seizure. Now past desperation, Wolf screams, and it catches the attention of one of the rescuers. The rescuer could not quite see them, so Bridget attempts to throw the pink backpack filled with rocks into the water below to get the rescuers' attention. However, due to being quite weak, Bridget could not throw the bag as far as necessary to reach the bottom and it snags on a manzanita plant. Looking back at Vonn and seeing her child laying on the ground unconscious, Bridget runs off the edge of the ridge, landing on the bottom, and ultimately sacrifices her life to gain the attention of the rescuers below, which it does. Wolf, Vonn, and Nola are then rescued by helicopter, though the rescue itself was a blur to Wolf.

After. Wolf awakens in the hospital, and Nola is at his door. Nola updates Wolf on Vonn, who is doing well and Vonn's baby has also survived. However, Nola tells Wolf that Vonn has not asked for her mother as yet, nor does she remember any of the significant moments from when they were lost in the mountains. Wolf learns that it is Byrd's relatives that were searching for them, with the search group being led by Byrd's cousin, Harley. Byrd then enters the hospital room. The reader learns that during his recovery while Wolf was on the mountain, Byrd spoke his first words since the accident, which were "'Wolf'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 345). This prompted Harley and Byrd to go to Wolf's apartment where they noticed that Wolf had left his backpack at home, something that he would usually bring with him to hike the mountain, resulting in the dispatch of Mountain Rescue. After Wolf's visitors leave, Vonn is ready to talk with Wolf since she has several questions about what had happened on the mountain but was most concerned about the whereabouts of her mother. Wolf disclosed to her that her mother had died on the

mountain, which shocked Vonn. Vonn chooses not to talk about the mountain anymore since she did not want to remember. Vonn then develops complications and spends the rest of her pregnancy in the hospital. It was during this time that Wolf notices a change in the ways in which she would talk about her mother since she would now talk about positive family moments and lovingly referred to her mother as if "[Vonn] completely rewritten the story of their difficult past" (Lansens, 2020, p. 349).

Wolf is eventually contacted by his father after being rescued off the mountain and he visits Frankie in prison for the first time in several months. Frankie is most curious about Wolf's journey on the mountain and what it felt like to be famous since he had seen Wolf's picture in the newspaper. Wolf had refused media interviews about his experience, and being the opportunistic person that Frankie is, Frankie could not understand why Wolf was not capitalizing on the fame he could have through selling his story. Frankie unsuccessfully tries to convince Wolf to give him some information that he could give to an agent. Once Wolf refuses, Frankie returns to his prison cell, seemingly disappointed that he could not get the information he was hoping to receive, likely to capitalize on his son himself.

It is disclosed to the reader that Daniel was the baby born from Vonn's pregnancy. The day that Daniel was born, and while Vonn slept, Wolf floated the idea of all of them moving to Michigan to be with Nola, though Nola deduced that Wolf wanted to move to keep Daniel away from whoever might be his biological father. Assuming that it was someone from Tin Town, Nola began to tell Wolf the details she knew regarding Daniel's biological father. Upon hearing Nola's description, he realizes that Daniel's biological father was none other than Wolf's own father, Frankie, thus making Daniel Wolf's biological half-brother.

The novel closes with the final sections of Wolf's letter to Daniel. Wolf apologizes for being the source of Daniel's confusion but justifies that he waited this long to tell Daniel the truth since no one had questioned Daniel's paternity, nor did Wolf want Daniel growing up with a father that was in prison. Though Wolf had wanted to tell Daniel about the mountain countless times, he felt that they would both be ready when Daniel was older. Wolf notes that he had said that he would never return to the mountain since the rescue, but upon disclosing the story to Daniel, Wolf decides that he must go back and would like Daniel to join him.

7.3.2 Explicit & Implicit Minoritized Characters

Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* is a novel that has an array of characters that have different personalities, but also different lived experiences that shape their actions, perspectives, and dialogue. In relation to *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, the analysis of the explicit and implicit minoritized characters from the novel directly speak to the Reading and Literature Studies strand within the ENG2D curriculum since both the overall and specific expectations within this strand support the literary analysis needed to discuss the facets of these characters (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The overall expectation of *Reading for Meaning* within this strand has the goal of preparing students to be able to "read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 73). This is emphasized within the specific expectations which outlines the skills that students will be able to achieve by the end of the course. For example, students are expected to extend their understanding of texts "by making appropriate connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 74). Students are also expected to learn how to critically analyse texts to "identify and analyse the perspectives and/or biases evident in texts, including increasingly complex texts, and comment on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 74).

Therefore, in addition to noting the guidance found within the ENG2D Reading and Literature Studies strand of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, I draw from postcolonialism, CRT, and anti-racist frameworks to discuss the characters of Wolf, Byrd, Vonn, Nola, and Frankie in the following sub-section. I chose to analyse these characters since my reading of these characters, as stand-alone characters and within the moments that they may interact with each other, significantly impact the reading of the novel. Additionally, I chose to analyse these characters since they explicitly and implicitly communicate minoritized and racialized experiences and perspectives that are invoked in one's reading of the novel. The following section provides an analysis of the minoritized and/or racialized voices and representations that these characters portray within the reading of the literature, which can ultimately influence the resulting discourse and teaching of the novel. Therefore, my close reading of the characters reflected in the following sub-section

allows me to answer my research question: Who are the minoritized characters discussed within the chosen text and how are they framed?

Wolf Truly. Wolf discloses to the reader that his mother's family is from England and that his father's family's heritage is more eclectic. Frankie's family name used to be Trulino, which Wolf's paternal great-grandfather changed to Truly in the 1930s to sound more American, while Frankie's mother's side of the family are French Canadian and Cree. However, the reader has a very limited description of Wolf, and Wolf himself does not self-identify with his heritage within the novel other than in one moment where he finds himself barefoot when his flip-flops break while he is in town. As his bare feet touch the ground, Wolf remembers that, according to his father, he is "one-sixteenth Cree. I began to navigate over the hot ground with fresh purpose, calling forth my thimbleful of Indian blood" (Lansens, 2020, p. 113), thus trying to draw strength from a heritage that he does not otherwise express an understanding or connection to. Additionally, other characters within the novel do not question or label Wolf as belonging to a particular racial and/or cultural background. For these reasons, I did not explicitly associate him with any racialized experiences and/or representations within my reading of the novel.

Conversely, Wolf's minoritized experiences stem from his socioeconomic experiences, as well as from the traumatic life events that are a part of his personal history. After witnessing his mother's murder at a young age and being left with an alcoholic father with a gambling disorder, Wolf was provided with an environment that did not help to support his interests or curiosities and instead, lacked consistency and often reflected corrupt values. For example, Wolf and his father originally lived in a less desirable area in Mercury, Michigan, but during this time, Frankie would send Wolf to the local library as a form of free childcare, where Wolf developed a love of books, and also where Wolf would indulge in treats from the local seniors meeting. Though Wolf had limited opportunities within this town, the library was a space that would support his learning and curiosities and was also a safe space for him. However, Frankie then uproots them to move to the mobile home development of Verdi Village (Tin Town), where Wolf is ultimately abandoned by Frankie, and where he lived in fear of his abusive cousin, Yago, while living in poverty and squalor.

After Frankie was arrested for vehicular homicide, Wolf experiences another level of abandonment as his last living parent has left him to fend for himself. As his character evolves throughout the novel, it becomes increasingly evident that Wolf is trying to individuate from his

family because of the social experiences and traumas that he has had to endure. At a young age, Wolf embraces his individuality through play by proudly exclaiming "'I am…ME,'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 7), to which his father responds by calling him arrogant, though Wolf could not tell if his father was encouraging, scolding, or mocking him. Though he strives to differentiate from characters like his father, and from the trauma that has shaped his life experiences, Wolf's character attempts to understand the world through the eyes of others, which ultimately influences the ways in which he develops his own understanding of the world around him. For example, when Wolf first sees Vonn, after acknowledging her beauty, her physicality, and clothing, Wolf states that "Frankie would have described Vonn as exotic, the way people do when they're not sure about a person's ethnicity" (Lansens, 2020, p. 13). Wolf then goes on to guess Vonn's possible racial compositions. By way of trying to understand this new person, Wolf reverts to trying to describe her as he imagines his father would in order to try to make sense of her racial ambiguity. Though sprinkled throughout the novel, it is through moments like this where the reader has glimpses of Wolf testing his understanding of the world against the dialogue of his father, the values that his father has taught him, and Wolf's own limited experience of interacting with others outside the dysfunctionality that he has come to accept.

Byrd. The reader experiences the character of Byrd through Wolf's narration, since it is through Wolf's recollection of Byrd while lost on the mountain that we get to know Byrd's character. When Wolf is reminiscing on the first time he meets Byrd, Wolf acknowledges that "We might have been brothers or at least cousins. The bridge of his nose was slightly broader, his hair darker and thicker, his eyes black, his complexion olive. The differences were defining ones, for I guessed he was Native American straight off and he did not guess so of me" (Lansens, 2020, p. 75). Wolf and Byrd become best friends, and as the novel progresses, the reader develops an understanding that Wolf highly respects Byrd's heritage, though his references to Byrd's Indigenous ancestry often lacks humility and nuance. For example, Wolf reflects on a conversation with Byrd where Byrd discusses his cousin wanting to teach him the cultural significance about the flora and fauna of the mountain, to which Wolf replies, "'Don't you want to learn all that Native American stuff? I would. I *do*,'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 121). This exchange exemplifies that Wolf himself was craving the exchange of this knowledge, but also the relationship with a mentor who would be able to provide this kind of knowledge. However, while Wolf communicates that he values the Indigenous knowledge that he wants to learn, his

words do not adequately reflect his value and respect of this knowledge since the ways in which he discusses Indigenous knowledge with Bird lacks the respectful language and nuance that would otherwise encapsulate this. Conversely, Byrd responds to this by stating "'When I was younger I did and then… I don't know… It's not that I don't want to know.' He thought for a moment. 'Sometimes a guy wants to feel like he *learned* something without being *taught*'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 121), thus reflecting Byrd's desire to learn this knowledge, but through reclaiming it by his own volition.

In another moment, Wolf tries to convince Byrd to drink some red weed tea to experience hallucinations together as a rite of passage and to celebrate their birthdays. While they were preparing the tea, Wolf asks Byrd, "'You've ever wondered about what it was like for your ancestors to perform their rite of passage? What kind of Indian are you? Even I've thought of that. Wondered what they saw… how it felt…'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 210). Byrd responds by saying "'Might be cool, I guess'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 210) and both characters then proceed in trying to make the hallucinogenic concoction. Within this exchange, it feels as though Wolf is baiting Byrd to try something that is relatively dangerous by questioning Byrd's Indigenous identity. Wolf acknowledges that he "seduced [Byrd with] the possibility of a spiritual journey in some animal realm" (Lansens, 2020, p. 211), while also admitting that he selfishly "didn't care about my friend finding his spirit" (Lansens, 2020, p. 211) since Wolf had his own motivations and curiosities for drinking this tea. However, it is in moments like these where the reader has glimpses of Byrd being drawn to his Indigenous culture, while also being held as a keeper of Indigenous knowledge through Wolf's perception of him. From the perspective of the reader, the ways in which Wolf references Byrd's Indigenous teachings and ancestry often lacks nuance, though the reader can also tell that Wolf's questions and curiosities stem from his respect for Byrd's lived experiences and knowledge. It is also noted that within Wolf's narration, Byrd does not take offence to ways in which Wolf speaks to him. However, through Wolf's narration, the reader can notice that Byrd is in the process of learning about his culture and histories himself, does not have all the answers, and is learning along with Wolf. Therefore, Byrd does not define himself by his Indigenousness, but his Indigeneity strongly contributes to the ways in which others that surround him define and understand Byrd's character.

Vonn Devine. Through Wolf's perspectives, our understanding of Vonn's character begins with her physicality, but as the relationship between both characters evolve, we learn the

complexities behind Vonn's behaviours and attitudes. The reader first notes Vonn as a racially minoritized character since Wolf's first mention of Vonn was that "She was beautiful, with black hair and dark skin, sharp cheek bones and full lips" (Lansens, 2020, p. 13). This acknowledgment of Vonn is then followed by Wolf stating that his father "would have described Vonn as exotic… I guessed the girl was biracial-Caucasian and Latina, or Caucasian and African American, or Latina and African American." (Lansens, 2020, p. 13). Though his guesses and/or assumptions about Vonn's race does not impact the ways in which Wolf perceives Vonn's abilities or experiences, it does create an aspect of intrigue that draws him to someone who he is attempting to classify and understand.

Once lost in the wilderness, the reader develops an understanding of Vonn's personality through her interactions with Bridget, Nola, and Wolf. Within her interactions with Bridget, Vonn displays resentment and negativity towards Bridget through taking any opportunity to communicate doubt in Bridget's abilities, voicing criticisms towards the types of romantic partners that Bridget has chosen, feeling disconnected from Bridget and her thinking as though they both "'live in completely different worlds'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 185), and expressing pessimism towards Bridget's positivity regarding their rescue. Additionally, Vonn would refer to Bridget by her first name, and it is not until the end of the novel after Bridget's death, that Vonn refers to Bridget as "'my mom' or 'Mama'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 349). Conversely, the reader develops an understanding that Vonn has a warmer relationship with her grandmother since we know that she lovingly refers to Nola as *Mim*, she has been taking care of Nola since her grandfather's death, and shows an array of care and patience towards her grandmother throughout their journey in the wilderness that Vonn does not show towards her own mother. Within her interactions with Wolf and through Wolf's perception, the reader experiences Vonn's resilience in the more challenging moments within the wilderness, her authentic personality, and her vulnerabilities as a profound sense of trust and emotions develop between the two characters. It is through Wolf's lens that the reader experiences the complexity of Vonn's character, allowing the reader to develop an understanding that she is so much more than Wolf's initial observation of being a "dark-skinned girl" (Lansens, 2020, p. 16). It is through Vonn's varied lived experiences and multifaceted relationships that she has with those around her and with herself that support her character growth in the more challenging moments presented within the novel.

Nola Devine. Nola's character represents a more mature, consistent, and experienced personality compared to the other characters in the novel, which can be attributed to her lived experience that she draws upon while lost in the wilderness. During their journey in the wilderness, Nola was often a voice of reason in moments filled with tension and/or immense emotion, though the reader develops a glimpse into her experiences that have ultimately shaped her maturity and spirituality. For example, once lost on the mountain, the hikers begin to have a more vulnerable conversation about their regrets, and it is through this conversation that the reader learns that Nola had fallen in love with her now late husband, Pip, in secondary school. It was during this time that Laura Dorrie, another girl attending their high school, was also in love with Pip. Laura's father also happened to employ Nola's father as a dishwasher in his restaurant. In an act of revenge towards Nola, Laura had Nola's father fired for allegedly stealing steaks, though this lie was completely fabricated by Laura. Upset by the stress and sadness that this caused her family, Nola impulsively sneaks into Laura's bedroom to somehow take her own revenge, but in the process, mistakenly lights Laura's bedroom on fire. After the event, Nola confided in Pip about what she had done, and in response to learning this information, Pip brings her to church where they sit and hold hands. Since then, attending church allowed Nola to find a community in which she found comfort. And while this regret was a heavy one to carry, it is understood that Nola accepts that it is though this action that Nola has learned that "'Regrets serve their purpose'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 98) since it is through this regret that Nola found peace within her church community. Therefore, in the more challenging moments in the novel, the reader is privy to seeing Nola drawing on her spirituality and connections to divinity through prayer, which ultimately strengthens her consistency and level-headedness. Since the reader is perceiving Nola through Wolf's eyes, the reader also notes that Wolf draws upon Nola's strength and beliefs to help him maintain his own level-headedness in the more challenging moments through his own participation in prayer.

However, while the reader can feel Wolf's utmost respect and admiration for Nola and her strength, Nola's abilities and the depth of her character are often implicitly dismissed and/or limited by Bridget. Prior to injuring her wrist, Nola is guided by Wolf through difficult terrain, often resulting in her feeling physically challenged but never asking Wolf to slow down. While Wolf acknowledges Nola's perseverance in these challenging moments, when Nola finally acknowledges her own fatigue and communicates "'I need to get in better shape'" (Lansens,

2020, p. 38), Bridget replies, "'I told you that a year ago,'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 38), as opposed to contextually realizing that Nola is trying her best within her circumstances and/or instead of providing sincere words of encouragement to acknowledge her mother's efforts. Following Nola's fall and the fracturing of her wrist on the mountain, both Bridget and Vonn seem to unintentionally assume that Nola is too delicate or incapable of handling the challenge of surviving the mountain due to her age, though Nola is often the pillar of strength for the group despite her injury. Admittedly, Nola's injury is quite challenging and does make her frailer as their journey on the mountain continues. However, Nola attributes her pain tolerance to aging and is more concerned with how her daughter and granddaughter are feeling as they are also being challenged by the elements on the mountain. Through learning about Nola's regrets, the Devines and Wolf are given a glimpse into Nola's full and complex life prior to the ways in which they know her now, and her age and experience are not reasons to treat her delicately or to marginalize her, but rather are reasons to acknowledge that Nola is fully capable and perseverant through the challenges that she has faced in her life and while on the mountain.

Frankie Truly. Frankie's character provides the reader with various minoritized perspectives, such as being a single father, an alcoholic, a gambler, and a criminal who blindly believes that he is enchanting, prideful, interesting, admirable, and is also someone who uses his Indigenous heritage to appear as a complex and captivating individual. However, it is important to note that I am not attributing a minority status to Frankie based on his Indigenous ancestry, but rather I am highlighting the ways in which his character has internalized a settler colonialism approach towards the ways in which he understands Indigeneity. When the reader is first introduced to Frankie, we learn that he takes pride in his French Canadian and Cree maternal heritage, though his pride stems from superficial representations of these heritages. When Wolf asks his father about his family, Frankie explains to Wolf that "'On my mother's side we're French Canadian and Cree. My cousins came down to visit us from Quebec one time. They were dark and lean. Badass. I take after my mother's side. That's how come I'm so stealthy. Why I like my feet bare"' (Lansens, 2020, p. 7). Within Frankie's reflection on his maternal ancestry, the reader notes that Frankie superficially attributes his cousins' complexions to being *badass*, while also insinuating that his lack of shoe-wearing and his *stealth* is due to his heritage as well. Therefore, while Frankie is proud of his heritage, he uses these characteristics to define himself without ever unpacking the meaning of these characteristics to his heritage and without

communicating a more nuanced understanding of his family's heritage. Frankie again invokes his Cree heritage when both Frankie and Wolf first meet Byrd by way of boasting about his knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of the local area. Upon briefly observing Byrd for the first time, Frankie asks Byrd if he is "'Cah*oo*la?'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 76), pronouncing the Cahuilla tribe's name incorrectly. Byrd did not answer in disbelief towards Frankie's (over) confidence in asking this question, though Frankie continues by explaining the Cahuilla's history and then claiming "'I'm part Cree […] That's a northern tribe. I figured if you're from here you must be *Cahoola* […] I did some reading up on the area, Wolf […] Cahoola's the name of the local Native Americans, of which I am one, well one-eighth. Cree. I'm one-eighth Cree'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 76). Within this exchange, Frankie confidently is trying to teach his son, and even Byrd, about the local Indigenous peoples, but is only superficially informed and educated about the information he is relaying, to the point that he does not realize that he is incorrectly pronouncing the tribe's name, does not fathom that he could be incorrect in his pronunciation, nor does he seek to confirm any of the information he is communicating to someone who is actually a part of that tribe. By invoking his heritage in these ways, Frankie takes the space to confidently communicate misinformation, make assumptions, and advise those around him within subject areas in which is he not well versed. Frankie does not exemplify that he authentically identifies with his heritage or that he has a holistic understanding of Indigenous histories and/or cultures, yet he uses it in moments where he believes he can boast and/or appeal to those around him.

7.3.3 Explicit & Implicit Representations

Similarly to the analysis of the explicit and implicit minoritized characters within the novel, the analysis of the explicit and implicit minoritized representations found within the novel is related to the Reading and Literature Studies strand within the ENG2D curriculum. The overall expectation of *Understanding Form and Style* within this strand has the goal of preparing students to be able to "recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 73). For example, within a specific expectation under this overall expectation, students are expected to able to "identify a variety of elements of style in texts and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance the effectiveness of the texts" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 75). Therefore, I invoked this prompt within the

following analysis that discusses the explicit and implicit representations that are woven throughout the story that help to further frame my close reading of the minoritized characters discussed within the chosen text. Within Lansens' (2020) novel, the story is greatly influenced by discourse surrounding Indigenous knowledge and people, as well as the concept of divinity and the beautiful, yet complex forces of nature. Consequently, this sub-section explores the ways in which the explicit and implicit representations of North American Indigeneity, divinity, and nature add additional nuances to the representations found within the novel's character development, as well as the ways in which these representations provide a foundation to the novel's themes.

Indigeneity. The novel provides both implicit and explicit representations regarding Indigenous North Americans through the Indigenous knowledges and stereotypes (both positive and negative) that are discussed between characters, but also through Wolf's own reflections on the Indigenous influences within his life. Through Wolf's narration, the reader comes to understand that Wolf has great respect for the Indigenous knowledge that surrounds his experience after moving to Tin Town, as well as towards the characters with Indigenous ancestry that influence his development after moving to Tin Town. As mentioned within Byrd's character analysis within the previous sub-section, Wolf has immense respect for Byrd and the Indigenous knowledge that he imparts onto Wolf. However, Wolf lacks the nuance in showing the appropriate respect and appreciation towards Byrd and his multifaceted experiences of being an Indigenous person and simply showing humbleness towards Wolf's personal lack of knowledge and understanding of the local Indigenous experience and knowledge. Earlier on within their relationship, Wolf "once asked [Byrd] if we'd exhumed the stupid cliché of the wise red man having one over on the dumbass white man. He thought about it for a moment, because Byrd was a thinker, and then said, 'Not cliché, brother. Classic'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 81). While the reader feels the informality within this moment shared between these two characters who are becoming best friends, stereotyping both an Indigenous and White person within this moment lends to the feeling of romanticizing the relationship between the settler colonizer and Indigenous peoples. Additionally, this also speaks to Wolf's own lack of Indigenous knowledge and experience with Indigenous peoples, while also depicting Byrd's attempt in trying to own his own Indigeneity in the context of his friendship with Wolf.

It is important to note that it is only after meeting Byrd that Wolf begins to show an interest in Indigenous experiences and ways of being within the novel. The reader experiences this when Wolf's flip-flop breaks, which triggers him to think to himself "The Native American walked barefoot and sometimes slept on the ground where he could feel and see and smell the earth" (Lansens, 2020, p. 113). Wolf's interest in Indigenous ways of being and knowing evolves into developing an interest and understanding of Indigenous plant knowledge through Byrd, which is useful information that he consistently draws upon while lost on the mountain with the Devines. However, in learning about the local flora and fauna, and specifically the risks in consuming red weed, Wolf becomes fascinated and excited by the idea of experiencing a vision quest through drinking a tea made from red weed. This results in Wolf asking Byrd if "'You've never thought about a vision quest […] You've never wondered about what it was like for your ancestors to perform their rite of passage? What kind of Indian are you? Even I've thought of that. Wondered what they saw… how it felt…'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 210). Within this exchange, not only does Wolf question Byrd's Indigeneity, but Wolf fails to realize that Byrd is on his own path in learning about his Indigenous ancestry. Conversely, it is in the moments on the mountain that we feel Wolf's appreciation for the knowledge he has gained from Byrd's teachings and for his friendship with Byrd, because the reader knows that without Byrd's openness to teach Wolf about the flora and fauna of the mountain and surrounding area, Wolf would not have been able to survive on the mountain with the Devines. However, the reader also notes that this appreciation, respect, and maturity towards Byrd is something that evolves over time through his reflections on the mountain, since the foundation of Wolf's initial interactions and dialogue with Byrd regarding Indigenous knowledge and culture is grounded in novelty and not through an already existing nuanced lens.

The respect that Wolf develops for Indigenous culture and knowledge is contrasted by the words and actions towards Byrd by a minor character in the novel, Gisele Michael. Gisele is a friend of Lark Diaz, Byrd's cousin, and is introduced to the reader when she is visiting Lark in Santa Sophia. Upon setting her eyes on Byrd and Wolf, Gisele states she "'Always loved cowboys and Indians. They're both just *yummy*.'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 205). This is followed by Gisele approaching Byrd and stating "'…I have a thing for Native Americans. Billy Jack. You know Billy Jack? I'm so into vintage. Film. Clothes. Everything. I long for a time when life was, like, simpler"' (Lansens, 2020, p. 206). Gisele's comments tokenize Indigenous bodies, as well

as reduce Indigenous culture to being a trend, as opposed to simply treating Byrd like a person and acknowledging that his Indigenous experience is as unique and multifaceted as he is. Moreover, Gisele continues her exoticizing of Byrd and his culture by stating "'I think Native could be hot – feathers, beads, buckskin, animal motifs, totem prints – if people could just sort of let it go, you know – the big injustice or whatever'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 207). Within this statement, Gisele directly minimizes Indigeneity to being a trend, which indicates that Gisele's understanding and appreciation of Indigenous culture and people stems from the ways in which Indigeneity has been represented in media and fashion. Gisele's comments, first implicitly and then explicitly, disregards the challenges, violence, and forced assimilation that Indigenous peoples have had to endure by way of fetishizing Indigeneity for her own pleasure and consumption. With Gisele's perspectives of Indigenous culture contrasting to the ways in which Wolf learns to respectfully reflect on his teachings from Byrd, Lansens (2020) provides the reader with the opportunity to gain an array of perspectives regarding the ways that Indigenous culture and knowledge can be represented within a North American context. However, the characters within the novel never sufficiently address these problematic representations and/or deconstruct these representations themselves, nor does Wolf (as the narrator) or the characters have any reflexive thought about the impact of the ways in which they speak to and about Indigenous characters and/or of how they speak of Indigenous culture and knowledge. Therefore, these representations position the reader to think critically about the ways in which the characters discuss North American Indigeneity and how these representations can both perpetuate these stereotypes but also critique these misleading representations and rhetoric around North American Indigenous representations.

Divinity. Within the novel, religion is mostly associated to the character of Nola due to her explicit discussions around religion, prayer, and her own religious journey. However, representations of divinity flow throughout the novel through both implicit and explicit allusions and reflections of spirituality, faith, and existence. The reader notes that character names within the novel subtly allude to spirituality and implicitly represent facets of the characters themselves. For example, Wolf's last name "Truly" implies a connection to truth and seems to allude to his search for truth, which can be seen in the reflections that he has throughout his narration of the novel. Additionally, Wolf's mother's first name "Glory" and when he first introduces his late mother to the reader, Wolf reflects on a precious memory with her:

> In my favourite memory she wears a silky white dress with batwing sleeves – one I've never seen in photographs. She's standing in front of a dressing room mirror where I discover our infinity. '*Always*,' I say. My beautiful mother laughs and tells me I'm clever before covering my face with soft kisses and spinning me in her embrace. I glimpse us with each turn. Glory looks like an angel in that white dress (Lansens, 2020, p. 5-6).

Though it is not initially obvious when reading about Glory, within the brief moments that she is mentioned within the novel, the reader witnesses Wolf remember his mother in a loving, ethereal, idealistic, and transcendent way. It is also important to note that Vonn, Bridget, and Nola's last name "Devine" also allude to their influence on Wolf on the mountain as if it is almost like meeting them was due to divine intervention to stop Wolf from taking his life. Additionally, though the Devines experience their own bouts of conflict within Wolf's presence, they treat Wolf with kindness and respect, which is also reflected in placing their trust in him to get them off the mountain. The respect and trust that these women show Wolf encourage him to lead the group, which ultimately pushes him to find the mental and spiritual strength to live for them, and for himself.

The novel provides a snapshot of Wolf's existential journey as he is lost on the mountain with the Devines, in addition to disclosing his reflections that occur after they leave the mountain to exemplify to the reader a transformed appreciation for life, for the journey that it is to live, and for developing a more profound understanding of his own purpose in the world. Though Wolf intends to end his life on the mountain due to feeling abandoned by his father, witnessing the accident that severely hurts his best friend, and feeling utter loneliness within his life, Wolf becoming lost on the mountain unexpectedly positions him to experience adversity that pushes him to reflect on his life, his moments with Bryd, and on the responsibility that he now has in ensuring that the Devines make it off the mountain alive. In surviving the mountain, Wolf gains a new perspective on life through appreciating the beauty of life, but Wolf also develops a renewed purpose within this world. Additionally, the choice to end his life is contrasted by Bridget's self-sacrifice of her own life. Bridget's death is a sacrifice that was made to ensure the survival of the group, which was ultimately fueled by her love for her daughter and her unborn grandchild. Alternatively, Wolf's suicide would have resulted in the Devines getting lost on the mountain without him, likely resulting in their own demise. In confronting his challenges and pain through his reflections on the events on the mountain, and on the memories with his family and friends,

Wolf's character implicitly communicates to the reader the importance of faith, whether through religion, spirituality, or in one's self, to find meaning in one's life and in finding the power to be resilient through the challenges that life may present. Therefore, the subtle representations of divinity found throughout the novel, such as through the names used within the novel and through the personal trials and tribulations of characters like Wolf, emphasizes the importance of introspection and connection to one's surroundings, but also to one's sense of self.

Nature. It is through Wolf's experience within nature that the reader comes to understand that the representations of nature within the novel have a significant and symbolic role in influencing the reflections and actions of the characters, thus fueling character transformations and evolutions throughout the novel. Within the reading of the novel, the reader observes nature as a central force that can contribute to sustaining life, while also has the ability to take life away. For example, the majority of the novel is set on Rendezvous Mountain, a fictional mountain that is the backdrop of Wolf and Byrd's evolving friendship, but also is the location of where Byrd has a life altering accident, where Wolf plans to end his life, where Wolf and the Devines have to overcome the challenge of survival within the harsh realities of the wilderness, where the group find a dead hiker, and where Bridget loses her life so that the rest of the group has a chance at survival. Conversely, it is also the same natural environment that provides Wolf and the Devines with sustenance when they are the most thirsty and hungry, thus being a driving force behind one's survival and struggles on a physical level. In confronting their mortality through the challenges that the wilderness pushes the characters to endure, the reader experiences that the mountain and nature are indifferent to the characters' struggles and to their survival and yet, nature can also provide the means to sustain life if one chooses to persevere.

Beyond the physical impacts nature can have on life and death, the ways in which the novel invokes nature also has a psychological impact on the characters. In having to trust one another, the interactions between Wolf and the Devines exemplify to the reader the journey of what it is to rely on one another, while also trying to protect oneself in the face of mortality. For example, when looking in the woods for sustenance during their third day on the mountain, Wolf discovers a half-eaten granola bar that Vonn had secretly eaten, and it was in this moment that Wolf experiences a rush of emotions: "Even as the claws sprang from my fingertips, I forgave her. Even as I growled at her, ripping at the silver foil, I forgave her… I swallowed the lump of sugar and oats. Then for the first time on the mountain I began to cry, and for the first and only

time since my mother died, a beautiful woman took me in her arms and rocked me like a child" (Lansens, 2020, p. 247). It is within this moment that we can acknowledge that Vonn had made a choice driven by her mortality by guiltily eating for her own survival and for the survival of her unborn child. We also witness Wolf selfishly consume the second half of the granola bar for his own sustenance. In confronting his mortality through something seemingly as innocent as eating half a granola bar, Wolf understands that Vonn is trying to survive, and since he chooses to consume the other half of the granola bar himself, Wolf is choosing to live though he had originally come to the mountain to take his life. Therefore, it is through being tested by nature and by the elements that Wolf rediscovers his will to live since this is an implicit moment where the reader is able to experience that "the mountain's had already changed [Wolf]" (Lansens, 2020, p. 144). Conversely, the reader witnesses the free will of Bridget to sacrifice her own life for the survival of the group, and it is through reflecting on Bridget's choice that Wolf notes that "Nature's mirror is sharply reflective and I missed the clarity the mountain brought, even the way our dilemma defined our purpose. I missed the hypnotic beauty of the wet rock, and the crisp, fragrant air, and Bridget. I missed Bridget" (Lansens, 2020, p. 353). Therefore, the reader is a witness to nature serving as the backdrop to one's free will, and it is through the hardships that nature presents that tests the characters' values, actions, and logic. Nature ultimately serves as a catalyst for the emotional and psychological transformations that the characters experience over the course of the novel by acting as a mirror for the characters in facing their thoughts, traumas, emotions, and values without any pretenses and/or façades, thus resulting in psychological healing and the ability to perceive their lives through a new lens.

The representations of nature within the novel lend to the idea that nature is not only beautiful, but its beauty reflects a spiritual and transcendent presence that is a catalyst for the characters' spiritual transformation. Within his narration, Wolf often personifies nature enough that nature itself begins to feel like a character within the novel since it plays such a significant role within the characters' physical and spiritual journeys. Wolf describes that "Time on the mountain could be deceitful and disappointing, like the girl I once thought I loved" (Lansens, 2020, p. 45). Additionally, in a moment where he becomes distracted when pondering about Vonn's choice to wear flip-flops when visiting the mountain, Wolf communicates that "I couldn't wonder much beyond that because the mountain was distracting me, wafting the butterscotch fragrance of Jeffrey pines up my nostrils, dispatching warblers and chickadees to greet me"

(Lansens, 2020, p. 21). This intoxicating beauty is understood to provide divinity within Wolf's experiences, such as when he first visits Angel's Peak with Byrd. During this visit, Wolf notes that "We stood there, silent above the dense white sea of cloud. It was the first time I felt that God feeling… I felt a loving presence all around me and a deep connection to all living things" (Lansens, 2020, p. 145). It is through immersing himself within the nature and the mountain that Wolf feels a divine presence that envelopes him in love, though this is also the same location where he would eventually decide to jump to his death, thus leading to a possible moment of divine intervention in meeting Vonn, Bridget, and Nola. Wolf finds himself captivated by the nature that surrounds him, but experiencing nature with the Devines adds more depth to the beauty that he experiences. Experiencing his beauty further encourages Wolf to reflect on the sacredness of nature and life, thus resulting in an acceptance of their mortality while lost on the mountain. In a moment of hopelessness within the elements, Wolf experiences a quiet reverence as he acknowledges that "The beauty of the setting sun on that night, the last night, was not lost on me, even with Vonn unconscious and Bridget huffing behind me, Nola leaning on her shoulder. I wished I had my camera" (Lansens, 2020, p. 325). This memory communicates a juxtaposition of the characters' mortality against the characters being comforted by the sacred beauty of the calming nature that surrounds them. When Bridget and Wolf discover the coveted Corazon Falls, the characters share a somber yet scared moment where "We were quiet, watching the waterfall, breathing our lasts breaths, thinking our final thoughts, drawing inevitable conclusions. Moved by the beauty of the falls, and the scattering clouds and the pale blue sky against the amber rock, Bridget sighed. I agreed. The rushing water. The clearing sky. Good place to die" (Lansens, 2020, p. 335). It is in a moment of breathtaking beauty that the characters "watched the water, mesmerized, preparing for our last breaths – at least that's what I [Wolf] was doing. I supposed I'd accepted it. I prayed that Vonn would wake long enough the see this rare sight… I don't remember feeling agitated, but rather calm" (Lansens, 2020, p. 336-337). This feeling of calmness encapsulates the culmination of Wolf reflecting on his life, his experiences, and his decisions that brought him to this moment, while being surrounded by a spiritual presence that is found in nature. It is through the group's isolation on the mountain that Wolf is able to introspect, explore his spirituality, truly appreciate the raw sacredness of nature, and find comfort in the transcendent beauty of nature while vulnerably confronting his mortality amongst a group of strangers.

7.3.4 Explicit & Implicit Themes

An analysis of the explicit and implicit themes of the novel is also associated with the Reading and Literature Studies strand within the ENG2D curriculum. This analysis is supported by both the curriculum's overall expectations of *Reading for Meaning* and *Understanding Form and Style*, two of the overall expectations that I discussed within the previous sub-sections. Under the *Reading for Meaning* overall expectation, students are expected to fulfill the specific expectation of being able to "analyse texts in terms of the information, ideas, issues, or themes they explore, examining how various aspects of the texts contribute to the presentation or development of these elements" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 74). And under the *Understanding Form and Style* overall expectation, students are expected to fulfill the specific expectation of being able to "identify a variety of elements of style in texts and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance the effectiveness of the texts" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 75). Therefore, these overall and specific expectations have influenced my analysis within the following sub-section.

Through the explicit and implicit minoritized and/or racialized voices and representations found within the novel's characters, as well as the representations woven through the story itself, key themes emerge from my personal reading of the novel that help to frame my close reading of the minoritized characters within the text: perseverance, sacrifice, courage, and redemption. The complexity of these themes is reflected in their consistent evolution as the novel and characters evolve, as well as in the ways in which they are interconnected with one another. Therefore, because these themes are heavily featured in the teaching of this unit, the following sub-section provides an overview of the ways in which these themes are most prominently addressed throughout the novel.

Perseverance. The perseverance that is exemplified within the novel is seen through the challenges that the characters endure within their personal lives, while lost on the mountain, and the ways in which they overcome the consequences of the actions of those around them and/or of the actions they choose to take themselves. Wolf and the Devines experience perseverance on a physical level through choosing to survive the elements while lost on the mountain. Throughout their journey, nature unfailingly challenges the characters through animal attacks, unforgiving weather conditions, bodily injuries, and a lack of food and water, and yet the characters choose to persist through these hardships in the hopes that they will be rescued from an otherwise ill

fate. These characters also exemplify emotional and psychological perseverance throughout their personal journeys within the novel. Wolf survives the death of his mother, the abandonment of his father, and Byrd's life-threatening accident, and though the hardships of his personal life exacerbate his psychological state to the point that he plans to end his life, he uses his time on the mountain to introspect on his past, his actions, and his values to accept his past and heal from the trauma that has greatly impacted his lived experiences. Additionally, Vonn also emotionally and psychologically perseveres through her lived experiences throughout the novel. Vonn grapples with not having a relationship with her biological father, is challenged by her mother for having differing outlooks and opinions, displays emotional turmoil while being lost on the mountain with limited food and water while being pregnant, and then survives as the result of her mother's death. In the letter to his son, Daniel, at the beginning of the novel, Wolf reminds Daniel to "remember our family motto – there will be sway" (Lansens, 2020, p. 3) since this motto evolved from the physical and psychological challenges that he and the Devines experienced on the mountain. This motto is reminiscent of the sway of the mountain tram due to the winds that the tram overcomes as it moves up and down the mountain, but Wolf also uses this motto to remind both Daniel and the reader of the importance in surviving the uncertainties of life, the importance of being accepting but resilient when experiencing hardship, and the importance of perseverance in the face of instability and the unknown. Therefore, the perseverance of the novel's characters allows them to not only survive on a physical level, but this also results in the characters' ability to heal emotional and psychological wounds to transform their perspectives on life and to have a more profound appreciation for the complexities of a life lived.

Sacrifice. While lost on the mountain, the characters exemplify varying moments of sacrifice that are driven by love, compassion, family, and both selfishness and selflessness. There are implicit moments within the novel where the characters sacrifice their comfort for the survival of those who are the weakest in that moment. For example, though Nola had been severely injured for most of the story due to her broken wrist and injuries exacerbated by her age, when Vonn is bitten by the snake and no longer conscious, Nola sacrifices her own strength and energy to help take care of Vonn within their last moments on the mountain. Conversely, Wolf consistently sacrifices his own safety and health for the survival of the group on the mountain, but he also chooses to sacrifice his choice to end his life. In choosing to live and help the Devines survive the mountain, Wolf chooses to live for his newfound appreciation of life, for the

others that he knows are dependent on him, for the compassion that he develops for the Devines, and eventually for the love that he feels for Vonn and her child.

The most poignant example of sacrifice within the novel is Bridget's sacrifice of her own life for the survival of the group, and for the love of her daughter and unborn grandchild. In his letter to Daniel, Wolf states "I'm relieved you finally know about Bridget… [Vonn's] mother was a hero. You should feel proud that you carry her blood. There should be a plaque honouring her at the tram station, a monument to her in Wide Valley. People should hear about what Bridget Devine did for love" (Lansens, 2020, p. 358). Bridget made this visceral sacrifice in a moment of total desperation since just minutes before jumping to her death, "Bridget turned to look at her mother and noticed Vonn trembling. 'She's seizing,' Nola said. Vonn went still, then limp" (Lansens, 2020, p. 338). Witnessing her daughter's health declining so rapidly and unable to gain the attention of the rescuers, "Bridget turned [again] to look at Vonn, unconscious on the ground. Then she looked at Nola. Then at [Wolf]" (Lansens, 2020, p. 340) and then proceeded to run and leap off the mountain, finally acquiring the attention of the rescuers but resulting in her violent death on the rocks at the riverbank below. Wolf, Nola, and Vonn come to accept Bridget's ultimate sacrifice for their survival, which reshapes the ways in which Vonn understands her mother's love for her, and ultimately reshapes both Wolf and Vonn's gratitude and love for family, and for the family in which they choose to create together with Daniel.

Courage. The development of one's ability and choice to be courageous is a central theme that is explored through various lenses within the novel. When lost on the mountain, Wolf and the Devines experience extreme hunger, despair, and immense self-doubt as they try to survive the elements, but also as they are psychologically tested as they endure life-threatening conditions and challenges. However, despite the challenges that nature presents to the group, Wolf and the Devines choose to be courageous, choose to keep fighting for their lives, and choose to face their realities within the wilderness. This further motivates the group's survival, even though it would have been easier to accept the limited chances of surviving the mountain. For example, Nola is the first to be seriously physically injured, and while she accepts that she is the eldest of the group and physically weaker compared to the others, she continues to travel the mountain with the rest of the group and bravely does so through the physical pain and limitations that she is experiencing. Vonn's character displays courageousness while she fights for her life and the life of her unborn child within extreme circumstances but also shows courageousness

when being vulnerable with the other characters. Vonn shares her resentment with Bridget regarding the ways in which she was raised and Vonn also confides in Wolf during very vulnerable moments where they share both physical and emotional intimacy. It is in these moments where the characters exemplify the courage to express their emotions of love and anger honestly and openly to reconcile their emotions as they transcend within their relationships.

Bridget is courageous in her ability to be hopeful in the direst moments. For example, after Vonn is bitten by the snake and the group's spirits begin to waver, it was "Bridget [that] still had a flicker of hope. She smiled when she saw [Wolf's] concern. 'She's breathing,' she said, spreading her palm over her daughter's chest. 'She's gonna be fine'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 327). Bridget also had the courage to believe in herself and confident enough to believe in her hopes and dreams, even when the other characters doubted her. While lost in the wilderness, Bridget had dreamt about the group's rescue, and though Nola and Vonn vocally doubted that Bridget's dream could predict the future, Bridget would fearlessly reiterate "'I don't care what you and Mim think, Vonn. I know what I know. I dreamed about our rescue. It was the most vivid dream I've ever had. I'm telling you. We are going to be rescued'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 139). It was this persistence that fueled Bridget's optimism and faith that they would survive. However, Bridget so intensely believed that the group would be rescued that it pushed her desperation for the survival of her family and Wolf to the point of sacrificing her own life. In sacrificing her life for the survival of the group, Bridget's character exemplifies the courage to choose not to live for life to continue, which is juxtaposed to Wolf developing the courage to live when he had initially chosen to end his life. Wolf exemplifies this courage to live when he chooses to lead the group to ensure the group's survival. Through the challenges that Wolf faces within his personal life and while lost on the mountain, his character grapples with the courage to be resilient while trying to help the survival of the others that are depending on him. Throughout his journey, Wolf reflects on the loss of his mother, the lack of a stable father, the life altering accident that Byrd experiences, his personal failures, and his lack of confidence within his identity. However, in taking on a leadership role amongst the Devines, Wolf confronts his traumas through his introspection on the mountain, heals from the loss and suffering that he has experienced, and develops the courage to choose to live despite the hardships that he has experienced.

Redemption. By the end of my reading of the novel and through retrospectively reflecting on the development of the characters within their contexts and lived experiences, it becomes clear that redemption is an important outcome from the characters' personal journeys. In moving beyond the idea of resiliency, redemption is reflected in the characters ability to embrace restoration through the rebuilding and reclaiming of relationships (between each other and with oneself). Additionally, redemption is also revealed in the healing that is the outcome of reflecting on one's truths and moving beyond this reclamation to actively be and do better within one's life. Wolf's story begins with broken and abusive familial relationships, and he shows a lack of a will to live. However, it is through his journey with the Devines that he not only witnesses a more functional family dynamic, but he himself becomes a part of their family dynamic as well. Wolf's interactions with the Devines encourage him to reshape his thinking and his perspectives, and in taking on the responsibility to ensure their survival, Wolf learns to grieve, heal from his past, and to reorient his thinking to redeem himself within his actions. In surviving the mountain, Wolf survives to tell his son the truth of the events on the mountain, the identity of Daniel's biological father, and the true impact that the journey on the mountain has had on the ways in which Wolf perceives family, his understanding of life's meaning, and his courage to build a future with Vonn.

While Wolf exemplifies his redemption by surviving the mountain and building a life with Vonn, Bridget's death is the catalyst for Vonn's redemption since it is upon Bridget's death that Vonn mentally rewrites and rebuilds the relationship she had with her mother. Initially, the reader develops an understanding for Bridget's personality and character through the resentment and anger that Vonn has towards her mother due to not having a relationship with her own biological father and for having an unstable home environment. But it is on the mountain where Bridget and Vonn have emotionally vulnerable conversations about their experiences of being mother and daughter. Moreover, upon waking up in the hospital and learning of her mother's death, Vonn chooses to focus on the positive memories that she has of her mother, referring to Bridget with love, thus reflecting that Vonn had "completely rewritten the story of their difficult past" (Lansens, 2020, p. 349). Therefore, redeeming her relationship with Bridget after Bridget's death reflects Vonn's active evolution of her understanding of Bridget, and a developed empathy for Bridget's experience of being a mother.

Conversely, there is no resolve for the relationship between Wolf and Frankie by the end of the novel. Within Wolf and Frankie's final meeting while Frankie is in jail and is the first time that Frankie had seen Wolf since the events on the mountain, Frankie implicitly communicates that he is most interested in monopolizing on Wolf's experience on the mountain to gain fame for himself. Frankie mentions that "'Opportunity's knocking, Wolf! […] I'm in touch with this agent who thinks he can sell your story'" (Lansens, 2020, p. 351). When Wolf communicates that he has nothing to say about his experiences on the mountain, Frankie's last words to Wolf and within the novel are "'I'm sorry to hear that,' he said. He looked into my eyes for a long moment before he mentioned to the guard that he was done. […] He limped when he walked away and raised his arm […] but he didn't turn to look at me" (Lansens, 2020, p. 352). Despite the potential for this meeting to be a loving and enlightening reunion between father and son, this lackluster moment between the two characters communicates that it takes effort and intentional growth to evolve in one's relationships and to transform one's perspectives. Wolf makes the choice to visit Frankie in jail, despite the abusive and neglectful behaviour that Frankie had shown Wolf in the past, and instead of also choosing to evolve in his relationship with Wolf, Frankie shows that he is unredeemable. Therefore, the novel communicates that though redemption is seen through one's ability to reclaim and rebuild one's relationships with others and oneself, it is only those that show the courage to be vulnerable, seek the truth, forgive, and embrace the pain and discomfort of growth that are capable in finding and earning their redemption.

7.4 Interviews with VH

In addition to providing an overview of the lived experiences that shape my perspectives, an analysis on the chosen unit, and an analysis of the chosen novel, it is also important to provide VH's perspectives on the ways in which she approaches the teaching of a unit through her implementation of the curricula, as well as the lived experiences that inform her pedagogical perspectives. Moreover, the perspectives and experiences of my participant inform a vital facet to my research since it is through VH's lived experiences from both inside and outside the classroom that inform her pedagogical knowledge and teaching of the chosen unit and literature. It is important to note that, by way of taking a narrative inquiry approach within my research and informed by the discussed theoretical frameworks, I primarily focus on VH's perspectives and

experiences within the following section to allow the space for VH to communicate her own stories. Additionally, I minimally invoke myself into the following section through the retelling and representing of VH's stories as they emerge in connection to themes that arose through our interviews. Therefore, the following section provides an overview and analysis of my initial meeting, first interview, and concluding interview with VH to reconstruct her insights and experiences through my lens as the researcher by way of developing an understanding of the ways in which an educator's experience influences their practical knowledge and how this may shape curriculum-as-lived.

7.4.1 The Initial Meeting

My initial meeting with VH occurred virtually in July 2023 and was about an hour long. This meeting was informal, brief, and administrative as it served as an opportunity to introduce VH to my research, to review and sign the consent form, to gain some background on VH's classroom experience, and to review the courses and units that she teaches in order to determine which course and unit would be best to be studied within the contexts of my research. By reviewing the courses and their respective units, it became clear that ENG2D would be the course that would be chosen to be reviewed within my research due to the course content, VH's approach to each distinctive unit, and the ways in which I personally identified with the course content. Within this discussion, VH mentioned that it is vital to be able to teach to the curriculum regardless of the course. Moreover, as we discussed the contents of each unit within her ENG2D course, I realized that the course expectations and themes from the literature were organized in such a way that the skills and knowledge that was intended to be developed through each course scaffolded upon one another. Additionally, ENG2D is a course that I remember taking myself when I was in secondary school, and it was structured in a similar way to VH's course and even consisted of some of the same literature. Therefore, my familiarity with the course itself and some of its contents made the analysis of this course more attractive to me on a personal, sentimental level.

Through an academic lens, I determined that choosing to analyse this course would provide a space to be curious and experience new course content and literature. Through this initial conversation, VH noted that her ENG2D course had a novel unit designed to explore Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, which was a novel that I had not read myself, thus

providing me with an amazing opportunity to interact with this unit and literature with fresh eyes from the perspective of the student. Additionally, choosing this unit also allowed me to explore a snapshot of the course by choosing a unit that was situated in the middle of the course. This meant that from the perspective of the students, they would have already had some experience with VH's teaching the course content and they would also be in the middle of refining their knowledge and skills that were expected to be developed as per the ENG2D curriculum. Towards the end of this initial meeting, VH provided me with the digital copies of her ENG2D course materials, which allowed me to review the course content to confirm that this was the unit I would review within my research. Upon completing this review, I confirmed with VH that I would be exploring this novel and unit, ensuring that she would be ready to share her pedagogical reflections in relation to the teaching of this unit within our upcoming discussions. I then closely read the novel, as reflected in the previous sub-section, and reviewed the unit's assignments, handouts, and structure since these contents would be at the foundation of my interviews with VH.

7.4.2 The First Interview

The first interview occurred virtually in early May 2024. Through I had prepared interview questions to help guide our discussion during our first interview (see Appendix C), the first interview between VH and I was meant to be informal. It was expected that my guiding questions in conjunction with VH's input would encourage a dynamic, personal, and open discussion to gain a better understanding of the different goals, personal approaches, and considerations that are taken towards teaching, and more specifically in the teaching of the chosen unit. It is also within this interview that I asked VH questions about her personal contexts, her experiences as a teacher, and her lived experiences with and/or understanding of minoritizations and racializations. Moreover, upon transcribing the interview, the following themes were identified through our discussion and are explored within this section: VH's lived experiences, background, and beliefs that inform her teaching, VH's perspectives on the facets that influence teaching; and VH's approaches towards the curriculum and the unit. Therefore, the resulting discussion was not linear, but rather quite complex and interconnected, which is reflected in the interconnected and layered themes that emerged through VH's reflections in reaction to both my guiding questions and to my interactions with VH throughout the interview.

Lived Experiences, Background, and Beliefs. VH grew up with her family in a diverse district located in Toronto, Ontario within an upper-middle class neighbourhood that she described as "very White, very snobby," while acknowledging that there were people of different backgrounds and races that lived within her neighbourhood as well. VH described her father as a Middle Eastern Jewish man who converted to Christianity at the age of sixteen and described her mother as having an Anglo-Saxon background based in the East Coast of Canada. And unfortunately, in regard to the label of Anglo-Saxon, I never dug deeper into this as the conversation was happening, though I assumed that this label was meant to encapsulate VH's race as White. Though VH had lived amongst people from diverse backgrounds, she recalled being bullied at school due to her Jewish heritage and experienced what she described as "Anglo-Saxon exclusion." VH had grown up as Christian though her family "still retain our Jewish identity," and in learning about her Jewish background, she "learned really quickly that you have to hide your Jewish identity" due to antisemitic rhetoric that she had personally encountered, such as being called "a dirty Jew." VH recalled learning about the Shoah (the Hebrew term for the Holocaust) from her paternal grandmother, and upon learning about the persecution and mass extermination of Jewish people during the Holocaust, she remembered "that was something that I knew, and I knew as a little kid I had to hide that side of myself. Even though we look like this [White]." Therefore, VH felt that though she presents as a White-skinned person, the colour of her skin "[meant] absolutely nothing. Because at the end of the day, they'll always see you as a dirty Jew," with "they" left as an ambiguous a term and category. It emerged through our conversation, nonetheless, that VH had experienced this exact sentiment expressed by her maternal grandmother with whom she describes as having racist tendencies due to the context in which her grandmother was raised. This resulted in treating VH and her siblings "as second-class citizens because [VH's] mother married a Jewish person." However, VH continued to seek a relationship with her maternal grandmother despite this treatment, and as life events occurred, her grandmother had a shift in her perspectives later in life. Therefore, upon reflecting on her eclectic experiences with different perspectives, familial cultures, and religions, VH mentioned that "I kinda felt myself not fully understanding both worlds" of her Jewish identity and Anglo-Saxon background since she was not specifically anchored to a either culture. Rather, VH reflected with me that she was greatly influenced by both sides of her heritage since one's background/contexts "…informs everything. Even though I

don't think of myself [as only one], I'm still identified…there still is a Jewish identity" that she associates with and is associated to. Conversely, within her nuclear family, VH explained that the foundation for her parents was the Bible and that "Our identity was as Christians… Because our identity wasn't in the culture, it was in our relationship with God."

It is through VH discussing her experiences based in her Jewish identity that I gained a better understanding as to the ways in which these minoritized experiences impacted her teaching, thus answering my guiding research sub-question: when applicable, in what ways do the racialized/minoritized experiences of the teacher impact the teaching of the selected texts? When we started discussing our reflections more in relation to education and curriculum, the resulting conversation further explored VH's personal perspectives and beliefs regarding race and racialization, and how this influenced her pedagogical choices. To gain more perspectives on VH's experience with the curriculum and the courses offered within the secondary school in which she teaches, I had asked, "Are there particular English language arts courses that stand out to you in regard to having discussions surrounding minoritized or racialized narratives and perspectives?" VH responded by stating, "To answer that broadly, all of our curriculum from 9 to 12 says that we have to look at a variety of voices and a variety of perspectives, right? And that to me is culture as well… So, to me, that cultural part is in there, and it's right through the curriculum from 9 to 12." I noted the use of the word "culture" within that response, and then asked, "But when you say culture, do you mean the culture of the school, the culture of the community, the culture of the individual's culture?" to which VH responded by stating "…Culture and individual. Different voices, different backgrounds. What we're talking about here. When you're saying 'racialized,' I would just say cultural. To me that's… we're just playing a game of semantics with that word." However, from my lens, it is also important to acknowledge the effects of race and racism as an ongoing presence within one's experience of culture. Therefore, through invoking my lived experience when interpreting this interaction in the moment, I felt as though *culture* and *racialization* are different, and felt the need to clarify and to further explore VH's perspectives by acknowledging that "I know you said instead of using 'racialized,' you'd use 'culture.' I think my use of racialized is how, you now, how one's… I think culture's a part of it, but how maybe one's colour of their skin impacts the way they experience the world in a way?" VH answered by explaining:

> I always say this… I actually believe humanity is one race, it's not different races. You're not a different race. You're still the same human being…We're the same species. That is again, my world view. That's why I don't use that word. That's okay. That's fine. We're talking about the same thing. One thing I always say is that you have to define your terms. So, defining the terms for me – that's where I'm coming from on that – is that I don't discount that. I don't discount different experiences. But different experiences are held by all of us. But again, I think the super glue is that humanity… we spend so much time looking at all those melanisation differences, which mean absolutely nothing… And it doesn't matter what we look like, the colour of our eyes, or the pigment of our skin, or the lack thereof of pigmentation … So, I want to define that term… So, the racialized. I know it's very much used in academia and it's very much what's in vogue in culture today, but I just feel like we miss a piece when we just spend so much time discussing that. Because it's the least important thing about somebody. It's the least important aspect of the individual.

Ultimately, VH communicated that she feels as though we should show that "we have so much more in common than what divides us" through inclusion and that to only see colour is limiting since it is insulting to teach children that they are only being heard "because you have a darker melanation," or because of their race. VH vocalized that the labelling of one's race is diminishing to an individual since they are so much more complex than to be reduced a race, and that it is hyper-racialization that creates race-based division. Alternatively, while I do agree and appreciate that being reduced to the colour of one's skin is diminishing to the individual, I also believe it is important to recognize that this does happen and has usually happened to me without being initiated by me, have impacted the ways in which I experience the world, and that race-based experiences are different from cultural experiences. While, one may argue, as does VH, it should not matter as to what one looks like, it actually does matter to some people since there are those that choose to treat people inferiorly based on their "race," resulting in racialized people having to operate within society knowing that they may be reduced to an unfounded notion that their skin colour may signal to others. Therefore, when people make assumptions about someone's abilities because of their race, I believe this is all the more reason to recognize this as a challenge that racialized people have had to experience and continue to experience.

Perspectives on the Facets that Influence Teaching. VH had about 20 years of teaching experience in Ontario at the time of the interview, which is experience that began by completing her teacher training through a college in the United States, with a practicum completed in teaching English. Once having begun her Canadian teaching career in 2005, VH's teaching experiences within Canada consists of several years of teaching both history and English courses at the secondary school level. VH disclosed that she is more inclined to teach history than English due to her own interests in learning history and her comfort level with the course content found within history courses. However, it was clear within our conversation that VH's strengths in teaching history help to inform the ways in which she approaches the teaching of English courses. Therefore, through a historical lens, VH communicated the value of acknowledging and understanding contexts within teaching by stating that "Context is everything... Context in history," which ultimately informs her value of contextualizing within teaching English literature as well. In invoking the example of the teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, VH discussed that context is important in teaching this novel since we must understand the characters within the context surrounding the characters. In noting that while the use of the "N" word is as disgusting now as it was during the time period in which the novel reflects, VH noted that there should be an acknowledgement of the context that is explored within the novel. As a student that has studied the same novel within secondary school and completed undergraduate courses that addressed the use of such derogatory language, I appreciate VH's perspectives towards the importance in taking a historical perspective when acknowledging that such language has been used and the impacts of using such language across time. Consequently, by invoking a CRT lens, it would be difficult to have conversations around the use if this language without acknowledging race, validating the racialized experiences of people, and deconstructing the systemic use of colonial social constructions to oppress the Other.

VH noted that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is also a story of love that must be appreciated as well. Within our discussion of this example, VH noted:

> Context is everything. If we are teaching in a vacuum without that, we are doing a disservice to the literature and then it [falls flat] and then we are focusing on an 'N' word in one of the greatest novels written in the 20th century, right? Instead of 'What is the message? What is the context? What are the themes?' … What we need is to make connections with students. It doesn't matter to me what your background is.

Therefore, in acknowledging the importance of contextualizing one's teaching, I asked VH to reflect on the ways in which her personal contexts and history, such as her experiences based in her Jewish culture, have influenced her teaching and her approach(es) in empowering her students. VH responded by stating that "I haven't looked at it that way. Yeah… I think [it's] one of the biggest things about teaching and understanding and embracing being a Jew," since "[one's background] informs everything… there still is a Jewish identity." Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the naming and labeling of one's identity can exemplify to students how the connotations of labels can be historically threaded into society and reflected in what may be learned within the classroom. Through her adult experiences of exploring her own family heritage and learning about the Holocaust, VH was able to contextualize herself within her teaching and to challenge herself to embrace the teaching of such a difficult topic to sensitize students to "a uniquely human experience" since "[i]t doesn't matter what's someone's background is, you can relate to that on a human level, right?" The importance of teaching students the value of making connections to human experiences also flowed into the ways in which VH discussed her perspectives when teaching English literature. This was exemplified when VH mentioned "You have to sensitize the student to the sensitivities of *Mockingbird*, to what's going on. You have to contextualize that, because if you don't, you're failing [as an educator]." However, by invoking a postcolonial framework, I realized that VH was empowered to invoke her own lens within her teaching since her personal experiences helped to shape and validate her knowledge of the world, which has further validated her own identity.

In owning her own contexts within her teaching that ultimately inform the values and intentions communicated through her teaching, VH also spoke to the importance of teaching values, like integrity and academic honesty, within her classroom and that the teaching of values that support a respectful environment are just as important as her teaching academic skills to the students. VH mentioned that the teaching of these skills are done through showing students these values through her own behaviours and approaches within the classroom since she had found that when students have not learned these values and/or had the adequate support within their academic experiences prior to reaching her classroom, they have a fear of failure and abandonment that stifles their ability to improve and to trust the process of improvement. Within our conversation, VH reflected, "I'm there to help [students]... They have this fear of failure and fear of abandonment, all at the same time" due to being pushed through an education system that

has abandoned them with their failures as they continue to progress through each grade without having mastered the skills, requirements, and expectations to be successful. Conversely, VH explained that she views failure as an opportunity to learn since "It's the greatest lessons ever!... Fail forward! It's my greatest gift to you! Through failure. It makes us. It makes us as people. And that doesn't mean that failure is you haven't lived up to what you thought. That's okay. But we are going to get better." VH indicated a true belief in the capabilities of her students since she believes that failure gives students the opportunity to improve and move forward within their lives since "[n]othing is so high stakes that we can't improve upon it." VH stated that it is the educator's challenge to be able to communicate this notion to students since it is the educator's job to be their cheerleader and to support their improvement, but "[they] have to earn this. Hard work and having to say 'you know what… I didn't know I could do it' and I'm like, 'I did. I knew you could do it. You can do it.'" Furthermore, VH communicated her belief in empowering students through her teaching since:

> …at the end of the day, I'm in the business of teaching human beings so there's not an obstacle so big that I can't relate to somebody else on… If we are open. Let me put a caveat on this. If we are in an open and [have a] respectful environment. And as a teacher, you have to create that. That doesn't come by osmosis. So, if you get to that point that you get that respect and you get that mutual respect that comes back, but then it's a place where the kids can be free also… I want you to let your hair down and at the same time I want us to have a frank conversation. What you're sharing is humanity.

In embracing her own humanity and contexts through her teaching, VH explained that she invokes the concept of a *yenta* (which I understood to be the Yiddish word for a busybody) to become more engaged within the lives and successes of her students since:

> [A]s a teacher, sometimes there's a face that I have to put on, but at the end of the day I'm still me. And my motivation is to help with that student. My motivation is to let me sit down, and even if you don't want it, I'm going to do it anyway. Because that's what my job is. My job is to coach you. Because I want you to be able to see it through, I want to walk with that, with that student through this problem or through their essay or through their assignment, or whatever it is… That's my philosophy. That's philosophically behind the teacher.

And similarly to the ways in which VH approaches students from her contexts, VH acknowledged that students are:

> ... coming with [their] culture… the culture that is unique to your family unit as well…. [T]hat's why you're so precious and so valuable is because your parents entrust us. When they send you off to school, they entrust us with you. That's a huge responsibility, right?... We are here to shape young minds. If I have nefarious intensions, you can see how easy it is to persuade young minds… that's a lot of power.

Therefore, within our conversation, VH recognized the immense responsibility that educators have in their ability to empower students through teaching the importance of empowering, coaching, and guiding students to acknowledge the human experiences that both students and teacher have endured, thus making meaningful connections between themselves and the course content to teach to values that she believes in both within and outside of the classroom.

In discussing her approaches to teaching, VH reflected on her journey of becoming an educator as a process since to be a teacher is "very uncomfortable particularly in the beginning and it's not natural and you have to learn it. And yet at the same time, there's a craft to it and there's a skill to it. You either are God-given communicators or you're not." VH reflected on her own grade 10 English teacher and found that not only does she remember that this educator taught her poorly, but he also did not approach teaching with passion, causing VH to reflect and note to herself that "'When I am a teacher, I am never going to teach like this.'" Reflecting on her experience of being a camp counsellor, this experience exemplified to VH that she had the gifts required to be within the profession of teaching. And though she has over 20 years of experience at the time of the interview, VH noted that "I still get butterflies thinking about work… I have enough in my repertoire, in my toolbox, that I can foresee - whatever they're gonna say to me, it's fine. I'm just gonna get to know them and we're gonna be on this journey together, but I'm nervous. I'm nervous meeting them." However, I understood this moment of nervousness as VH recognizing the importance and value in the anticipation of her role as a teacher within her class. VH also acknowledged her nervousness in stating "that's a good nervous energy and I kind of thrive on that … then I'm in control, this is the captain. I don't share power, but at the same time, we're gonna go on this journey together. That to me is a good, healthy aspect of teaching." VH communicated to me that, in going on this journey with her students, it is her responsibility as the educator to connect with students since "[i]f I'm not reaching you

then, it's a me problem… and we've tried to work on it, it's still a me problem." For the times that it feels difficult to connect with a student, VH communicated that the onus is on the educator to still question how they can reach that student since all students can gain something from the course content and/or from their connections with the educator. VH also reflect on her experiences during teachers' college where there were moments where she felt challenged in how she could reach students, and she had a professor who had poignantly told her "'Give yourself a break. Give the kids a break. Talk to them. But you're not going to be able to get everybody but if you get most of them and almost everybody, that's great, but you won't get them all so don't worry about that one.'" It was through this exchange that VH realized that while she may not be able to reach every student, possibly due to issues occurring within the students' life and/or other uncontrollable circumstances, it is still her responsibility to question how she can reach those students and do everything in her power to try to reach them while also being kind to their personal circumstances. Therefore, it was clear within my discussion with VH that she is driven as an educator since she felt as though "my whole life has been training for this and my whole life has been training for being a teacher," and that to be an educator is an innate gift that must be honed and developed, while also being a gift that comes with enormous accountability.

In discussing her development as an educator, I was also curious to gain some insight on the ways in which educators are supported within their teaching journey based on VH's experiences. VH communicated that while teachers often take their own approaches to the teaching of a unit, she would often collaborate with colleagues since borrowing and collaborating with one's colleagues is an "organic thing that happens [within education] … When you respect your other colleague[s], and you respect what they're able to do." Therefore, VH noted that since the teaching of the curriculum is ultimately under the control of the educators themselves, it is important to see educators as the experts that should be encouraged, supported, and empowered within their teaching. It became increasingly clear that VH believed that it is not only the teacher's approach within the classroom that helps educators connect to students and builds a community of learning within the classroom, but it is also the sense of community, support, and respect that teachers and administrators have for one another, or lack thereof, that impact the climate of the classroom as well. Therefore, this led me to ask VH about her perspectives on and experiences with professional development as an avenue to support her learning as an educator within a community of educators. VH responded by indicating that she felt as though most of the

professional development she has experienced has not been as beneficial as collaborating with her colleagues because the professional development that she has experienced is usually led by people like administrators, experts provided by the school board, or even other educators who do not have the skills to empower educators and/or who do not speak to the challenges that educators experience in reality. VH noted that "if you actually empower teachers… if you allow them to be creative, you can learn so much." Therefore, it is the professional development that speaks to the talent of teachers within the room that can truly empower educators, as opposed to using professional development to simply disseminate information that does not recognize the real classroom challenges and/or successes of educators.

Approaches Towards the Curriculum and the Unit. Through my first interview with VH, it was clear that VH implemented the curriculum within her teaching as a guide in how she structures her courses and course units. However, VH explained that she also takes a flexible approach to the application of the curriculum due to the dynamic nature of classrooms and students that may change the ways in which the content of the course may be received. When discussing her approach to structuring a course, VH indicated that she designs her courses backwards since she first notes "where I want to end up" by the end of the course since she also takes a linear approach in the scaffolding of her lessons. This is also where VH takes a creative approach to the methodology of her course. Because VH sees educators as the experts within the classroom, she communicated that she views the curriculum as a tool that is at the foundation of teaching since "the curriculum… is not insulting to teachers if you read it properly. It says that you have the creative space and power, and you are empowered as a teacher, to then take what [the curriculum document] says and be creative and create your lessons from it." VH reflected on her belief that "[o]ur foundation for teaching is curriculum and to know it. So, if you don't have that, what the hell are we doing teaching?" Additionally, speaking to the flexible approach towards the implementation of the curriculum within her planning process, especially in relation to the impact of colonialism on our society and course content, VH acknowledged that "[teachers are] always changing and always trying to [reflect on], how do we do it better? How do I communicate it better? And how do we reach the students? And how do they learn? …What is their learning?... Those are tough questions that aren't answered quickly." Specifically in relation to the literature selected and used when exploring the curriculum, VH noted that "It's a process. This might've worked in 1985, or this might've worked in 1993. Does it still work? We have to

re-evaluate that… You have to be a thinking practitioner." VH noted that while the curriculum does not tell an educator which pieces of literature to explore within their classroom, it is important for an educator to challenge themselves to go beyond "mediocrity" and consistently re-evaluate the ways in which they are approaching the curriculum and chosen resources. For example, VH admitted that while she is not a fan of postmodernist literature, she knows that she cannot ignore the large canon of English literature that falls within this category, is able to appreciate it for the art that it is, and therefore, is able to offer students Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* within her ENG2D course. VH also noted that she does not choose literature that is against her own beliefs, nor does she choose literature that violates her moral compass since she believes that literature can have a powerful impact on the reader through the images and values that it may communicate. Additionally, it is important to note that VH mentioned that she takes a historical perspective to literature by teaching to the importance of the context surrounding the piece of literature, while looking to address the human experience encapsulated within the novel. These perspectives have allowed VH to choose pieces of literature that reflect and represent various facets of the human experience since the literature explored in her ENG2D class reflects "…different stories and different cultures and I love looking at stories from different cultures… they have to meet a certain criteria, a certain quality. There has to be a meaning. There has to be something that we can connect to…something so personal in that human story that we can follow." Therefore, it is understood that VH can successfully teach to the foundations of the curriculum by selecting pieces of literature that can speak to the "layers of understanding" within the human experience and through exploring "what the story is behind the story," regardless of genre.

In relation to implementing the curriculum within lesson planning, the educator's approach in teaching, and the assessments of a course and/or unit, VH and I discussed the importance in considering the academic contexts and abilities of one's students through VH's reflection on the writing abilities of her students. VH noted that she approaches the development of her students' essay writing skills with structure so that the expectations of students are clear. In having clear expectations, VH communicated that "We want to be improving [on students' abilities]. That's the foundation… Because if you can't write within the parameters, you can't write anything… I am pretty strict in the beginning. I think, as a teacher, 'Here's what I expect of you'… but then the more we get more comfortable, build trust." By taking this approach, VH

noted that the class is then equipped to be more creative within the foundational skills that they have developed. Within her experiences, VH noticed that by time they have reached her class at the grade 10 level, students "don't know the functions [or] structure of grammar… or punctuation. So that's a huge part to teach that. So, I teach that… outside of what I should be doing at the grade 10 level but I have to teach basic punctuation, basic grammar, basic topic sentencing, basic transitional words." Therefore, it was understood that VH felt as though she needs to teach these foundational aspects of English reading and writing since without this knowledge and experience, students will be unable to succeed within obtaining the skills and knowledge outlined within the curriculum, nor will students be able to eventually embrace the more "creative aspect[s] of writing." VH also noted that within the teaching of the ENG2D, she noticed that "… [students] don't even know what implicit means! They don't even know what a semi-colon is for! They don't even know! They don't know what a conjunction is!" For this reason, VH has taught parts of speech and poetic devices at the beginning of the course within the short stories unit so that students can be equipped with the knowledge they need to be able to be successful within the context of the ENG2D curriculum by the time they reach the poetry unit at the end of the course. Moreover, when assessing students, VH highlighted the importance of assessments reflecting what has been taught in class and the knowledge developed in class since it is within these assessments that students are expected to "[prove] what you know. That's a really hard measurement within saying how much are you regurgitating what I want to hear as the teacher… But then at the same time, I'm interested in what that student knows." VH spoke to the importance of maintaining high standards and expectations within the classroom and within the assessments that occur within the classroom by upholding academic integrity throughout the course and by assigning varied assessments to students to allow them the opportunity to exemplify academic integrity. VH noted that "I've had to adapt. I can't send them home with an essay. I can't send them home with anything written. They have to write it in front of me…. Because I need to see what [they] can do." VH explained that she approaches essay assignments this way since she felt as though there are no academic consequences regarding plagiarism within the current education system, and it is her responsibility as the educator to uphold the standards of academic integrity within the classroom to ensure that the right values and lessons are taught to her students. And now with the accessibility of artificial intelligence (AI), which just outside the scope of my reasearch, the table has been flipped upside down. Aside from the

completion of in-class writing, the author of essay submissions has become ever more complicated. Therefore, within the teaching of a course within the guidelines of the curriculum, VH has the responsibility to balance the academic contexts of students, in addition to the contexts of students based on their lived experiences and cultures.

Within the context of applying VH's approaches to the curriculum more specifically to *The Mountain Story* unit, VH and I discussed her overall objectives of the chosen unit. With considerations towards the knowledge and skill levels of students upon entering her classroom, VH communicated these considerations challenge her "to pick at least something from each of the strands of the curriculum and say I can hit on this… I'm not just gonna do the one, I want to hit on them all." For example, in the context of the chosen unit, VH noted that she is able to include the media strand within her teaching by examining the various book covers of the novel to explore the implicit and explicit messages portrayed by the selection of book covers. This activity supports "[t]hat scaffolding of learning of being able to [address the] implicit, [the] explicit, to read into the text, to bring in your literary devices… [to] clearly see this is foreshadowing… clearly see this is a flashback…. clearly see what part of the setting of the story we're in." VH communicated that she uses the curriculum to support the class's exploration of the themes, characters, settings, and the deeper connections that students develop towards these aspects of the novel to embrace critical thinking and to develop the skills to be able to write critically about their exploration of the novel. By way of implementing the curriculum to empower students within the unit, VH reiterated that her approach to teaching to the English curriculum is similar in her approach to teaching to the history curriculum, especially due to the interconnectivity of the two subject areas. VH explained that she believes that the goal within education is to create a well-rounded person who can take part in discourse, and to compartmentalize subject areas within this process would be a disservice to the interactive process of education. VH also addressed the importance of valuing the hidden curriculum within her teaching by reiterating that though educators are there to teach to the curriculum, "I'm not your fountain of knowledge… My job is just to lead you… So, you can then go and hopefully you leave this [classroom] maybe taking one or two things away and you leave this building and you say 'well, I don't remember what you taught me, but you taught me that I mattered.' That is what we call the hidden curriculum." VH reflected that she views the hidden curriculum as letting students know that they matter and that their importance in the world should be "more

important than any of this discussion [in the classroom]… [and should be] confirmed every day" since it is through the development of their confidence that students are able "to build [on] that sense of self, a voice." Therefore, VH acknowledged that "there is no formula" within teaching and implementing a curriculum since "[t]here's always a plan… but my best laid plans can go out the window real quickly… That's the adjustment and you always have to adjust yourself" as an educator when students come to class with diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills that are to be developed within the course.

By way of guiding students in developing their critical thinking skills within the context of the unit, VH indicated that she uses class discussions and corporate reading as tools to help "[e]nlighten students" to "go beyond the surface" to understand the ideas and themes that are being represented by the novel. VH explained that it is through class discussions and the reflections that emerge from reading corporately that VH tries to frame characters and their contexts to position students in connecting to the characters' feelings and their experiences since:

> I'm always trying to sensitize the student to the character … you never really understand somebody to see from their perspective, until you climb into their skin and walk around in it for a while. I literally want them to be immersed… But they're gonna bring their own eyes to it. So how do we do that? We want to connect to that feeling.

Therefore, in addition to "providing that structure and that culture around the characters" through guided discussions, VH explained that she purposefully reads particular sections with the class to draw out student reflections on the ways in which they may feel if they were to experience the challenges that the characters may be experiencing, such as encouraging students to reflect on their relationships with their parents. VH has taken this approach throughout class discussions by implementing guiding questions that invoke reflections on the uniquely human experiences, emotions, and stories reflected within the novel. For example, within the context of Lansens' (2020) novel, VH reflected that she becomes emotional reading about Nola since Nola's character reminds her of her relationship with her paternal grandmother. Conversely, VH has experienced students that have more difficulty connecting to the concepts, plot, and themes encapsulated within the literature discussed in class. Though this presents a challenge, VH noted that she recognizes that class discussions provide an opportunity to appreciate the lived experiences of students by encouraging and supporting them in learning from the lived experiences of other students and of the educator to provide a space to appreciate difference. It is

noted that VH's approach within her discussions is also inspired by her perspectives in teaching history. In paraphrasing Winston Churchill, VH mentioned "a nation that ignores its past is doomed to repeat its mistakes," and in approaching class discussions as a place to hear student's perspectives, students are able to practice the ability of looking at an event and being able to ask '"What can we learn here?"' in order to learn from the mistakes and actions of others. VH also noted the difficult and delicate discussions surrounding Wolf's choice to end his life, and while she discusses with her class that suicide as a terrible thing, VH explained that "I don't like to dwell on that aspect of it, but he's so despondent… he's actually not suicidal… He doesn't want to end his life. He's got so much to live for and he's so hopeful. He's such a beautiful character to be hopeful for because… he's hopeful despite his despondency, despite his situation." Therefore, VH implemented this aspect of Wolf's character to reiterate that "this is a story of redemption. It's a story of love and that's how I frame it…. I think that's something we can all connect to… I get excited… about the characters because they are complex. They're dynamic." It is this multifaceted nature of the characters that emerges within the class conversations that allows students to practice metacognition and reflection within their discussions from the vantage point of their personal perspectives and contexts.

It is through the course content explored in class discussions that VH can contextualize the literature and is able to encourage students to share their perspectives that evolve as they practice and apply their critical thinking skills within the context of discussing the novel. VH communicated that "my job is for them to think… It's not to tell them what to think… you can be independent thinkers. It's not to tell you the easy answers. We want the easy answers – 'Just tell me yes or no.' Black or white. No, no. No, that's not my job." Conversely, VH noted that "my job is to encourage you, not to discourage you." Here, VH acknowledged that sometimes it is her job to tell students to think in a particular way but notes that these times are few and far between, such as when she had previously taught some students who had denied the occurrence of the Holocaust. It is within these instances that she would draw upon her faith to care for their personhood, to show care for them, and to show care for their development as people. And it is within critical moments like these, when topics need to be clarified within her classroom, that VH takes the time to have a fireside chat with her class. These chats would involve having discussions that are driven by the students and thus doing away with her agenda for that class. VH acknowledged that doing away with her agenda for a class in which she chose to do a

fireside chat instead was something that was a challenge at first since she would tend to have a heightened awareness towards the content that needed to be covered within the unit. However, VH found that these authentic chats would allow students to build trust with her and to see that "… [the educator is] real. They need to see you're a human being and they all need to see you care about them. So, the curriculum… I follow it, obviously. But… it's more important that that kid feels, you know, safe. And in this space, that they can be in their voice, can be heard and I want to hear from them." Therefore, VH reflected that she encourages reflection within her classroom, and discusses reflection as a way of embracing the skill of metacognition that is outlined within the curriculum without "not read[ing] yourself always into it." By acknowledging that "…when you read, it's a conversation between you and the author. It's so intimate," VH also acknowledged the importance of reading the chosen novel critically from a literary perspective, to connect it to other stories of survival, and to "…[ask] questions of each other and myself and say, 'what would I do in this situation?'" It is through collaboratively exploring the course content that the class can "…[deconstruct] and [construct the novel] back together…. Let's read into it. Let's pull that out. Let's make those connections… So, by the time we get to the novel, [the students] have maybe a little more muscle to do that."

VH also noted that the process of deconstructing and constructing important passages, themes, and characters within the chosen novel can be emotional since it is through these discussions that VH and the class explore the cyclical nature of the messiness within relationships, making connections, living life, and understanding these themes within their own personal contexts. VH acknowledged the importance of experiencing the literature in this way since she personally feels the significance of exploring the human experiences that are encapsulated by the chosen novel. VH noted "I don't want to go to painful places, but we have to sometimes will ourselves [to go to these places,] and there's moments I do. There's emotion I do show, and I can't help it." Therefore, in deconstructing the novel, the students gain a deeper appreciation for the importance of understanding one's context since the students gain perspective in realizing that the characters are "…rooted in reality and the characters are [messy]." Through our conversation, it became increasingly clear that it is through the flexibility within the class discussions and reflections that students gain an understanding that it is the characters' contexts that add to the messiness and complexity of a character within a novel, ultimately reflecting the messiness that we find within our lived experiences as well.

Though the final essay could be perceived as the final assessment of the chosen unit that displays the knowledge and skills that students have developed throughout the unit, VH noted that she believes it is actually the class discussions and discourse that emerges within their class discussions that is the true product of the students' knowledge and skills developed within the class. VH communicated to me that grades cannot sufficiently reflect the ways in which students are able to understand the course content. Rather, it is through the class discussions that VH is able to grasp students' understanding of a concept or idea, and that learning through these discussions "[are] the whole point of education." It is through classroom discussions and VH's support in guiding students through the essay writing process that she has aimed to fully immerse students within the novel and the themes that the novel presents. And it is also noted that because VH believes in scaffolding students' learning, the unit occurs within a course structure that scaffolds overarching themes discussed as well. Therefore, when students reach this unit, they have already had some experiences with themes like perseverance, courage, and sacrifice within the other units that they have already experienced, thus adding more depth to their understanding of the concepts and themes that flow throughout the course. However, VH noted that while she must grade students so that they have a mark at the end of the course, "[m]arks never define you. It's not who you are as a person. It's not who you are in my eyes. It's a snapshot of something." So, within the context of the unit's final essay, VH acknowledged that "I'm asking [the students] give me an uncreative form in an essay. I want [the students] to stay within those limitations because I want to see if [they're] able to put [ideas] together based on backing it up from our primary source, from our only source, the novel." VH also acknowledged that the final essay is "…actually clipping your wings at creativity… because you need to learn the fundamentals to write, right? I'm doing you a favor because I'm not allowing that creativity because it's not safe yet." Therefore, though classroom discussions have allowed VH to gain an understanding of the depth to her students' learning, VH communicated that she views the completion of the final essay as a step within her students' academic journey since it is within this assignment that they learn the process of essay writing. Furthermore, VH reflected that learning the process of essay writing allows students to successfully go forward within their academic careers having learned the foundations in English language writing to be able to evolve creatively within the subject area.

7.4.3 The Concluding Interview

I conducted a concluding interview with VH about three weeks after the first interview. The three-week gap allowed for both VH and I to consolidate what was asked and said during the first interview, as well as to note any other thoughts and/or reflections that occurred as a result of the ideas that were discussed within the first interview. Similarly to the first interview, the concluding interview was also meant to be an informal discussion, though I had prepared some guiding questions that were in line with the themes that emerged from our previous discussion (see Appendix D). Additionally, I also noted questions that I wanted to address that may not have fit into the flow of the first interview. Therefore, this section discusses the new themes that emerged specifically within this concluding conversation but also addresses any evolving ideas and new insights into VH's perspectives related to the themes discussed within our previous conversation.

Within this concluding interview, there were more poignant discussions surrounding VH's perspectives regarding text selections within English courses. We also had a larger discussion regarding the role and development of empathy within the classroom, as well as the importance of connecting to students and the ways in which teachers can be motivated to make those connections. We further discussed curriculum-as-planned, but in relation to VH's perspectives on the hidden curriculum and curriculum-as-lived. In relation to our discussion within the first interview, we further explored VH's reflections and experiences regarding professional development. As a result, the themes discussed within the following section were also quite multifaceted and interrelated since the experiences and ideas communicated by VH were developed within a conversational web. Therefore, the ideas and themes that evolved within this concluding interview were developed through the connections they have with one another, as well as through the connections that they have to VH.

Perspectives on Text Selections. In reflecting on teachers' abilities in choosing texts to explore within an English course, VH communicated that as an educator, she exercises the ability to judge the types of content that is acceptable for her class based on the class, her personal expertise, and her personal values. VH reflected on her personal experiences of reading Margaret Atwood within university and not feeling connected to this author since "I find her antithetical to my values. She puts a lot of things in there that I just found, this is not something I want students to have. But then she's not even the worst. She's tame." Regarding texts that are available and/or

taught within secondary school, VH noted that she cannot accept literature that is "explicitly sexual. [Students] don't need that. There's literature passing today in schools that is pornographic. That's disgusting. That's antithetical to my values so I could never get behind that." Conversely, VH indicated that she views classic literature as "good literature and qualified literature… that's stood the test of time," and it is the literature that withstands the passage of time that allows her to reflect and ask "Does it stand up? Does it hold up? What are the values in there? Is it my job to teach values that are antithetical to someone's background?" VH reflected that she asks those questions "[t]o be aware that people are coming from diverse backgrounds. To be aware to that there's a tremendous responsibility with a moral compass to have that [power of literature choice]." Therefore, VH communicated that while "[k]ids don't need to be exposed to all kinds of stuff, but they can be exposed to intricate ideas at a younger age," educators can utilize what she describes as "good literature" that can be grounded within the curriculum. VH also reflected on the importance of being open to varying text selection since in listening to different voices and being open to student interests, "[t]here are good books written, you know, why not study popular fiction? Why not study things that kids actually read?... I'm always like, let's get them interested in what they actually like." In choosing literature that students may identify with, like popular fiction, VH has observed that this motivates students to connect to stories and perspectives outside of themselves since popular fiction also reflects real values and life lessons. Therefore, educators need to be able to evaluate the types of values that their chosen literature will communicate to students. As opposed to choosing literature "…out of laziness," VH communicated that she reflects on the potential of teaching her chosen literature by asking, "Is there gonna be something we can sink our teeth into? So, I think that's something that you have to qualify literature with. Is there something of substance here? And if not, it's fluff… Is it worthwhile? And is it literature? Right. Is this great literature? No, but is it literature? Yeah. There's something here…" that students can relate to since it is important for educators to practice "…knowing students and knowing what they're capable of… [and] not talking down to their intellect."

Empathy within the Classroom through Curriculum-as-Lived. Through acknowledging her own personal contexts and perspectives, VH discussed the role and development of empathy within the classroom. VH indicated that she values that "[w]e all have a story to tell… that's what's exciting when you build relationships with people… [Y]ou hear that

story and you're like, that's really cool… that's an ingredient to who you are. That helps shape you to be who you are." VH noted that it is hearing student stories that helps educators "…understand and have empathy, not sympathy, have empathy for them." However, though VH stated that she is open to learning the truths of her students, she also acknowledged the importance of objective truths. Especially within the subject of history, VH reflect that she does not believe that history is interpretive since "[w]hen we look at fact based on historical record, we rely on multiple accounts and eyewitnesses as well as secondary… we have to walk through that process…. the Historical method… the sun does rise every morning in the East. I can say it doesn't. It doesn't change objective reality and the truth, right? That *is* the truth." At this point, I mentioned to VH that within this example of the sun rising in the East, I believe that history becomes interesting when one asks "…but what did it look like from where I was standing?" VH responded by stating that, "That's the viewpoint," and that she has noticed that within the educational system, "[o]nce people [have] made up their minds… this is your viewpoint forever. We don't ever want to shift them. It doesn't matter what the evidence is. And we, the factory of education, have told people to have these viewpoints that can't be changed." VH noted that reinforcing viewpoints that cannot be changed does not reflect learning or growth. Speaking to her personal ability to shift her viewpoints, VH noted that "I've had huge seismic viewpoints… I'm constantly shifting, but I'm not shifting on those things [that] to me [are] universal like my biblical beliefs and values, but… if I'm not open to change, then I'm rigid. And it's very difficult…" to reach others within that rigidity. In believing that "we can reach all people … [and] we can sensitize everybody," VH reflected on a student who was "violent, hates women, hates Christians" and who she believed needed to be approached with openness and care since even though they differ from one another, "[h]e needs to hear that he's important… to reach him." By being curious about the student, their perspectives, and their contexts, VH communicated that it is through reflecting on the student in this way that she becomes grounded and open to changing her viewpoint of the student.

VH stated that when teaching history, her "goal is empathy," especially when discussing historical events that happened to real people since "…this is not fictional. So, I always want to make that connection if we're looking at a broader story in history. I want to narrow in on that individual. I want to focus on them because that's where the empathy comes from because it's a human story." VH discussed that she has also applied this approach when teaching English

courses since a hidden aspect of the curriculum is to follow the provincial curriculum to make students "good civic people… [since] that's the whole point, is to be a good civic individual, [which] means to care about other people." In defining empathy as "understand[ing] what you're going through," VH vocalized that from her position, "I can't turn a blind eye…not to be a bystander," which ultimately encourages her to teach students to have courage since she believes that "we have very little moral courage in our country" that makes its way into teaching. Similarly to the ways in which she teaches history, VH communicated that she aims to teach students about identifying the conqueror, the victor, and what it means to be courageous. When teaching Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, VH has taught to the idea that it is the character of Wolf that is the victor of the story. In developing empathy for the character of Wolf, the reader notices "he's such a little broken person… He's super hopeful. He's been given such a bad deal and some of us get a bad deal in life, but that doesn't mean that defines him. Because it didn't define his life. The worst experience of his life, his mother being killed in front of him, his father going to jail, didn't define who he was, right?" Additionally, in developing empathy for Wolf's life experiences, VH noted that it does not matter what the cultural background is of the reader since the reader will be able to relate to the character through connecting with the humanity that the story encapsulates. Therefore, VH communicated that it is through the act of empathizing that educators can sensitize students to different experiences. However, VH clarified that while the story should reflect empathy, it should "[n]ot [be] empathetic to the victors. Not empathetic to the enemies or the evil doers, as I would call them, but empathy to say, 'what do I do in that situation?'" Therefore, VH indicated that she takes the vantage point of empathy within teaching English literature by way of asking and answering, "how do we reach kids? How do we sensitize the student regardless of my mind... [T]he human heart. It's the same right here. We got the same [heart]," since she believes that regardless of one's experience or background, we can empathize with each other through our humanity.

Connecting to Students and the Motivations of Educators. Within our discussion, VH reflected on her personal practices of the ways in which she likes to connect to students, and the ways in which she looks to motivate her teaching practices through learning about her students and their experiences within the Ontario education system. By implementing conversational activities, VH indicated that she can develop an understanding of the dynamics between students, but this also allows VH to desensitize students to their less desirable previous experiences and to

sensitize them "…to what I want to see in this classroom." Additionally, it is through this exercise that VH has heard "these hellish stories [of students' previous experiences in the classroom]… I've had kids tell me stories that I've been in tears…they need to know that that's not okay and someone needs to say it's not okay at this point." In hearing the negative past experiences of students, VH reflected on her need to then deprogram students from these types of experiences since she views secondary school as an opportunity to reprogram students with more positive experiences. It was also at this point in our conversation that VH then reflected that "…our job is to protect kids…" and in not doing so, educators are breaking Ontario's *Education Act* (1990) since it is this act that gives one the right to be an educator that take actions in the interest of the student. VH noted that the *Education Act* is "…in the line [with] Judeo-Christian values and principles… what we do [is] we protect the weak. We champion them but we also build them up." VH communicated her anger in hearing about educators hurting students within students' experiences in the classroom, and explicitly noted that "I don't like people whose motives are bad… [What] are you doing teaching?... I don't think this is the right job [for them] … [T]his is not the right job for you if you don't fundamentally like kids and want to help them… if you don't respect the student to begin with, that's the foundational piece." Having previously noted that "… the source of my moral compass is the Bible," VH linked her importance for respecting students to her religious views since she perceives peoples of all kinds as image bearers of God. Therefore, it was understood through our interviews that these religious beliefs have also guided VH's textual choices, how she approaches these textual choices, and the ways in which she has interpreted the curriculum through her pedagogical choices.

In asking VH to expand more on her implementation of fireside chats within the classroom, our discussion regarding her motivations as an educator and the importance of connecting to students evolved. VH communicated that whether the fireside chats are planned or spontaneous, the point of the moment is to allow students "to have a moment to breathe. Let's just breathe in. It's okay to breathe. It's okay to exhale, especially when things are piling" on within other courses and/or within their lives. Creating this time to have open conversations with students works as a multifaceted tool that exemplifies to students that it is important to take a moment to slow down when one feels stressed and/or overwhelmed, as well as allowing VH to gain insight and information about factors that may be impacting her students' ability to learn. In connecting with one another through these chats, VH communicated that she aims to create a

safe space where students can voice their concerns, communicate if there is something that surfaced within class discussions that did not fully address their reflections, and to be able to comment on something that was taught in class. VH also noted that sometimes fireside chats are done as a collective group or within smaller groups, depending on VH's gauge on the class's comfort level; both options allow for students to get to know one another, learn about each other's experiences, and practice their ability to hear others' perspectives to "[create] that community within the classroom." VH reflected that "[i]t's probably the most important [thing in the classroom] than anything else is to create that community and that sense of purpose that everybody belongs… [and can] participate in the conversation." However, while it is important for the focus to remain on the students and their needs, VH also explained that students may learn about her in these moments as well since it allows students an opportunity to see that VH is "a real person and I'm not always uptight about certain things." In attempting to recreate the vulnerability that occurs when one is amongst friends and sharing their dreams, feelings, and thoughts around an actual campfire, VH acknowledged that the fireside chats in her classroom allow her students to see her vulnerability, which humanizes her within their community of learning. Additionally, VH noted that when she tried to show students that she can be vulnerable and honest with them, she is also attempting to exemplify empathy and care towards the individual learner in moments where they can relate to one another. VH reflected that this ultimately allows her and her students to build a community of learning based on trust.

VH communicated that exemplifying empathy and building trust are important aspects within her classroom since implementing, exemplifying, and practicing these tools leave space for student voice and the ability for educators to empower student voices. VH reflected that the English curriculum notes the importance of student voices, and that in encouraging their voices and in not talking down to students, educators are communicating to students that they matter. It was at this point in our conversation that I asked VH to reflect on the ways in which her teaching has helped to address the different facets that impact the lived experience of minoritized students within their Canadian contexts. As a response, VH acknowledged that empowering student voices within a community of learners allows students to feel comfortable in expressing their ideas and to have their voice heard, regardless of their ethnicity and/or culture. VH noted that "I don't ever want a kid feeling that their voice doesn't matter… I want to hear from you. It doesn't matter what, you know, melanin tone you have… you matter in my classroom." When asked

about the ways in which educators can strengthen the teaching of minoritized perspectives and students, VH invoked the importance of building a community of learners within her class, while acknowledging that it is a process to build this community and trust between the educator and individual students. For example, VH has found that in having one-on-one conferences with students, VH is able to build trust between herself and the student, as well as using these conferences to exemplify respect for the individual student as well. VH noted that "there's a respect there that goes both ways… It's a respect for the individual but that's paramount, and [students] have to see that and oftentimes [it] has to be modeled to them until they get it right… Again… the most insignificant thing to me, I think, is how somebody looks. That doesn't matter. I want to know who you are." VH reflected that it is important to build a good rapport with one's students to truly connect with students regardless of their race and culture, and though she expressed that the most insignificant thing about someone is the way they look, she also shows awareness towards her own racial representation regarding the ways in which her students might perceive her:

> I hope [they] don't think it's just a White lady teaching [them]. Like that is the least significant thing about me and to most of the world, they don't see me as White anyway, like I'm an Other… It doesn't matter. Who cares. That's so unimportant. What is important is we're gonna be in a relationship and you didn't choose this relationship, but that's okay. And I didn't choose this relationship, but that's okay. We're gonna make the best of it… We're gonna do the best we can and hopefully we can trust each other and that's a currency that pays dividends with kids too.

I regret not explicitly asking about what VH meant when she said, "they don't see me as White anyway," but one might infer that she meant that people may identify her as Jewish before primarily attributing her identity to being White. Furthermore, in giving the utmost importance to the relationship that VH aims to build with each individual student, and collectively within the class, VH noted that in getting to know the students, she tailors the class to their interests to further build their relationships. For example, though VH was teaching an English course, she noted the students' interests in food and decided to include a Food Day where everyone brought in foods that they liked and/or grew up with. VH took this opportunity to bring in latkes, allowing her to share "a little bit of me with them… there's a reciprocal relationship… [O]nce you share and you show respect to somebody, you get a lot from them and when you respect

them enough as a person, that's just everything." In reflecting on her personal heritage and experience with coming from what she describes as an immigrant family, VH communicated that while she respects students' culture and who they are, she ultimately respects their parents since they have entrusted her to educate their children. Moreover, VH also reflected on the potential to be labeled as someone who may be seen as a "White lady with whatever light hair and blue eyes." This is something that VH rejects since it does not encapsulate her own lived experience having been raised within an immigrant family with similar cultural experiences to those of her students that may be racialized and/or minoritized. VH also noted that this shared experience often is a part of the foundation of her empathy for those students as well. Therefore, VH noted that through honestly connecting to students and their experiences, she aims to build reciprocal respect within her relationships with students, which comes with "building that trust with them. It doesn't always happen beautifully."

Perspectives on Implementing the Curriculum-as-Planned. When discussing the importance of teaching and exemplifying trust, respect, and empathy within the classroom, VH and I also discussed VH's perspectives on the hidden curriculum and the curriculum-as-lived. VH noted that, as a part of the hidden curriculum that evolves within her classroom, she uses the curriculum to facilitate the empowerment of student voices through the discourse that evolves within the classroom in relation to the course content. However, VH also communicated the importance of educators first developing an understanding of why they are teaching something from the curriculum and where that aspect of the curriculum originates. VH also voiced the importance of becoming skilled in making the appropriate selections from the curricular documents to be able to address the subject area in a way that ensures that educators have sufficiently incorporated the strands of the curriculum. In noting the broadness and simplicity of the Ontario English curriculum documents, VH reflected on her own process of implementing the curriculum since it is this broadness within the curriculum that allows educators to liberally interpret and implement the curriculum within their classrooms. VH has used this agency to first reflect the principles outlined within the curricular strands through "the breadth of the course, specifically to the unit." VH communicated that she then looks to incorporating the overall expectations outlined within the chosen strand, which then allows her to narrow her teaching focus to the specific expectations. Within our discussion, VH was vocal about the importance of drawing from the curriculum within her teaching. To exemplify her own curricular knowledge

and cooperation in working with the administration, VH noted that if any administrative staff were to walk into her classroom at any given point in time and ask about how the lesson relates to the curriculum, “I can turn to [the curriculum]. That document was always on the side of my classroom” to support her pedagogical choices.

In grounding her lessons within the curriculum documents, VH communicated that the hidden curriculum evolves from the teaching that occurs within the classroom and the values that students take from the teaching since “these are the attributes of what we want students to walk out of Ontario schools with.” VH reiterated that it is clear from the curricular documents that “[w]e want them to learn to read. We want them to be oral communicators. We want them writing. But if you start to look at the underbelly of that,” VH noted that this is when educators can exercise their ability of being intentional and selective in which expectations they aim to address within their teaching of a lesson, unit, and/or course through developing a plan tailored to their students’ needs, abilities, and/or experience in relation to the curriculum. However, VH indicated that if she notices that the lesson and class discourse are evolving into something outside of her planned directions, “to me that conversation is far more important than hitting all of the strands right in the document or hitting that overall expectation on this day, in this moment. To me, [this discourse] is what you have to have, and if you're not having that discourse in the classroom, you're never going to have that [profound] experience.” VH acknowledged that her style of teaching encourages discussions and reflections, and as an experienced educator, she feels comfortable being flexible in her approach to teaching. However, VH credited this flexibility to being able to trust herself but also having learned to trust her students within the guidance and petametres that she has learned to implement within the class to create a safe space to have those discussions. VH indicated that she purposely creates this safe space since it is within this safe space that students learn to respect her, and that both VH and the students learn to trust each other. VH noted that English courses particularly allow a flexibility towards the curriculum since through less structured discussions, the course content allows for a space to reflect on the human experience in a way that can be deeply personal.

It is also through the flexibility of the curriculum that VH embraces her own learning within her position as an educator. VH had reiterated that the Ontario curriculum documents acknowledge that there’s a symbiotic relationship that exists between the teacher, the student, and their parents. VH reflected that these relationships are based in respect, and through

balancing these relationships. Therefore, VH indicated that she takes her responsibility of educating students very seriously since she has awareness that parents entrust their children to her and to the values that she will teach them. With the curriculum at the foundation of her role of being her students' coach and leader, VH reflected that educators have the responsibility in encouraging students to think critically and for themselves since she is not interested in feeding answers to her students. Rather, VH communicated that she is interested in students critically thinking about their perspectives and developing the ability to voice their thoughts, while she simultaneously learns along with the students throughout this process. In reflecting on her own experiences as a young student, VH remembered one of her own previous teachers mentioning to the class that, "Here, we permit mistakes," which was VH's first introduction to the idea that it is okay to make mistakes. Within the process of learning, especially from the position of the educator, VH communicated that she makes mistakes and "want[s] to be as transparent about that as possible. I'm not gonna reach everybody. I'm gonna hurt your feelings. I'm so sorry. It's never my intent. You know, I have to show that humanity too, that it's okay to make mistakes." VH reflected that teaching and the action of learning is not completed through students finishing booklets, silencing students and their ideas, or being physically seated away from students during class, but rather VH discussed that she believes that:

> You need to walk around. You need to be front and centre. You need to be in the midst of the kids. So, it is noisy. So, there's discussion. It is busy and that seems chaotic to the straight lines. We're not factory workers, right? But we still have a system that's set up for factory workers. To be a little assembly line. [The] bell rings, we got to clock-in and clock-out… That's not what education should be and it's a great responsibility… it's that busyness [that] can be scary. It can be intimidating.

Therefore, VH reflected that she views student discussion, the noisiness within conversation, and the interactions between students within the curriculum-as-lived as useful feedback, which indicates to her that "[t]hey're actually learning. You know that they're learning." VH also reflected on the practices she has seen other educators invoke from her own perspectives as a young student in the Ontario education system, such as completing booklets while being expected to "…shut up. Sit down. Don't say anything. That wasn't teaching." It is from her own personal experiences as a student within the Ontario school system that VH determined that she wanted to approach teaching differently than the ways in which she saw her own teachers

behave. VH noted that though it is a part of the teacher's responsibility to teach to the curriculum, there may be some students that find themselves not engaged with the class (i.e.: falling asleep during class time). VH commented that in these moments, it is also her responsibility to actively understand why students might not be engaged in class, to understand what might be occurring within their lives, and to connect to them to create more profound opportunities for student learning within their personal contexts. VH acknowledged that in these moments of learning, students will make mistakes, but educators "…always want to see you use your brain…" by critically thinking and learning from those mistakes. VH noted that it is for these reasons that she believes in the importance of experiential learning, as well as the importance of having smaller class sizes. VH communicated that she believes that these factors would allow for educators to make more profound connections to their students, and to develop a better understanding of individual student needs. VH indicated that by teaching students "…in a way that works for their understanding, not for the system that we've created," students will be more prepared "…to think for themselves so that they can begin to have that success…" within secondary school. In reflecting on her own academic experiences, VH communicated that she "always feel[s] like I've taken a long road and a long route… I don't want kids to take that long route. I want you to feel like you're having that success…," as well as feeling like they are being supported by her within attaining that success since VH does not want her students "…to wrestle alone… I want you to tell me and I can actually help you."

Reflections on Professional Development. Drawing on our initial discussion, VH and I further explored her perspectives on professional development within this concluding discussion, as well as the considerations that she takes towards her personal values towards teaching and the purposes of education. I had asked VH if she had any reflections on our first interview and she mentioned that on a personal level, she noted that through answering the questions that I had asked her, she felt affirmed in her abilities as an educator since it is not often that she has discussions and/or is asked questions about the values and perspectives that go into her pedagogical choices. Through acknowledging the thought that goes into her pedagogical perspectives and actions, VH communicated that she believes "…that there's been a guiding hand. God has guided me in the job…" and through reflecting on her career as a teacher, it gave her an opportunity to feel affirmed in her approaches and actions. VH clarified that she does not need affirmation to feel acknowledged, but rather the affirmation she felt through our interaction

allowed her to truly appreciate her ability to teach a novel like Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, which was something unfamiliar and outside of the canon of English literature that she had previously taught. VH communicated that though she was learning to teach the novel while the students were also learning the novel, I understood that VH was proud of her ability to encourage student voice during the teaching of the novel by asking them effective leading questions that would guide them towards critical thinking. VH noted that "At least I'm on the right track in terms of curricular stuff and trying to and being able to vocalize that and tell you a little bit about me. Because I can't divorce the me from the teacher because she's still the same. There's a mask. The mask is peeling off…. [to be] able to explain [my] point of reference." Similarly to the ways in which VH invokes class discussions to ensure student voices are empowered, this part of our discussion made me aware of the importance of educators having the opportunity to also take part in discourse to have moments of affirmation for themselves, in addition to reflecting deeply on what they do and the thoughts that go into their pedagogical actions. In noting that "[w]e don't talk about the nuts and bolts…" that go into teacher perspectives and pedagogy, VH indicates that she feels as though teachers often inherit other teachers' tools, lessons, and resources, without questioning why it is the way that it is, how it can be improved, and/or the importance of teachers being able to identify with the content that they are implementing within their teaching. Therefore, VH stressed the importance of teachers critically thinking about their course and unit structures, as well as the importance of reflecting on one's teaching materials and resources to understand the value in "…constantly trying to change things and to make it better…" This is especially important when working off of a colleague's material that was created to be taught by someone else with a different lens. VH believes that when utilizing shared resources, "I have to make [the lessons] my own. It's got to be my own. It has to be through my own eyes… There's just no other way… Because I can't communicate [the lessons] if it's not my own." Therefore, it was through this part of our final interview that I gained insight on the importance of educators being affirmed in their teaching abilities and choices since this ultimately influences the ways in which they find their own confidence in making their personal pedagogical choices that impact their ability to empower student voices within the classroom.

Following the theme of affirming educators, VH and I also had a discussion about the treatment of educators, especially within the context of professional development and the ways in which VH believes professional development could be improved. VH communicated that she

believes that the molding of young minds "…in gaining knowledge is a really high calling in [an educator's] responsibility. A lot of people do the job. But [that] doesn't mean they're called to it. So, I take that responsibility seriously." Though VH had communicated that she believes that teaching is a calling, I could not help but also note my personal understanding that there is also an immense amount of experience is needed for educators to learn about themselves as educators and to learn about teaching students. Moreover, in taking that responsibility seriously, VH communicated that she finds that she excels when the supporting administration trusts that educators can successfully educate students, as opposed to some of VH's other experiences where she felt as though the administration treated teachers as if they were inept. By having varying experiences with administrations and the support that they would provide, VH communicated that she learned the importance of developing "…really good relationships with people across departments…" as a form of support, as well as learning to balance "…giving too much [within the classroom] but at the same time when I'm there, I'm present, that's where I want to be is present in the classroom and give everything I can in those moments." However, though she has experienced negative moments with school administrations, VH noted that "…that's not gonna stop me in the classroom" because she does not perceive herself as working for the administration but rather has positioned students at the forefront of her work since she believes that it is educators and their contributions within the lives of students that outlast administrations.

Within our previous interview, VH voiced her unsatisfactory experiences with professional development, which caused me to ask her about the ways in which she believes professional development could be improved, especially in relation to teaching to minorized perspectives within the classroom. VH noted that, based on her experiences and perspectives, it is important for professional development to include, encourage, and listen to "…authentic voices from real teachers." VH explained that "…if we're to improve that experience, you need to actually listen to [educator] voices, and you know some of the best and smartest people are sitting there in your schools and some of the best resources [that are] untapped are sitting in your schools." VH reflected that while not all teachers are of the same caliber, she had noticed that many of the teachers who may be the best resources are rarely asked to organize or be included within professional development exercises. VH also noted that from her personal experience of developing her own pedagogical practices, she had found that she learned most from her

conversations with other educators and through asking them questions to develop an understanding of the reasoning behind the choices they make within the classroom. Moreover, VH also voiced her lack of interest in leading a professional development session herself since it is through having more authentic discourse and insights into educator perspectives that allows teachers to think critically about the ways in which they practice within their own classrooms, as opposed to the professional development that VH has experienced that failed to highlight authentic teacher perspectives. VH voiced that politics between teachers and administration impact the approach taken within professional development, which ultimately impacts the trust that is developed between these two vital facets within a school community. Instead of feeling seen as independent and accountable, VH stated that she feels as though educators are not trusted by administration and/or seen as the expert class in their field. Conversely, VH communicated that she believes that bringing in outside experts within professional development does not allow schools to take a business or entrepreneurial approach to homing in on the resources that are already within the school. VH explained that, by not empowering the voices and perspectives of educators within professional development, she believes that administrators are taking part in the dumbing down of culture for the sake of meeting requirements and quotas outlined by the school board that may not consider the realities of teaching within a classroom. VH communicated frustration towards how these perspectives limit the potential of teachers within their pedagogical practices and undermines educators' knowledge and experience. Furthermore, VH noted the importance of having administrative leadership that would be humble amongst educators who are authentically trying to help their students and improve their practice.

Through our discussion surrounding professional development, VH mentioned the inclusion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within education as a quota that administration try to invoke within various facets of schooling and education. Before continuing, I would like to note that DEI is not the same as equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). EDI is relevant to employment equity practices that are practiced within Canada (Employment Equity Act, 1995), which places equity before diversity to ensure that when equally qualified people have applied for a job and a choice needs to be made, the choice would be to hire the underrepresented to ensure equity in the workplace (Ibrahim, in press). Conversely, DEI is used within the United States to address systemic discrimination within government and public institutions, with diversity management implemented by quotas (Ibrahim, 2025). Therefore, it is understood that

within this conversation, VH understands EDI to be DEI, but these terms are not only semantically different but also have different definitions and attributes. However, to be true to the discussion that occurred between VH and I, I have referred to VH's use of DEI, though I believe VH may be misattributing this term to the EDI practices within a Canadian context.

Due to the explicit mentioning of DEI, we further explored VH's perspectives within this portion of the concluding interview. In regard to hiring practices, VH voiced that it is demeaning to be told that someone got a job because they are a woman and/or because they are a person of colour, since "[i]t's demeaning to society but it's demeaning to the individual and we don't care about the individual in this story" if we are to minimize them to these factors of who they are. VH communicated that she believes that approaching hiring with DEI "wedge[s] us so that we're not individuals anymore," but rather VH believes this approach towards implementing DEI groups people together without acknowledging who they are as unique individuals and their individual capabilities. However, it is understood that EDI is what is implemented within equitable employment practices in Canada, not DEI. VH described equity as "impartially without the lens of all color… It's justice…Impartial means it doesn't matter what you look like." Furthermore, it is understood, based on our first interview and through our second interview, that VH has communicated that she believes that the way someone looks is the least important thing about them. However, from my perspective as a racialized woman, I would like to reiterate that while my skin colour should not encapsulate anything about who I am and/or my abilities, I believe that it does matter what a racialized person looks like since I know from firsthand experience that people are treated differently and often inappropriately based on the way they look. Therefore, to interject my personal lens, I do not believe that it is effective, realistic, and/or fair to be colour blind and/or impartial to the racialized experiences that racialized people need to endure to prove themselves within our society and/or within the workplace. Additionally, VH communicated that she also has strong feelings about White people who take it upon themselves to implement DEI since it reflects a "savior complex because at the end of the day [they] actually think [they] are superior to others and the inferior people need our help lifting themselves up…That's the rationale that I object to. That is the problem… [their] need to bring up all the little people, all the inferiors, all those who we put lower because of their skin [is] like that." VH communicated that within our complex multicultural society, it is important to have clear expectations and if one has the qualifications to meet those expectations, that is the ways in

which someone should be judged. In relation to these perspectives provided by VH, she gave the example of wanting to play hockey alongside her brothers, but because there were no girls within the league, it was a barrier that she had to break and did so by meeting the standards needed to be within the league, without the standards being changed for her inclusion.

In turning our focus on curricular perspectives, VH noted that with focusing on DEI within the education system:

> We lower our standards…We're saying, 'No, you don't have to meet the high watermark, you don't fail until you get to high school. I'm just gonna push [students] through.' So, we're saying to kids of whatever backgrounds you are… 'You're too dumb for this…we know that you can't do this.' That is completely defeatist again… it's so insulting. It's insulting to kids. It's insulting to their intelligence and it's the same well-intentioned feelings behind that…

Again, it is understood that EDI is implemented within Canadian employment equity to ensure that equitable treatment is at the forefront of hiring practices; therefore, I believe VH is misattributing DEI in this instance. However, to invoke my personal lens, I do not believe that invoking equity within teaching is lowering standards but rather allows students to be actively supported in reaching existing standards according to their needs. From my perspective as a racialized woman, it is unsettling to think that to some, the acknowledgement of one's race within educational practices means that a racialized person cannot be expected to perform to the curricular standards set by the norm, as if it is one's race that is the factor that is debilitating them, as opposed to recognizing the systemic suppressions and the effects of those suppressions that racialized people have experienced and continue to endure. Moreover, I then asked VH to reflect about where curricular standards come from, and how might educators make these standards more equitable for students and teachers. VH acknowledged that inequities within education happen due to the types of teachers that end up within the education system, but she also believes that the ways in which educational standards are applied are what impact student achievement. VH noted that she knows educators who have learned within professional development that Black students do not perform well within the literacy test and has heard educators voice that they do not want to teach applied classes because there are a lot of new immigrant students, all of which impacts one's approach to teaching these students. In having these perspectives, VH believes that these educators are not operating within the value system of

allowing students to earn their success and do not show value for the student since DEI is condoning these statements to be made and for these perspectives to exist. VH noted that "Our standards aren't bad. It's just like our laws aren't bad. They're not applied. When we show partiality in how we apply the law, that becomes a problem… We're gonna let that person off because you know, we feel bad because I don't want to be called a racist," instead of using failure of meeting standards as an opportunity to learn and improve. I also do not believe that acknowledging students' racialized educational experiences and knowledge development should encourage educators to be partial to them. Rather, I believe that acknowledging students' racialized experiences allow us to better understand the systemic challenges that they have had to face, challenges which include educators that choose not to recognize the assumptions that are made regarding students' abilities based on their race.

VH also noted the influence of Judeo-Christian values within education's curricular standards since "in the search for equity, if we treat people with a Judeo-Christian value, which is what the West is founded on, is your meritocracy, you earn it, you're valued, you matter. Then that changes everything. That changes how we look at everybody. It changes how we interact with each other." In noting VH's comment about showing partiality when applying the standards, in addition to her comment about the influence of Judeo-Christian values within education, I do not believe that one can be impartial in equitable educational practices if we treat people based on their perceived merit. Rather, if we are to judge people based on their perceived merit, that judgement is being made with bias based on one's personal values of who is deserving since merit is not universal, but rather subjective. Moreover, if one's approach to education is based on meritocracy through a Judeo-Christian lens as VH mentioned above, it feels as though one's value and equitable treatment is conditional based on merits that are grounded in Judeo-Christian values. This would ultimately communicate that some students matter more than others and/or some students are more deserving of success than others based on how well they can perform to how Judeo-Christian values define merit. While I understand the role Judeo-Christian values have had on Canadian education, I feel as though if we are to hold students to Judeo-Christian values within today's context, these standards cannot fully encompass the multifaceted challenges and experiences that impact students' abilities to succeed within their educational journeys, especially with Canadian diverse student populations who are not necessarily privy to these values. I believe it would be difficult to judge students based on a

rubric that they are not familiar with and considering that not all students practice or believe in Judeo-Christian customs, it would be inequitable to enforce expectations that are based in a value system that cannot support students' individual needs within today's society. Conversely, I also understand that the Ontario educational system requires students to earn a grade at the end of an assignment or course, but if educators expect students to earn a grade at the expense of students' beliefs and/or values, wouldn't this indirectly communicate to students that their lived experiences and knowledge do not matter if they cannot align with a particular lens? Wouldn't this ultimately further encourage a colonial lens within pedagogical practices? I felt a discomfort in VH's comment because as someone who was not necessarily raised with Judeo-Christian values but learned these values to survive within my own social contexts, this made me realize the extra work someone like me has to do in order to be perceived as deserving of my successes, to satisfy the existing social constructs that gatekeep success, and to be perceived as having merit.

The mention of Judeo-Christian values within our Western society was also interesting to me because VH mentions its influence on Canadian education, and also the importance of these values within the ways in which a person can earn and exemplify their societal value. However, I could not help but also think of the ways in which the intentions and context behind invoking Judeo-Christian values within our society may impact the ways in which people may be treated and perceived, especially since these same Judeo-Christian values have been used to justify things like residential schools. I mentioned this to VH within our interview and she communicated that "history is riddled with contradictions," and gave the example of the expansion of the British Empire:

> Yes, we can say colonialism… but then here's the other side of that. Everywhere they went, they brought laws, and they brought common law to people and lifted up massive swaths of people… who never had that before. Who are subjugated. And you're like, 'But that's a contradiction.' And then you say, 'Well, the British Empire, they engaged in slavery.' Yes, but slavery ended because of the British Empire… Those things are contradictories.

While I understand the contradictions that exist within history, especially when viewing an event from different vantage points and lived experiences, it felt as though this was a justification for colonialism based on the results of colonialism that still influence our society today. I could not

help but to relate this comment on colonialism to a point that was mentioned earlier within this interview, when VH mentioned the saviour complex that she attributed to when White people take it upon themselves to implement DEI. Within her comment on colonialism, VH was admiring the empowerment of subjugated peoples, as well as the enforcement of laws on people who were perceived to never have had that before; however, it also feels as though this view of colonialism justifies the colonizer taking it upon themselves to implement and subjugate groups of people seen as inferior to laws and regulations that trivialize the group's culture, language, and livelihood prior to contact. I think we must remember that it is one thing to genuinely want to help a fellow human, and it is another thing to systematically enforce one's personal beliefs and regulations on groups of people as a means to control others.

VH also noted other groups that have taken part in slavery, and who continue to take part in slavery, "But that's an inconvenience. We don't want to say that because we have this idea of oppression and it's based on what we look like. It doesn't. It's not. So, it's individual groups. And if we look at this word *equity*… it's actually impartiality." Based on our conversations, I understood VH's use of impartiality here to mean that we should be unbiased towards the ways in which we treat others, regardless of what they may look like and/or where they are from. However, I personally believe that while I agree that it is important to respect others regardless of the way they may look and/or where they are from, we cannot be impartial to their lived experiences. Speaking to her personal practices, VH indicated that she takes the perspective of treating people "with integrity as an individual, as an image bearer. Because that is, first of all, that's the ethic. And secondly, but because what you look like doesn't matter – are you qualified for this? Yes. And even if you're not, I'm gonna treat you with that same respect." VH continued her reflection by stating:

> Our intentions behind even DEI are not bad. We have good intentions… But if we're morally bankrupt, if we don't have a common set of values and if we don't believe in common law, which is the common law of our country, then we can have no consensus. And so, then these become wedge issues, so the consensus isn't there… [W]hen we superimpose [DEI], we're not changing the heart problem of the moral bankruptcy of our country. We're not changing that dynamic. So, we're superimposing something with good intentions, but we can't change this. Because it's a spiritual problem. Because if you think that you're better than somebody, that's hate right? That's hatred. That to me, that's

> against God's law and it's against what He designed us to be, is that we're made in His image, so you're an image bearer. I'm an image bearer. So far, that's it. That's equality.

Within this reflection, VH discloses that it is her belief in God that guides her ethics, but I also understood that it is her belief in God that guides her approach and understanding of DEI. Based on our conversation, I understood that the common set of values that VH is referring to are Judeo-Christian values, and that she believes the implementation of EDI (or her understanding of DEI) creates wedges within society instead of consensus. I personally believe that the incorrect implementation of EDI can created wedges between people, the correct implementation of EDI within the ways in which we conduct ourselves in society has the ability to highlight the inequities that people experience, as it should. While this may be uncomfortable when this disrupts and even challenges the accepted consensus or world view that people have found comfort in, I think this can empower people to take concrete steps in acknowledging that no one should be treated as better or worse than another person, only that people may experience challenges and barriers that can and should be removed to truly reflect our societal distaste for the pre-exiting wedges and hurdles that minoritized and racialized people are expected to overcome.

In reference to VH's comment on the needs to have a common set of values within our society, I noted that we might not always agree on the same values since we all come from such varied lived experiences that are not necessarily based in the same cultures and/or religions. VH responded in acknowledging that this idea of not having the same values is to be expected within Western democracy, though:

> I didn't use to think this but I do now - there's certain values there that are antithetical to the West. And that are antithetical to our rule of law… I'm talking about in terms of principles, but on a higher level and what a great responsibility if I, responsible as a teacher, the moral obligation, the responsibility that's imparted on me because I'm entrusted with these lives.

Based on our conversations, when VH mentions values that are antithetical to the West, I understood this as values that are antithetical to the Judeo-Christian values that VH previously acknowledges to be at the foundations of our society. Conversely, this would also mean that the values and principles communicated by religions outside of the Judeo-Christian customs risk being antithetical to our rules and laws, which may risk othering these groups as opposed to

being open to learn about them. Moreover, in reference to VH's lens as an educator, I understood that VH believes that it is her moral obligation to act according to the Judeo-Christian values that are not only at the foundations of her personal morals, but that she attributes to the foundations of our society, and in doing so with the right intentions would ultimately improve the moral bankruptcy of our country that she mentions within the previous paragraph. However, I personally do not believe that the inclusion and acknowledgement of different values from different religions and/or cultures to be antithetical to our country since we live within a country that has a separation between religion and state. Speaking from my personal lens, I do not believe that religion should govern the ways in which we approach others on a societal level, nor should it influence who we educate and/or the curriculum that is implemented within educational practices since this would not be equitable to the diverse groups that are a part of our society.

Speaking to the morality that VH incorporates within her teaching perspectives, VH communicated that she believing in the value and preciousness of children since children are "our greatest legacy and they're the most important people in our society. So, we have to protect them at all costs. My job as an educator, I'm trying to protect [them]. I don't care, whatever your background is... Like you might come from a different way, but that's okay. I'm here to impart. This is how it works here," with "here" being understood as Canada. VH also noted the importance of celebrating our cultures while also acknowledging that "[w]e're in public education… I don't proselytize, but people proselytize all the time in public education. They proselytize politics. They proselytize their lifestyle choices… They proselytize to kids very young about alternative families and lifestyles…that's their parents' job. [As an educator, they're] not your kids." Here, VH communicated that it is not the role of public education to preach to students, especially regarding politics and what she refers to as lifestyle choices; I did not press VH further on her reference of "alternative families and lifestyles," but within the context of our conversation, I understood this to mean people who identify as LGBTQA+. Additionally, considering the perspectives that VH communicated to me regarding her religious beliefs within our interviews, I also understood her appreciation for traditional family values and family structures, which is also why I believe she communicated that a students' education about differing family structures and sexuality should be something that is completed at home based on the students' family values, and not within the public education system. Conversely, VH explained that it is her role to sensitize students to the morals and values that VH encompasses

within her teaching, with considerations taken towards “folks who come from a different [immigration] background…[since] [w]e're all immigrants at one point.” VH communicated her awareness in that an educator’s influence “can be very great or can be very small,” and for educators that like to proselytize their personal lifestyle choices and values within their teaching, “that's not our job [as] public educators…You live. Nobody's saying you can't live whatever lifestyle you want. That's part of the deal. We live in the West…. [but it’s] not our job as educators” to include that within their teaching practices.

VH argued that the point of higher education is to be able to discuss ideas in order to not “accept these things but to think for ourselves. That's our job [in education]. That should be the job of education, not indoctrination into anything… But my job is for you [to] think for yourself, to empower the student through voice, through experience, but [to] empower the student.” Moreover, VH reflected that some students are afraid to think for themselves due to the fear of being wrong or feeling less-than due to pre-existing beliefs that they carry into the classroom. VH noted that she has experienced this particularly when discussing world issues and handles this by kindly rebuking students through guiding them to consider factors that they may not have considered before and to define terms to ensure there is an understanding between both the student’s and teacher’s interpretations. VH indicated it is important to take this approach since students are impressionable, and while it is not the educator’s job to tell students what to think, it is the educator’s job to encourage students to think more profoundly, to think for themselves, to consider varying perspectives, and to learn “to be able to argue something that you were actually diametrically opposed to, [since] that's a really important task in life. It's a huge important, intellectual task.” VH noted that it takes skill to be able “[t]o argue the opposite of what you actually believe, morally, fundamentally,” and by encouraging this practice within her teaching, VH noted that students are given the opportunity to learn organically through conducting their own research which gently opens students to differing perspectives and ideas. VH communicated that though students may not remember a particular lesson within her classroom, students do remember the feeling of learning something new without facing punishment for what they may believe. VH noted that “those are the obstacles we overcome [as educators] and that's that mental sort of dance” of being able to teach students while also maintaining humility with your students as an educator. VH reflected that, “[students] teach you as well. I'm not the expert. I'm the subject expert, yes. [They] don’t know nothing but [they] will learn and we will learn together.

That's my approach…we learn together and that is that lifting up" within that reciprocal relationship that evolves within the classroom.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the themes that emerged from synthesizing both my analysis of the ENG2D curriculum outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document in conjunction with the chosen unit exploring Lansens' (2020) novel *The Mountain Sory* and the vantage points of VH. I first analysed the course contexts of the ENG2D course taught by VH by reviewing the units taught within VH's course, with a focus on the chosen unit that discusses Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Sory*. After establishing the course contexts surrounding the novel study of Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Sory*, I delved into the novel by providing a summary of the novel and reviewing the explicitly and implicitly minoritized characters, representations, and themes found within my reading of the novel. Finally, I analyse the themes and ideas that developed throughout my interviews with VH that speak directly to her pedagogical approaches within the classroom. With the ENG2D curriculum at the foundation of my analysis, by scaffolding my overview of VH's ENG2D course, the chosen novel, and my interviews with VH out of my review of the curriculum and my personal lens, the following discussion addresses the themes that develop from the synthesis of these facets.

Chapter 8: Discussion

The following discussion synthesizes the existing publications that I explored within my review of the literature in Chapter 2 with the analysis from Chapter 7, through the lens of the theoretical frameworks that have informed my research as outlined in Chapter 3. Within this discussion, I holistically address the following themes that emerged through my review of the analysis: (1) acknowledging the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived; (2) living the tensions between the roles of institutions, the act of teaching, and morality within education; (3) the entity of the teacher; (4) the reclaiming of identity and language within educational spaces; and (5) empowering difference by working through discomforts. Therefore, the following discussion section addresses the ways in which my analysis answers the research questions that have shaped this thesis.

The overarching question that guided my research is: **Through examining the textual choices of an English language arts educator and the narrative representations stemming from the chosen text, what are the challenges and possibilities that a teacher confronts in seeking to empower students and student representations through their pedagogical choices?** Since the overarching question is not directly answerable, it is worth reiterating the research's sub-questions that support the answering of this overarching question: (1) how does the educator choose classroom texts, noting any considerations towards minoritized representations and characters?; (2) who are the minoritized characters discussed within the chosen text and how are they framed?; (3) when applicable, in what ways do the racialized/minoritized experiences of the teacher impact the teaching of the selected texts?; and (4) how do I, as both the researcher and a student that has experienced the Ontario secondary school curriculum to be studied, retrospectively and currently receive and make sense of the chosen text and the respective representations of its characters? Therefore, through the discussion that emerges from my lens within this section, this section answers my guiding research sub-question: how do I, as both the researcher and a student that has experienced the Ontario secondary school curriculum to be studied, retrospectively and currently receive and make sense of the chosen text and the respective representations of its characters? Similarly to the ways in which my interviews with VH evolved, the forthcoming themes that emerged from my analysis are not linear and answer my research questions with complexity and intersection. The emerging themes are interconnected since they are in conversation with one another and are

addressed in conversation with the publications explored within my thesis (Clandinin, 2016), as well as in conversation with my own personal lens as both the researcher and a participant within the research conducted (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Chilcott & Barry, 2016; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2018).

8.1 Acknowledging the Tensions Between Curriculum-as-Planned & Curriculum-as-Lived

VH and I discussed the value of a linear approach in implementing the curriculum within the classroom and the value of a flexible approach to empowering students through the discourse that occurs within the classroom. Through these conversations, it became increasingly evident through my interviews with VH that while there are undoubtedly tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived, it is important to acknowledge and move through those tensions towards accepting the complexities that shade the ways in which students perceive their world within their contexts (Bell et al., 2009; Dillon, 2009; Lopes & Macedo, 2014; Malewski, 2010; Ng-A-Fook et al., 2016). Within our interviews, VH acknowledged that at the foundation of her teaching is the curriculum, which guides her linear approach to scaffolding her courses, units, and lessons. However, VH also communicated a flexible approach towards implementing the curriculum within her teaching due to the varying experiences, knowledge, skill levels of students within her classes, and very significantly, her moral position. Based on the ways in which VH discussed her implementation and approach to having both planned and impromptu discussions and reflections in praxis with the curriculum, it seemed as though she was unknowingly embracing Pinar's (1975) notion of *currere* within her teaching. As discussed within the literature review, Pinar's (1975) method outlines four stages that guides one to orient and ground one's self-study within their curricular contexts to establish a more effective curriculum (Hendry, 2023). These stages are: the regressive stage (returning to and immersing oneself in a past memory or moment), the progressive stage (an envisioning of one's future), the analytical stage (analyzing one's past, present, and future), and the synthetical stage (combining and reflecting on one's experiences and perspectives to develop an understanding of how these experiences have influenced the decisions they have made and perspectives they have had) (Pinar, 1975, 2012; Roofe, 2022). With the curriculum at the foundation of her lesson plans and teaching, VH communicated that she encourages students to reflect on their past experiences (the regressive stage), guides students to think about evolving within their contexts (the progressive

stage), asks students to think critically about their contexts and desires (the analytical stage), and to reflect on their experiences and perspectives within the contexts of the course materials to develop an understanding of how they have come to develop their personal perspectives to move towards self-conceptualization within their curricular contexts (the synthetical stage).

Within the example of the chosen unit, I found that VH communicated the importance of students reflecting, analysing, and synthesizing one's lived experiences and perspectives to better understand the characters and their choices within the chosen novel, which ultimately encourages students to mobilize themselves towards self-conceptualization within their curricular contexts. However, in taking part in this reflexive practice, it seemed as though students' learning and the consolidating of knowledge that occurs within this practice embraces a more multidimensional, as opposed to linear, exploration since students are encouraged to dialogue with their past knowledge and experiences within the context of the class's present discussion (Darder, 2012; Roofe, 2022). Therefore, while an educator's teaching may be guided by curriculum-as-planned, we can see that within the example of VH that by accepting and expecting curriculum-as-lived within one's teaching, this centralizes the subjectivity of the student within their lived experiences to move beyond the objectiveness of curriculum-as-planned. Moreover, in evolving from a linear approach to learning and embracing a complexity model to learning, perceiving learning as a dynamic and continuous process surpasses "predetermined educational goals established by the institution" (Roofe, 2022, p. 5). This also moves towards the idea that knowledge cannot be standardized and/or linear since one's learning evolves through the complexity of our unique and individual circumstances (Quinn & Hendry, 2023; Pinar 2023).

Though it is understood that students experience personal and profound learning through curriculum-as-lived, teachers have the challenge of implementing assessments that are meant to "[judge] the quality of student work on the basis of established criteria and assigning a value to represent that quality" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 20). VH reflected that some of the most profound learning for students occurs in moments where they are able to reflect on their own perspectives, as well as through critically reflecting on the perspectives of their peers. VH also spoke to the importance of implementing varied assessments within her teaching to allow students to practice academic integrity and for students to have the opportunity to prove what they know, especially in relation to curricular expectations. If knowledge cannot be standardized, it seems inconsistent, or even irrelevant, to associate a student's knowledge to what they are able

to produce (Eisner, 2005), to their ability to regurgitate information that has been deemed to be of most worth by curriculum developers (Malewski, 2010; Knapp & NCEE, 2008), and to their ability to perform to societal norms and values (Alghuwainem, 2025). If educational assessments are not primarily valuing the depth and intricacies of the discursive learning that students are engaging in, this further reinforces the idea that "the function of education has never been to free the mind and the spirit of man [sic], but to bind them" (Henry, 1963, p. 77) to the constraints of societal expectations, though under the guise of empowering students within their own contexts and lived experiences. VH also noted that in assigning assessments like the chosen unit's final essay, "I'm asking [the students] give me an uncreative form in an essay. I want [them] to stay within those limitations because I want to see if [they're] able to put together based on backing it up from our primary source, from our only source, the novel." When VH was exploring these perspectives, I understood the importance of ensuring that students learn the foundations of writing within an English course first before being able to evolve creatively within this subject. However, I also experienced some strain between the value of discursive learning and the idea that at the end of the course, educators, students, and even parents give the most value to a student's grade, while the depth of learning that students experience within their ongoing discussions in the classroom do not receive the same recognition. Moreover, when looking at these different ways of assessing learning through a postcolonial lens, I believe that one's educational experiences reinforce the notion that assessments provide a snapshot of one's knowledge, while encouraging students to find comfort within the restrictions and limitations that they are expected to perform to as outlined by curricula. In encouraging the quantification of student knowledge through assessments, curriculum does not and cannot adequately support educators in holistically assessing learning grounded within student experiences when it reinforces "dominant educational thought and practice… reliant upon standardization, quantification, and objectivity" (Quinn & Hendry, 2023, p. 26).

I believe that VH serves as an amazing example of an educator who is attempting to move through the tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. Through our conversations, VH exemplified her approaches to recognising the variances between students and encouraging them to discuss and reflect since it is through these discussions that students can critically think and relate to their knowledge development within their personal contexts. However, VH also expressed that she takes on an immense responsibility

in determining and selecting strands to assess since it is these strands that communicate the ways in which students are judged within the classroom. Additionally, these strands set a standard regarding the ways in which students are expected to perform since our society has determined and reinforced students' value and ability to develop knowledge and skills within the context of these expectations, and this ultimately feels contradictory. While VH acknowledged that as an educator, "[o]ur foundation for teaching is curriculum," though it is the hidden curriculum that influences student knowledge development since it is through the hidden curriculum that teachers can teach students that "'I mattered'" and the importance of being "good civic people." It is expected that students incorporate their lived experiences into their learning within the classroom to more fully exercise their academic integrity and skill. Yet, while students are expected to value their personal learning journey, they are being judged on their ability to be ranked within academic and social norms that do not and cannot account for the variances in lived experiences and individual academic journeys. It is noted that there is a brief mention of the cruciality of language in students' own personal learning and development to further "appreciate the nature and value of a diverse, multicultural society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4) within the introduction of the Ontario curriculum document. However, it is important to also acknowledge that through the implementation of this curriculum, it is inescapable for students' personal learning to be judged and quantified against standards that are grounded within Eurocentric ideals that naturalize settler colonialism. If these are the standards and expectations that students are being held to, and if educators are teaching students to these norms and judge students in relation to these norms, it feels as though these norms are not and cannot be representative of lived experiences in our society. Therefore, I argue that both students and educators experience something that I refer to as *curricular whiplash*; I imagine this to be the erratic and simultaneous flow that occurs as both educators and students personify and embody the curriculum as they move through the tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived (Pinar, 2015; Ashbee, 2021; Woods, 2021; Wang, 2023). Moreover, I imagine this erratic and simultaneous flow to range between a gentle or aggressive figurative oscillation, dependent on how challenged educators and/or students feel when teetering between both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived within a lesson. By moving through these tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived, both students and educators are attempting to balance their abilities to fulfill the

expectations presented to them by the curriculum while also simultaneously surrendering to an authentic embracement of learning within one's unique contexts that cannot be quantified by standardized expectations.

8.2 Living the Tensions: The Role of Institutions, the Act of Teaching, & Morality within Education

Based on my analysis, it is evident that educational institutions continue to grapple with their roles in implementing and perpetuating colonial values and narratives through, especially through the example of VH's reflections on her experiences with the implementation of EDI in education (which was referred to as DEI by VH). It is understood that ideally, including EDI within education is meant to recognize, critique, unravel, and evolve from education's role in disempowering, silencing, exploiting, controlling, and diminishing the history, cultures, and lived experiences of racialized and/or minoritized populations (Hojjati et al., 2018). Moreover, EDI can be effective in recognizing the legacy of colonialism within educational practices and the effects that colonialism has had within disempowering minoritized experiences (Ward et al., 2023). However, while VH reflected on the positive intentions behind the inclusion of EDI within education, VH also communicated alternate perspectives in implementing EDI in regard to hiring practices and the ways in which we uphold expectations and standards within the classroom, and through the implementation of the curriculum. VH voiced that for someone to be hired because they are a woman and/or a person of colour is demeaning to our society, but also to the person since reducing them to these characteristics does not acknowledge their full story, nor does it speak to their fully ability to exemplify their qualifications. VH also spoke about the lowering of curricular standards that occurs when students are reduced to their race and the perceived abilities of students based on their race. Additionally, VH discussed the implementation of EDI as something that creates wedges that perpetuate hyper-racialization that creates race-based division. When perceiving the role of institutions through a postcolonial lens, I understood VH's perspectives since I agree that making assumptions about someone's ability, or lack thereof, based on the colour of their skin does not do justice to an individual's experiences since this could restrict and reinforce one-dimensional discourses pertaining to race and racialized experience (Gulson & Webb, 2013). However, VH also described equity as "impartially without the lens of all color… It's justice…Impartial means it doesn't matter what

you look like." While I believe that it should not matter what I, as a woman of colour, look like, the difficulty is that it does matter because the colour of my skin has invoked attention and assumptions that I did not condone nor represents who I am, thus othering me despite any efforts to be considered as more than what my skin colour represents. Moreover, we must acknowledge that these are experiences that minoritized people are challenged by within our society and that continue to be a part of their stories and lived experiences. For example, as mentioned previously, educators would simplify my heritage to being Indian though generations of my family have never visited India, including myself. In public, strangers have expressed surprise towards the way I sound when I speak English due to their preconceived assumptions that are based on the colour of my skin. Conversely, English being my only spoken language comes as a surprise to different people as well since I have been told that there is no way that English is the only language I speak since I am Brown, or that I am not a true Canadian if I do not also speak French. Within these scenarios, the colour of my skin and my language abilities (or lack thereof) are compared to the colonial constructs, norms, and expectations that still plague our society. Moreover, this creates a narrative over which I have no control and are unprompted expectations that have followed me within my educational experiences and while being in different social contexts. These are expectations and assumptions that I am then forcefully positioned to defend and/or justify due to wedges that were placed by the individual perceiving the colour of my skin, simply because my skin colour signaled and/or represents something to my viewer. Within my contexts, race is a lived experience based in my reality, in addition to being a part of my identity (Dei, 2013), regardless of whether it is by my choice. Therefore, with intersecting postcolonialism and the CRT framework, it is important that educational institutions go further than acknowledging that their students can and will be challenged in society within this capacity. Because the educational foundations of our standards and expectations are grounded in colonial and Eurocentric values (Burke, Winsor, & Power, 2023), educational institutions also have a responsibility in dismantling these same values that have long been systemically perpetuated by these same institutions as a way to control the narratives of those that are racialized and/or minoritized. Furthermore, as much as institutions, teachers and researchers struggle against racialized experiences, we need to also acknowledge the actual and real impact that racialized experiences have on society and within the lives of individuals.

In addition to the ways in which institutions have a role in the values and narratives that

they perpetuate, when it comes to teaching, it is important to also acknowledge the ways in which the act of teaching contributes to the values, standards, and expectations that are communicated to students within educational institutions. Since schools "[function] as a political field of socialization that competes with the family and assumes compromises as students adjust to authority" (Paraskeva, 2021, p. 5; Siegel, 1970), the act of teaching becomes a significant channel that exemplifies morals and ideals to students. The values and perspectives that students acquire through the socialization that occurs within the classroom reflects that they are at the mercy of the educator's pedagogical choices. Taking VH as an example of an educator who has taught the Ontario secondary school English curriculum, we see that her pedagogical choices are influenced by her Christian morals and beliefs, which influence her literary choices that she teaches in the classroom. For example, while the theme of divinity was not the reason that Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* was chosen by VH, VH communicated that it was her personal beliefs that helped her personal reading of the themes and characters found within the novel, which ultimately influences her teaching of the novel. These beliefs also influence the values that are at the basis of the ways in which VH treats her students and are the beliefs at the foundation of the ways in which she interprets the curriculum. Though VH indicated a high regard for the cultural backgrounds of her students and sees her students as image bearers of God, she also reflected that she understands her profound responsibility and power she has in caring for and guiding her students since they have been entrusted to her by their parents. VH also noted that "you might come from a different way, but that's okay. I'm here to impart. This is how it works here," which further reflected her care and appreciation that she personally has for her students.

Conversely, it is important to remember that by being within a position of power while building trust with students, educators should not attempt to assimilate students, as it has been the experience with Indigenous people, when imparting knowledge and/or values under the guise of morality within their teaching, as has been historically done through calculated and collaborative efforts between the Government of Canada, educational institutions, and religious entities like the Catholic Church (Burke et al., 2023). By invoking a postcolonial lens influenced by CRT and antiracist theory, it is also important to acknowledge that for those whose lived experience is in direct opposition to the colonial values and expectations at the foundations of educational practices (Burke et al., 2023), schooling may not feel like an equitable practice, but

rather further dichotomizes the learner's lived experience against hegemonic discourse (Battiste, 1998). It is also noted that within our interviews and discussions about the themes presented by the chosen novel, VH and I did not discuss how the novel naturalizes the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge, though I believe that to fully account for themes that emerge within the novel, this must be addressed. I wonder if I noticed this because of my own racialized experiences, and the personal weight I give to how those experiences can impact one's character development.

As exemplified by the ways in which VH makes pedagogical decisions based on her lived experiences and beliefs, it is important for educators to maintain a professional boundary and distance with the inclusion of their viewpoints, which is easier said than done (Quinn & Hendry, 2023). Teaching based on a teacher's personal contexts and beliefs may implicitly and/or explicitly encourage students to dissociate from their culture and lived realities (Peters, 2001), as opposed to empowering students to identify with their diverse lived experiences, as well as authentically including and celebrating student lived experiences within a community of learning as described by VH. However, there were contrasting moments between VH's value of including students' lived experiences in the classroom and her perspectives on racializations and/or minoritizations. Within our discussions, VH communicated the importance of sensitizing students to human experiences to build their understanding of empathy, but in acknowledging experience, we must also acknowledge the impact that one's racialized and/or minoritized experience has on the ways in which one feels a sense of belonging to the community in which they live. While I agree that people are so much more complex than the colour of their skin, I also understand that the challenges that I have had to overcome by being reduced to the connotations that my skin colour may encompass have contributed to my complexity as well. Therefore, it is through acknowledging minoritized and/or racialized experiences, and including these perspectives within educational institutions and teaching, that we can have a fuller perspective into the human experiences that people have had to endure, thus allowing us to begin to dismantle the control that racializing and othering has had on minoritized populations within educational institutions. If we are to ignore this complicated conversation about one's identity formation within institutions and within the act of teaching, educators would then be embracing "larger societal discourses about whose knowledge and experience counted, and whose did not" (Wooten, 2023, p. 191). This would ultimately condone the standardization of experiences and a

curricular standardization that would silence students' inner experience and subjectivity (Riley-Taylor & Daspit, 2023), rather than honoring the lived experiences that are at the foundation of the learning and the subjective truths that emerge from the experiences and conversations that occur within the classroom (Pinar, 2015, 2023).

8.3 The Entity of the Teacher

Since teachers are the medium in which educational institutions convey the surrounding society's valued knowledge and social values, structures, norms, and expectations (Tarc, Ng-A-Fook, Ausman, & James, 2025), is it important to evaluate teachers under a critical lens as they also work through their own schemas, experiences, and knowledge against institutional values (Paraskeva, 2021; Mitchell, 2023). Within our discussions, VH was generously open about owning her own contexts within her teaching that ultimately inform the values and intentions that she communicates through her teaching. This includes VH's Christian beliefs that influence her morals towards the ways in which she treats students, her values that guide her in ensuring that her literature choices are not against her own beliefs and do not violate her moral compass, and her beliefs that impact the values taught to students that emerge from teaching the curriculum-as-lived. It was evident through my conversations with VH that she takes a highly professional approach towards the extent that she discloses her personal beliefs to her students, in addition to being able to take a robust and experienced approach to the ways in which she implements the curriculum within her class. VH was also clear in communicating that Ontario's *Education Act* (1990) is "in the line on Judeo-Christian values and principles… what we do [is] we protect the weak. We champion them but we also build them up." VH also communicated a distaste for White people who implement what she describes as DEI and views them as people with a "savior complex because at the end of the day, you actually think you are superior to others and the inferior people need our help lifting themselves up." Therefore, with implementing her personal values in understanding Ontario's *Education Act* and the ways in which she interprets the curriculum, VH exemplified that she approaches teaching as an act of advocacy for the student to teach them academic skills. VH also indicated that she takes part in this advocacy to ensure that students' are taught values like integrity, empathy, and honesty through being sensitized to the human experiences that are discussed within the classroom. However, though VH communicated a distaste for White people who take on a saviour complex in their implementation of EDI,

teaching as an act of advocacy may skim a thin line between advocacy and a saviour complex as well. I agree that students benefit from educators that can advocate for them, but in teaching students values and sensitizing them to human experiences, educators need to be aware of their own contexts that inform their biases towards which human experiences are valuable and which values are virtuous. Additionally, there needs to be awareness towards how these facets are being communicated within the classroom to ensure that one's teaching does not dichotomise and/or vilify the complex human experiences and knowledges that people have, especially if this may differ from the educators' experiences and/or opinions. Therefore, I think it is important that in acknowledging one's personal influences, VH's professionalism serves as a reminder that educators need to be mindful of the ways in which they are aligning themselves within their position of power to ensure that they are not dichotomizing experiences as superior and inferior between themselves and their students (Smith & Rogers, 2016; Smith et al., 2011).

In joining these ideas with VH's perspectives on the importance of educators having the best intentions when educating young minds, as well as the importance of educators being held to high standards themselves, my conversations with VH highlighted several considerations. These considerations include the importance of educators having the skills to be professional within the classroom, educators' ability to respectfully teach to the diverse human experiences that come with each student, and educators' ability to sincerely respect their students' backgrounds though their personal contexts as an educator may differ. While educators may not agree with some of the values that students may have based on their experiences outside of the classroom, it is also important that while educators are working through their own schemas within the context of their class that they also acknowledge and have awareness of their position of power and authority within the classroom (Paraskeva, 2021; Siegel, 1970). It is an educator's position of authority that communicates social values, structures, norms, and expectations that ultimately competes with the values that have already been embedded within students through their lives outside of the classroom. This then can position students to have to compromise who they are outside of the classroom with who they are expected to be within the classroom based on the pedagogical choices of another human being and based on a value system that may or may not validate their personal experiences (Pinar, 2010). Therefore, educators have an immense responsibility in questioning and reflecting on their role in the values that they choose to exemplify within the classroom, the ways in which their personal biases influence their

pedagogical choices within the classroom, and the role they may or may not play in perpetuating systemic dichotomies concerning social values and norms that often subjugate racialized and minoritized experiences (Mirhosseini, 2018; Pennycook & Coutland-Marin, 2003).

More specifically within the context of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), it is important to highlight the ways in which the pedagogical choices and personal perspectives of educators' impact student discourse and creativity, as well as the literary choices that are explored within the classroom. Educators have an immense responsibility since they are positioned and expected to lead the discourse that occurs within their classrooms from an informed and educated perspective in line with the curriculum (Ashbee, 2021; Boudreaux & Elby, 2020), while simultaneously making pedagogical choices that effectively support students' personal learning. Educators have the responsibility to make nuanced choices in the resources that they invoke within their teaching that are at the foundations of the discussions that emerge within class, such as the literature they choose to explore within a unit. As discussed with VH, educators can choose to explore literature based on their personal preferences, though the exploration of the chosen literature needs to be completed within the guidelines of the curriculum. Therefore, it is evident that the curriculum has the ability to empower the educator, but it is the educator that needs to skilled in choosing literature that they can confidently teach to the curriculum, but also literature that contains facets that students can identify with to encourage fruitful discussions and to encourage students to embrace the self-reflexivity of knowledge development within the classroom (Ng-A-Fook, 2014). However, in having the ability to make such impactful pedagogical choices, this exemplifies a dichotomy of "a strong inequality of power between teachers and students, which facilitates the shaping of students into the molds imposed by the adults" (Paraskeva, 2021, p. 9). This encourages one to question the role that education pays in perpetuating linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2018). Invoking their personal values in selecting classroom texts provides educators with the opportunity to use their position of authority and power to destabilize dominant discourses by choosing literature that is atypical to the Western canon of literature that has typically modelled an unrealistic standardized human experience (Berchini, 2016).

As discussed through the perspectives communicated by VH, learning about and teaching a novel that is unfamiliar can be uncomfortable if educators have not done so previously and are not encouraged to do so. Moreover, it is important for educators to feel supported, encouraged,

and empowered to be creative and confident in their abilities to gain experience and apply their instructional design practices to be more receptive towards different cultural discourse, linguistic diversity, and the experiences that racialized bodies may endure (Petherick, 2018). Teacher experience lends to the ability to make pedagogical choices that bring experiences out of the student, guided by the curriculum. However, educators also need to be able to acknowledge their own experience and values while implementing respectful limits of including these personal experiences within the classroom. Though an educator's experiences inform their pedagogical choices, this should not impact the role of the educator as they coach students and guide discussions within the classroom. It is vital for educators to acknowledge the importance of student experience in guiding classroom discussion and discourse since it is students' learning that is central to their knowledge development. In recognising that it is through affirmations of identity that students are able to make strong curricular connections when studying a text (Kapoyannis, 2019), it is vital that educators take opportunities to evolve from teaching the typical Western canon of literature to further structure classroom discourse to "dialogically engage with differences, to perceive their own values from the Other's viewpoints, and to re-construct values in situated interaction and negotiation" (Zhang, 2019, p. 596). This ultimately empowers both students and educators to experience and embrace differences through literary analysis.

8.4 The Reclaiming of Identity & Language within Educational Spaces

The literature chosen by the educator to be discussed within class, as well as the critical and reflexive thinking that emerges from the resulting discourse surrounding the literature, has an important role in empowering students in embracing their lived experiences and the facets of their identity. Additionally, the studying of the selected literature also provides students the space to reclaim the educational space by inserting their intercultural perspectives within the discourse that emerges in the classroom. Therefore, it is vital for educators to understand and critically evaluate the consequences of colonialism in the teaching texts that belong to the Western literary canon. These texts tend to "[privilege] Eurocentric perspectives" (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 79), though students may come from minoritized and/or racialized experiences, interact with people who have diverse lived experiences, and/or are undoubtedly a part of the multifaceted Canadian landscape. Through invoking a postcolonial lens, it is

understood that by choosing to teach literature that centralizes Eurocentric and/or White perspectives, educators are perpetuating the idea that the identities of Canadians are formed through the implicit bias that the stories of White people are superior. Additionally, this further reflects that stories of White people are more worth telling than an array of racial and cultural backgrounds that "[destabilizes] dominant discourses in the West, [thus] challenging inherent assumptions and critiquing the legacies of colonialism" (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 80). In taking the example of VH's choice in teaching a novel like Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*, this coming-of-age story does portray a selection of racial and cultural backgrounds, though it portrays racism and exclusion in problematic ways through the characters, representations, and themes seen within my analysis of the novel. Additionally, because the novel is set within the United States, these portrayals cannot fully encapsulate the racism and exclusion that has occurs and has occurred within a Canadian context. Furthermore, VH chooses to focus on the values of empathy and humanizing experiences within her teaching of the novel and does not explicitly utilize the novel in exploring the racialized experiences portrayed within the novel, though these themes may arise organically within class discussions. Therefore, from my personal lens, minimizing an exploration around the racialized experiences portrayed within the novel potentially risks marginalizing and oppressing diverse perspectives through the discussions, or lack thereof, that may take place within the classroom (McBean & Johnston, 2018; Kumashiro, 2002). It is important to note that I see this as a "potential" to occur if an educator is asking students to critically evaluate the representations portrayed within a text but does not implicitly and/or explicitly engage in decolonizing education by confirming that one's racialized experiences are a part of one's identity formation, as noted within the unit's character analysis. However, because racialized experiences impact identity formation as per CRT, it is an inescapable facet that will eventually precipitate and challenge dominant streams of representation (Damrosch & Spivak, 2011), just as it has precipitated within the research and writing of this thesis. Therefore, by having the power in choosing the literature explored within the classroom and controlling the ways in which representations are explored within the classroom, educators are exerting their own control over the ways in which language and representations are explored within an academic setting that has "[directly implicated] the knowledge construction and knowledge understanding of the colonised people" (Roofe, 2022, p. 8). Therefore, educators have the responsibility in modeling the decolonizing of language and

representations within the classroom since doing so is vital in communicating to students the importance of questioning the normative discourse that has historically attempted to assimilate the Other into the norm (Samier, 2023; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012), which ultimately motivates students to reclaim intersectional spaces like the classroom (Puwar, 2004).

By way of reclaiming one's identity through the ways in which literature is explored within the classroom, it is important to also acknowledge the consequences of the ways in which we talk to and about racialized and minoritized bodies within education (Asher, 2010). From a personal perspective, my racialized and minoritized experiences are nonetheless a part of my lived experiences as a Canadian who has extensively experienced the Ontario education system, as someone who has been racialized within Canadian society, and as someone who has had these experiences impact my own identity formation. Conversely, if educators do not understand and/or are not open to the impact that racialized and/or minoritized experiences have on students' identity formation, omitting this facet within classroom discourse will continue to exclude racialized positions from educational systems (Gilmour et al., 2012). In taking a postcolonial lens in recognizing, critiquing, and contesting colonialism's impact on our society, it is vital for educators to motivate students to authentically discuss and/or insert themselves within an overarching education system that has long "ignored or devalued knowledge which children bring along with them to the classroom" (Tupas, 2023, p. 400; Thomson & Hall, 2008; Gonzales, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2002). Moreover, in acknowledging the language and discourse embodied within curricula that dictates normative discourse and attempts to assimilate the Other into the norm through a postcolonial lens (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012), it is important for racialized and minoritized students to be empowered within educational spaces to become skilled in their use of the English language. This will result in students decolonizing their educational experiences by developing their abilities in reclaiming this lexicon and using the English language to insert their diverse, racialized, and/or marginalized lived experiences and culture through "[interrogating] English and everything that it stands for in our lives" (Tupas, 2023, p. 404). Ultimately, by "reorganizing our classroom practices, reconstituting our identities, and revaluing and incorporating local knowledge" (Tupas, 2023, p. 404) to be inclusive of minoritized and/or racialized experiences, it is important for students, educators, administrators, and educational systems to critically question and actively engage in decolonizing education. In doing so, these stakeholders can authentically understand the immense value in upturning and

challenging dominant streams of representations within the Ontario education system and English language curriculum as it exists today (Damrosch & Spivak, 2011).

8.5 Empowering Difference by Working Through Discomforts

It is vital for educational institutions, curricula, and educators to have a focus on empowering students through their differences since it is through invoking the facets of one's difference within their classroom experiences that will allow students to ground their knowledge development within their lived experiences. Doing so would also simultaneously strengthen one's identity formation and personal practical knowledge that emerges from experiencing curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived within this lens (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Kapoyannis, 2019). However, in empowering difference, it is important to recognize the pedagogical discomfort that educators must experience in challenging their own perspectives and the normative concepts of belonging that are at the foundations of Ontario's curricula. If educators are to truly evolve from a sterilized and standardized curriculum that was founded on excluding racialized positions from educational systems, educators must acknowledge the genealogy of colonial structures within curriculum policies before deconstructing and transforming curriculum to encourage both educators and students to be *wide-awake* to the social and personal complexities that learners may experience within their own contexts (Gilmour et al., 2012; Greene, 1991; Hojjati et al., 2018; Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). Through invoking an antiracist theory lens, only when achieving this awareness will students be able to value the ways in which their racialized and minoritized experiences have impacted their identity formation. Therefore, as representatives of institutions and curricula, educators must also have awareness that the ways in which they experience the world may not be the same as their students, nor should an educator's lived experiences be used as the status quo in making their pedagogical choices. For example, though VH comes from a diverse and eclectic background, she communicated that she can be perceived as a White person by others, which does not encapsulate her complex experiences or the othering she has experienced as a person with Jewish heritage. VH had voiced her experiences with the negative treatment she experienced due to her Jewish heritage, and presenting as White did not encapsulate her experience of being a daughter of an immigrant. Therefore, in VH sharing these perspectives, I felt a connection to her within this context since I believe the ways in which I have been racialized do not and cannot encapsulate

the complexity of my experiences and my heritage. However, I also became more aware that while we have both have had experiences of exclusion based on our heritage and/or the way we look, our experiences of exclusion cannot be the same, thus uniquely shaping us within our personal contexts.

As mentioned within my analysis of the interviews, VH indicated that "I understand a lot of the immigrant experience. I come from an immigrant, but I understand it. I grew up [in it]." VH communicated that her Jewish heritage contributed to her identifying as coming from an immigrant family, which has allowed her to connect with students on this level as well, though not all immigrant experiences are alike. Therefore, while it is important to note that it is irresponsible to assume that VH's experiences fall within normative discourse because she looks White, being perceived as a White person would lead to different racialized experiences that impacts one's identity formation compared to the racialized experiences of someone who could be identified as belonging to a different race. Additionally, within my analysis, I noted VH's choice in using the word "cultural" as opposed to "racialized." It is understood that VH's definitions of these words are based on the ways in which she has experienced the world, whereas for me, as someone who has experienced society as a Brown racialized woman, there is a clear distinction between the ways in which my racialized and my cultural experiences have shaped my identity. Therefore, when considering my own experiences and VH's perspectives on racialization, it is evident that the presence and experiences of minoritized bodies within a context that is driven by Eurocentric ideals presents a tension between the ways in which we perceive the bounds or limits of individual student experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Moreover, by taking VH as an example of a professional and dedicated educator, it is clear that her intention is to empower students to critically reflect on, question, and synthesize the values that are explored through literary analysis and within the class's community of learning. However, if students are to reclaim their marginalized and/or racialized identities and if their educator does not believe in the impact that race has on one's identity, students may not feel comfortable in asserting themselves when expressing their ideas and reflections from their minoritized and/or racialized vantage points (Tupas, 2023).

Aside from feeling less comfortable in teaching English language arts compared to teaching history courses, VH's discomfort in choosing to teach a novel outside of the typical Western canon taught at the grade 10 level signaled to me the importance of educators seeking

out this type of discomfort to find opportunities to promote the development of other knowledges and alternative avenues of knowledge production that ultimately assist in the decolonizing of the social constructions that exist within education (Sahlane & Pritchard, 2023; Strong-Wilson, Malenfant, Hasebe-Ludt, Irwin, Johnston, Leggo, Ng-A-Fook, Oberg, & Smits, 2020). Within our interviews, VH communicated the importance of choosing literature that is not antithetical to her values, does not expose students to content that is inappropriate, and can be grounded within the curriculum. While I understand VH's perspectives in not wanting to expose students to content that may be deemed as 'inappropriate' within the classroom, I also appreciate the balance that VH needed to have in invoking literature within the classroom that gives students the opportunity to navigate different lived experiences as to not censor students to experiences and values that might differ from their own. Moreover, in acknowledging the ways in which VH's religion and values guide her pedagogical choices like literature selection, it is important to note that VH's lens of perceiving curriculum as being based in Judeo-Christian values helps her professionalism when guiding students through the values that are communicated through the literature taught, as well as how themes like morality and empathy are approached within classroom discourse. Because students may come from differing religions and value systems, it is the responsibility of educators to have total awareness of their bias in order to not use their position of authority to dichotomize value systems, to Other the lens of students, and to depower and infantilize students who may not understand and/or identify with the hegemonic constructions at the foundation of dominant discourse (Burney, 2012; Katz, 2018; Loomba, 2005; Sitter, 2010). Admittedly, there is discomfort in recognizing that to be an educator is to carefully and professionally navigate the importance of empowering one's students without invoking a façade of being concerned for their protection, welfare, and liberation through students' submission to the educator's perspectives and values (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In understanding that while educators are stakeholders within education, the facets that influence educators impact the ways in which curricula are understood and conveyed. In acknowledging that classroom discourse evolves from the teacher themselves, we must also acknowledge that students are central to the act of teaching, and therefore, educators can and should explicitly recognise, explore, and teach to the diverse experiences that influence students.

Through experiencing the novel myself and gaining insight into VH's perspectives, I appreciate that VH chose Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story* to be taught within her ENG2D

class through determining that it is not antithetical to her values, while also exposing students to challenging themes and storylines that can explicitly confront students to consider different lived experiences and challenges that they may or may not identify with. Speaking to the implementation of this particular novel within an Ontario secondary school ENG2D class, there are facets within the character development, settings, and storyline that give students a taste of experiencing diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds. However, the novel itself does not explicitly relate to the Canadian socio-cultural contexts that surround the reader during their formative years of education, nor does it sufficiently explore an array of racial and cultural backgrounds through nuanced representations (McBean & Johnston, 2018; Kumashiro, 2002). While the novel itself does not explicitly participate in the disregard of racialized and/or minoritized experiences, the focus of the novel is on the lived experiences of an 18-year-old man that has ambiguous Indigenous heritage, while also providing some instances of problematic representations of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the educator to exemplify critical questioning of the representations conveyed by the novel by actively engaging in the decolonization of education. Within the example of VH, her personal perspectives and linear approaches towards scaffolding her courses, units, and lessons exemplify that she does not try to explicitly engage in the decolonizing of education. Conversely, I found that within practice, the dynamic discussions that VH recalled with her students, as well as the ways in which she would aim to thread student contexts and experiences throughout the teaching of the unit embraced a multidimensional exploration that is constantly in dialogue with an individual's past knowledge, present experiences, and future ambitions (Darder, 2012; Roofe, 2022), which indirectly engages facets of decolonizing education. This multidimensional exploration ultimately challenges a linear approach to teaching the unit, as well as the course structure itself, since the dynamic conversations that emerge from the literary analysis, as well as the metacognition, critical thinking, and student reflections explored within the curriculum-as-lived are not and cannot be linear since these facets are always in conversation with one another. It is within these moments of reflection and dialogue that educators have the potential to create spaces to critique colonial discursive structures that have evolved from these foundations and make meaning from what is excluded from that discourse, thus taking concrete steps towards decolonizing education (Ng-A-Fook, 2024).

The discomfort between a linear versus multifaceted exploration of both the curriculum

and chosen literature is also evident in the tensions between the reflexive discourse that occurs within classroom discussion grounded in the novel and the restrictive quantifiable final essay assessment. In my conversations with VH, she recognized an educator's responsibility of balancing classroom creativity with curricular expectations and acknowledged that grades cannot sufficiently reflect the ways in which students are able to understand something. Moreover, VH noted that it is through class discussions that she is able to profoundly grasp students' understanding of a concept or idea, and that the discourse that emerges "is the whole point of education." However, if educators and institutions are to judge the capabilities of students on a grade that is based on their abilities to abide by the rules of the English language, as opposed to how students process and develop their understanding of the English language, this further reinforces the idea that one's value is based in one's ability to exemplify knowledge deemed to be the most valuable according to societal norms and values (Eisner, 2005; Giroux, 2018; Alghuwainem, 2025). This further disregards considerations towards students' abilities to make strong curricular connections through multidimensional and non-linear ways of thinking that are "inclusive of the alternative modes of being, seeing the world and reasoning" (Al Tamimi, 2023, p. 422). Though our current Canadian socio-cultural contexts, institutions, curriculum, and educators may not explicitly label the intersected and multifaceted experiences of minoritized and/or racialized students as "culturally worthless" (Campbell, 2006, p. 195), educators are expected to "[judge] the quality of student work on the basis of established criteria and assigning a value to represent that quality" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007; p. 20). However, these judgements are known to be done within constructs that are founded in hegemonic and dominant values that suppress those who are in conflict with Eurocentric ideals (Pillai, 2012; Davis, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2002). Therefore, within these constructs, educators are expecting students to flourish within an approved realm or context of social norms and expectations that do not consider the multiplicity of thought, knowledge, and culture that adds depth and richness to lived educational experiences (MacPherson, 2010; Daniel et al., 2016).

Though it is uncomfortable to insert oneself into spaces that want to "control and delineate" (Chariandy et al., 2020, p. 71) what one knows to be their truths that are grounded in one's lived experiences, this discomfort is necessary to also push the constructs and limitations that individuals, society, and curriculum have placed on minoritized and/or racialized bodies. Therefore, it is important for students to practice decolonizing the normative concepts of

belonging that are at the foundations of hegemonic discourse and the curricula of dominance that flows through the knowledge production and dissemination that occurs within the classroom (Battiste, 1998; Fasakin, 2021; Smith & Rogers, 2016; Smith et al., 2011; Tupas, 2023). Moreover, by way of empowering difference within the classroom, students can and should be empowered to practice subjectively reconstructing the ways in which students are expected to interact with their peers, with educators, and with the curricula to critically analyse one's space in society (Dei & Kempf, 2013; Lund & Carr, 2015). As the medium that comprehends and communicates curriculum within the classroom, it is vital for educators to make room for the inclusion of the very real experiences of students that may contradict the standards and expectations that educators and curricula routinely impose on students since it is the inclusion of "memories and significant contributions of members of historically marginalized groups, …[towards] real education [that] enables children of color to recognize the lies inherent in colonialist claims to truth, to be self-determined, and to become instigators of social change" (Brandon, 2010, p. 131). By utilizing the curriculum to navigate the notion that there is no "self-evident and natural truth," educators can empower students through complicated conversations that highlight the importance of understanding each of our vantage points from the experiences and beliefs that we each have developed (McBean & Johnston, 2018, p. 83). This ultimately creates a space for students' subjective reconstructions to include "other knowledges and alternative ways of categorising the world" (Sahlane & Pritchard, 2023, p. 6). However, especially within the context of English language arts, it is important for educators to understand that through their pedagogical perspectives, it is essential for educators to take the opportunity and initiative to accept the limitations of their own knowledge and experiences. It is important for educators to act within their authority to create a space where students can navigate the hybridity of recognizing the normative discourses that attempt to suppress the validity of their lived experiences. It is important for educators to learn to navigate within hegemonic discourses, to then dismantle, reclaim, and reconstruct the educational space to be one that is open to the variances in experiences, knowledges, and skill levels of the students that inhabit this space (Egéa-Kuehne, 2012; Stanley, 2011). In opening the educational space to students in this way, educators can model that students unconditionally belong within this space. Therefore, it is vital for educators to encourage students to intersect their minoritized and/or racialized experiences, viewpoints, and truths in order for both students and educators to confront an educational system

that has implicitly and explicitly challenged the presence of minoritized bodies, identities, and experiences.

8.6 Chapter Summary

To answer my guiding and overarching research questions, I utilized this chapter to address the following themes that holistically developed from my analysis: (1) acknowledging the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived; (2) living the tensions between the roles of institutions, the act of teaching, and morality within education; (3) the entity of the teacher; (4) the reclaiming of identity and language within educational spaces; and (5) empowering difference by working through discomforts.

In acknowledging the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived, it is understood that both students and educators can move through these tensions by having awareness towards their abilities to simultaneously fulfill curricular expectations while reflexively embracing students' subjective growth and knowledge development (Doll, 2012). However, it is also important to recognize the impact that the roles of institutions, the act of teaching, and morality within education have on students' identity formation during this knowledge development. In doing so, we are able to recognize the colonial structures at the foundations of the ways in which teaching and learning are approached within these facets (Tarc et al., 2025). Judging students based on standardized expectations that do not and cannot account for students' varied racialized and/or minoritized experiences further reflect that institutions, teaching pedagogy, and the values encompassed within curricular expectations perpetuate colonial structures. These structures are known to exert colonial misrepresentations that exercise power over knowledge development, implement language as a tool to construct colonial cultural authority, and use literature to further establish dominant discourses (Benn-John, 2018). Therefore, it is important for institutions, educators, and students to invoke a postcolonial perspective to encourage the resistance and reclamation of one's space within these oppressive structures. In understanding that discourse can both subjugate the Other and reclaim intersectional spaces as per antiracist theory (Puwar, 2004), educators have an important role in how they empower students to destabilize dominant discourses. Teachers also have a powerful and challenging role in representing both institutional principles and the best interests of their

students when teaching curricula since educators are human too and must also consider their personal perspectives within their pedological practices.

In borrowing from CRT by way of evolving social discourse with the goal of transforming the relationships between institutions, educators, and students (Skelton, 2025), it is incredibly valuable for educators to implement narrative/discourse analysis to question the structures that perpetuate these colonial structures that are inescapable within education. In doing so, educators can bring awareness to the facets that influence their own pedagogical choices, while learning to make nuanced choices when selecting the literature taught within the classroom. This awareness would encourage classroom discourse to move beyond stories that represent universalities that cannot embody the varied experiences of diverse student populations. Additionally, to move beyond a postcolonial lens towards decolonizing education, it is important for racialized and/or minoritized students to be encouraged by educators to reclaim one's identity and language within educational spaces. In empowering students to insert their intercultural perspectives and experiences within the discourse that emerges in the classroom, educators would also be empowering students to construct knowledge that excels beyond colonial hierarchies (Martin, Pirbhai-Illich, & Pete, 2017). Furthermore, through including Indigenous perspectives within decolonizing education, "…[remembering] the narratives that inform our understandings of Canadian history…" (Ng-A-Fook & Milne, 2014, p. 93) encourages students to de-westernize, reclaim, and regenerate their narrative conceptions of who they are, thus empowering difference within their Canadian social contexts. However, by empowering difference through grounding students within their lived experiences, it is vital to recognize that educators will experience pedological discomfort since they must first challenge the normative concepts of belonging that are at the foundation of Ontario's curricula and that may be found within their own perspectives (Pardy & Pardy, 2020). Students will also experience this discomfort as they insert themselves into spaces that may want to control the narrative of students' lived experiences (Chariandy et al., 2020). Ultimately, though uncomfortable to experience within the contexts of the educational systems and structures in place, it is vital for educators to empower students to have the complicated conversations that address the constructs and limitations that individuals, society, and curriculum have placed on minoritized and/or racialized bodies.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

The following chapter provides culminating perspectives regarding the research completed and perspectives established within my thesis. This chapter first offers a summary of my thesis and then establishes the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications of my research. Next, I acknowledge the limitations of my research, as well as offer future directions that can be taken with the research completed within my thesis. I conclude this chapter with some final thoughts regarding the ideas that have evolved within my thesis, and the ways in which these facets impact the considerations needed when educating and empowering students within their diverse lived experiences that are at the foundations of how they understand themselves within their Canadian contexts.

9.1 Summary of the Thesis

Over the course of this thesis, my research was guided by the overarching question: **Through examining the textual choices of an English language arts educator and the narrative representations stemming from the chosen text, what are the challenges and possibilities that a teacher confronts in seeking to empower students and student representations through their pedagogical choices?** The following are the supporting research questions that guided my research: (1) how does the educator choose classroom texts, noting any considerations towards minoritized representations and characters?; (2) who are the minoritized characters discussed within the chosen text and how are they framed?; (3) when applicable, in what ways do the racialized/minoritized experiences of the teacher impact the teaching of the selected texts?; and (4) how do I, as both the researcher and a student that has experienced the Ontario secondary school curriculum to be studied, retrospectively and currently receive and make sense of the chosen text and the respective representations of its characters? To answer the above questions, I established the chosen theoretical frameworks, relevant literature, and chosen methodological framework, which supported my examination of VH's textual choices within her ENG2D course, her pedagogical perspectives, and her approaches in empowering students from the vantage points of my own minoritized and racialized experiences.

Within the first part of my thesis, I reviewed the literature that discusses curriculum theory, as well as the tensions that exist between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. In establishing a foundational understanding of curriculum, I evaluated curriculum theory

through a postcolonial lens, the ways in which curriculum can be decolonized, and included established research that is relevant to my thesis. To further ground the literature discussed, I then established the theoretical foundations that inform my research and that allow me to answer the above research questions. I established the frameworks of colonialism, postcolonialism, how these frameworks influence discourse, and the ways in which these frameworks are in conversation with the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory, decolonization theory, and antiracist theory, all of which have a role within informing my research. Chosen as the methodological framework that informs the qualitative research found within my thesis, narrative inquiry has allowed me to highlight the importance of creating meaningful connections between the participant and researcher through the value of storytelling. Additionally, my use of narrative inquiry through the lens of the chosen theoretical frameworks has allowed me to investigate its approach towards knowledge development, its ability to support the value of teacher knowledge and narratives, and its ability to inform my personal perspectives within my role as the researcher and participant within the research conducted. Therefore, to further embrace narrative inquiry within my research and to establish my lens in understanding the chosen novel and VH's pedagogical perspectives, I provided my personal narrative which situates insights into my own perspectives and experiences as both the researcher and a student that has experienced the same ENG2D curriculum, thus contributing to the data used within this study.

Before delving into the specifics surrounding VH, her textual choices, and the ways in which I interpret these facets within my own lens, I completed a document analysis of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) with a focus on the ENG2D course. I provided this analysis add depth to VH's pedagogical and curricular choices since is understood that VH's teaching is grounded in her personal experiences and perspectives, as well as her interpretation of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document. Here, once I established the curricular expectations of ENG2D through this document analysis, I investigated the structure of VH's ENG2D course and the chosen unit that analyses Lansens' (2020) *The Mountain Story*. Through this investigation, it is noted that VH chose this text since it met the expectations outlined by VH's English department and met the standards of VH's personal moral values, but was not explicitly chosen with considerations towards minoritized representations and characters. Rather, VH found that this novel provided an opportunity for students to connect to

the human experiences of the characters regardless of the characters' racialized and/or minoritized experiences. VH also communicated that the teaching of this novel supported her goals of encouraging students to be empowered to voice their perspectives, to practice critical thinking, and to exemplify the knowledge and skills outlined within *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) within their best of their abilities.

After situating VH's ENG2D course and the structure of the chosen unit, I provided a document analysis of the chosen novel to highlight the minoritized and/or racialized characters and experiences discussed within the chosen text. After establishing my own understanding of the novel within my own perspectives, I analysed the resulting discourse that emerged from my interviews with VH. Through our interviews, I gained insight into VH's experiences and values as a self-described Christian woman with Jewish and Anglo-Saxon heritage that inform her experiences, morals, and pedagogical perspectives. Moreover, upon analysing my interviews with VH, I identified the following themes that emerged from our conversations: (1) the significance in acknowledging the tensions between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived; (2) living the tensions between the role of institutions, the act of teaching, and morality within education; (3) the complexities encompassed within the entity of the teacher; (4) the importance in reclaiming one's identity and language within educational spaces; and (5) the vital need for students, educators, and institutions to empower difference by working through the discomforts necessary to evolve educational practices.

9.2 Implications

There are theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications that have emerged through my research upon the completion of this study. The following section discusses the contributions and consequences of my research in relation to the use of postcolonialism in critically examining the pedagogical approaches used within Ontario secondary schools, the importance of taking a narrative inquiry approach in revealing the intricacies of the impact that one's lived experiences have on the ways in which we learn, and the extent to which an educator's experiences influences their lens, motivations, and ability to empower students within the classroom.

9.2.1 The Necessary Inclusion of Racialized and/or Minoritized Experiences

As explored within the theoretical literature reviewed within my thesis, colonialism has and continues to influence curricula in both explicit and implicit ways. My interactions with both the perspectives of VH and the chosen novel have exemplified the importance of acknowledging the colonial structures found through the representations, language, and literature used in the classroom that influence the teaching of the ENG2D curriculum. Additionally, it is important to encourage the thoughtful considerations towards the ways in which educators themselves are impacted by their lived experiences and to provide space to delve into the discomforts that exist when attempting to bridge connections between different thoughts and perspectives that can exist between both students and teachers. Within the example of VH, we see the influences of her experiences based on her caring approach towards students, her interpretations of the Judeo-Christian values and the value of meritocracy that she appreciates at the foundations of the curriculum, and her experiences with EDI within education. Therefore, it is important to note that teachers are also human beings that have their own lived experiences, have their own schemas of understanding their world, and can learn and be open to learning as they may also be challenged by their interactions within their educational community. Consequently, it is important to be wary of *needing* educators to show students the *right* ways of being and/or expecting educators to have a complete and flawless approach to the values that they include through both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. Moreover, within my interviews with VH, her perspectives surrounding race and what it means to be racialized differed from my own perspectives, though she had also described being treated differently from her peers due to her Jewish heritage, which is a part of her heritage that has greatly influenced all facets of her life. While VH likened race to culture and noted that one's race is "the least important aspect of the individual," my understanding of being racialized is defined by how one's colour of their skin impacts the way they experience the world, and the ways in which the world receives them based on the colour of their skin. Moreover, colonialism perpetuates a lack of critical reflection surrounding the Othering and racialized experiences of those that have been directly and/or indirectly subjugated under its control (Kennedy, A., McGowan, K., & El-Hussein, 2023), which makes it all the more important for minoritized and/or racialized students like myself to reclaim the impact that race has had on one's lived experiences. Therefore, we must acknowledge the differences between culture and race, especially within educational contexts, since misattributing

these terms would continue to marginalize the very real and impactful experiences that minoritized and/or racialized people like me must endure in moments where we must reclaim space for ourselves within society. As a student who has experienced the Ontario public education system amongst the literature and societal values that have been communicated within these classrooms, I have understood that the presence of racialized bodies, identities, and experiences challenge the standardization that is expected of us while supporting the pluralism that exists within knowledge development.

Within my analysis of the chosen novel, because VH did not have explicit considerations towards the racialized and/or minoritized experiences of the characters, I was positioned to find those facets on my own in order to identify with the characters and values taught to me through my interactions with the literature. Moreover, while I completely agree with VH's perspective that the ways in which one looks is the least important thing about a person, I also believe that the attitudes and interactions that racialized people must endure can sometimes be the most important and marking experiences that a racialized personal can experience. Though it is a part of my thesis to appreciate the racialized and/or minoritized representations within the chosen novel, I also believe on a personal level that it is important to connect with characters and representations within literature discussed within educational settings since these are facets that can and do impact one's experience of the world. I believe it is fundamental to be able to incorporate and/or develop values that consider my own lived experiences due to the value formation that evolves through analysing literature within the structure of a curriculum. From the position of a student, in seeing some resemblance of who I am and the cultural knowledges that I have developed within the literature I have read allows me to view curriculum, the chosen literature, and the educator's pedagogy as credible. Therefore, it is vital to critically evaluate discourse to ensure the inclusion of facets that recognize the racialized and minoritized perspectives and experiences that students bring with them into the classroom (Damrosch & Spivak, 2011; McBean & Johnston, 2018). In doing so, students are encouraged to disrupt dominant norms and are supported in developing the ability to deconstruct normative structures that are found within the standardized pedagogical practices that flow through the ways in which students are taught (Wilson, 2008; Ahmed, 2012; Mirza, 2015). One may even conclude that what educators teach, and the pedagogy used in their teaching, speak directly to who they are as

teachers (culturally, linguistically, racially, etc.), the values that educators cherish, and the (un)spoken lessons and outcomes that educators desire for students learn through their teaching.

9.2.2 The Contradictions in Universality

My research also addresses the idea that if we are to provide a space for non-European identities to evolve from subjugation (Puwar, 2004; Virdee, 2017), the process of identifying the effects of colonial discourse and progressing its meaning into a hybridity (Collins, 2018; Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2011), or transculturation (Rama, 2012), can be a messy and uncomfortable process. In using a narrative inquiry approach within my research, VH and I were able to share our experiences with an open and respectful approach. This allowed me to hear VH's perspectives while creating the space to hear her stories that influenced the ways in which she has developed the values that inform her teaching. Through our conversations, I also gained profound insight as to the empathetic and caring intentions behind VH's pedagogical choices. It is also important to note that within my personal lens of interpreting VH's stories and experiences, there were moments within our interview that I had differing opinions and understandings since I am informed by differing experiences that have influenced the ways in which I comprehend the world around me. In retelling our complex stories and lived experiences, I was able to conceptualize and reflect on the disorderliness that has occurred within our own unique experiences in our knowledge development (Huber et al., 2013). For example, within our discussions, VH communicated the importance of exposing students to universalities to provide opportunities for students to empathize with others. Conversely, I believe that one's truths are not developed in the same way as another person since it is in the pluralism of one's stories that exemplifies that one's identity can be connected to a context or place in a unique way (Michie, 2013). Though we can acknowledge the similarities of experiences from one person to another, we must also acknowledge and validate the *multiplicity of histories* and narratives that are too complex to categorize universally (de Alva, 1995; Nayar, 2015; Combs & Freedman, 2012). VH had also mentioned that history is riddled with contradictions, and it is for this reason that I believe that there is no one right way of developing knowledge and/or approaching learning, especially since people have differing moral approaches. Moreover, we cannot accept a singular way of approaching knowledge development since one's experience within their own contexts helps to reflexively inform one's knowledge (Hall, 1980; 2013). In taking a narrative inquiry

approach within my thesis, VH's reflection on her practice has allowed me to delve into the ways in which one's beliefs are woven through an educator's pedagogical choices. This has ultimately cracked a window into the intersection of an educator's subjective experience and the different facets that shape curricular practices, classroom experiences, and the complexities of knowledge that in turn inform students' learning and life experiences.

9.2.3 Messy Conversations & Knowledge Development

Through my research, it is evident that building trust and appreciating contexts between students and teachers is vital in empowering students within their own contexts. In taking part in vulnerable, and sometimes messy conversations within my research, I have learned that it is important for both educators and students to be tentative in what we think we know. It is through learning through this discomfort that we can learn more about ourselves, but also about the complex and sometimes unimaginable experiences that inform our knowledge development. Notably, there is an inequity of power between students and educators since our education system and curricula positions educators to be the ultimate leaders within the classroom, thus holding educators to high expectations and standards. Knowing that teachers are incredibly complex and are also navigating their own identity and knowledge formations, educators need to practice a reflexive self-awareness within their pedagogical approaches in gaining their own self-awareness towards the ways in which they participate in the deconstructing and transforming of curriculum. Moreover, when educators feel empowered in this way, students are also encouraged to feel empowered to be *wide-awake* to the social and personal complexities that learners may experience within their own contexts (Greene, 1991; Hojjati et al., 2018; Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). An educator cannot think that they know everything and communicate this to students since doing so would reflect to students that there is no room for different and/or new learning to occur within the classroom.

Within the interviews, VH communicated humility and vulnerability in accepting that she is human and can make mistakes, and her acceptance of this reflects to students that they are safe within her classroom to make their own mistakes and to learn within a supportive environment. While students have the opportunity to improve and learn to master the skills taught within her classroom, VH also communicated that to be a teacher is to have an innate give in teaching young minds as experts within their field, while also refuting the idea that she is a fountain of

knowledge for her students. There are some contradictions within these perspectives, which I believe speak to a silent power dynamic that educators have to grapple with when they are balancing the dynamics between a classroom and the curriculum amongst their own experiences and beliefs. If educators are expected to be the holders of absolute truths, we risk the colonization of students through, whether direct or indirect, elimination of valuable histories and experiences. This would perpetuate a status quo that would continue to encourage a static model in understanding the world and subjugate students to colonial constructs that are at the foundations of curricula (Chavan, 2013; Kumasi & Hughes-Hassell, 2017; Vaudrin-Charette, 2015; Vargas Ramos, 2015). Within VH's constructs of understanding the world around us, she credits her Christian beliefs that influence her pedagogical choices and she also credits the Judeo-Christian values that she attributes to the foundations of education within Ontario. While VH describes the positive moral values that flow from these beliefs and the values that have greatly influenced her pedagogical approach, I believe we also need to create spaces to critique colonial discursive structures that have evolved from these foundations and make meaning from what is excluded from that discourse (Wotherspoon, 2014). Conversely, the presence of my body, identity, and experiences may be similar, different, and/or contradictory to VH's experiences and the values that she describes to be at the foundation of Ontario's education system, but creating space to have messy conversations about these facets allows both educators and students to appreciate the diversity and similarities of experiences that reflexively inform one's identity and knowledge formation.

9.3 Limitations

While my research provides valuable insights towards the pedagogical considerations taken by an educator when teaching an ENG2D course, as well as insight as to how minoritized perspectives like my own can intersect within curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived, there are some limitations within my narrative study that need to be acknowledged. It is important to note that the completed study is meant to provide a snapshot of one educator's pedagogical perspectives, the personal experiences and values that influence her pedagogical approaches, how the curriculum-as-planned is implemented within a particular secondary school located within a specific community, and within a particular socio-cultural context at a particular time (during COVID and before the current boom of AI). Therefore, this study is in no way

meant to be applicable to other Canadian communities, schools, and/or curricula as these factors can vary immensely in lived experiences and overall demographics. Additionally, in choosing to analyse an ENG2D course and the chosen unit that has been taught within the province of Ontario, it is important to acknowledge my own bias and the bias of VH since it may be more likely that we have both been exposed to, a part of, and/or familiar with minoritized/racialized experiences and/or identities, compared to other Canadian communities that may be less diverse. It is also important to recognize that though I have chosen to study one unit amongst several units taught within VH's ENG2D course, the pedagogical perspectives of VH and the values at the foundation of VH's pedagogical approaches may also be applicable and/or implemented within other units. Therefore, it is expected that because students come from different backgrounds and lived experiences, some students will identify and learn from the lessons taught within the chosen unit, while other students may identify with other units just as profoundly. However, since the scope of the completed research is focused on VH and the ways in which she has chosen to pedagogically implement the chosen text, further studies are required to assess the varied ways in which students may experience, identify with, and consolidate curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived within their contexts. Ultimately, the varied lived experiences of students are both valid and significant to the decolonization of curriculum and the ways in which curricula are implemented.

9.4 Future Directions

As mentioned above, the results stemming from my research provide the perspectives of one educator within a particular context and are in no way meant to indicate that the perspectives of one educator are the same for all educators. In noting that this narrative study included one educator and her lived experiences, her ENG2D course, her perspectives on implementing *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English, 2007* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) within a secondary school located in a suburban school board within the Greater Toronto Area, and that her perspectives are communicated through my lens as a minoritized woman who has experienced the same curriculum in Ontario, this research is meant to be a snapshot of a particular context within a particular point in time. Therefore, this research is meant to be a precursor to conducting similar studies within different contexts. For example, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study with different educators within the same school that are

teaching the same course, with different educators within the same school board that are teaching the same course, and/or within different communities across Ontario that are teaching the same course. Within these examples, it would also be beneficial to include student perspectives. In completing similar studies with participants on both micro and macro scales, it would be interesting to assess the ways in which the results may differ and/or be similar. Additionally, repeating the study with some changes to the methods would allow us to gain an idea about the ways different communities in Canada approach student empowerment through education, the values that inform educators' pedagogical choices, the values that are more prominent within the community, and how these facets may differ from one context to another. Moreover, I would continue to include a narrative inquiry approach within any varying studies since this approach recognizes the importance of building meaningful connections within the intricate development of knowledge, the messiness of these connections, and the ways in which the lens of the researcher may influence the information gathered within the research. Because the research completed for this thesis is meant to open the possibilities for research within the same vein, I believe that in order to stay true to the authentic experiences that inform the experiences of educators and students, it would be vital for all participants within any future research to be open to the authentic disorderliness that occurs within knowledge development and the discovering of truths through the retelling of diverse stories and lived experiences (Huber et al., 2013).

Though it was not the focus of my research, the topic of academic integrity was briefly mentioned within my conversations with VH, which I believe is a topic that deserves to be addressed through further research. VH communicated her desire to uphold academic integrity when assigning varied assignments like the chosen unit's final essay, and VH reflected that she assists students in embracing academic integrity by ensuring that assignments like the final essay are completed in class. In a time where AI is readily available, VH indicated that she is specifically interested in what students can do themselves with the knowledge and skills that they develop in class, without calling into question the author of their assignment submissions. Therefore, future research is needed to gain a more thorough understanding of how both educators and students understand and apply academic integrity within their educational experiences, and ultimately how one's approach to academic integrity influences one's development of writing, research, and critical thinking skills. Within this same line of research, it would also be beneficial to conduct research to gain a better understanding of the ways in which

AI is perceived within educational settings by both educators and students, as well as any considerations that Canadian curriculum and curriculum theorists have towards the uses and/or vulnerabilities that AI presents to academic integrity. With considerations towards racialized and/or minoritized experiences, future research would also need to address if and/or how AI can be an effective tool in upholding academic integrity since it is known to harbour its own biases, which results in inaccurate information and maintains an embodied Whiteness that further homogenizes knowledge and oppresses marginalized groups (Cave & Dihal, 2020).

9.5 Final Thoughts

I feel immensely grateful to have been given the opportunity to gain such profound insights into VH's pedagogical perspectives towards how she looks to empower students within their contexts. Consequently, hearing VH's perspectives and reflecting on them has encouraged me to reflect on my own experiences within the Ontario public education system, since it is the same system that is at the foundation of my educational experiences, and are the same educational experiences that have guided me to reach this level in my own academic career. Within my educational experiences, there have been moments where I did not feel empowered by my educators, but those instances have been drowned out by the moments where educators looked forward to supporting me and my peers in our process of coming into our own identities and constructs of our world, which is much like the support that VH exemplifies for her students. While I have not had an educator that has made me feel explicitly unwelcomed within a class, there have been times within my social and public experiences where I felt others were apprehensive to include me within spaces due to their preconceived notions of me and my capabilities based on what my skin tone signalled to them. Therefore, I have learned that it is a privilege to not have to justify why you belong in a space, and to simply be accepted in that space without any conditions. Taking my own lived experiences as an example, sometimes minoritized people experience this privilege when we feel peace and/or unison with the space we are in and/or with the people we are surrounded by, but there are moments where we might unexpectedly find ourselves positioned to assertively claim the space that we know we belong to and in. By recognizing the ways in which minoritized and/or racialized experiences have real consequences on how students develop their own identity within their contexts, educators can empower students to own their contexts and knowledge within the classroom. Additionally,

educators can facilitate the opportunities for students to practice and live what it is to belong in a space so that they develop the confidence to claim space in moments where they are told they do not belong. The presence of minoritized and/or racialized experiences and knowledges within the tensions that exists between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived are necessary to decentre colonial standards and norms since the presence of our bodies, identities, and experiences challenge the universalities, binaries, and/or absolutes that are at the foundations of the ways in which our society understands student success through curricula. I recognize that it may be uncomfortable to question and deconstruct curricula that are at the foundations of our own academic experiences. However, if we are to authentically evolve the ways in which students are being educated within a continuously evolving society, both educators and students need to be empowered within their differences as they reflexively develop their identities since one's lived truths are so much more complex than what dominant discourse can convey. Ultimately, when students are empowered to critically think about their internalized world views, students learn that it is the intricacies within our lived experiences that allows one to profoundly identify with and develop knowledge, thus moving beyond a standardized world view to embrace and reclaim the complexity of their lived experiences.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Certificate of Ethics Approval from the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity:

04/07/2023

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE I CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	S-04-21-6713
Titre du projet / Project Title	Minoritized Canadian Discourses: A Critical Examination of the Ontario English Language Arts Curricula
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Renouvelé / Renewed
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	12/07/2021
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	11/07/2024

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Ranjita PADALIA	Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Awad IBRAHIM	Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie I www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

APPENDIX B

A copy of the consent form that was signed by VH:

uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Consent Form

Minoritized Canadian Discourses: A Critical Examination of the Ontario English Language Arts Curricula

Principal Investigator: Ranjita Padalia, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa.
Telephone : ; Email :

Supervised by Awad Ibrahim, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa.
Telephone : ; Email :

Participation invitation: I am invited to participate in the study named above, led by *Ranjita Padalia*, as a participant in a project that will be included within her doctoral thesis project.

Objectives of the Study: The objectives of this study are to: investigate the role of an educator and their rationale(s) by determining their literary choices through interviews and document/discourse analysis; through the analysis of minoritized characters, investigate whether the selected literature used in classrooms is culturally responsive to our complex Canadian social landscape; and study how curriculum choices encourages/hinders the inclusion and understanding of diverse Canadian narratives.

Participation: My participation in this study consists of two discussion-based interviews in which I will share my thoughts and experiences regarding teaching English language arts with minoritized perspectives and narratives with the principal investigator, Ranjita Padalia. The interviews will be recorded for future consultation by the principal investigator and will be transcribed to facilitate the analysis of our discussions. All personal and identifying information will be omitted from this scientific paper – confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured at all levels of this study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, I will be referred to as the randomly selected initials of *VH* throughout the doctoral research project. Each interview will last for approximately one hour.

Risks: I understand that there are no risks associated with the completion of this study.

Benefits: There are no personal benefits to participating in this study. My participation to this research study will benefit research focusing on understanding pedagogical perspectives towards minoritized narratives within the Ontario secondary school English language arts curricula.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have the assurance that the information that I will give to the researcher will remain strictly confidential. I can expect that the content of this experiment will not be used in any other way but an eventual scientific paper. My name, personal data and other information, under the rules of confidentiality, will never be divulged. **Anonymity** is guaranteed through the following: only the anonymous subject number will be entered in the computer along with the transcript/recording of the interview.

☎ 613-562-5804
613-562-5235

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Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5 Canada
www.uOttawa.ca

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Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Data Conservation: All data will be stored as a computer copy only and kept on a safeguarded, password protected USB only, which will be equally locked within the office of the principal investigator located within a locked building. All data will be destroyed after a period of at least 5 years has elapsed. This data will only serve as tools to write an eventual scientific paper. At no point will it be possible to identify individual participants during the dissemination of results.

Voluntary participation: My participation in this study is completely voluntary and I am free to stop at any time of my choosing. I may refuse to answer certain questions, without being presented with any negative consequences whatsoever. If I so choose to stop this study, all data collected until that point will be eliminated.

Confirmation: I, _____, accept to participate to this study led by *Ranjita Padalia* from the *University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education.*

For all additional questions/information concerning this study, I can communicate with the researcher.

For any information regarding the ethics aspects of this research, I can address the research ethics board located at the University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland, Room 154, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of this form, one of which is mine for information and safe keeping.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Experimenter's signature: _____ Date: _____

☎ 613-562-5804
🖷 613-562-5235

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Appendix C

A list of informal interview questions that assisted in guiding the first interview:

Interview A: Discussion surrounding "How does the educator choose classroom texts, noting any considerations towards minoritized representations and characters?"

The following questions are intended to guide the initial discussion between the principal investigator and participant:

1. How long have you taught English language arts at the secondary school level?
2. Are there particular English language arts courses that stand out to you in regard to having discussions surrounding minoritized and/or racialized narratives/perspectives? If so, which courses?
3. Within the chosen course and unit, what particular literature do you utilize within the classroom?
4. Within the chosen course and unit, what guiding questions and/or ideas do you invoke to include racialized narratives?
5. What are your overall objectives regarding the chosen unit?
6. Do you have lesson plans available to share with me?
7. Have you received any external training and/or professional development regarding including racialized narratives within your teaching?
8. Which curricular documents do you utilize within the preparation of teaching the chosen course/unit?
9. Please describe your personal approaches within the teaching of the chosen unit.
10. Are there any particular considerations that you take when teaching of the chosen course/unit?
11. How have your lived experiences with and/or understanding of minoritizations/racializations impacted the teaching of the chosen course/unit?
12. What are your perspectives regarding the minoritized characters implemented within chosen literature discussed in the classroom?

13. How do you consider or anticipate the inclusion of minoritized representation in the planning/execution of the unit?
14. What are your personal experiences with minoritization and/or racialization? How does this intersect with your teaching?
15. What are your challenges with teaching this course/unit?

Appendix D

A list of informal interview questions that assisted in guiding the concluding interview:

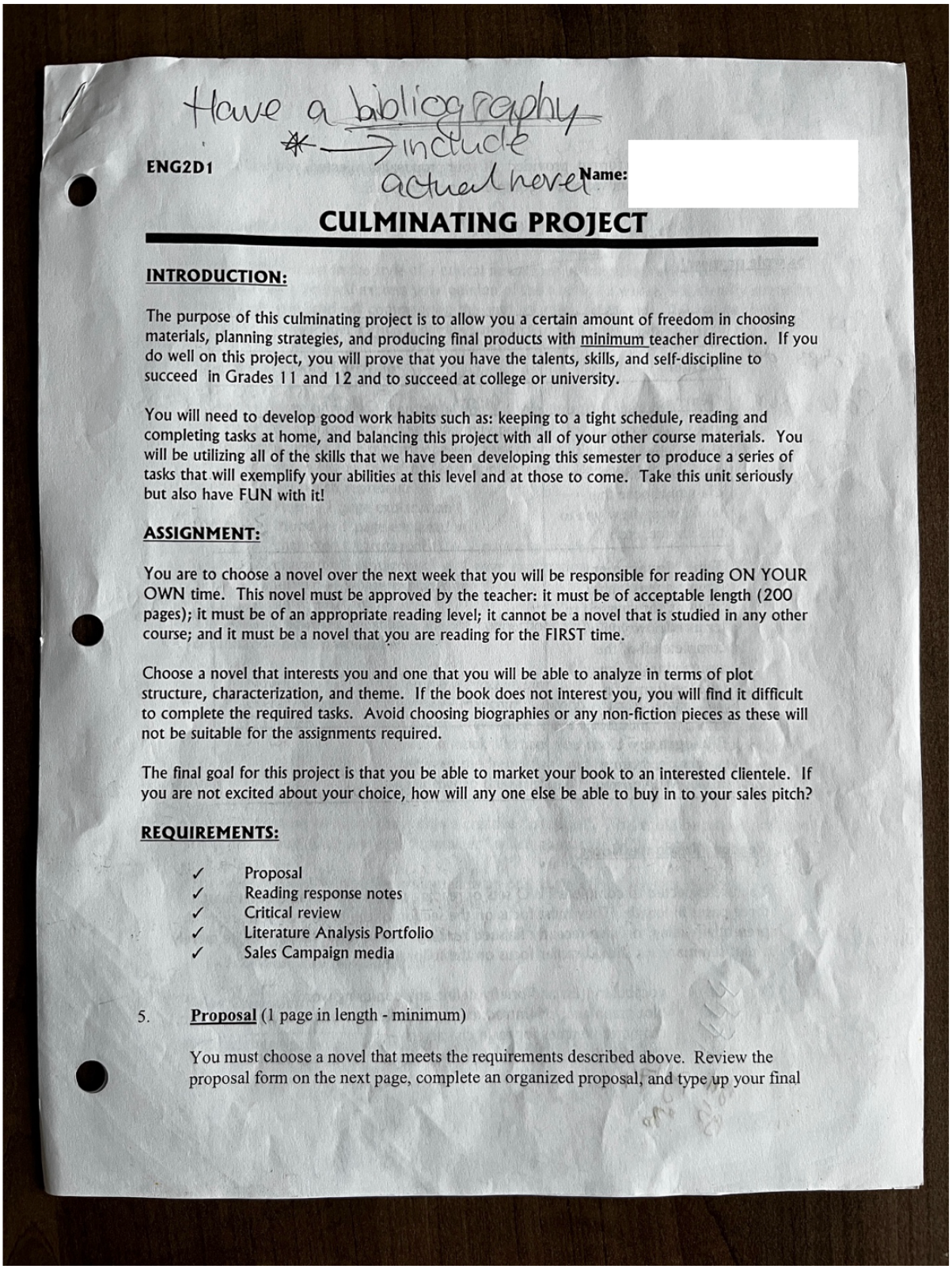
Interview B: Discussion surrounding Final Thoughts

While the final discussion will significantly be influenced by the principal investigator's reflections, the following questions are intended to guide the final discussion between the principal investigator and participant:

1. Since our first interview, how have you reflected on our previous conversation?
2. How do you believe your teaching has helped to address the different facets that impact the lived experiences of minoritized students within the context of their Canadian socio-cultural landscape?
3. What are your perceptions concerning the planned and lived curricula within the unit?
4. Based on your experiences, how can educators strengthen the teaching of minoritized and racialized perspectives?
5. In your perspective, how can professional development be improved to encourage and assist with teaching minoritized/racialized perspectives within the chosen course/unit?

Appendix E

The Culminating Project Handout from the ENG2D course I attended in 2007:



Have a bibliography
* → include
actual novel

ENG2D1 Name:

CULMINATING PROJECT

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this culminating project is to allow you a certain amount of freedom in choosing materials, planning strategies, and producing final products with minimum teacher direction. If you do well on this project, you will prove that you have the talents, skills, and self-discipline to succeed in Grades 11 and 12 and to succeed at college or university.

You will need to develop good work habits such as: keeping to a tight schedule, reading and completing tasks at home, and balancing this project with all of your other course materials. You will be utilizing all of the skills that we have been developing this semester to produce a series of tasks that will exemplify your abilities at this level and at those to come. Take this unit seriously but also have FUN with it!

ASSIGNMENT:

You are to choose a novel over the next week that you will be responsible for reading ON YOUR OWN time. This novel must be approved by the teacher: it must be of acceptable length (200 pages); it must be of an appropriate reading level; it cannot be a novel that is studied in any other course; and it must be a novel that you are reading for the FIRST time.

Choose a novel that interests you and one that you will be able to analyze in terms of plot structure, characterization, and theme. If the book does not interest you, you will find it difficult to complete the required tasks. Avoid choosing biographies or any non-fiction pieces as these will not be suitable for the assignments required.

The final goal for this project is that you be able to market your book to an interested clientele. If you are not excited about your choice, how will any one else be able to buy in to your sales pitch?

REQUIREMENTS:

- ✓ Proposal
- ✓ Reading response notes
- ✓ Critical review
- ✓ Literature Analysis Portfolio
- ✓ Sales Campaign media

5. **Proposal** (1 page in length - minimum)

You must choose a novel that meets the requirements described above. Review the proposal form on the next page, complete an organized proposal, and type up your final

copy based on the format provided. If your proposal is rejected, you will have three days to choose another novel and to complete a new proposal.

Specific

Sample proposal

* Put all dates on Calendar or timeline

Title of Book	Angels and Demons
Author	Dan Brown
Genre	Literature Fiction
Overview of Novel (brief summary of what the book is about, why did you choose this book, what drew you to this choice, etc.)	
Time Management (create a reasonable timeline for yourself in terms of how you will complete all of the assigned tasks - may take the form of a calendar, timeline, etc.)	
Bibliography (works cited using proper MLA format)	

2. **Reading Response Notes**

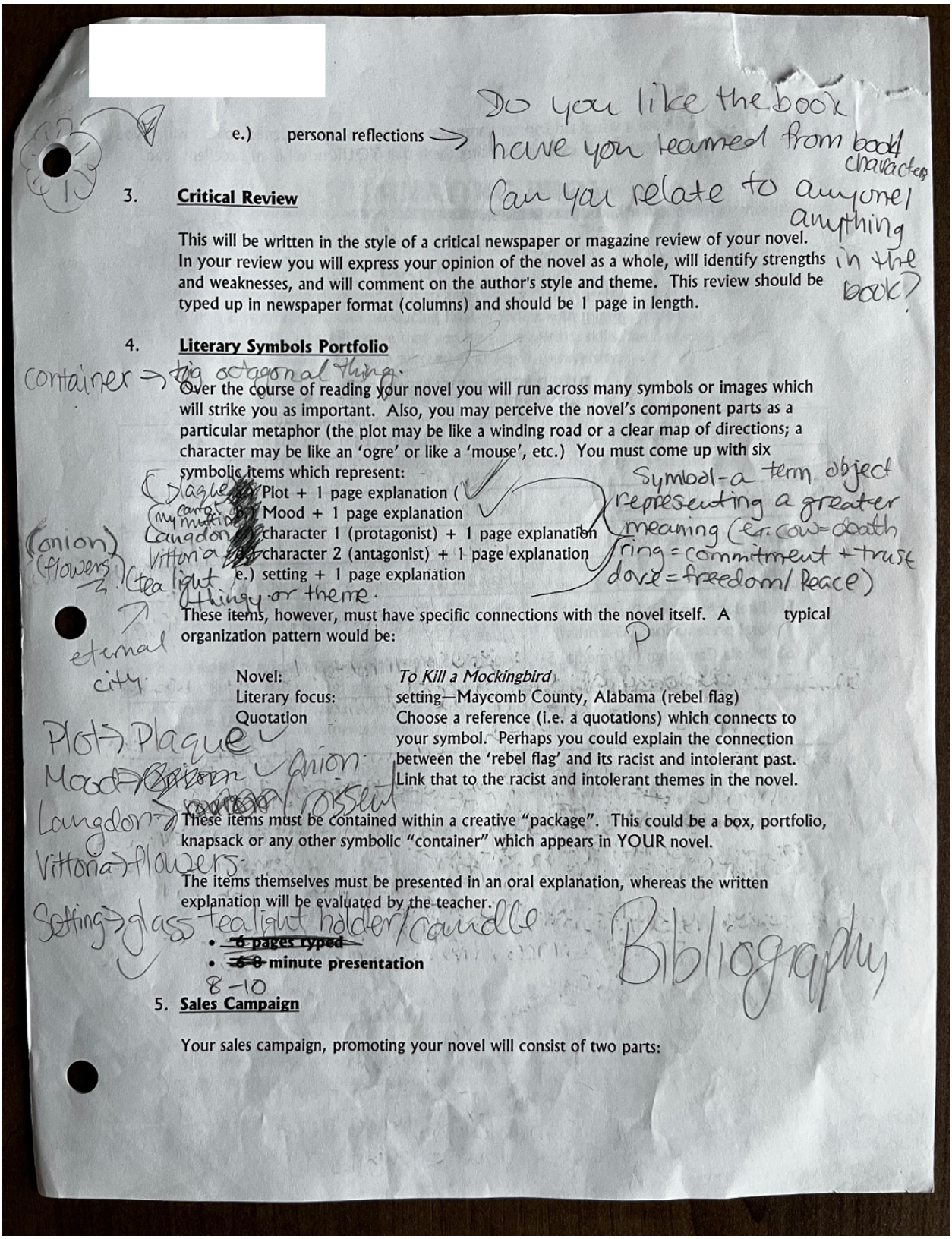
You are expected to complete TWO sets of reading notes which should be at least three pages in length. They must focus on the section of the book that you are presently reading, or have recently finished reading. These notes should not be merely a plot summary but should rather focus on the following:

Introduction
Complication Point
Main Conflicts
QUOTES
Rising Action
• 3 or 4 incidences pg 11 pg 174 pg 65

a.) vocabulary (list and briefly define any confusing words) 7-10 words → sentences page #s
b.) plot graph analysis (introduction, complication point, rising action, etc.)
c.) character sketches for main characters
d.) identification and interpretation of theme and literary devices

• The theme that I think
• 3 or 4 literary devices (metaphor, symbol)

2 or 3 Quotes prove the Characters personality and appearence



e.) personal reflections

3. **Critical Review**

This will be written in the style of a critical newspaper or magazine review of your novel. In your review you will express your opinion of the novel as a whole, will identify strengths and weaknesses, and will comment on the author's style and theme. This review should be typed up in newspaper format (columns) and should be 1 page in length.

4. **Literary Symbols Portfolio**

Over the course of reading your novel you will run across many symbols or images which will strike you as important. Also, you may perceive the novel's component parts as a particular metaphor (the plot may be like a winding road or a clear map of directions; a character may be like an 'ogre' or like a 'mouse', etc.) You must come up with six symbolic items which represent:

a.) Plot + 1 page explanation
b.) Mood + 1 page explanation
c.) character 1 (protagonist) + 1 page explanation
d.) character 2 (antagonist) + 1 page explanation
e.) setting + 1 page explanation

These items, however, must have specific connections with the novel itself. A typical organization pattern would be:

Novel:	*To Kill a Mockingbird*
Literary focus:	setting—Maycomb County, Alabama (rebel flag)
Quotation	Choose a reference (i.e. a quotations) which connects to your symbol. Perhaps you could explain the connection between the 'rebel flag' and its racist and intolerant past. Link that to the racist and intolerant themes in the novel.

These items must be contained within a creative "package". This could be a box, portfolio, knapsack or any other symbolic "container" which appears in YOUR novel.

The items themselves must be presented in an oral explanation, whereas the written explanation will be evaluated by the teacher.

- ~~6 pages typed~~
- ~~5-8~~ **minute presentation**

8-10

5. **Sales Campaign**

Your sales campaign, promoting your novel will consist of two parts:

a.) Create a visual aid (poster campaign or perhaps a re-designed cover) which you will present to the class, convincing them that YOUR novel is an excellent read.

- **Creative media**
- **2 minute presentation**

Paragraph 3: Give evidence and references to back up your reasoning for picking that specific symbol (quote).

DUE DATES & EVALUATION

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	MARK
1. Proposal	February 29	4.5/5
2. Reading Response Notes I	April 2	13.5/15
3. Reading Response Notes II	May 1	14/15
4. Critical Review	May 20	19 /20
5. Literary Symbols Portfolio (10-oral presentation, 30-written) 6. Media Campaign (10-media, 5-oral)	Presentation dates to follow (June 9-13) Approx. 5 presentations per day.	/55
		TOTAL = /110

51/55

double-spaced

***** THIS INDEPENDENT STUDY UNIT IS WORTH 20% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE *****

4. The final part of your I.S.U. will require you to prepare a symbols portfolio. A portfolio consisting of 5 pages (+ or -). Each page identifying an element of the novel you read by representing it by a symbol
   - each page (layout) x5
   - Double spaced (200-250 words each page)
   - Three separate paragraph.

   ex: Paragraph 1: Give a brief summary of the element discussed in relation to the novel.

   Paragraph 2: Explain the symbol you have picked and how it relates to the book. Discuss your thoughts + insight on why you picked your symbol.