

Toward an Intercultural Ethics of “Original Difficulty” in ESL Curriculum: A Hermeneutic
Inquiry

by

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Abstract

Global occurrences in recent times have highlighted the degeneration of conversation and relationships at all levels, and the ways that education might disrupt such harmful grammars of engagement have been explored by scholars writing in the field of intercultural communicative competence and language teaching. However, discussions about the applications of intercultural communication in language teaching contexts are often entrenched in the language of models, competence, and evaluation—approaches which are often inattentive to how “you” and “I” make up the “we” from which our shared existence emerges (Smith, 2003). This study inquires into the complexities and possibilities of teaching intercultural communication within a task-based ESL curriculum framework. It contends that meaningful language-learning may benefit from fuller considerations of ethical and relational understandings of the self in relation to others.

Theoretically informed by hermeneutics and African wisdom, this study is guided by the question of our ethical obligations to others, and it theorizes a relational ethics of intercultural communication for ESL curriculum and instruction that begins with an onto-epistemological shift in our current understanding of what it means to learn and teach a language. It introduces a curriculum for intercultural learning that prepares students to engage ethically in a shared, intercultural world and considers the discursive elements of identity that shape intercultural encounters.

Following a 3-year-long biweekly conversation with instructors on the topic of intercultural communication in a Canadian post-secondary setting, this study was conducted as a first step toward curriculum re-envisioning in the research context. Five ESL instructors participated in the study, and data were collected over a 2-month timespan through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews and interpreted using a hermeneutic paradigm.

Grounded in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and African wisdom traditions, this research draws on hermeneutic inquiry, “the practice and theory of interpretation” (Chesla, 1995), as a means of developing an understanding of the challenges and possibilities of teaching intercultural communication alongside this study’s participants. As both a theoretical framework and a strategy for doing research, hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation and understanding of the interconnected human condition and the many ways that understanding presents itself (Gadamer, 1976). Hermeneutic interpretation considers how the concepts of place, dialogue, and belonging shape how we come to know. This understanding informed both the interviewing and the curriculum re-envisioning in this study. Interpretation therefore unfolded in dialogue with participants in order to come to a relational and referential understanding of what it means to engage in intercultural communication in ESL pedagogy and curricula. I deploy a hermeneutic understanding of language as a worldview to interpret the ways in which coming to know a new language is also about coming to know a way of entering a new world (Aoki, 1999).

Findings from the study align with the recent understanding in the language teaching field that intercultural communication is shaped by discursive elements of identity. Research participants identified race, religion, gender, and sexuality as aspects of identity that required more explicit attention in current ESL curricula and instruction. They also cited time constraints, expectations to cover course content, concerns about creating uncomfortable classroom environments, a lack of intercultural objectives, and inadequate curricular materials as some challenges of teaching intercultural communication in ESL classrooms. The findings lead to my discussion of ways in which the field may reimagine concepts of time, language, and language tasks so as to be more ethically responsive to cultural plurality and the commonalities and differences in our shared world.

The study contributes to existing English language teaching scholarship by revealing limitations of task-based learning and communicative competence. It further introduces an alternative relational framework for thinking about the goals of an intercultural curriculum of language learning in higher education settings. This curriculum points to the need to engage with students’ lived experiences and addresses the lack of teachers’ voices in the literature by legitimizing the wisdom in the lived stories of instructors who dwell within the landscape of ESL instruction (Aoki, 1991/2005). The significance of this study lies in its potential to shape what is possible within language teaching and learning, in-service teacher training, and curriculum development.

Keywords: ESL, intercultural communication, hermeneutics, language teaching

Preface

This thesis is an original work by ©Rekiyat Omeneke Siyaka, 2022. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project: Toward an Ethic and Curriculum of Intercultural Competence No. #Pro00086444, February 11, 2019.

Dedication

For my son, Ethan
Whose hugs kept me grounded,
and gave me a reason to continue

for my mom
who “carried” me again in the last four years
that I may stand and fight for this dream

for my dad and siblings
for believing that I can

for my ancestors and guardian angels
for walking this path before me
and with me
so that I didn’t have to walk alone

To God

For gifting me with beautiful people and experiences
And the special gift of experiencing many beautiful cultures
That I may see and write the world
Interculturally.

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It is often impossible to adequately language the most profound feelings and moments in my life . . . this is one of such moments.

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Prelude

Wrestling With the Middle

The middle is an uncomfortable place to dwell.

I feared it.

Because it asks me to let go.

To make peace with not knowing. Not knowing what comes next

I loathed it

Because it asks of me something I am not used to giving or giving up

It asks me to give up control.

The middle of things

Is sometimes the place of suffering

Suffering with it. The place of original difficulty—

I do not want to suffer. So I avoid this middle

And run ahead or reminisce about the past

The middle is the potent center where new life is continually formed

Where you are changed, transformed, remolded and constantly beat to form

So I run again

But I am pulled back.

Hermes reaches out and puts a leg in front of me

Traps and tips me over

So I am back in the middle

Suffering

Suffering with it

(Rekiyat Siyaka, 2018)

Invocation

And what about *how* we tell the story, or the words we choose? How might we read/write curricular stories if our curricular places (both physical and philosophical) overlap or intersect or diverge? (Hurren & Hasebe-Ludt, 2003, p. xx)

Tarrying With the Text: Note to My Reader

As you, the reader, may have gleaned, my work is hermeneutic, which means that I am writing with/in a living, active paradigm. There is play and flux at work in my text: sometimes a sudden, deliberate disruption of flow, to cause us to pause, to pine over a word, to allow the word to act and speak for itself while also acting upon us. I consciously strive to interrupt any sense of linearity by such disruptions, invoking “anti-narrative,” which Ross and Jardine (2009) describe as the story that continuously disrupts and unsettles the expectations we have of stories. Writing from within a living paradigm also means that I see interconnections and ancestral bloodlines in everything. Such a project of identifying connections also seeks to return things to their “original difficulty” (Jardine & Field, 1996, p. 257), so there is a patient and a “tarrying” attitude that I invite you, my readers, to cultivate as you engage my work. The place of “original difficulty” is the site of reclaiming the historical, linguistic, and cultural complexities of living the particularities and difficulty of our everyday lives. Returning to original difficulty means embracing the ambiguous and intractable, and resisting the temptation to explain away the complexity of our lives in rational language (Jardine & Field, 1996).

My work seeks to give attention to interconnections in the interdisciplinary and “free spaces” (Jardine, 2012b, p. 7) in order to make meaning as I interact with multiple concepts in the fields of second language instruction, intercultural competence, wisdom traditions, critical pedagogy, and hermeneutics. The hermeneutic event of opening up free spaces involves calling the old into account with the new, and opening up possibilities for the old to encounter its own renewal (Jardine, 2012b, p. 7). I seek to identify and bring to fore the living threads that run through the multiple fields with which my research is preoccupied. A profound awareness that has shaped my thinking in relation to how I approach and write my research is the understanding

that those threads are not efforts curated by a researcher; the effort is not about synchronizing or synthesizing fragments of unconnected concepts and weaving them together, because “these living threads exist *whether we know it or not*. They are always already at work shaping our lives *anyway*” (Jardine, 2012b, p. 8, emphasis in original).

In working from the in-between of multiple fields, a most pressing issue for me in presenting my research has been in the area of structure. In the time since the first draft of my candidacy paper, my writing—not just the content, but the approach to presenting my ideas—has changed—become enriched, renewed, rebirthed. Likewise, what I set out to investigate has also changed, and now, it appears that my research stands as a “thing,” complete in itself. My research has grown and assumed a new life of its own. As Gadamer (1989) asserts, research that is worthwhile develops its own life, “over and above our wanting” (p. xxviii). It is an impossible task to attempt to exhaustively describe the procedures of hermeneutic research (Jardine, 2008), but I am constrained by the conventions of academic writing to speak to issues of structure that may answer my readers’ questions about how and why I have organized my work the way I have. However, I ask that you *suffer* with my text, even in places where it may not be immediately obvious where my wonderings and wanderings lead.

Throughout my paper, I integrate personal stories that include conversations with colleagues, flashbacks of personal events, and African wisdom stories I was told by my parents or grandparents. In these instances, I italicize the section and use one and half spacing between lines to capture the rush of memory and the urgency of such flashbacks. These memories from the past wash through my consciousness in gripping, riveting ways, and it seems vital to capture these momentary disruptions in ways that accord them their own honor of place. When I relate

folktales, field journal entries, and personal reflections, I also italicize the sections to disrupt the linearity of the regular font-style of academic writing.

Writing interpretively is an important part of a hermeneutic project; hence, there may be sudden preoccupations with a certain word or concept that call me in relation to my research. Often, I “while” (Jardine, 2008, p. ii) over a word because it is a recurrent concept that comes up throughout my dissertation, and as a result, you may observe a pattern of constantly re/turning to an idea or concept to keep me grounded in the things that matter. Jardine (2008), very much influenced by hermeneutics, speaks about the importance of “whiling,” by which he means lingering, giving attention to, and “composing our understanding of something, seeking kinships . . . and verisimilitudes” (p. ii). Given that my research explores several theories and concepts, whiling keeps me grounded in an important hermeneutic understanding that everything is interconnected and interpenetrable. We cannot while over the fragmented and disconnected; for a research to be worthy of while, we have to live with/in and in the midst of topics that we belong to in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways (Jardine, 2008). When a researcher lives with/in several disciplines, it is also vital to be “able to speak and write in many different voices, using a variety of styles and forms, allowing the work to change and be changed by specific settings” (Hooks, 1999a, p. 41). In light of this consideration, there is play with tone, voice, presentation, and style throughout my paper.

Finally, I ask my readers once again to tarry with me and the text that unfolds. Tarrying with the text will mean that the reader is open to bursts of new interpretations and meanings and to disruptions of the taken-for-granted, because in order to understand a text and the claim it makes, the text “must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and

different way” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 309). By stepping into the wisdom that a text speaks, the reader becomes “radiant” (Illich, 1993, p. 17).

I invite you to an experience of radiance.

Chapter 1: A Dance with Routes and Roots

(Not) Breathing in a Time of Extraordinary Claustrophobia

And here we are, at the mercy of a ubiquitous novel virus that has unleashed profound terror on our world, people, nature, and the essence of interactions that has shaped life as we knew it in the past century. The trajectory of Covid-19, and its pattern of movement, is instructive in many ways. The Covid-19 virus, initially dismissed by Western countries as a “Chinese” virus, was not considered a concerning threat to the West until around February 2020, when the first cases hit North America and Europe. The swift nature of the spread is itself evident of the interconnectedness of our globalized world. As a researcher interested in the nature of human interactions, I watched the news keenly, firstly, because of my increasing fear of this horrific virus and, secondly, because of my curiosity about how the virus has impacted and disrupted patterns of human communication.

When Canada recorded its first case of Covid-19 in March 2020, citizens were immediately inundated with news of how the virus “behaves” in the human body; the primary symptom and complication being that as a predator in the respiratory system; the virus attacks the lungs and denies its sufferer an oxygen supply. As a result, patients suffering severe forms of Covid-19 infection commonly talked about feeling like they were suffocating. This inability to breathe has been both a symptom and a complication in the management of the disease, leading to an alarming global death rate of over half a million people, as of July 2020. Breathing, an activity that most healthy individuals had rarely consciously thought about, became something to pay keen attention to as one of the first signs of having contracted the virus. In medical practice, the inadequate supply of oxygen to the cells leads to a condition called hypoxia, and a primary symptom of hypoxia is shortness of breath and the feeling that one is choking. In order to avoid

Covid-19 and hypoxia, and ensure that one continues to “breathe,” citizens are advised to wear masks and face coverings to protect themselves and others in this time of pandemic. In addition, “social distancing” became a prevalent safe practice to avoid proximity with other humans. For the first time in my own life, I have felt genuine fear of encountering another human being in the elevator, in grocery store lines—everywhere. To combat the risk of further spread, all public spaces like workplaces, schools, businesses, and recreational centers went into mandatory lockdown that effectively disrupted human contact. Covid-19 has brought many challenges, but it has also forced us to sit still for the first time ever, to truly take in and “see” our individual and collective circumstances, the quality of national and local leaders we elected, and societal inequalities and injustices that we have always been too busy to deeply contemplate. Isolated from family, friends, work, school, gym, and all other integral areas that made up our previous routines, we all have, and continue to, experience non-Covid-19 related hypoxia. Yet, amid this ravage on our collective lives, another pandemic rages, choking (in the literal sense) some lives who manage to escape the claws of Covid-19. This time, it’s the police killing and maiming of Black bodies in the United States.

I Can’t Breathe

In the past week, I have found myself gasping for breath for a reason unrelated to Covid-19. As the extrajudicial and racially motivated police killing and brutality of African Americans gained international media attention, our TV screens were inundated with the most horrifying images of George Floyd trapped under the knees of a White American cop. As life (and oxygen) was snuffed out of George Floyd in real time, viewers all over the world beheld the grotesque scene of a choking victim wailing and begging for his life as he repeatedly muttered the unforgettable words “I can’t breathe.” It was seven minutes and forty-eight seconds of pleas until George

Floyd was suffocated to death by law enforcement officers in broad daylight in the full glare of several citizens, in the most “powerful” country in the world.

As a Black woman and mother of a Black son, this blatant cruelty that is one in an unending list of unwarranted killings of Black people in the United States was very close to home. The visual, and the haunting words of George Floyd, “I can’t breathe,” reminiscent of Eric Garner’s similar cries from 2014, are prominent death cries in the centuries-long murder of Black bodies in the United States and the world at large. As I sat listening to George Floyd’s memorial eulogy by Reverend Al Sharpton, I struggled to breathe myself, stifled by the Reverend’s stark description of the disposability of the Black body in America. To exist in a racially oppressive society is to constantly be in a state of hypoxia, struggling to breathe: corporate, judicial, medical, educational, societal policies all have their knees deep in the necks of Black bodies, cutting off the breath of Black bodies, and disconnecting Black bodies from life sources in literal and figurative ways.

I have had time to reflect on what living as a Black body must mean in places like the United States, as story after story emerges of Black bodies being killed for the most unbelievable reasons by law enforcement officers. Killed for jogging. Killed for sleeping. Killed for running away. Killed for standing. Killed for kneeling. Killed for obeying. Killed for resisting. Killed at home. Killed at the store. Killed for existing. This knee, constantly pinned to the necks of people of color, makes breathing, a natural physiological activity, a risk for Black people. One of the real takeaways for me, of watching bodies like myself be murdered and maimed, is that Black people do not have rights to their breath—that Black bodies breathing and existing is always temporal, subject to the whims of the next police officer. This realization in itself prevents living Black bodies from fully breathing. In the wake of the George Floyd murder and the trauma of

watching the graphic images of his murder, I have broken out in fearful sweats in my sleep, clutching my own neck, afraid. I have woken up on many nights, watching prayerfully over my three-year old son and wondering how he will navigate his own life in a world that treats Black bodies as disposable, and the only immediate thing I could do was read, or write in my study. Now, more than ever, educators must decry these deplorable acts of racism and discrimination, and the spiritual dis-ease that could make any person kneel casually and comfortably on another human’s neck, draining life out of him in the process. In Canada, the Asian and Chinese communities have come under heightened racial attacks and discrimination in the wake of the global Covid-19 outbreak. I watched in absolute horror, as a Chinese senior in his 90s was pushed and shoved out of a BC store due to racially motivated discrimination against people of Asian descent. As educators, we must not only write about systems that make such acts possible, but ways that we might work towards the collective healing of our world. As educators, we have long been aware that human activities have also wrought immense imbalance on Mother Earth, threatening the sustainability of our planet, and the inheritance of our children. We must, with urgency, theorize better terms of engagement with others and our planet. If there is a silver lining from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is the gift of a pause that it has forced on us in this lockdown, to consider our circumstances and perhaps more fully see and feel the impact of the decay in our century-long toxic patterns of interaction with others and our planet.

A Time and Season

As we follow the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, one of the most memorable and significant responses to these events is to see for the first time, an entire world on its toes, demanding justice and holding organizations, countries, and individuals accountable for how they treat others. Media coverage showed protesters from all over the world who defied

Covid-19 threats and took to the streets for weeks on end, demanding justice for George Floyd and, by extension, all other victims of discrimination and harmful systemic bias in all societies. It was both uplifting and heartbreaking to see scene after scene of protests from across the United States, Canada, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. This time, instead of the usual performative speeches, inaction, and silence from police leadership, we saw mayors, political leaders, and prime ministers take to the streets to demand accountability from law enforcement agencies and equitable societies for people of color. As Canadians joined the protests as allies of the Black Lives Matter movement, it soon became apparent that, more than just allies, Canada has some reflection to do as it relates to its own systems of racism against the Indigenous population, the physically and mentally vulnerable, and people of color. Pervasive views about a post-race world were called to question as video after video graphically revealed that not much has changed about the treatment of non-White bodies in Canadian society and the world at large.

What has changed, however, is the response to the ills of racial inequality. Several organizations and institutions, government parastatals, and non-profits released memos acknowledging the Black Lives Matter movement and decrying racist views and policies. As Reverend Al Sharpton noted, time seems to be up, and more people are asking questions of those in authority and demanding better. This is a new time and season in many ways. It is a time in our history—first for many—when our world has ground to a halt in unprecedented ways due to a pandemic. It is also a season where many have lost the patience for platitudes and rehashed government responses to the oppression and brutalization of people of color. However, as the grace to stand up for what is right has abounded for many, so also has evil increased. While Black Lives Matters protests raged on, we saw news reports of another Black man killed for

sleeping at a Wendy’s drive-through. As many have demanded justice, White Supremacist organizations and racist individuals have become emboldened. I have heard more brazenly racist views since George Floyd’s death than I have all my life combined. Far right supporters of Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) have been more vocal about their racist and exclusionary views than ever before. In many ways, as a collective, we are finding it difficult to breathe in the extraordinary circumstances that have enveloped us. Something has to bring some respite, and some kind of therapy is required to enable us to breathe again. As educators, curriculum and curriculum work is a refuge in unsafe times (Jardine, 2014) such as these. Curriculum work helps us both to find shelter and a grieving place; we must be able to grieve. At auspicious times such as these, the writing of this dissertation has been both a gift and a burden: a gift because curriculum work is refuge, and a burden because like a prophet, I have received a few words for our times that I must share. Refuge, in the context of curriculum work, is not a place of comfort, but one of discomfort and immeasurable challenges. The gift of refuge, however, is that it allows educators to engage in the important work of the pursuit of wisdom for the times. I invite you to my place of refuge.

Writing From the Middle

As I reviewed the second draft of this dissertation, it dawned on me that my own personal journey has changed so much since the initial draft of this chapter several years ago. As an individual, I have evolved in so many ways that I deem it necessary to provide you, my readers, with a brief introduction to my present so you can better follow stories of my recent past, which inspired my interest in doctoral studies and this research. When I first started writing this dissertation paper a few years ago, I was a curriculum specialist at an English as Second Language (ESL) program in a post-secondary institution in Alberta. In July 2019, I became the

academic chair/manager of the program. Most of the teaching events I describe in this chapter took place before I became an academic chair in the past year. To ensure that you, my readers, understand how I am deploying certain (debated) terminologies and concepts that are central to my research in this paper, I provide a short discussion below.

This research study proceeds within an enlivened paradigm of hermeneutics and African wisdom traditions, which are both preoccupied with the interconnectedness of all things. Consequently, I do not use the more common term “intercultural communication competence” (ICC) or intercultural competence (IC) throughout this dissertation except when I directly reference the work of other scholars who have used the terminologies in their own work. My rejection of the ICC and IC terminologies is a deliberate disruption of the predominantly Western ontological approaches to theorizing intercultural communication in ESL settings (Byram, 1997a, 1997b; Kramsch, 2001, 2004, 2010; 2011; Risager, 2006), which often discuss intercultural communication within evaluative, measurement-based, skill-centred approaches. Instead of ICC, throughout this paper, I use “interculturality” (Byram & Risager, 1999) or “intercultural communication” to reclaim a more relational, non-skill focused, dialogic understanding of communication between cultures and to align with my hermeneutic and African wisdom notion that understanding the Other is always a process, never complete, and always within the context of interaction and dialogue.

These discussions above also point to an important question of ethics, and how I deploy the concept in this study. As can already be gleaned from the foregoing, my interest in ethics in this research is rooted in an African wisdom and hermeneutic understanding of intercultural dialogue and communication. As such, I articulate ethics as a relationality, as dialogue situated in the midst of relations, and more specifically, my discussion of ethics is focussed on how

intercultural interactions in ESL settings might be informed by African wisdom and hermeneutics. I provide more details about the foregoing in later chapters.

I hope you get to know my journey, and that my homecoming story in this chapter will enrich your own journey.

In the Beginning: Memories From My Childhood

The birds seem very excited as they jump from one palm tree to the other, their melodious chirping sound blending permanently with the environment. I am about eight years old. I watch as a group of little children play “Suwe,” the game in which they draw square boxes with their tiny fingers on the brown earth and jump from one square to the other. Their boisterous screams of victory rent the air. A child throws a stone at a bird which flies away and perches right at the very top of the palm tree. Over and over again, I observe how the birds, enjoying these little games with the kids, seem to come back down very close and then fly back up again. Yes, the birds love teasing these little friends of theirs. My eyes move temporarily over the sun, the yellow sun hanging loosely in the sky like the yoke of an egg as it dances uncertainly in its white. How I love watching the sun rise and set. I cannot move right now, or I would be playing “catch me” with the sun, I often chase it as it seems to chase me; yet we never catch each other. It is starting to disappear very quickly as the clouds become pregnant. I know it is going to rain as I catch a whiff of that earthy smell of impending rain. I hear raised voices of women as they call on their playful children to hurry up with an errand before the rain starts. The goats and pigs are starting to race in, one or two goats come into full head on collisions with the pigs. I chuckle; these animals know when it is going to rain.

A hand nudges me gently, bringing me back to my immediate environment. My mother and I are at the hairplaiter’s, the honey-skinned middle-aged woman across the road from our house that plaits my hair into cornrows every weekend; there are about two or three other women waiting to have their hair plaited after mine. I run my hands impatiently through my thick, long hair to see how much is left to be plaited. I like the rubbery feel of it. The hairplaiter notices my impatience and turns me around so that I am seated on the floor underneath her low stool, my face nestled between her thighs as she effortlessly plaits my hair and shares stories with my mother and the other women. If there were no other women present, she would tell me

stories. Of good and bad wives. Of virtues and good spirits. My favorite is the animal stories, like “how the tortoise got its rough back.” For now, my mother and the other women are sharing tales of the past and present. Interesting stories of the community, ancestors, the taboos and who broke them. I listen with rapt attention as the rain pours and the thunder reverberates around us. I also hear the distant giggles of children playing in the rain . . .

I grew up in this environment, close to nature with nights of folktales, riddles, and wisdom quotes by my grandparents. It was here that I learned about my heritage, my ancestry, the beliefs of the *Ebira* people to which I belong, what we hold dear, and what is considered taboo. It was here that I could bathe in the rain and drink cold rainwater from my grandmother’s clay pot. It was here that I could trap the brown earth between my toes, make sand houses with other kids, and play house. It was here that I felt the wind on my face, surrounded by family and relatives so numerous that I lost count. It was hard in those days to tell who was a relative because everyone seemed to be able to scold me, correct me, feed me, teach me, and send me on errands. It was all one unit to me. Of course, there is a proverb that says “it takes the whole village to raise a child.” We were taught to think of the collective; of everyone. Before bedtime, my grandma would go and check on the animals and make sure they were all home and safe, then check on us. Everyone seemed so at home with nature. Everyone was responsible for everyone else. I remember now how my mum always told me that you are who the community says you are, so we were admonished to always behave well to other people because it was from others that our identity must necessarily rely.

Now that I reflect on this, it would appear that there was no individual “I”; it was always the “We.” I remember my grandparents and parents telling me I was my great-grand uncle because I was sort of an incarnate of him. I think now how puzzled I was at first when family members would arrive at our home and call me *Itopa*, which was not my name. They would hug me and talk to me like they had known me for decades. It was my grandmother who explained to

me that when people saw me, it was not quite me; it was the ancestor that had come back through me that they saw and it was him they called when referring to me. So even though I was Rekiyat, I was more significantly “Itopa,” my great, grand uncle now considered an ancestor, has come back to continue to live through me. In this sense, we had a collective identity that was not just comprised of the living, but a blend of living family members and ancestors who continued to live through the young children. It was a fusion of clan relationships and extended families. It was to these truths that we were committed. Progress and success, therefore, was in keeping the lineage pure and free from collapsing by striving to continue the good name of the family. If you lived an honest life and were considered a good person in the community, then you were successful. Everyone had a responsibility to uphold and continue in the legacy of the good name of the family because as the elders often said: “if one finger brought oil, it soiled the others.”

At age nine, we moved to a town an hour from my village where my parents worked at an iron and steel company; my dad as an engineer and my mum as a school teacher. I did not feel that organic connection with my roots here; mostly because it was an elite estate comprising professionals from different ethnic groups, nationalities, and cultures. However, my literature classes gave me a chance to keep a connection with my roots. It was during the literature classes that I started to feel the stirrings again, of those age-long wisdoms with which I was raised as a younger child. It was while reading Camara Laye’s autobiographical novel, *The African Child*, Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine*, and Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* in my senior secondary school that those intriguing wisdom and traditional beliefs and practices that I had encountered in my early years first had verbal expressions. As I sat in those literature classes, the stories, proverbs, parables, and anecdotes denoting African wisdom and values must have helped me start to develop a sense of self and identity in relation to my culture. Additionally, because this

school and this new town comprised several other Nigerian ethnicities and expatriates from other countries like Russia and Germany, I started to realize that I was an *Ebira* girl and that I was in some ways similar or different from the other girls. It was here, faced with the “otherness” of other cultures, that I started to form a sense of cultural identity. It was the connection and rapt interest in these cultural discussions during my literature classes that I decided I wanted to study English language arts at the university, so that I could read more African literature.

During my undergraduate study in Nigeria, as I immersed myself in Western education, I gradually forgot those values. At this time, it was about the competition to be better than the others in class. It was about the individual, and the ability to position oneself strategically in the global market. It was about becoming “sophisticated” and shedding off all burdens of the traditional to embrace the Western. Seats were separated and classes set up so that individuals could not interact during lessons. I have no remembrance of ever doing a group project or even a pair/group discussion in any of my undergraduate classes. Individualism was praised as was independence. In 2004, I finished university with top grades and focused my attention on building a solid career. To be competitive, I had to acquire more degrees, the currency of the Western world.

It seems that the more I acquired one degree after another, the farther away I became from those ancestral and traditional values I was taught while growing up. I believed that the more Western values I imbibed, the more “civilized” and happy I would become. Unconsciously, I distanced myself from the “burdens” of my traditional roots as I sought for a more “realistic” way of being in the world. I could not see how those values related to Western education, or how they helped in my career. I could not see any co-relation between those values and more tested ways of modern science. For me, these values had become “primitive” and “outdated.” I sought

to improve on this new self; a westernized self that could become “globally acceptable.” With each additional degree, the gap widened. I loved the respect that I commanded when people realized how much education I had. In my mind’s eye, I was getting closer to reaching the ideal pedigree, a westernized Nigerian.

In line with my lofty plans, I set out for the United Kingdom in 2010 to study for a Master’s degree in English Language Teaching on a British Council scholarship. I was well on track to be the ultimate poster-child for everything a Nigerian ESL teacher may aspire to be. However, coming to Canada for the Ph.D. course paradoxically exposed me to new paradigms in education research that appeared to be returning to wisdom ways of knowing and the values within it. I was shocked and humiliated. I had come to Canada in search of more “western-ness”; I had discarded my values in exchange for western education. How could it be that as I sat in this Canadian classroom, I was being pointed back again to truths I had buried permanently in the past? How is it that it took a westerner to open my eyes to the wisdom inherent in the values I was raised with? I had come to seek more western ways of knowing and somehow, I was being directed back inwards, pointed back towards my roots. As I took courses in mindfulness/contemplative practices and wisdom traditions from my supervisor and other professors, and as I engaged in class readings on, for example, the Dalai Lama’s spiritual healing/revolution, I realized that all along, I had been in search of something that was right within me. I had drifted so far from my roots that there seemed to be an impasse. I had come full circle. I was regretful of the haste with which I so quickly abandoned my values for western ones, which I had now found did not have all the answers either.

I had been played inside out. The very basis on which I had defined myself in the last ten years was called to question. I had come to a place of total crisis and lost my way. For me, it was

more than a doctoral study. It had become an experience that had broken me down to the very core; this experience then, must also hold the ways to my redemption. This rupture, a disruption in my thinking, compelled me to pay attention to what life was saying to me by this experience. As is typical, a topic starts to become apparent to us when we are “pulled up short” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 268). Being “pulled up short” interrupts false pride, preoccupation with self, invincibility, or compulsive desire for control (Kerdeman, 2003), so I was compelled to pause and pay heed to the claims that my circumstances were making on me.

Two years later, when I took up a job to teach English as Second Language at a Canadian post-secondary institution, I was constantly haunted by events that gave rise to questions about how educators understand what different cultures have to offer. These puzzles showed up in my class, during staff meetings, during informal discussions with colleagues, in staff training, calling me, addressing me, and speaking to me because “when a topic shows itself, it *haunts us...*” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 72, emphasis in original).

My research about ethical approaches to intercultural communication in pedagogical spaces is, in many ways, like a quest to find my way to my roots. This time, to be open and accepting, and having seen other ways of knowing, maybe I would be able to appreciate the richness of mine; or at least the values in it. I am also more careful now not to fall into the trap of dualistic thinking, where reconnecting with African wisdom means there is nothing to be learned from Western ways of knowing. One of the most important insights from my research journey has been the understanding that all cultures are impoverished in some ways, necessitating the need to engage the richness of wisdom from other cultures (Smith, 2008). As an African proverb puts it, “wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.”

In the time since the commencement of my Ph.D., it would appear that I am a sort of “subject-in-process” (Kristeva, 1977, p. 134); I keep discovering and rediscovering myself. Along with this process of ongoing (re)discovery is a shift in my mode of understanding. Whereas in the past, I had often lived within a dualistic mindset that saw things only in terms of “this or that,” coming to a place of rupture and my ongoing process of research has brought me to an understanding of how to live in the “zone of between” (Aoki, 1991/2005, p. 163). The very nature of my work as an ESL teacher, curriculum developer, and researcher invites a different way of proceeding with the tensions and friction that often come with these contested terrains. This living in-between is, for me, a way of acknowledging that there is always something left to be said and that, in my work and research, I do not have to avoid engaging the tensions; alternatively, I should embrace them and speak from within them. I do want to reflect on some of the specific areas of tensions that I bring to my research because curriculum theorist David G. Smith (2003) invites educators to reflect on and name what they live in-between: what exactly are they living in-between and in what ways? (p. xvi). He further explains that *in-between* must always have an address because it is always relational to an *Other*, and accordingly, “each of us can . . . learn to identify the specific Others that define the specific tensions in the middle of which we claim to be living a life” (p. xvi). As a Black woman living in a predominantly White society, I am constantly conscious of feeling like an “outsider,” sometimes even invisible. However, it is not the invisibility I struggle with, it is the tension that comes with being constantly “alone” in the contexts from which I enact my daily life. For instance, I am conscious of often being the only black woman in a meeting room or class. I am a second language speaker of English, who taught and developed curriculum, then became academic chair in an ESL field overwhelmingly dominated by native speakers.

I grappled with a range of tensions during the years I worked as curriculum developer. Designing curriculum materials frequently involves questioning how things are and interrogating the taken-for-granted in the field, but it was also easy to feel unqualified to speak to and engage native speakers about how their language is taught. Because I came into the role of curriculum developer from being a teacher, it seemed to me that I was constantly sitting astride a cacophony of interruptions of my curriculum development effort by voices of reason emerging from my own lived experience of being a teacher. Presently, as a researcher interrogating curriculum from within a hermeneutic paradigm, I am constantly pressed for language to articulate or justify ideas that are largely not aligned with a curriculum field entrenched in instrumental notions of teaching and learning, and its attendant language of objectives, competence, evaluation, skills, and so on. While the site of study for my research is a post-secondary institution that places value on “technical” and “applied” skills that prepare students with industry-ready skills, my research proceeds within a paradigm that seeks to repudiate such “eloquent assurances” (Caputo, 1987, p. 4). I am pressed on all sides. I am a program manager/leader with professional background and interest in the curriculum design field which is charged with the responsibility of proffering answers and solving teaching and learning related problems. At the same time, my research proceeds within the hermeneutic worldview that seeks to keep the conversation open, invite ambiguity, and accommodate the “not yet” (Aoki, 1991/2005, p. 164).

Proceeding with these tensions hermeneutically may also entail learning to dwell in the in-between; a space that has been variously described by different scholars. Kerdeman (1998) describes the in-between place as the space of existential tension between home and exile (p. 252). As Gadamer (1993) declares, “in this between is the true place of hermeneutics” (p. xxxviii). Inhabiting the place in-between allows me to be both strong and vulnerable, accepting

of my own limitations and open to having and learning from new experiences. Such discipline of living in-between involves not just a mere change in perspective, it invites a “different mode of existence” (Bruns, 1992, p. 47). Now learning to live in-between all the tensions I bring to my research, I often find myself navigating the spaces between familiarity and strangeness and, as Kerdeman (1998) contends, “pulled between familiarity and strangeness, we find ourselves in the middle of an ongoing liminal experience, not quite at home in the world, yet not entirely estranged from it” (p. 252). Such complex dance with home and exile that a hermeneutic worldview invites becomes more apparent when, in my role as a manager and curriculum developer, I am called on to “make the call,” often in black-and-white statements. Choosing the in-between in such instances, often seems like an avoidance of responsibility and, as Smith (2003) notes, it could often be taken for a reluctance or unwillingness to take responsibility for hard decisions (p. xvi). However, living in the middle or in-between “implies a decentering of fixed being-ness, in order to open a clearing for possibilities” (Lee, 2017, p. 20). It allows us to avoid the trap of binaries, because we learn to approach life from what Aoki (1999) describes as “neither this nor that, but this and that” (p. 181). Dwelling hermeneutically in the zone of between also suggests attunement to a worldview that is alive and active, drawing the researcher into an experience of being changed by their own work. I elaborate more on the hermeneutic tradition throughout my paper and especially in my research paradigm section.

I hear the crowing of the cockerels. It is a new dawn.

Coming to My Research

What I would like to do in this chapter is story some pivotal moments/events that further brought me to my research, moments in which I felt addressed. As Moules et al. (2015) note, an address typically interrupts the taken-for-granted nature of our understanding, often arriving in

the form of a question or a cluster of questions. The events I lay out below also further buttress the idea that “an address might not always be sudden; instead, it may have lingered for years and nagged in maybe not quite noticeable ways. However, there is a process of actually ‘waking up’ to this or starting to pay it attention, and beginning to question” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 72). In the next few sections, I provide a detailed account of the events leading to the experience of the address. I also describe a conversation series I started with instructors in my context in 2015 while I was a curriculum specialist. Since the conversation series and the events I attempt to describe below spanned a period of nearly four years, I have included dates for each account so that you can more easily keep track of the experiences I describe.

Handprints on the Whiteboard: A Teacher’s Encounter With Diversity

The first incident that addressed me happened in 2015, when I started teaching English as a second language at a post-secondary institution in Western Canada. The student population at this institution was mostly comprised of new immigrants and international students: Asian, African, Latin American, and Eastern European students who were trying to learn English as a Second language in order to find work and, for some, to be accepted into the main programs of the institution. The ESL course is an intensive fast track program that spans eight weeks for each level. Students typically enter the program at Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) four and finish at CLB eight. Each course runs for eight weeks: Speech (comprising speaking and listening) and Communication (writing and reading). I taught Levels Four and Five students (Canadian Language Benchmark Eight and Nine, respectively). About forty percent of the students had college education in their home countries and required some English language proficiency to get a job in Canada or take additional post-secondary degrees. The students I

taught were mostly very motivated because they knew they had to achieve the Canadian Language Benchmarks in order to proceed with their own plans for their career and future.

Instructors' Background

Instructors teaching in the program are predominantly White, from a range of educational backgrounds. To teach ESL at the institution, a Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) Canada certification is required. Many instructors at this context had bachelor's degrees in fields ranging from psychology, social work, and education and subsequently completed a TESL certificate or diploma course. About half the teaching population have Bachelor's or Master's degrees in Applied Linguistics or related field. Almost all instructors in the program have had minimum five years of teaching ESL abroad.

The Curriculum

Just before I joined the teaching department in 2015, the program had undertaken a curriculum revision project and implemented a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) methodology aligned with the Willis' (1996b) model. Activities and tasks in the program's curriculum were centred around Canadian workplace culture in order to provide students opportunities to learn about Canadian culture and in many instances, make comparisons between theirs and Canadian culture. The curriculum also integrated recommendations by Alberta Teachers of English as Second Language (ATESL) intercultural communication competence framework which encourages ESL programs to include tasks that might help students develop an intercultural “stance.” To that effect, curriculum texts often included readings or listening texts about different cultures, culture shock, stereotypes. In a couple of lessons in the intermediate-ability classes, there were a few reading materials on discrimination, but they were never designed to be taken up beyond their linguistic content. In addition, students were required to

complete daily journals comparing their experiences of living in Canada with life in another country they have lived. What was immediately obvious to me was that, even though the student population represented a diverse range of cultures that depict Canada’s multicultural settings, and though references to culture and cultural differences were made in lesson materials and assignments, there was no guidance for how an instructor might address more complex issues of intercultural communication. Because lesson materials were selected to represent a range of cultures and identities without a focus or goal of explicitly engaging such issues of diversity, it was not apparently clear how an instructor might prioritize “covering” lesson outcomes and making room to accommodate meaningful intercultural dialogues that may emerge from class readings. I found myself constantly speaking to my multiethnic students about the inappropriateness of certain expressions they made; my students also had feelings of displacement and growing unease about how their own cultural understanding was relevant. In their journal entries, I had noticed that they thought many of their own cultural norms concerning the workplace were different than Canada’s, so they put their values into an inferior position. However, because there were no explicit intercultural goals and objectives in curriculum, there were not many opportunities for me to engage learners in a discussion about their views, and sometimes bias. I wondered at the planned curriculum and how there were many good opportunities to bring intercultural discourses to the forefront that the curriculum had yet to take advantage of. I should add that lesson plans and all teaching resources were already prepared within a task-based language teaching framework. Instructors only “delivered” the lessons; they had no way of altering anything.

I provide a section on task-based language teaching in the next chapter, but for ease of understanding, task-based language teaching is an approach to language teaching and learning

that is based on the notion that classroom tasks should reflect meaningful “real-life” language use. Within a task-based language teaching framework, language teaching is organized around tasks and the focus is on meaning and task completion.

I pondered on issues of difference and intercultural dialogue every day, willing myself to do whatever I could while staying within the boundaries I was allowed as an ESL instructor. I was aware of the still voice in my head that told me I was privileged to have such a job and that I must not push too much because I was still an “outsider,” despite my job and educational qualifications.

Is Africa a Country? Problematizing the Language of Curriculum (June, 2015)

Another issue that haunted me and drew me to the call of the address is related to the curriculum. The curriculum at this institution follows Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) based on the Willis (1996b) model which means that lessons were designed around language tasks following three stages: pre-task, task, and post-task. Further, the Willis model had specific guidelines about activities that could be carried out in any of the three stages of the task cycle, so seemingly irrelevant questions that appeared “off-task” made it difficult to take up issues that were not directly included in the lesson plan. Many times, when my students asked me the kinds of questions that I hoped would be asked in classrooms, the kind of questions that I believed that critical education should encourage students to ask, I looked over my shoulders before responding, as if I was doing something wrong. Still, I tried to encourage them to think in ways that enabled them to come up with those questions. One day, after I had shared handouts to students for their task, I noticed something I thought was a great teaching moment. Students were required to read a number of brochures for different vacation resorts and then write an email to a client recommending the best option of the four vacation destinations. One of the

resorts was in Italy, another in Paris, one in Spain, and the fourth, in *Africa*. While other countries and cities were specifically named in the brochures, the last resort was simply in Africa, as though Africa was a country. I took that opportunity to get students to “notice” and I asked them questions about why this was problematic. In all, it was a great three-minute teaching moment.

A few days later, I ran into a colleague who had taught that same lesson; she told me an African student in her class had also raised the issue. The student was very upset and had expressed that he was disappointed that, even in class materials, he had to encounter such subtle lack of acknowledgement of the diversity in Africa. My colleague, a White woman, told me she felt really bad and agreed with the student’s view, but she did not think she knew how to respond to the situation in a meaningful way.

Taking My Place

In August 2015, a few months after I first started teaching at the college I got appointed as the curriculum specialist of the department. It was an exciting opportunity for me. I was excited about all of the amazing ideas I had that could be added on to the curriculum to make it more relevant to the socio-economic and cultural experiences of our student demography. Finally, I could really do something!

Wrapped in Complicit Innocence: “Teachers are Good People”

In September 2015, I experienced a profound moment of being addressed by my topic. It occurred a few weeks into my new position as curriculum specialist, while I was having a professional development session with all eighteen instructors in my department. During the session, I was explaining the concept of the political dimensions of education. It was an introductory session and my first professional development session since taking on the role of

curriculum specialist. While exploring the idea of how school and well-intentioned teachers could be complicit in systems of oppression, an instructor suddenly raised his hands in frustration and disbelief. He then proceeded to explain that every teacher in the department was a “good person,” stressing that there were no “racist” colleagues in our midst. The students, he noted, were also very comfortable with the teachers because the teachers had all taught English language in Japan, China, and other countries. He ended by stating that all the teachers were good people who have never done anything to hurt any student. In subsequent conversations with instructors, I had come to the realization that, even though I had taken it for granted that all teachers generally knew or agreed that there was a political dimension to education, especially language education, now I knew how wrong I was. We needed to talk about other issues first. Critical pedagogy? Anti-racist education?

I realized that a conversation about intercultural communication in teaching spaces had to commence with teachers. I was immediately curious about the prospect of engaging teachers in an ongoing conversation about intercultural communication. To open up and continue conversations along this line, I set up a bi-weekly conversation series with the goal of engaging instructors on conversations around intercultural communication.

Breaking Bread: Teachers Building Community Through Conversations

In October 2015, I started a bi-weekly conversation series with instructors, and we explored topics on intercultural competence, race and schooling, micro-aggressions, race and representation in popular culture, and inclusive education. It was an informal, conversation-style session with teaser videos and PowerPoint presentations, after which instructors shared their knowledge and experiences in relation to the topic. The sessions were very well attended; even though they were not mandatory there was, for the most part, a one hundred percent attendance

rate. The conversations had two sessions: morning and afternoon, and instructors attended the session that best fit their schedules.

At these sessions, instructors were vulnerable in their sharing and learning. It was my goal to stir conversation about intercultural competence without necessarily dominating it, or “teaching” instructors. Within a few weeks, instructors caught on and started to send videos and links to articles they could find about race relations in Canada, especially as they related to schools and teaching. These articles and videos usually generated valuable conversations and threads of emails. Teachers often wrote reflections detailing their own initial and evolving responses and reactions to readings, videos, and conversations in the session. Eventually, we decided that we needed a portal that could house this wealth of valuable information and interaction, and resources that our community was generating.

To enhance continuity in our ideas, one of the instructors, who was also our technical support personnel, opened a BrightSpace portal for our conversations where anyone could start a thread relating to a topic, pose a question or a puzzle about an experience with students in their classes, or share other intercultural encounters they had personally had. Many times, instructors dropped by my office to share stories of what they were observing in their own daily lives in relation to these issues.

And . . . Rupture (October, 2016)

While I had thought everything was going well, in October 2016, I, however, experienced another profound moment, a disruption of the taken-for-granted nature of our conversations. Until that moment, the teachers were enthusiastic about our conversation series and we had a communal portal for sharing videos relating to racism in our society, the United States, and other parts of the world. One of our sessions was titled “MakeitAwkward,” borrowing from a trending

hashtag at the time, which was inspired by an Edmonton Black man who had been assaulted by a group of White males in a car. The victim had started a well-received social media movement called #MakeitAwkward. This was an important opportunity for me to make connections to the everydayness of racism and discrimination and how the issue of racism should not be thought of as distant, far-in-between, and “weird things crazy policemen do in the United States.” In achieving the goals for which we started the conversation series, it was important to get instructors thinking about the everydayness of racism and how it is the daily experience of some people. I took on the topic of micro-aggressions. Everyday racism. Common experiences of minority groups. Intersectional oppression. And boom! The entire thread came undone. Anger. Flushed cheeks, as some instructors expressed their opinions about everyday racism. Here are some of the comments I heard:

“No, but when I say things like that, I don’t mean to be racist.”

“Why are people expected to be so politically correct all the time?”

“Oh, so you mean I am racist?”

“I don’t agree, nothing has been handed to me freely as a White male. I have been poor too. Been broke too. But I can’t claim it’s because I am White.”

So, while instructors were generally irritated by some of the instances of discrimination happening globally, a few reacted differently when the topic of racism hit too close to home.

Troubling Still Waters: The Experience of the Address (November, 2016)

Our conversation series started to focus more on how systemic oppression works within Canada, and instructors started to become more at ease with discussing racism and discrimination within Canadian settings. As our community of practice became stronger and more comfortable, something else was coming up constantly in our conversations. During

conversation series, instructors began to share more frequently about “incidents” arising in their classrooms that sometimes left them unsure as to how they might respond. They shared incidents of racial and homophobic slurs, religious discrimination, and so on. The tone of our conversations gradually went from a “political” stance that instructors have to questions of application. As we shifted discussions to ways that instructors might address complex issues that directly impacted our student population, it became obvious that that the disconnect between lesson outcomes and discussion on social issues made it difficult for teachers to find a balance between a focus on teaching language goals and teaching students to engage in intercultural dialogue. Some colleagues felt that there was not enough time in the curricula to focus on “extra” issues, therefore, it was best to teach explicitly for linguistic competence. Some instructors explained that they would often ignore a student who made culturally or racially inappropriate jokes because they were unsure of appropriate ways to broach the subject.

Over time, myself and a few instructors interested in ways that language teaching might create spaces for meaningful socio-political issues chatted regularly about ways that curriculum might better integrate some of intercultural issues that were already emerging in our classrooms. More than ever, instructors were sharing “incidents” in their classrooms related to race, gender-non-conformity, and sexuality that the curriculum did not provide guidance for addressing. At about the same time, the institution began to make concerted efforts at integrating inclusive practices across its operations. I was invited to sit on a committee convened by a faculty curriculum coordinator, on the committee were other curriculum coordinators and instructional designers, and our task was to develop a comprehensive proposal for the institution on “interculturalizing the curriculum.” It appeared to me that everywhere I turned, something about intercultural communication as a pedagogical undertaking was speaking to me. The

conversations I was having with my colleagues, the committees I was sitting on across the institution, and increasing student incidents on the topic were all speaking to me. There was a sudden connection and understanding that washed over me because “understanding starts when something addresses us” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 299). As everything came back to me like a sudden wave in the ocean, I stepped into some understanding of how everything was always leading up to this moment. An address brings us to the recovery of what was forgotten (Moules et al., 2015).

Research Problem: New Directions

A year later, in November 2017, as our conversation series gained popularity among staff, I got invited by other departments in the institution to speak about intercultural communication and teaching practice to instructors. Instructors seemed to agree that there was a conflict in teaching intercultural competence within a program whose goal was to teach students about Canadian workplace culture; how could such a program also be able to engage the students’ own cultures and worldviews when that is supposedly the very starting point that teachers need to move students away from?

Equally important is the fact that teachers had constantly requested for there to be some kind of classroom-ready tips for engaging intercultural competence in the classroom instead of constantly “whining” about these issues and not being able to “help.” As one of the instructors asked me, “How can we help these students then? Are there a list of things that could be printed for us to take to class to deal with students from different parts of the world?”

Informed by curriculum theory and the writings of William F. Pinar (2004, 2008, 2013), Pinar et al., (1995), Ted Aoki (1984, 1983, 1991, 1993, 1999, 2003), and David G. Smith (1991, 2010, 2014) on the instrumentalization of education, my answers to these questions were often along the lines that we do not need another manual that seeks to label students from different

parts of the world as though students and humans were mere concepts that could finally be “mastered.”

The Dark Walk to (Re)Discovery

I wondered if in trying to avoid simplistic views of intercultural competence, I had myself fallen into the trap of “othering” the very people I wanted to go along with. For instance, based on the strength of our conversations in the previous years, I had thought it was necessary to design a curriculum of intercultural competence. In the past few years, following feedback from my research committee, I have had reasons to hold my own self to scrutiny and question how I might be complicit in the ways that curriculum developers often do not engage teachers in curriculum design. It has become even more apparent to me that living in-between entails questioning one’s self and staying faithful to constantly re/turning to the middle. I realized that honoring the ethos of the group also means involving instructors in envisioning a curriculum of intercultural competence. In line with Aoki (1991/2005) who cautions that curriculum planning “should have as its central interest a way of contributing to the aliveness of school life as lived by teachers and students” (p. 156), I find myself re/turning to the middle, where teachers and curriculum development can go along together in ways that do not foreclose conversation (Smith, 1991). My research travels in the space in-between the curriculum developer’s touch, tact, and attunement, and the teacher’s pedagogic touch, tact, and attunement (Aoki, 1991/2005, p. 164). To think about intercultural competence from the in-between is to acknowledge the complexity of the concept and *suffer* with it. With the above in mind, this dissertation sets out to explore these questions:

- What does it mean to engage an intercultural ethics of “original difficulty” in the context of ESL pedagogy and curriculum?

- What might constitute an ethics of intercultural communication in ESL curriculum?
- What do ESL teachers identify as the possibilities and complexities of teaching for intercultural communication?

An important, recurring question that continued to haunt me throughout the conversation series with my colleagues, and in the course of thinking about this research was: exactly what might it mean to re-envision intercultural communication, more commonly referred to as intercultural competence (ICC) in ways that are not simplistic or skills-based, but in ways that invite a deeper reflection on the tensions and complexities of such discourse? As mentioned previously, my study problematizes and rejects the language of competence as a starting point for engaging a more complex discussion of what it means to understand the other. I provide a fuller critique of the language of competence in the next chapter.

Picking up from my “Note to My Readers” section at the start of this paper, I would like to further discuss the concept of “original difficulty” in order to provide a fuller background of how I use the terminology in this dissertation. The term was first used to capture the robust and complex undertaking of hermeneutics when Caputo (1987) described hermeneutics as “a reading of life that . . . restores life to its original difficulty . . . an attempt to stick with the original difficulty of life and not betray it” (p. 1). Jardine and Field (1996) subsequently adapted the terminology to advocate for a more complex understanding of language, arguing for the repudiation of a narrow and shallow understanding of language in pedagogical contexts. Caputo (1987) warned of the dangers of “eloquent assurances,” and the need to resist the temptation to offer simplified solutions to complex problems (p. 4). In academia, as I have mentioned elsewhere, there is a tendency to offer simplified frameworks and models as ready-made solutions to complex pedagogical issues faced by educators. To counter such simplistic

approaches in language teaching as outlined in their paper, Jardine and Field (1996) suggested a restoring of the life of language to original difficulty. By embracing original difficulty, educators could better embrace the ambiguous and retractable, as well as resist the temptation to explain away the complexity of life in rational language (Jardine & Field, 1996).

What will it mean to engage a discussion of intercultural communication that begins with an understanding that the terrain is complex, messy, and multilayered? As I discussed previously, I am wary of eloquent assurances, so I am curious about a way to re/turn, reclaim, and restore the fullness of the concept of intercultural communication. Further, what are the complexities and possibilities of teaching for intercultural competence within a task-based language teaching framework? I am also curious about how teachers might envision a curriculum document whose goal is to teach toward the development of interculturality (Byram, 1997a). Teachers are often handed a curriculum that they have had no part in developing, yet they are expected to “implement” it. Aoki (1992/2005) described this robotization of teaching as reminiscent of “Japanese automobile factories” (p. 189). I seek to understand how teachers might envision an intercultural curriculum that they are involved in conceptualizing. How might teachers generate a curriculum document that aims to develop intercultural communication in ways that acknowledge the tensions of difference? Engaging these questions from a standpoint of original difficulty would mean always bearing in mind that human life cannot be understood as an object or property that can be fully mastered because “no amount of measured technique will save us from the ongoing task of deliberation and decision” (Gadamer, 1983, p. 112). Proceeding from a place of original difficulty would also mean “living between the lines” (Calkins, 1991) and finding the courage to enter into “difficult, contested conversation(s) between what is new and what is already established, between the voice of the individual and the echoes of tradition”

(Jardine & Field, 1996, p. 257). Despite the realization that such an undertaking is daunting and intimidating, I still choose to return to original difficulty in hopes that I might learn to “run with the wolves” (Pinkola-Estes, 1992) and commune with the “wild, spirited, difficult character howling” (Jardine & Field, 1996, p. 259) at the very heart of such a nuanced and complex topic as intercultural communication.

As earlier stated, instructors in the research context are predominantly White; what are some challenges White teachers might face in developing and implementing a curriculum that disrupts Western ontological orientation to the other? Moving away from the language of skills and strategies around intercultural competence, what might teachers variably understand an ethics of intercultural competence to mean in their teaching contexts? Aoki (1991/2005) cautions that curriculum developers and curriculum supervisors heed the input of experienced, thoughtful teachers by giving “legitimacy to the wisdom held in lived stories of people who dwell within the landscape” (p. 267).

The research context is a post-secondary institution in Western Canada. The teachers in the immediate research context are predominantly White, university educated, and middle-aged. I provide more details about the teachers and context in my research paradigm chapter. In what follows, I turn to an overview of the relevance of my study to the field of education.

Relevance of the Study to Education

A number of scholars have explored the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in education and teaching (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Bickley et al., 2014; Byram, 1994, 1997a; Dunn et al., 2009; Guilherme, 2002; Young & Sachdev, 2011). Despite this general acknowledgement, many ESL teaching contexts continue to adapt uncritical approaches to the study of language and culture. Most ESL schools are a meeting point for a wide range of

students from varied backgrounds, and these students, as they grapple with learning and integrating into the Canadian culture, soon find that the Canadian workplace culture also includes many more sub-cultures with which they have to deal. Increasingly, ESL teachers are faced with students from diverse cultures and identities, but curriculum is often more focused on preparing learners to communicate “appropriately” in the Canadian workplace without a complex discussion of the discursive aspects of identities that shape every interaction with the other.

On the global scene, Bastos and Araujo (2015) contend that, given the numerous research findings that point to the fact that language teachers do not feel prepared to teach intercultural competence, “an investment in teacher education is crucial, not only for language teachers to be able to build their professional skills for fostering their learners’ development of ICC, but perhaps above all, to develop their own ICC” (p. 132). Bastos and Araujo (2015) further note that “teachers cannot teach what they do not know, do not own, or do not believe in” (p. 132). Similarly, Schlein (2009) observes that, as internationalization efforts have gained attention in the curriculum field, teacher education has also gained attention in curriculum theorizing and this, in turn, means that there is a growing pressure for pre-service and in-service teachers to develop transnational notions of curriculum to transform their practice (p. 22).

Along these lines, Young and Sachdev (2011) note that while there has been a widely accepted consensus that intercultural approaches need to be integrated into language learning and teaching, only few empirical studies exist as yet that provide accounts of how such approaches have been operationalized. Young and Sachdev (2011) further observe that there has been very little investigation of an actual take up of an intercultural approach to language learning. While pre-service teachers have received some attention (e.g., Dunn et al., 2009), research into

language teaching has not always considered the beliefs and practices of experienced language educators (Young & Sachdev, 2011). To address this gap in the literature, Young and Sachdev (2011) recommend that future research explores “teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices, and most especially experienced teachers’ beliefs and practices about cultural difference, culture teaching and culture learning” (p. 165).

Similarly, Bickley et al. (2014) contend that while a few studies have recently explored the perspectives of instructors, “no similar research has been conducted with adult ESL instructors in the Canadian context” (p. 142). The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) Curriculum Framework explains that intercultural communication competence is a very crucial skill for both ESL students and teachers to develop, however, little reference is made to teachers’ own understanding of intercultural competence. Limited research exists in the Canadian context of accounts of practice of intercultural competence in ESL settings. The ATESL framework states that intercultural competence is not necessarily about a set of materials but a “stance” that teachers have to take in their teaching approach. However, despite offering steps for teaching students toward this “stance,” the framework does not explain how teachers could be supported to first develop this stance themselves.

Recurrent criticisms of intercultural competence scholarship include an observation that it is not often clear how the concept could be applied in classroom settings. In addition, as previously mentioned, teachers have not often been involved in the process of curriculum development. For these reasons, my research explores teachers’ understanding of how instructors might re-envision intercultural curriculum for ESL contexts. Having established the need for this research, I now will briefly discuss the journey of my different scholarly influences during my doctoral program that have helped bring me to my research question; namely, critical pedagogy,

engaged pedagogy and wisdom traditions, all of which gave me a context for returning to and reflecting on my past experiences.

Researcher Identity and Theoretical Framework

Critical Theory and Pedagogy

As a Black woman from a country (Nigeria) with colonial history, and as a witness to the ravishing destruction that colonialism has wrought, the subjects of power and oppression have always been dominant in my consciousness. As a teacher, I have worked with students from impoverished backgrounds and those from privileged backgrounds; two polar groups co-habiting in the same city, each group an “outsider” to the world of the other and unable to comprehend the existence of the other’s reality. As a result of this experience of teaching the very poor and the very rich, I have been drawn to issues of power; those who have it and what it affords them, and those who do not and what that denies them. Growing up as a child who, depending on the government of the day, sometimes fell in the margins of the impoverished or just at the doorstep of the middle-class, I have been “awake” from early on in my life to issues of injustice and inequality and the way the lives students lead outside of school also reflect the kind of school they gain access to and what opportunities are offered them. In the early years of my career as a teacher in Nigeria, I was often disturbed by the presence of extreme poverty, the lack of schoolbooks, or the deplorable state of classrooms. I was surrounded by young children in primary and secondary schools who had to go hawk wares in their neighborhood in the morning before they could go to school, and children who went to school without eating breakfast.

In complete contrast, a few years into my teaching career, I got one job after the other at independent, privately owned, British-curriculum international schools in Nigeria’s capital city, Abuja; attended by children of the extremely rich and privileged of the society. One of these

schools was multi-cultural; about seventy percent of the student population were students of Nigerian heritage and thirty percent of students were from other parts of the world. It was in places like these that I had felt most like an outsider. The sheer luxury and comfort in these private schools amazed me; the vacations the students talked about, the access these students had to everything. It was in such schools that I experienced the stark, unashamed arrogance of power and wealth, and it helped shape what I had always suspected: that power was not just in the political spheres of presidential and state houses. It was present everywhere. Ubiquitous. And for the poor, they did not need a reminder of their powerless state. Their powerlessness was also an ever-present darkness that pervaded everything. This was evident in students who had to drop out of school because their parents could no longer afford to pay their school fees. A few years later, they were on the streets, checking out on life.

Beyond that, as a teacher who was an outsider to that affluent class (all the teachers were), I would constantly draw my colleagues' attention to what shocked me the most: how the privileged students lacked any awareness/consciousness of their own privilege. There was a taken-for-grantedness, an everydayness, an ordinariness to this privilege that stunned me. Surrounded by other students and peers who had equally rich and powerful parents, it was normal to run into designer dresses, shoes, etc., in the hostel's garbage bin. The curriculum did not prepare any teacher to address these students. How do middle-class teachers have a conversation with affluent students who act like teachers were beneath them? Freire (2005) addresses this class disparity between students and teachers when he notes that “one of the challenges to progressive educators, in keeping with their choice, is not to feel or to proceed as if they were inferior to dominant-class learners in the private schools who arrogantly mistreat and belittle middle-class teachers” (p. 128).

I taught English/Literature and I constantly sought opportunities to bring issues of privilege and oppression to my affluent students' attention. Most were disinterested, a few amused, others incredulous. The magnificent edifice of the school which sat on acres and acres of grandeur, also ironically, overlooked a dingy, shanty settlement in the capital city. I would ask my students to look out the window and see the cart pushers, or beggars that littered the streets just less than one kilometer away from us. For the most part, the students said only lazy people ended up like that. I could not discuss extensively about such issues in my lessons because the school also forbade teachers from speaking critically about power; many of the parents whose kids attended the school were themselves culpable in systems of corruption that robbed the country of resources.

When I left Nigeria for the UK, and later Canada, I had these issues on my mind and at the onset of my doctoral studies, critical theory was at once as relevant as it was striking, because it offered me a fresh lens to rethink my world and frame my experiences. While I did not understand the workings of race and racism when I first arrived the UK, class disparity as described above, offered me a path to understanding critical theory. A curriculum theory and foundations course I took in my first year of doctoral work, first made me aware of the work of renowned curriculum theorist, William F. Pinar (2013). Critical pedagogy was my earliest philosophical influence as it gave me the language and framework to re-read my experiences of growing up in postcolonial Nigeria, as well as my experiences of being a Black woman immigrant in Canada. In my professional life as a teacher and researcher, my worldview has been profoundly influenced by critical pedagogy with its focus on challenging inequality and speaking critically about power (Apple, 2004, 2013; Fine, 2000, 2003; Freire, 2005, 2009;

Giroux, 1983, 1997, 2009; Hooks, 1999b, 2003; Kanpol, 1999; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren, 1994, 2003, 2009; Phipps & Guilherme, 2004).

Critical Pedagogy in the Now

Prior to my having begun my candidacy work and at the start of the conversation series with colleagues in my present teaching context, I needed a framework, a theory, to situate some of the concepts that I wanted to share. When it became obvious at the start that many teachers in the department did not think that school systems could be oppressive, or that teaching could be complicit in systems of oppression, critical pedagogy offered me a solid framework for presenting issues of oppression, class, power, and identity to my colleagues. In order to articulate a hermeneutic understanding of critical pedagogy and how it helped shape my initial conversations with teachers in my department, it is perhaps instructive to review the critical pedagogy movement and how it came to be.

The term critical pedagogy has its first textbook usage in Giroux's (1983) *Theory and Resistance in Education*. A number of key scholars began to provide the groundwork that revitalized educational debates about domestic schooling in the US in the 1980s. These scholars include: Apple (1982); Anyon (1980, 1981); Freire (1985); Giroux (1983); and Shor (1980). A major goal of the movement was to consolidate diverse views in order to create a framework for radical teachers who desired to critically take up issues of oppression in the education systems. As Baynham (2006) observes, practitioners of critical pedagogy seek a system of education where happenings and discussions in the classroom make a difference outside the classroom. This opportunity to take up worthwhile discussions in the classroom that critical pedagogy offers is particularly important given the context of my research, which as previously discussed, does not provide much opportunity within the planned curriculum, to engage some of the very vital

issues that our student population (immigrant students) face in the wider Canadian society. When crucial questions about injustice and issues of difference and acceptance arise in the classroom, should educators continually say to perplexed students that these are irrelevant and outside the scope of the subject matter? In my view, critical pedagogy, therefore, particularly lends itself to teaching in ways that attend to the “deepest rhythms of life” (Smith, 2008) because of its preoccupation with the lived realities of students’ lives. I follow Freire (2005) in his view that “those wanting to teach must be able to dare, that is, to have the predisposition to fight for justice and to be lucid in defense of the need to create such conditions to pedagogy in schools” (p. 8).

Critical pedagogy gave me the ability to interrogate the tendency in the English language teaching field to proceed with a belief that teachers primarily teach content and culture of the target language, and the notion that experiences of students and teachers are outside the scope of the curriculum. As Kincheloe (2004) maintains, “the classroom, curricular, and school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals” (p. 2) and while teaching professionals have some agency, what they can do is not entirely free and independent of decisions that have been made previously by those who operate by a different set of ideologies. This suggests that decisions about what a teacher chooses to address or let slide are always influenced by what has been done. Critical pedagogy provided me with theoretical grounding to engage instructors on the fact that every educational context is a site of struggle (Kincheloe, 2004).

Another key critical pedagogy educator is Peter McLaren and his discussion of issues of power and oppression in school systems has been very crucial to my understanding critical pedagogy. For instance, early on in the conversation series with the ESL teachers, McLaren’s (2009) discussion of the hidden curriculum was insightful for bringing us all to a discussion and,

gradually, an understanding that the curriculum is more than just a “program of study.” Speaking on the unstated but crucial aspects of curriculum in shaping lives into the weak or strong in the society, McLaren (2009) also expounds on the concept of the “hidden curriculum” which “refers to the unintended outcomes of the schooling process” (p. 75). These writings in critical pedagogy were valuable contributions that marked the earliest progress we made in our conversations.

In the English language teaching field, scholars like Pennycook (2001), Akbari (2008), and Sadeghi (2008) have used the lens of critical pedagogy, and have also called for the field to take up the political dimensions of language teaching. An interesting insight offered by Akbari (2008), makes for a particularly practical understanding of the applications of critical pedagogy in English language teaching. Explaining that the field of English language teaching has historically positioned itself as “neutral” and “apolitical,” Akbari (2008) argues:

The identity of a language is shaped by what has happened to it, and what it has done to others; if we look back upon the history of English and its close connection with the spread of colonialism, we find ourselves pausing, pondering, and admitting that English is not an innocent language. (p. 277)

Coming from a country with a colonial history, I am immediately able to identify with Akbari’s (2008) claim above, because to date, my country still bears witness to the non-innocence of the English language. Fifty-seven years after gaining its independence from Britain, the English language continues to be the national language of Nigeria. More than that, it is a reminder that languages are associated with power and oppression. A very important point to consider is the practice in English language content development to “anesthetize” commercial course books in the hope of making them “politically and socially harmless for an international audience” (Akbari, 2008, p. 281). Critical pedagogy provides a lens for examining such values and

interrogating how such rhetoric about the “apolitical neutrality of English language” (Sadeghi, 2008, p. 2) could distract from questioning issues of social inequality in English language teaching that play out in the form of sexism, classism, and racism in the classrooms. After learning about critical pedagogy, I was introduced to hermeneutics. I have found that hermeneutics further enriched my understanding and provided a different kind of language to capture my emerging knowledge. In becoming knowledgeable about both discourses, I became conscious of their intersections and also differences. I found myself drawn more and more to hermeneutics, while at the same time conscious of the indisputable place of critical pedagogy in my research.

This and That: Of Hermeneutics and Critical Pedagogy

While I found critical pedagogy to be very useful for situating an initial understanding of issues of oppression, power, and privilege in school systems, I am proceeding hermeneutically to engage the issues that critical pedagogy has brought to my attention. In pursuing a conversation that is open to possibilities and the *not yet* (Aoki, 1991/2005, p. 64), I needed a different kind of language to engage conversations, a language that hermeneutics offers. The experience of the address of the topic that I described in a previous section, brought me to a sense that critical pedagogy may other the very people we seek to be allies with. Speaking about the possibility that critical pedagogues may perpetuate the same oppressive systems they seek to challenge and dismantle, Ellsworth (1992) reporting on a critical pedagogy course she taught, contends that when her participants attempted to put course concepts into practice, they produced outcomes that further heightened the very conditions they had set out to challenge. Consequently, she suggests that instead of engaging only critical pedagogy, educators may need to explore other kinds of conversations and encounters that allow them to acknowledge their own implications in

formations of oppression. Similarly, Smith (1991) argues that critical pedagogy could predispose well-meaning teachers to deprive the oppressed of their voices because as he aptly argues, “dialogue in the critical sense becomes dialogue with a hidden agenda: I speak to inform you of your victimization and oppression rather than *with* in order that we create a world which does justice to both of us” (p. 196-197). In my own experience of discussing a critical pedagogy approach with teachers, there are often feelings of guilt, discomfort, and sometimes anger that may lead teachers to become defensive and unable to converse openly. While critical pedagogy brought me to the place of rupture, for me, making further meaning of this rupture, requires an additional theoretical lens. I find that hermeneutics emphasizes conversation *with* instead of *about* and *for*; it offers a way for me to proceed that allows me and the teachers with whom I collaborate to dwell in the middle, to go along together with the consciousness that no one has the last word. However, rather than turn away from critical pedagogy in the turn toward hermeneutics, I want to co-dwell with them. This co-dwelling of hermeneutics and critical pedagogy is another area of tension in my research, and while I am conscious of the incompatibility of the worldviews underlying these theories, I am again seeking a place in-between. For instance, while critical pedagogy does not quite work with the way I would like to proceed in exploring possibilities for answering my questions, it offers a language to describe the complexities of relationships within the intercultural competence literature. In addition, critical pedagogy enables the interrogation of power struggles, systemic oppression, and inequality. I have found the concept of pedagogy of discomfort (Boler & Zembylas, 2003) which is very much informed by critical pedagogy, to be a useful lens for interrogating the tension that educators navigate while taking up the difficult task of talking about difference in the classroom.

As I ponder on this unusual co-habitation of hermeneutics and critical pedagogy, I am reminded of the hermeneutic understanding of the intersubjectivity and mutual interpenetration of everything, but, as Smith (1999) notes, only a particular kind of discipline can help us make those connections which are not always superficially obvious. As previously mentioned, I am also drawn to Aoki's (1992/2005) call that we embrace “and-ness,” and “this and that” instead of thinking in binaries of “this or that” (p. 268). Such understanding, according to Aoki (1992/2005), comes from knowing that multiplicity is not the elements, but what there is between the elements. It is in this complex sense that Aoki (1992/2005) describes that critical pedagogy and hermeneutics are relevant in my research. While critical pedagogy is not the primary theory with which I proceed, it is always there, in the middle, illuminating, and especially providing language that I otherwise would not find words for. As Smith (1999) rightly observes, if all critical pedagogy has contributed is language for naming oppression and power, it still has contributed enough. After critical pedagogy and hermeneutics, another educational orientation, “engaged pedagogy” further inspired me. I provide some detail about engaged pedagogy below.

Engaged Pedagogy

In the second year of my doctoral program, I discovered and was drawn to African-American theorist and writer, bell hook's (1994) concept of “engaged pedagogy” (p. 13), which proceeds with the view that teachers have a duty to attend to the spiritual as much as the intellectual in their classrooms. I was interested in this concept for several reasons, but mostly because engaged pedagogy gave words to many things I have always believed about teaching and learning, and even sometimes practiced in my own teaching, without necessarily having the language or theoretical framework to capture those beliefs. Engaged pedagogy was my first

encounter with the concept of “care” and “soul” being expounded in the educational literature. Initially writing from the tradition of critical theory herself, hooks (1994b) advocates for a way to proceed beyond critical theory, and introduces the concept of engaged pedagogy:

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred: who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. (p. 13)

Like hooks, I have always believed that as teachers, we have a responsibility to our students that goes beyond school grades. While engaged pedagogy is similar to critical, multi-cultural, and feminist scholarship as it challenges white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist ideologies, it goes beyond that by making a call for teachers to relate to their own souls and to those of their students. Hooks (1994b) calls on teachers to practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit, because as she stresses, it is important to teach in ways that attend to and care for the souls of our students; such approach to teaching, according to her, provides “the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p. 13). My reading of hooks’ engaged pedagogy prepared my heart for the most life-changing experience in the course of this doctoral program; an experience I detail below.

Wisdom Traditions

Having first heard the word “soul” in connection to teaching in my reading of hook’s engaged pedagogy, I started to dig further along these lines. It was during one doctoral course on “Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Contemplative Pedagogies,” taught by Dr. Eppert, that I started to fully make the connection between the course literature I was reading and the African wisdom traditions that I was raised by. A certain “forgetfulness” that had taken over my mind was

suddenly pulled off, like a veil, and I began to see how my whole life has always been interconnected with my past, present, and future and how I have always been interconnected with others. With regard to the scholarship on wisdom traditions in education, I have been most influenced by the writings of Smith (2003, 2008, 2010, 2014) and Eppert (2009). While taking Dr. Eppert’s course, I was simultaneously taking a course on research methodologies with Dr. Fidyk. I was tremendously influenced by conversations with Dr. Fidyk, who encouraged me to write weekly on topics relating to African wisdom. As I sought to position myself as a researcher in line with my evolving understanding of what it means to live in the world as an African woman, an educator, an immigrant teacher, and second language instructor, I began to find that critical theory alone did not offer me the robust and interconnected, non-dualistic view of the world that must of necessity be cardinal to my existence. Having fallen into the trap of polarizing cultures in the past, I sought a more balanced view of the world. I also sought more to interweave my readings in hermeneutics with wisdom traditions. I wanted an educational space where Western values were just as important as other worldviews, and a classroom space that allowed students to learn from all knowledges, including their own. To gain better understanding, I enrolled and completed an independent study course on wisdom traditions with my supervisor, Dr. Eppert. The course helped me make connections between African wisdom teachings and pedagogy. I realized that I wanted a different, wisdom inspired lens for teaching that acknowledged the place of all kinds of knowledge. Along these lines, I have been particularly inspired by Smith’s (2008) assertion:

The end goal of education can never be knowledge in some independent and discrete sense . . . instead, the purpose of education is to learn how to live well, to be free of

delusion, and to be attuned to the deepest rhythms of Life so that one is living Life according to its fundamental nature. (p. 26)

Proceeding: A Note on Ethics

In this section, I turn my attention to the question of how I am taking up ethics in the context of my research. The word *ethics* is derived from the Greek root word *ethos*, which means “character” and the guiding beliefs or ideals that characterize a community or nation. In modern usage, *ethos* denotes the disposition, character, or fundamental values peculiar to a specific person, people, corporation, culture, or movement. Ethics, as I use it in this paper, simply refers to interdependence and our obligation to others. While there have been various definitions of and discussions about ethics and what constitutes ethics in the wider literature of philosophy, review of those is outside the scope of this dissertation. I use ethics in this dissertation to mean a relationship between self and other that leads to flourishing and enables us go along together. My investment in a relational understanding of ethics is grounded in African wisdom traditions, which emphasize the importance of interdependence over individuality. For instance, the African wisdom notion of “ubuntu” as theorized by Desmond Tutu (1999, 2013) and other scholars (Christian, 2012; Le Roux, 2000; Letseka, 2000; Maluleke, 1999; Ogude, 2019; Teffo, 1996; Venter, 2004) is informed by the concept that “I am, because we are.” At the center of the concept of ubuntu is the idea that interdependent network of human relationships is the life force of humanity (Ogude, 2019, p. 3). Hence, the Zulu proverb, “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” roughly translated as, “I am because you are, we are, because you are,” captures the idea that the individual does not exist in a vacuum but in a web of interconnected and interdependent relationships that make it possible for life to go on. Within this ethics of interdependence that underlies ubuntu “every person, every individual, forms a link in a chain of vital forces, a living

link, active and passive. Joined from above to the ascending line of ancestry and sustaining below him the line of his descendants” (Teffo, 1996, p. 103).

My interest in ethics is in the relationship between people of different cultures and how that relationship can thrive and flourish in the ESL teaching and learning contexts. In this specific context of my dissertation, the notion of “self” is based on an ontological orientation rooted in a hermeneutic and African wisdom orientation that all beings are interconnected and interdependent. In order to better understand what such interconnectedness of all beings might mean for ESL and intercultural communication teaching and learning, and in order to understand such relationships better, I draw on Gadamer and other curriculum scholars throughout this paper to illuminate how we might conceptualize an ethics of intercultural communication in ESL education contexts.

My research seeks an understanding of these ontologically driven conditions of imbalance that manifest themselves through intolerance of others and an understanding of the harmful engagements with our world and planet and rituals that might bring some healing to our collective consciousness. To develop such an understanding and reimagine ways to proceed, I engage an ethics of intercultural communication that is based on a relational understanding of our interaction with others.

As is common knowledge, the topic of culture, and the way people interact with difference, has been taken up in several different ways in scholarly literature. In education and corporate settings, intercultural competence, cross-cultural competence, and multi-cultural education have all been used, sometimes interchangeably, to describe attempts to theorize ways that individuals could better get along and co-exist with people of other cultures in a rapidly globalizing world. I problematize this proliferation of terminologies in a different section.

Multicultural education and anti-racist education have approached the subject from a lens of oppression and social justice, while multicultural education has engaged in the same from the lens of education for inclusion and diversity. More recently, several Canadian post-secondary institutions have begun to create equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) centres on campuses to address issues related to social justice and ensure that school policies are inclusive and equitable for all though the success of these attempts are outside the scope of my discussions in this chapter.

In this paper, I proceed with the term *intercultural* because it aligns with my own interests in notions of interactions as a dialogue, conversation, and exchange with an “other,” whose ontological orientation might differ from mine but whose different worldviews also hold possibilities for enriching mine. Such dialogic connotations of the term *intercultural* also aligns closely with my interest in hermeneutic and African wisdom relational approaches to developing an understanding of the world around us. The degeneration of conversation and relationships of various kinds in present times, and the harmful consequences of such imbalanced relations, have been abundantly explored in the fields of anti-racist education, critical race theory, and multicultural education, to name a few. However, my own interest in ethics as it relates to intercultural communication is to explore how hermeneutics and African wisdom traditions might further enrich our understanding of the root causes of these societal dis-eases and ways that these traditions might be deployed to counter current grammars of divisiveness in relationships of all kinds. As Smith (2008) wisely noted, no tradition has all the answers and solutions for the present human condition. As such, there is much to be gained by exploring an ethics of intercultural communication from a different ontological paradigm that invites an understanding of self as already interconnected with others.

The work of critical scholars and activists continues to be a catalyst for provoking societal transformation at many levels. This study pays homage to this very important work and draws on concepts of critical pedagogues to illuminate several issues of concern in intercultural communication. I am, however, choosing to approach my topic from a different lens because having come to an understanding of the nature and machinery of oppression, I am drawn to and curious about ontological orientations and worldviews that drive such oppression in the first place and the ways we might invoke non-Western ontological paradigms to counter current challenges in intercultural communication (Bai et al., 2015; Smith, 2008). Hermeneutics and African wisdom are also instructive for understanding an ethics of intercultural communication because they are relevant for understanding ways in which the societies and spaces we inhabit are influenced by factors outside of human interaction: interaction with nature, interaction with other living beings, and elements of the world. I am interested in the ontological orientation that makes it possible for the ills that we experience in today’s society to thrive. I am declaring these upfront so that you, my readers, may not be left confused about questions you expect my research to answer that it may not, or directions you expect this research to go that it may not. We all, regardless of research paradigm, contribute some wisdom to an understanding of an urgent and degenerating global challenge—I hope that my research provides just another different way of looking at the same issue.

Part of my rediscovery process of my African wisdom heritage was the remembrance of a certain way of approaching life’s issues and problems that might be considered radically different, even irrational, to the Western mind. In many African cultures, not being able to understand or perceive, not being able to tolerate those who are different from us, is a form of an illness (Somé, 1999, p. 29). As a Nigerian woman, I reflect back on my childhood memories of

the way that severe family challenges were approached. If a child had impaired cognitive functions and could not cope at school or follow instructions as expected of their age, the elder in the family did not seek clinical diagnosis, they sought to understand the spiritual dis-ease at the root of the physical symptoms. It was a commonly held belief that spiritual influences and workings interacted side by side with physical symptoms and that impoverished spiritual states always inevitably led to dysfunctional physical states.

These beliefs and practices also applied to behavioural irregularities. If a child in a family suddenly became involved in immoral behavior or crimes, elders of that family understood that there was a spiritual malaise that informed such unacceptable patterns. Similarly, current break down in relationships with others, evidenced by racism and bigotry of all kinds, can be interpreted and understood through an African wisdom lens. As Somé (1999) eloquently explains below:

Another form of this illness is the inability to accept or even tolerate those who are different from us. Worse, this inability encourages suspicion, fear, and resentment. Thus, it is an illness of collective psyche when different cultures don't understand each other.

The history of mankind (sic) is plagued by the psychic disease that has caused us so much pain in the world. (p. 30)

Such a disease described above is also understood as deeply spiritual, and as such, methods of addressing it must proceed from a consideration of the tumultuous energetic and spiritual conditions of imbalance that drive such outward manifestations of intolerance and bigotry. Western medicine similarly refers to hidden physical health conditions that drive more overt physical symptoms as “underlying conditions.” As we already understand from Western medicine, treating physical symptoms without addressing underlying conditions may temporarily

offer relief, but the illness is bound to return sooner or later. Now, when one imagines the futility of a cycle of treating recurring symptoms and neglecting to treat the cause of those symptoms, it is then easier to follow this enlivened paradigm with which I proceed in my research. Within many African Indigenous concepts of healing, all processes of healing must begin by addressing the energetic or spiritual states in turmoil (Somé, 1999).

More than ever before, it is both crucial and urgent in these extraordinarily difficult times, to investigate ways in which socio-political systems and structures serve or disempower vulnerable populations. The Covid-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts has revealed, even more clearly, the disparities across all levels of society, including healthcare access, ever-dwindling job pools amidst lay-offs and furloughs, and decades-long neglect of seniors' care and welfare. But it is also more pressing now to yield to calls of curriculum scholars and wisdom sages who have, over the past few decades, called for an epistemological and ontological shift in the ways that the West views its relationships to others. Covid-19, despite its ravaging impact on the world, has also critically highlighted ways in which all beings are inter-connected, and underlined the wisdom that we live or perish together as a collective. In recent times, we have started to see and understand how a virus ravaging citizens in any given country could easily become something that impacts everyone.

Perhaps entering into a new understanding of this interconnectedness of our collective humanity, we saw the world stand up and march in protest of the death of George Floyd in the United States. This is a clear nod to a growing awareness that George Floyd is every Black man in Canada, in the United Kingdom, in the Netherlands, and all over the world. Despite these refreshing glimpses of growing awareness of justice for all, recent months have also revealed rapidly degenerating decline in interpersonal relationships, as evidenced by emboldened

nationalist movements in the United States, Europe, and pockets of countries around the world. It is almost as though great darkness has overcome our world and the perilous times variously prophesied by Biblical prophets have now come upon us.

Recently, I read several Twitter threads depicting truly shocking images of race-related assaults and micro-aggressions against Black men and women. As I watched brazen, blatant racist expletives directed at people of colour in various states and cities, it dawned on me that there is a spiritual malaise that makes such level of disconnectedness with other humans possible. When I watched the eight and half minute long video of the White cop’s knee choking life out of George Floyd, and the officer’s casual, care-free, unruffled manner, I found it difficult, as an African, to not believe that there is a commonality of spiritual state that makes such savagery ubiquitous and possible in broad daylight in the most powerful nation of the world.

In Canada, we saw images of police brutalizing the mentally vulnerable, minority groups, and other vulnerable populations. This pandemic also revealed something similarly alarming: the worst of an individualistic, capitalist orientation prevalent in the West. I saw images of protesters in the US, and more recently, Canada, clamoring against the wearing of masks and citing the violation of their human rights. These mostly able-bodied, healthy protesters also called for the reopening of the economy at the peak of the pandemic because, as they articulated, healthy people should not be trapped indoors and unable to get professional haircuts because of a government-imposed consideration of the elderly and other vulnerable populations. We saw unbelievable images of citizens deliberately spitting on others at grocery stores because they had been asked to wear masks to protect theirs and others’ health. In obvious hysteria at this novel idea that their individual actions and movements may directly endanger others, these protesters yelled “I don’t care,” “that’s not my business.”

But we should care. We should care because we saw the devastating consequences of this individualistic, self-centric orientation in the alarming global death rates. We saw how the elderly seniors in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and the United States died in the thousands, alone and without a chance to say goodbye to their loved ones. In Canada, we saw, despite early lock-down measures of the country, the disproportionate death rate of elderly citizens in care homes.

In many ways, this “uncaring” attitude, demonstrated during this pandemic, is at the root of the Western dis-ease that curriculum scholars and wisdom philosophers have described and denounced. To counter such debilitating dis-ease, it appears that in addition to calling out and dismantling systems of injustice (as is the goal of critical theory and pedagogy), educators need to heed various calls for ethical approaches to ethical pedagogies that facilitate an ontological shift to an orientation of care toward others, and our planet. Noddings’ (1984) “ethics of care” provides a starting point for conceptualizing our duty of care to others. Within an ethics of care, we have a primary obligation to care for others, including strangers. Noddings’ (1984) ethics of care proposes that ontologically, relationships are basic to humanity, and identity is always in relation to relationships with others. If, as Noddings (1984) contends, the propensity to care is a basic and universal human attribute, African wisdom teaches us that disinterest and disregard for the responsibility to care for others is symptomatic of an energetic imbalance, a disorder of the human spirit. To address such a state of spiritual imbalance, it is necessary to explore an ethical approach for teaching intercultural communication. Such an ethical intercultural communication framework proceeds with the premise that even when others’ worldviews differ from ours, we are obliged to view such differences as opportunities for a “time of hospitality” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 82). To care, in the context of intercultural communication, is to make pedagogical spaces

hospitable and welcoming so that learners with diverse worldviews can strive to come to a genuine understanding of one another. Further down in this dissertation, I provide an overview of how an ethics of intercultural communication has been conceptualized by other scholars, and a discussion of scholarship that informs the way my study engages an ethic of intercultural competence.

I hope that, at this point, I have helped you, the reader, understand the scholarly and theoretical influences embedded in my research questions. In the next chapter, which traces a hermeneutic understanding of literature, I engage a ritual most familiar to me: untangling strands. Exploring literature reminds me of my hair rituals: my African hair, messy and glorious. To get to the glory of it, I sometimes have to endure the pain of combing through the thickness, sometimes not knowing how I might proceed. The literature on intercultural competence, task-based language teaching, and hermeneutics stand tall and dense in beauty, with tangled edges awaiting my hermeneutic comb. Before I put a comb to my hair, I soak it up in natural oils and let the oils settle. My African hair demands reverence, and a certain mindfulness when I approach it. It is a lot of things: tangled, glorious, and messy, but it also holds much wisdom.

Let us approach theory with caution and wisdom.

It is written.

Chapter 2: Tangled Strands and Open Doors to Language Teaching

Reflections on Scholarship on ESL Teaching and Learning

Having discussed different theoretical lenses I bring to my research, I now turn to a discussion of the theoretical literature specifically on language teaching and learning. I give particular attention to task-based language teaching, because that is the methodology used in the English program that this research is situated. My goal is to infuse this literature with my hermeneutic understanding of language teaching concepts so that I can find bloodlines and ancestral connections in the work I engage. As Jardine (1998) articulates:

The goal of interpretive work is not to pass on objective information to readers, but to evoke in readers, a new way of understanding themselves and the lives they are living . . . understanding who we are more differently, more deeply, more richly. (p. 50)

Such a deep and rich interpretation of who we are invites a consideration of the interpenetration of concepts that inform our research rather than suggesting a fragmented approach to the concepts under consideration, because, as Jardine (2008) points out, fragments do not address us in ways that enable us to seek kinships (p. ii).

Exploring connections and kinships in theory requires understanding that “everything is always already everywhere present” (Smith, 1999, p. 57), an integral part of the hermeneutic approach. However, seeing the inter-subjectivity and bloodlines in disciplines that do not immediately appear connected requires what Smith (1999) calls “imaginal discipline,” an openness to experience that transcends putting forth categories of explanation or language of clarity (p. 46). Proceeding with imaginal discipline entails accommodating ambiguity, so I am seeking to create a space in my research for the ambiguous, all the while recognizing the challenges of doing so. In approaching theory and my research hermeneutically, I am being

called to put forward a new response to previously familiar concepts because my “old knowledge/language are now inadequate to the task of naming what is now being confronted” (Smith, 1999, p. 130). Unlike the negative meaning often associated with ambiguity in daily English usage, the hermeneutic tradition emphasizes that ambiguity makes it feasible for us to be present to understanding by keeping the possibilities open; when we speak in clear and certain language, “speech grinds to a halt, or reduces to chatter, because there is nothing more to be said” (p. 130). However, I also recognize from my own experience in teaching language, that communication does also require a capacity to communicate with clarity; so, like an acrobat on a tight rope, I am attempting to find a balance.

Task-Based Language Teaching

An important question on which I have had to reflect deeply is how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) lends itself to my research. In my proposed research context, the language teaching program is based on the Willis (1996b) model of task-based language teaching; and as I mentioned in the previous chapter, task-based language teaching, like many other language methods, has not often integrated issues of intercultural competence in its curriculum materials. A frequent item of feedback from teachers about the curriculum is that the TBLT framework is prescriptive and fast-paced, making it impossible for the framework to be used to engage critically with lived experiences of the students. On the contrary, taking up a theoretical framework that includes TBLT makes it possible to explore possibilities for discussing language theory side by side with issues of intercultural competence. In addition, exploring an ethics of intercultural communication within my research context might also involve envisioning intercultural competence in relation to the possibilities and limitations of a

TBLT curriculum framework. It is, therefore, important to reach into the dense forest of theory and make meaning of a task-based language teaching framework.

Coming across the concept of task-based language teaching was in itself a defining moment for me. I first encountered the term while I was studying for a Master’s degree in English language teaching in the UK in 2010 and, a few years later, during my PhD program when I took a course on task-based language teaching taught by Dr. Dunn. TBLT is personally and professionally relevant to me because of my own experiences of learning English in a Nigerian secondary school. Below is my personal story about learning English as a school subject in Nigeria.

Glaring at Fenced Walls: A Mismatch of Methods and Contexts

I am in the front-row seat and I have the door of my wooden locker opened above my head so my face is totally buried and concealed. Without looking around, I can tell that many of my classmates are doing the same. This is our brief moment of denial. As we struggle to build some mettle to cope with the eighty laborious minutes of the daily English language lessons, I slowly bring out my course book. I hear the English teacher asking us to open our textbooks to page seven. Today, we are studying “adverbial phrases” again. Again.

There is a near unanimous sigh from the class. I hear the teacher asking a classmate to explain the differences between adverbial phrases and clauses. My brain slowly switches off. I don’t understand why we have to learn noun phrases, recite definitions, and compare noun phrases and clauses in so many English classes, every school session. Next, she asks us to recite lines from our textbooks that talk about airports. AIRPORTS. I had only seen those when I watched television programs at our neighbors’. We are learning lines from our textbook that talk of a white man named Jim speaking to an airline attendant about flight tickets. We have to repeat these lines as the teacher raises her voice in sudden, uneven tones that jolt me from my brooding trance.

Repeat after me: “Hi Jim, your flight will arrive Heathrow very late, probably at about 11.30pm. Would you like a cup of coffee, looks like we are running very late.”

COFFEE.

What is that?

HEATHROW.

Where is that, I wonder. But more importantly, why am I reciting lines about airports in my 4th year of secondary school? There were no airports around me; I had never been to one. My parents had never been to one. WHY do I need to learn lines about proper greetings at an airport? I am not sure that I or any of my classmates will ever be going to one. Neither will our parents. So, I am thinking now: I really. Don't want to learn. Lines. About airports greetings.

JIM.

We do not know anyone by the name of Jim. A friend sitting next to me giggles as she reads a line about feeling too cold on the airplane. She further reads another sentence in which a lady at the airport requests a hot glass of milk and a blanket. We all giggle uncontrollably from the sheer silliness of these lines. None of us in that school will be seeing the inside of an airport or an airplane anytime soon. Our parents had not been paid for nine successive months. Half my classmates had been sent home the day before for their parents' inability to pay their school fees. So why were we learning lines about airports?

“Repeat after me,” she is yelling: “It is a cold winter, isn't it?” WINTER. We do not know what winter means. Nigeria has a rainy season and a dry season. “Repeat after me,” she continues: “Yes, it is. I can't wait for the summer season!”

A classmate raises her hand: “I am going to the latrine, she says.”

“TOILET!” yells the teacher.

“I have told you to say TOILET,” she continues. “Now, get on your knees and face the wall.” We all giggle. But how were we to learn the proper words for everyday communication when all our English classes engaged realities that weren't ours? Airports, winters, and coffee? We had English language classes every day, but we did not learn meaningful language for our everyday communication. I did not belong in the world our textbooks described, and our textbooks had nothing to say about our reality. So we sat there every day, peering at the high fence that this foreign world represented as we climbed very slowly. Peering at empty walls of the fence because we did not belong in that world and we were not welcome there. My English language classes drained life out of me.

When I first came across the concept of task-based language teaching in my graduate studies, it was a turning point for me. It was the first time I found words to describe all the feelings of resentment that I had nursed for years. More importantly, I was relieved to find that there was indeed a way to teach English that advocated the use of meaningful, context-specific language to communicate.

The Emergence and Entanglements of Task-based Language Teaching

As a hermeneutic writer, I caution that while I aim to bring relevant ideas in the field into the conversation, my over-riding hope is that this discussion of task-based language teaching can also bring some attention to the messiness of scholarship in the field. In what follows, I seek to bring attention to the messiness of task-based language teaching literature, particularly with respect to definitions of task and debates around focus-on-form and focus-on-meaning.

Exploring task-based literature gives me a way to show that that just like my proud, thick, kinky African hair, the dense glory of literature and theory are often tangled. Sometimes, those tangled edges unravel as I continually “engage” my hair with a comb and oil; at other times, those tangled edges remain. So, it seems, in my understanding of literature relevant to my research. Having some of the tangles provides the density and thickness that make my African hair, the helix, such a beauty. The tangles in my hair are a proof of rigor. Similarly, the hermeneutic writer does not seek to make the complex appear simple; if anything, a hermeneutic writer seeks to paint the picture in a way that allows for the complex, the unresolved, and the puzzles. In bringing attention to the messiness of the literature on task-based language teaching, the tangled locks, and the lingering strands that would not stay in place, I hope to show that it is possible to proceed with difficulty and unanswered questions. I introduce the messiness through the metaphor of hair because as I mentioned at the start of the paper, the African hair is a crucial

symbol of wisdom and because much of what I have learned about what it means to live a good life have come from wisdom teachings related to hair.

Task-based language teaching gained attention in the last few decades when scholars from a diverse range of fields started to call for more task-based approaches to language teaching (see, for example, Candlin, 1987; Crookes & Gass, 1993a, 1993b; Long & Crookes, 1992; Prabhu, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2009; Swales, 1990; Van den Branden et al., 2009; Van den Branden & Van Gorp, 2021; Van den Branden & Verhelst, 2006). Other scholars have also expounded on the benefits of task-based language teaching, like those in the areas of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (e.g., Ellis, 2003, 2004, 2005; Estaire & Zanon, 1994; Prabhu, 1987) and teacher educators like Willis (1996a, 1996b), Willis and Willis (2007), and Nunan (1989, 2004).

In scholarly literature, the concept of “task” grew in the 1980s and 1990s from communicative language teaching and second language research. During this time, as Van den Branden et al. (2009) rightly observe, it had become apparent that communicative language activities were no longer adequate to sustain learners’ development of advanced second language competencies and language accuracy. As the awareness of this void in communicative language activities grew, questions began to emerge about how much learners gained from communicative language teaching in terms of language development and their actual ability to use language. Consequently, it became crucial to seek approaches to language teaching that focused on helping students develop the ability to actually use language instead of the overriding preoccupation with knowledge about language that existing approaches seemed to favor (Van den Branden et al., 2009). Educators and scholars of language teaching increasingly started to question the focus on teaching grammar and metalanguage, while students of language were not necessarily able to

translate that technical knowledge into functional language for everyday communication. In my narration at the start of this section, I have shared an account of my own experience of learning English through grammar-driven methods and how disconnected the classroom language instruction was from our functional language needs in our everyday lives. It became increasingly evident to practitioners and scholars in the field of language teaching that a different approach that allowed students to learn functional language could be an effective way to strike the much-needed balance between classroom language learning and the actual language needs of students. In line with this realization, early publications on task-based language teaching proposed tasks as an appropriate unit of analysis capable of enhancing the achievement of functional language. Task-based language teaching as an approach drew influences from different disciplines: educational philosophy, second language acquisition, cognitive psycholinguistics, and socio-cultural learning theories, to give a few examples. TBLT also challenges mainstream views about language teaching in that it is based on the principle that language learning will thrive most successfully if teaching aims simply to create contexts in which the learner’s natural language learning capacity can be nurtured rather than making a systematic attempt to teach the language bit by bit (Ellis, 2009). In what follows, I engage a discussion of the problematic issues around the definition of the word “task” in task-based language teaching.

Tasked, Taxed, and Burdened by Language: A Hermeneutic Understanding of Tasks

While my discussion of task-based language teaching above explores its “coming-to-being-ness,” I hesitate to proceed without bringing into the conversation a tangled strand that has shaped how scholars and practitioners in the field have characterized task-based language teaching. This conspicuous and ubiquitous tangled strand is the very definition of the word

“task.” It is instructive to unpack this term, around which debates, criticisms, and innovations in the field have been centered.

Similarly, it is important to explore the areas of tension in task-based language teaching scholarship. In doing so, I also aim to provide a hermeneutic understanding of terms so that we, as educators, can contemplate on and interpret what a concept means. As Moules (2002) articulates:

Definition is the shape that language takes around a word. It is only when we begin to believe that definitions are “true” that we betray hermeneutics. Rather, when definitions are defined as interpretations, they become hermeneutic. When we take up definitions hermeneutically, we venture into the contingent understandings that are situated in lives, relationships, contexts, and histories. (p. 2)

Engaging definitions as interpretations, like Moules (2002) suggests in the quotation above, I will now explore a hermeneutic understanding of task. A task-based language teaching approach is built around units of tasks. The word “task” has its origin in the Old North French *tasque* and Latin *taxare*, which mean censure, charge, duty—and, in verb form, “to evaluate” or “to assess.” In the English lexicon, task was first used in 14th century Middle English to refer to “a quantity of labor imposed as a duty” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). By the 1590s, it was used to mean “to burden, to put a strain upon.” Subsequently, the phrase “take one to task” evolved, preserving a meaning closer to its Latin root associated with tax. In contemporary usage, task (noun) is “a piece of work to be done or undertaken” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). As a verb, to task is “to assign a task to, make great demands on (someone’s resources or abilities)” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.).

This etymological understanding of the word *task* is instructive for contemplating the relevance of the word in language teaching settings. I will use the case of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), because that is the context within which I have learned and taught English. I learned to speak my first language, Ebira, and the English language as soon as I was old enough to produce speech. Like many Nigerian children from middle-class families, learning the English language very early was considered vital since English is the dominant means of communication in the Nigerian society, the medium of instruction in schools, and the national (official) language in the multi-ethnic Nigerian society. The ability to speak English, then, has also made it possible to perform assignments involving interaction in the public space where there may be no mutual intelligibility of other languages such as regional dialects. In the Canadian context, for instance, we could ponder the fate of someone who does not speak the English language in Alberta. Some of the challenges such a person might face include an inability to perform everyday transactions like shopping, difficulty moving from place to place or asking for directions or help, difficulty communicating with a healthcare professional even when urgent medical attention is required, and an inability to find work. In fact, anyone who does not speak any English in Alberta and, by extension, Anglophone Canada, is likely not able to perform everyday tasks, whether those tasks are assigned to them or whether they are simply tasks important for survival. It is in this sense that the word *task* reminds me of its original association with “tax,” “assessment,” and “duty,” because the daily motions of living as humans render us indebted to tasks; our very survival depends on our ability to carry out certain actions, which are in turn mediated by language.

Consequently, students who have enrolled in our department’s ESL programs have done so primarily because they need to be able to perform everyday tasks, both workplace tasks and

tasks in school settings. Conversely, lacking English language skills to perform such tasks denies them the ability to complete vital errands; hence, language has put a burden on them, a strain, and a demand. Following from this understanding, a task-based approach to language teaching would prioritize tasks emphasizing functional language use over those that are focused on abstract language learning. For example, the program in my department has the goal of preparing students for the Canadian workplace, so the course is organized around units of tasks that are related to real Canadian workplaces. When this functional understanding of language is lacking, learners continue to be burdened by their inability to complete a piece of work in everyday language. In my experience as a secondary school student, much attention was given to teaching about language (e.g., grammatical forms, metalanguage) instead of teaching functional language, so students continued to lack necessary language skills for everyday communication.

The literature on task-based language teaching is also inundated with diverse definitions of “task” from different scholars. While many scholars in the field have often found areas of agreement and congruence, the meaning of the word task continues to remain a controversial point. One of the earliest descriptions comes from Prabhu (1987), who is widely credited as the father of the task-based language teaching movement. As Prabhu (1987) articulates, a task is any “activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate the process” (p. 24). While the first half of his description resonates with more contemporary definitions of tasks in the field, the latter part, which attributes some controlling power to teachers, deviates from contemporary understanding of teacher roles in task-based language teaching. In my own experience, for instance, perhaps the most recurrent complaint made by teachers using the task-based language teaching methodology is the loss of teacher control. Prabhu’s (1987) definition,

often classified as being most relevant to the procedural syllabus, has also been criticized for being somewhat abstract and “oriented towards cognition, process and (teacher-fronted) pedagogy” (Long & Crookes, 2009, p. 57). Candlin (1987), also lending his voice to the definitional challenge, explains:

[A task is] one of a set of differentiated, sequencable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied, cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen and emergent goals within a social milieu. (p. 10)

Again, this description does not immediately lend itself to a clear understanding of task, especially because there is an implicit suggestion that any series of language learning activities would qualify as task. More importantly, the complexity of meanings attached to the term complicates a teacher’s ability to evaluate what “task” would mean for their classrooms.

Some scholars have aimed to describe tasks in a more relatable, everyday meaning of the word. Long (1985), for instance, explains that task refers to a piece of work that people do for themselves or others, stressing that “tasks are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists” (p. 89). Skehan (2009) asserts that “a task is taken to be an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world, task completion has some priority and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome” (p. 83). Similarly, Crookes (1986) describes task as “a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, or at work” (p. 1). Finally, for Willis and Willis (2007), tasks are “activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome (p. 12). A common thread that runs through the definitions above is that language tasks engage language

for communicative purposes. However, so intense is the debate around “task” that Littlewood (2004) has questioned the validity of task-based language teaching in the first place given that the very meaning of the word task is laden with problems (p. 325).

I present different scholars’ understanding of tasks above to show that there is hardly agreement in the literature on what constitutes a most accurate meaning of task. While some scholars seem to reach a consensus on certain conditions that qualify a language activity to be called task, for the most part, almost every notable scholar in the field has a definition for the concept. However, returning to the historical meaning of task: “placing a burden on,” and “making a demand on someone,” is significant for a hermeneutic understanding of the term.

Approaches to Task-Based Language Teaching

In addition to the divergent opinions of scholars regarding how tasks should be defined, there is also a disparity in how scholars approach task-based language teaching as a methodology. In line with this tension, a few scholars have argued that there is more than one way of doing task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2009; Willis & Willis 2007). Willis and Willis (2007), for instance, note that task-based teaching is not the same the world over, so that “teachers who begin with the notion that tasks should be central to teaching then go on to refine an approach which fits their own classrooms and their own students” (p. 1). Such flexibility to adapt task-based language teaching to suit specific contexts is, in my opinion, vital to emphasize in English language teaching contexts. Often, a model of task-based language teaching is imposed on teachers who are not given options for adapting the model to fit their specific teaching contexts.

Several scholars have proposed different approaches to doing task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003; Long 1985; Sheen, 2003; Skehan, 1998a; Willis, 1996). While they all

agree that a task-based language lesson should have a communicative focus, they do not agree on how the issue of form should be taken up. Models of task-based language teaching proposed by Skehan (1998a), Long (1985), and Ellis (2003) all give priority to natural language use.

However, the authors do not agree on how grammar may be addressed. While some scholars recommend an explicit focus on grammar and form at the pre-task stage, others, like Sheen (2003), argue that the only grammar to be addressed is that which causes a problem in communication. Other models recommend that a focus on form or grammar only be introduced at the post-task stage (Willis, 1996b).

In the department where I work, for instance, as previously mentioned, the curriculum is based on Willis' (1996b) model of task-based language teaching, which takes up awareness-raising activities around form and grammar only at the post-task stage. This version of task-based language teaching is often referred to as a strong version. The debate about form has been a major area of controversy both in the area of TLBT research and in classroom practice. One of the most frequent criticisms of task-based language teaching is that the methodology prioritizes a focus on meaning over correct grammar (Ellis, 2009). Skehan (2009), for instance, argues that while methods of instruction that make meaning a primary focus have benefits for authenticity and relevance to acquisitional accounts of language development, such methods encourage learners to focus on meaning and thereby neglect form. This neglect of form, according to Skehan (2009), consequently leads to pressure for learners to produce immediate communication instead of helping learners to develop their interlanguage growth.

In my own experience of working with Willis' (1996b) task-based language teaching framework as an instructor and curriculum developer, what has emerged in my understanding is that ample opportunities already exist for adequate coverage of grammar in the post-task stage.

The advantage of having grammar in the post-task stage is that students get an opportunity to focus on task completion and functional language use in the pre-task and task stage without the burden of constantly worrying about their grammar. However, many teachers in my current department started off questioning the validity of task-based teaching when it was first introduced. Echoing concerns similar to those already discussed above, teachers in my department believed that grammar was not getting adequate attention in task-based language teaching. In response to this criticism, Ellis (2009) suggests a task-based language teaching framework in which attention to form can figure in all three phases of a task-based lesson (pre-task, task, and post-task), stressing that advocates of task-based language teaching do not view attention to form as an optional element of task-based language teaching, but rather as a necessary element to ensure “noticing” (p. 232). Noticing in language teaching contexts is used in a sense similar to its Latin root *notitia*, which means “being known,” “get to know,” and “get acquainted with.” In contemporary usage and in language instruction, it means “to become aware of,” observe, pay attention to (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Along the lines of these root meanings, language students are often called to “notice” how words, especially target grammar structures, are used in context. Such “noticing” activities provides opportunities to address grammar concerns.

An important aspect of task-based language teaching, and one which makes it compatible with notions of justice and equality, is the learner-centered nature of the methodology. In a task-based lesson, the teacher does not have the traditional role that is so consistent with the “banking system” of education that Freire (2009) critiques. Freire (2009) describes the relationship between teacher and students in the banking system as one that involves “a narrating Subject (the teacher), and patient, listening objects (the students)” (p. 52). Within such a relationship, Freire

(2009) observes that the content or topic being narrated has the tendency to become lifeless. However, in a task-based lesson, the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator, coach and guide, giving students the autonomy to be thinking subjects with agency. While I have found this learner-centered nature of TBLT to be very beneficial, it has also frequently been a source of much disconcertment for students and teachers, largely because many English language learners are themselves more familiar with methods of instruction that privilege teacher knowledge over student knowledge. Many teachers are also used to maintaining control in their classrooms and, therefore, methods of teaching that call for a relinquishing of that power inevitably perplexes and disrupts teachers' conception of self and ideas about how power is negotiated in the classroom. Unsurprisingly, this learner-centered nature of task-based language teaching has been another area of debate in the literature. Some scholars have argued that learner-centered approaches to language teaching may not be relevant in examination-driven contexts where teachers regularly prepare students for standardized tests. Addressing this issue of contextual appropriateness, Ellis (2009), for instance, asserts:

Educational systems in many parts of the world place the emphasis on knowledge-learning rather than skill development, and a task-based approach to language teaching is not readily compatible with such a philosophy . . . TBLT calls for the use of performance-based testing, but in many educational contexts examinations test knowledge rather than skills, and teachers will understandably feel the need to tailor their teaching to such examinations. . . . Arguably, too, TBLT is not easily implemented in large classes-a structural feature of many educational contexts. (p. 242)

Ellis' (2009) argument above resonates with the prevalent tendency in the English language teaching field to “export” methods without due consideration for issues of socio-cultural

appropriateness. In line with Ellis’ observation, some scholars (Butler, 2005, 2011; Carless, 2003, 2004; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Li, 1998) have argued that task-based language teaching is not feasible in Asian contexts due to issues of cultural appropriateness and a heavy focus on tests and examinations in such contexts. In my own experience of teaching the English language in Nigeria, I have come to the conclusion that it would be nearly impossible to teach a strong version of task-based language teaching due to the power relations in teacher-student roles in African settings. A strong version of task-based language teaching would be considered too learner-centered for the traditional teacher-centered classrooms that characterize the Nigerian public education system. For a task-based approach to language teaching to be effective in the Nigerian contexts, a “weak” form, which allows for considerable teacher control, may be more feasible.

Despite the arguments for and against the benefits of task-based language teaching, I have found that teachers soon adapt to new practices and overcome their initial concerns about losing control. As someone who learned to speak English in a multi-ethnic context like Nigeria, I place great value on the opportunities for functional language use that task-based language teaching offers. The method has great benefits for English language instruction, because, as Ellis (2009) maintains, task-based teaching provides learners opportunities for rich language input, fluency and accuracy.

Lingering Questions on Task-Based Language Teaching

Having explored the scope of work done in the area, I am still, however, left with some questions. For instance, scholarship on task-based language teaching makes little reference to accounts of practices that integrate intercultural communication. There are even fewer accounts of how social justice education and critical pedagogy can be integrated into a task-based

curriculum framework and task-based instruction. Jardine (2008) invites us to reflect on the question, “what makes a classroom experience worth, not simply zero-sum school grade exchange, but while?” (p. i). How might we re-envision language learning tasks in ways that make them worth “lingering over, meditating upon, remembering, and returning to”? (Jardine, 2008, p. i). If a hermeneutic interpretation of task brings us to the understanding that English language tasks place a burden on second language students, is it not appropriate to consider ways that such burdens might be lightened? As Smith (1999) notes, teaching and learning are both preoccupied with enlightenment, and enlightenment itself presupposes “bringing light to a situation, and of lightening the burdens of human experience” (p. 98). My research seeks possibilities for lightening the burden by exploring ways we might integrate concepts of ethical intercultural communication into a task-based language teaching curriculum. In order to trace a path that might open new spaces for incorporating intercultural communication within a task-based language teaching curriculum, I return to a discussion of hermeneutics as a means of reflecting on the limitations of task-based language teaching and the need for more attention to intercultural competence in the design of language tasks.

Oh, Gadamer, Abide with Me: An Offering to the Elder of Philosophical Hermeneutics

Smith (1999) reminds us that doing hermeneutics is not a pointless or mindless rambling or about theory; rather, it is a preoccupation with understanding life as it is lived. Hermeneutics is a way of being in the world, and its boundaries are “permeable and open” (p. 47). Given that such hermeneutic understanding has informed my approach to every part of this dissertation, it may seem redundant to devote a section to hermeneutics. However, as Jardine (2008) notes, hermeneutics is also about giving thanks for this very life that we are granted. I consider this section a thankful meditation on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.

As a young child, I was often puzzled whenever I saw a little boy dressed exactly like the village priest, walking with the priest. My parents told me that little children who the gods had ordained to be the next priest had to work with the priest and learn about priesthood. There is an esoteric nature to the wisdom of traditions—in order that an uninitiated may gain entry into that cult of understanding, the initiated has to have guidance and tutelage. I could never have accessed Gadamer for myself. It was one of my professors, the “initiated” Dr. Fidyk, who gave me access to Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Thank you Dr. Fidyk, for letting me walk behind you, thank you for teaching me about Gadamer.

Also, while growing up, during traditional festivals, my grandfather would call the whole family into his chambers, and before saying a prayer or commencing the discussions, he would offer a drink, first to the Almighty God, then to our ancestors and the elders of the land. This offering is called a libation. It is an invitation and an honouring of all those who have trodden a path before you. As the drink is poured, the teachings of each elder are recounted and celebrated. In this section, I will pour a libation to the elder of philosophical hermeneutics whose words and wisdom have shone a light on my path, illuminating my path and giving me the much-needed direction to proceed in dense, dark forests. As I pour this drink, I call you, Gadamer. I call you, and I recollect all that I have learnt from you. Oh, my elder Gadamer, this drink is for you.

The Concept of Experience

Gadamer’s description of experience in the hermeneutic tradition is one that has been very instructive for how I take up ideas in my research. For Gadamer, experience is not a sum total of the knowledge and skills one has acquired. Experience, especially in today’s workplace settings, is often demonstrated in a section so titled in the resumé; such a section often contains a catalogue of competencies acquired. In contrast, an experienced person in the hermeneutic

tradition is someone “who, because of the experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well-equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 364).

By its nature, experience is always preceded by an unpleasant surprise, a let-down, and a disappointment. For Gadamer (1989), experience is always usually associated with one’s expectation about something not being met, a falling short of something that we expected to turn out differently. This consideration brings to mind my early days in the doctoral program; I remember being extremely disappointed after one term of not being taught “curriculum studies.” Based on my understanding at the time, curriculum studies meant learning how to set objectives, outcomes, lesson plans, and assessments. So, I went from class to class each passing day, hoping that I would get to learn about “curriculum studies.” What I was learning every day was, in fact, curriculum studies; however, what I was presented with did not match my previous expectations, so in my eyes, my Ph.D. courses had “fallen short.” I was disappointed. It took me a while, but I gradually came to an understanding of how the Ph.D. program was taking up curriculum studies and “development.” It is this nature of experience that Gadamer (1989) describes when he notes that experience often frustrates a previous expectation. More than that, we know better as a result of the thwarted expectation, because we develop a new understanding of the object that contains the truth about the old one (Gadamer, 1989, p. 364). This view of experience has enabled me to cultivate a patient attitude toward the unending cocktail of shattered expectations I have had in proceeding with this research. In other words, when an object “does not pass the test” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 364) of my previous understanding of it, I am learning to accept the unpleasant surprise as experience, instead of failure.

Encountering experiences, let-downs, and unpleasant surprises also compels one to question previous understandings or interpretations of the object under scrutiny. In my experience of coming into the Ph.D. program that I recounted previously, my disappointment put me in a position where I had many questions. As Gadamer (1989) articulates, “the negativity of experience implies a question” (p. 375). Hermeneutics is instructive for understanding the nature of questions and how they link closely with experience, because when an object or thing does not meet our previous expectations, questions arise in our minds that force us to consider our previous understanding of it. Gadamer (1989) further explains,

We cannot have experience without asking questions. Recognizing that an object is different, and not as we first thought, obviously presupposes the question whether it was this or that. (p. 370)

When I first took up the role of curriculum specialist at my institution, I had taken it for granted that all teachers understood that education was inherently a political act. I had also assumed that every teacher would naturally be interested in learning about the cultures of their students and willing to engage the emotional labor that came with discussing race and difference in our classroom spaces. This experience gave room for questions that came to my pedagogic focus, because “a question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 375). In my subsequent chapter on methodology, I offer a more detailed review of Gadamer’s concept of questions, especially as it relates to research questions and interviewing. For now, I seek to return to questions of language.

Let Us Play the Language Card, Shall We? A Hermeneutic Understanding of Language

We are always already biased in our thinking and knowing by our linguistic interpretation of the world. To grow into this linguistic interpretation means to grow up in the world. To

this extent, language is the real mark of our finitude. It is always out beyond us.

(Gadamer, 1977, p. 64)

Some time ago, the teachers in my department were signed up for a three-day workshop on providing preparatory training for English language learners seeking to meet English language requirements through a well-known, international standardized English language test. During the training, teacher trainers who had worked for the English testing organization for a long time asked if any of us had ever taken their test and what our opinions were about their speaking test.

I was immediately catapulted to a few years ago, when I had to take the test as part of the admission requirements for my Master’s degree program in the United Kingdom. At the time of taking the test, I had already been an English language teacher for six years, and I also had access to consistent round-the-clock internet, so I was able to access all the preparatory materials for the test. Yet, I still remember vividly how I tried to avoid looking at the white-washed walls of the sparsely furnished, small room where the examiner sat stoically, staring me down through huge-rimmed glasses as my knees threatened to give way beneath me. I was attending the speaking examination, conducted as a one-on-one interview between candidate and examiner.

The examiner handed me a task card. I flipped it open. It read, “Tell me about a time you were collecting items. What kind of items do you collect?” Awkward silence from me. The examiner told me I had one minute to collect my thoughts and start speaking. But all I could think of was the question itself, which I considered quite irrelevant to someone in my context. To start with, I had never heard of the concept of “collecting” items prior to the few days I spent preparing for that speaking test. Despite my research into the meaning and practice of collecting

items, I still could not find a frame of reference within my context to situate a discussion around the topic.

As a Nigerian, I did not know anyone in my sphere of contact who collected items. In a country where more than half the population live on less than a dollar per day, the very idea of collecting things, seems incongruent with the lived experiences of the people. Aside from the economic privilege that the idea connotes, all the people I knew at the time only bought things that held a functional value for everyday life.

So I sat there in the testing room, reeling out a rehearsed, grandiloquent, and decontextualized monologue about travelling every year to collect stamps from different parts of the world. I could barely hold the gaze of the examiner because everything I said sounded strange, alien, and indeed fictional to me. Apart from delivering what I considered to be an embarrassing speech, I also nursed a seething anger; as an English teacher myself, I could not understand why talking about something so removed from my world should be a test of my speaking proficiency. It was probably the toughest and most purposeless speech I had ever given. Therefore, when facilitators at our workshop here in Canada asked our opinion, I raised the question of the socio-cultural relevance of tests, citing my own experience. The facilitators went on to explain that the test was very neutral, as questions were carefully created to strip them of context and culture, enabling candidates from all parts of the world answer the same questions. Many other instructors agreed that such questions were a test of how speakers could speak about abstract concepts. Words seemed inadequate to express my disagreement with this claim to neutrality that constantly trailed English language teaching, curriculum design, and testing. How could I have explained that the very idea of collection is itself both a cultural and economic marker, so that there are places in the world where such a culture may never exist, due to a lack

of economic capital? Perhaps there is a demography of Nigerians who would instantly have personal experiences of collecting, but they would be the exceptionally rich. In my perspective, embedded in the notion of collecting is privilege: cultural privilege and economic privilege.

The facilitator further explained that any student who had no experience of collecting could simply say they had never collected anything. How does this inability to answer a question affect their assessment? It is unclear. How might such a question, for instance, give unequal advantage to another candidate in contexts where collecting items is considered a cultural practice? Discussions with the facilitators and other practitioners, and the insistence that language teaching can be culture-neutral, got me contemplating my own research in relation to language. In the following section, I attempt to provide a hermeneutic understanding of language by unpacking the notion of language from multiple perspectives. I commence with a personal story of language from an African perspective, then I engage scholars in the curriculum field who have given their voice to the issue; finally, I bring Gadamer’s hermeneutic concept of language into the narration.

A Budding Flower in my Father’s Garden

Language frames everything we do, yet it remains an enigma in the field of English language teaching as we continually approach the concept of language from contradictory paradigms. Sometimes, we present a dodgy attitude toward language as if it is not that thing that is constantly at the core of how we frame our world, what we are allowed to know or not, who gets entrance, and who stays out. Maybe we could play dodgy games with language but I am going to play. Too. Let us go into the house of language, break bread, and build communion, that our eyes of understanding may become enlightened. As I ponder the subject of language, I am transported to the early days of my life and how my ancestors played with language.

Let. Us. Play. *I was only a little child when I started to wonder why my grandparents and all the adults around me seemed to never be able to communicate in simple language. For what seemed to be every fortnight to my young mind at the time, I witnessed elders wearing long flowing tunics, donning ash-white chewing-sticks reaching their grey beards, sauntering down the dusty, untarred roads leading to my grandfather's large compound. They would have in their hands huge gourds and calabashes containing clear, sweet, freshly-tapped palm-wine of the best quality. They would slowly, with unhurried gait, approach our family compound with a chant and gingerly put the calabashes down. The family compound, usually made up of clusters of circular clusters of small houses or huts, was often the hub of family gatherings because of its huge central space. It is my cousin's "wine-carrying" ceremony, and these old men, in the company of a young man who made a display of exaggerated bashfulness, would be asking my cousin's hand in marriage on behalf of their son. The children in the house would all perch around doors like restless flies, waiting curiously for the all too familiar proceedings. First came the giant, huge kola nuts, which were broken, cut in pieces, and passed around to the guests as a sign of welcome. Then followed the libation: palm-wine poured on the floor as remembrance and invitation to the ancestors.*

"My brother, as you know, a toad does not run in the daytime for nothing. If it is not being pursued by something, then it is pursuing something. We are here to pluck a beautiful flower in your garden," says the oldest of the guests.

"I have many beautiful flowers in my garden, which of them brings you?" Asks my grandfather.

"My brother, if you would, her name is Ahueiza. We cannot afford such a jewel, but we have brought these drinks and gifts as appreciation for such a beauty," replies the old guest.

"All my daughters and grand-daughters are comfortable in this home. I am not in a rush to send them away," my grandfather also quips in a voice filled with mischief and barely-restrained laughter.

On and on they would go. And even though I was present, I could not make sense of these exchanges, which were always heavily inundated with proverbs. As a Nigerian wisdom saying goes, proverbs are like the palm oil with which kola nuts are eaten. My cousins and I would stare in astonishment as the elders chattered away in metaphoric language we could not decipher, even though we fully understood the local dialect. Such flowery language was meant to

give elders entry and exclude the uninitiated: children. This poetic dance of language and speech was an enigma to my young mind. In this instance, like in many others, we became strangers in the setting despite belonging to that community. Language, in this sense, was used to both exclude (children) and express a bond (with adults). Suddenly, language, as my little cousins and I had known it, loses its neutrality and universality; it loses the “we-ness” for us that we had taken for granted, becoming instead an “inclusive-we” for a narrow group. Language learning was considered as a creative, potent, and, spiritual medium of exchange that its proverbial and figurative quality must be learned patiently, through childhood to adulthood. Yes, my ancestors had an understanding that language was a living word, alive, potent. It determined who qualified as an insider and who stayed out. They understood that through language, they participated in the world, sometimes participating in several worlds because worlds are contained in language and communicated in language.

However, in much of language teaching and second language instruction, there continues to be a neglect of the political dimensions of education in general, and language teaching in particular. A look at the history of the English language, and its association with colonialism, shows us that like every other language, it is neither neutral nor innocent. In line with this consideration, Aoki (1991/2005) articulates that second language instruction prioritizes linguistic competence wherein mastery of vocabulary and grammatical rules is seen as learning. As a result, second language curriculum orientation “allows the view that language competence in any language essentially involves the learning of purely technical skills” (p. 273).

In the next subsection, I linger on the concept of language in order to situate my research within an understanding of language that is consistent with what I believe as a hermeneutic-inspired researcher, a teacher, and a teacher-educator. In achieving this understanding, I

contemplate Aoki’s (1999) admonition that the field of English language teaching strives toward an “urgent recovery of the fullness of language” (p. 273). But how might we recover a fuller understanding of language in English language teaching? How might we take up the concept of language in ways that attend to a more complex understanding of language? Gadamer’s hermeneutics offers an insight into language that aligns with the goals of my research.

At Play With Gadamer: Restoring Language to Its Original Fullness

A most striking feature of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is the important place that language holds. Due to its inextricable link to understanding, and, by extension, interpretation, language is a vital part of Gadamerian hermeneutics. In the hermeneutic tradition, we understand that the world presents itself in language (Gadamer, 1977, p. 465). A hermeneutic understanding of language provides a way to counter a less effective technical approach to language instruction, because such an effort allows for a deeper conversation about language, which in turn opens up possibilities for exploring intercultural competence in language teaching. In my research, I thus seek to approach the concept of language from a hermeneutic understanding grounded in Gadamer’s (1977) argument that “language is by no means simply an instrument, a tool” (p. 62).

Moving us away from a narrow understanding of language, hermeneutics brings us to the understanding that language cannot be stripped, split, and taken apart, separate from its speakers or from the worlds of its speakers. As Gadamer (2013) contends, “language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it . . . language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it” (p. 459). Thinking back on my conversation with the international test facilitators, what I was trying to communicate, eloquently expressed by Gadamer (2013), is that “languages are worldviews” (p. 459). Trying to separate the concept of

collection from the worldview that it presents is not only impossible, but also counter-productive, because language is always already dependent on the world it presents. Thinking about the idea of language as worldview, I reflect on a common word in the Nigerian English lexicon: “bride-price,” a term that is absent in standard (Western) English. Its closest English equivalent is the word “dowry” which does not quite mean the same thing. A bride-price is token money or a gift presented to a woman’s family by her suitor’s family. It is a seal that a marriage contract has been entered into by the two families, in a much similar way to signatures on a marriage contract in the West. While Nigerians (or many other Africans) may consider the concept of bride-price to be common and speak eloquently about it in a test, the same cannot be said for someone who has little or no previous knowledge of such a cultural practice. That such a word exists at all in the Nigerian or African variation of English while absent in Western English, is indicative of how languages point to worldviews. In essence, restoring language to its fullness may also mean that we more mindfully consider how languages are always already embedded in worldviews.

Furthermore, a hermeneutic understanding of language is instructive for foregrounding my research because it contextualizes the “exchange” and fusion of horizons that take place when we learn a second language—an important feature of intercultural dialogue. Gadamer (2013) articulates that in hermeneutical experience, those who have learned and understood a foreign language also understand that what is said in a foreign language is said *to them*, that is, what is being said has a claim over them. He further explains that such an understanding is “impossible if one’s own ‘world-view and ‘language-view’ is not also involved” (p. 459). Aoki (1999) similarly notes that “coming to know a second language is indeed a coming to know a way to enter a new world” (p. 239). For instance, ESL teachers in Canada are often teaching

immigrants about “how things are done here.” Students are usually presented with authentic Canadian texts, or those created by teachers who are often Canadians themselves. How could we, then, make any claim to neutrality in language teaching? How is such an ideal possible when curriculum and instruction are driven by real people who view the world a certain way and embody worldviews? Why should we desire neutrality to begin with? Preoccupied with similar concerns, scholars writing in the field of second and foreign language education have also advocated for a more explicit attention to language teaching and socio-political issues. These scholars proposed the concept of intercultural communication for developing a view of language teaching that prioritizes socio-cultural, socio-political, and critical engagement.

Let us now, then, turn to a fuller discussion of intercultural competence.

Turning Around With Theory: Exploring Intercultural Competence

Instead of “intercultural communication” as I have used throughout this dissertation, in this review section, I sometimes use the term “intercultural competence” or “intercultural communicative competence” because the body of scholarship in the field uses these terminologies, and it is important not to distort the original ideas of practitioners in the field. In those instances, I use quotation marks where possible, to signal to my readers that I am deploying the terms as used in theoretical scholarship in the field. Approaching a complex, contested, and multi-layered concept like “intercultural competence” from an interpretive paradigm calls for a certain kind of attitude, one that seeks to “provide huge and luscious meadows, where each seeming isolated topic . . . becomes a living *topica* . . . ripe for the cultivation of memory and character” (Jardine, 2012b, p. 76). Cultivating an understanding of the field, then, will involve tarrying in its topography and inhabiting the fullness of its “place” in historical and contemporary times. In commitment to my research paradigm, I approach this

topic with reverence, seeking alternative paths to thread in the in-between, seeking new meanings and new connections in the midst of a topic already overloaded and saturated with ambiguous and multilayered frameworks.

Any attempt at packing the concept of intercultural competence into tidy boxes definitely leads to conceptual challenges, this probably accounts for the numerous definitions, models, and assessment strategies in the field. While I do not claim that my research brings the answers to the questions that I have about the study of intercultural competence, I do consciously attempt in my work to seek “original difficulty.” Because approaching the topic hermeneutically means whiling about it and seeking middle grounds, ancestral bloodlines, and verisimilitudes, it means seeking a new way of re/envisioning and expressing what it is that intercultural competence means. It means problematizing the familiar, the taken-for-granted, and seeking kinships with the unfamiliar. A hermeneutic interpretation of the intercultural competence literature would require a return to “original difficulty,” as well as a commitment to agonize over previously glazed-over details.

What makes a research undertaking worthwhile? How might I attend well to this topic that has placed a demand on me? In my approach to this topic, I seek to open up “free spaces,” and while I do not intend to repudiate the old, my taking up of this topic hermeneutically attempts to call the old to account by the new, an attempt to call the old “to face the possibility of its renewal, transformation” (Jardine, 2012b, p. 7) Paying heed to the call of Hermes also entails bringing a historical voice to the field, because, as Jardine (2012b) noted, “education’s only prospect is that we might have some hand, some however small say in the setting right of the world and the shape of our learning to live therein” (p. 6).

As an area of research, intercultural communication has a short history, and Hall (1959) is often seen as the father of the field (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005, p. 138). Historically, academic scholars in the field of intercultural training have shown much interest in the area of intercultural communication competence. The last few decades have seen astronomical growth in migration patterns and coupled with the globalization trend, people all over the world and in different fields have come in contact more than ever before, necessitating the need to interact with others in ways that are respectful and sensitive to the dynamics of difference. In addition, the rise in global travel and migration has contributed to the growing attention the field has gained. The general challenge of communicating across cultures, a challenge in all fields of human endeavor in present times, has made the study of intercultural communication an area of interest for many scholars across different disciplines since the 1980s. In recent decades, scholars from fields such as education, engineering, communication, and media have shown interest in the research and study of intercultural communication and intercultural competence (e.g., Byram, 1997a; Chen, 2009, 2010, 2014; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Collier, 1989; Deardoff, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

While it is generally accepted that, with growing encounters with other cultures, an understanding of intercultural communication competence is essential, the trend of globalization has thrown some complexity into the nature of the field. As a result, scholars approach the concept from multiple perspectives, re-examining its development in different interactional contexts (Chen & Dai, 2014, p. x).

With global innovations in transportation and communication technologies, widespread popular movements around the world, the rapid development of multiculturalism, and de-emphasis on the nation state (Chen & Starosta, 2005), the study of intercultural communication

competence offers possibilities for people of differing cultures to achieve their goals effectively and appropriately in the process of intercultural interaction. This point highlights the fact that the need for learning about intercultural communication is not a task for visitors or immigrants to a new country alone; it is also a task for people who belong to the host countries in order to learn appropriate ways to interact with people whose cultures are different than their own. Several times in my experience as a teacher, I have had to have private conversations with international students who did not understand that some racially discriminatory language, which may have gone unquestioned in their own homogenous cultural contexts, was extremely inappropriate, offensive, and unacceptable in contexts like Canada. For instance, international students may sometimes casually use a discriminatory term without meaning to be offensive. Members of the host country, too, are sometimes not aware of how their communication or their notions about “otherness” are steeped in embedded racial prejudice. Sometimes, such communications fall into the category of micro-aggressions, which sadly are frequent experiences of people from minority cultures. In a conversation a few years ago, someone had casually commented that education and training, especially in the medical sciences, were so rigorous and thorough in Canada that if they were ever to travel to African or other “third world” countries and fall sick while there, they would not seek treatment but would return to Canada immediately. This attitude, they explained, was because they *knew* that universities in “third world” countries had a culture of normalized corruption and examination-related malpractice, so that doctors trained in such countries would lack the necessary skills for practice that Western-trained doctors effortlessly possessed. Attitudes such as the aforementioned are clearly harmful. Undertaking study in intercultural communication has, therefore, become a necessity, a pedagogical and curricular issue in all contexts where humans interact. As long as there are encounters with people from other cultures,

as is now common in schools and workplaces all across the world, it is my conviction, alongside scholars in the field of intercultural communication competence, that people need to develop a better awareness of intercultural communication. In order to develop such an awareness, it is necessary to cultivate a different kind of ontological and epistemological attunement toward the other.

While scholars (e.g., Byram, 1997a; Chen & Dai, 2014; Deardoff, 2006, 2011; Koester & Lustig, 2015; Kramersch, 1993) in the field of intercultural communication and intercultural communication competence generally agree about people’s need to become more adept at communicating across cultures, defining what the concept of intercultural competence means has itself been a hotly debated task. For instance, there has been very little agreement amongst scholars about the appropriate terminology for intercultural competence (Deardoff, 2011), leading to a proliferation of various terms which have been used interchangeably with intercultural competence in the literature. Names like multi-culturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, international communication, transcultural communication, global competence, cross-cultural awareness, and global citizenship have often been used to mean intercultural competence in the literature. However, these different terms are not necessarily interchangeable as they each designate a different kind of interaction.

Shedding light on the terminology confusion, Koester and Lustig (2015) make a distinction by explaining that, while cross-cultural study involves the comparison of two or more cultures “whose members are having intra-cultural experiences,” intercultural study, on the other hand, “involves interaction among people from two or more cultures” (p. 20). Similarly, Gudykunst (2002) described intercultural communication as face-to-face communication

between people who come from different national cultures (p. 179). Deardoff (2011), however, questions the relevance of location in the definition of intercultural competence, arguing that intercultural competence is applicable to anyone who interacts with people from different backgrounds, regardless of what location the interaction takes place. A closely related term frequently used in describing intercultural competence is the term “intercultural speaker,” which refers to “someone who has an ability to interact with ‘others,’ to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluations of difference” (Kramsch, 1998 cited in Byram et al., 2001, p. 5). While these definitions all point to an understanding of intercultural communication as an ability to interact appropriately with people from a different culture, it is the contention of this research that the term “inter-cultural competence” needs to be re-envisioned and re/interpreted with a more holistic approach. Such a holistic approach will consider the ways that interactions are influenced and shaped by discursive identity categories like gender, sexuality, age, socio-economic status, and ability. Returning to “original difficulty” demands that the terminology itself be unpacked, interpreted, and problematized. In everyday life and work, practitioners in education use and encounter terminologies like culture, inter-cultural, competence, etc., but it is vital that we rethink our understanding of these terms, because while we interpret the unfamiliar in hermeneutics, the familiar also calls for interpretation (Gallagher, 1992, p. 124).

Breaking the Being Open: Defining Intercultural Competence

Gadamer (2012) asserts that interpretation and questioning “break open . . . the being of the object” (p. 362), and this breaking open unveils and unravels the previously obscured, “making visible, experiencable[,] and understandable the ontological inherence of one thing in

the very being of another” (Jardine, 2008, p. 237). How might we interpret and question the study of intercultural competence in ways that bring such visibility and illumination?

What does it mean to be *intercultural*? How might we understand the term “intercultural competence” hermeneutically? These are important questions to ask: it is imperative to seek alternative ways of understanding popular terms that are being used both consciously and unconsciously in our present times. A search of the word “intercultural” in an etymological dictionary does not bring up answers, and this in itself is a pointer, an indicator that this term asks us to take a different way of coming to an understanding of it. While there are entries in the etymological dictionary for “inter-” and “culture,” the word “intercultural” appears to be of relatively new origin and coinage, so perhaps a look at the history of its usage could be a good starting point for coming to an understanding of what the word means.

The term “intercultural competence” first appeared in Hall’s book *The Silent Language* (1959). As a formal field of study in higher education, intercultural communication was first taught in communication studies in the late 1960s. The prefix “inter-” has its roots in 1) the Latin *inter*, which means “between” or “among,” and 2) the Sanskrit *antar*, which means “between,” “within” (Wiktionary, n.d.). “Culture” comes from the Latin root *cultura*, which means to till, cultivate, and worship, but I am particularly called by its proto-Indo-European root, which means “to turn around.” The word “intercultural” derives from both words, and can then be understood to mean the in-between place where people turn around together, cultivate an understanding of the world together, and till together this world within which we collectively dwell. It is the place where we can cultivate our collective humanity, the middle ground where we can collectively make sense of our world, turning around together.

In addition to the challenge of multiple terminologies used interchangeably, the complex nature of intercultural communication competence has made it impossible for scholars to reach a consensus on what it means to be interculturally “competent,” despite many decades of research in the field (Chen & Dai, 2014). Underlying this complexity is the fact that the literature of intercultural competence is replete with diverse perspectives informed by even more diverse theoretical approaches, goals, and components (Chen & Dai, 2014). Again, approaching the issue of competence from a hermeneutic standpoint, it is important to while over the term “competence.”

To begin, the term “competence” is in itself problematic, as it is suggestive of a mastery of some pre-given skills. Interrogating the language of competence brings to mind Donsky’s (2015) question in relation to the skills-driven nature of professional practice. Donsky (2015) further asks, “how much are we burdened by being evaluated, measured, marked, labeled, scored, and graded? What does it mean to be ‘good at?’” (p. 187). In the context of intercultural communication, what does it mean to be competent? While the literature offers a useful rationale for explaining the benefits of learning about other cultures, the problematic terminology of competence forecloses dialogic, imaginative, and regenerative conversation. I have seen this in my own experience of participating in and leading workshops on intercultural communication. There is an implicit assumption that competence is something that a few courses or workshops can bring about. As Collier (1989), arguing from a postcolonial perspective, asked, “who defines competence? Who makes the decision about who is competent and what authorities or powers decide the criteria for competence in intercultural communication and who gets left out in the decision-making process?” (p. 142). When educators and teachers have asked me how they could get “certified” as interculturally competent given the numerous conversation series and

workshops on the topic that they had attended, I have always been reminded that such expectations come partly from the terminology of competence itself.

Commenting on the language of competence in the contexts of teaching, instruction, and curriculum design, Aoki (1984) asserts that terminologies such as competence as used in present educational discourse are enshrined within a technical, framework, a reductionist view entrenched in an understanding of competence as instrumental reason and instrumental action. Working in ESL curriculum development, I have often been puzzled and dismayed by the variations of the language of competence (e.g., teaching competencies, curriculum evaluation competence) with which curriculum documents are inundated. One of the most recurrent uses of language around competence in curriculum documents is language competencies, which are often seen as identifiable, unambiguous, measurable skills and values that can be evaluated and graded to a specific benchmark. By extension, it is not surprising how a terminology like “intercultural competence” could be easily understood by educators as a set of skills to be mastered. The language of competence has also been criticized on grounds that embedded within such a terminology is a social judgement. Hence, Koester and Lustig (2015) argue that “competence is an impression, not a behavior; an inference one makes, not an action one takes; an evaluation, not a performance . . . intercultural communication is not something one does but rather something one is *perceived* to be” (p. 20).

Because I am constrained by the limitations of the terminology of intercultural competence but fully aware that I am not able to change the term as it is designated in the literature, I turn to the etymological roots of the word in order to seek meanings and interconnections within which I can situate a hermeneutic understanding.

Competence has roots in Latin *competentia*, which means “meeting together, agreement, symmetry.” Its earlier form *competere* means “fall together, come together, be convenient or fitting, to strive in common” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). How might we understand competence in ways that invoke not an evaluative but rather a holistic meaning in line with the historical meaning of the word? Resonating with *inter* and *cultura*, the root meaning of competence has to do with going along together, striving together, a symmetry of unity. However, in present usage, it is difficult to conceptualize a way that the language of competence might be used to invoke any meaning that is not related to measurement or evaluation. Having considered all, I resist the language of competence in its totality because a focus on unity also does not provide room for the discussion of disparities, systemic racism, and, power inequalities that are often prominent challenges in second language education. I therefore look to language education scholarship for a more appropriate term that takes the political dimensions of language learning into account. While there have been numerous scholarships on various issues of intercultural communication, my discussions in the sections to follow will explore scholarship in the field that directly further our understanding of intercultural communication in second language education contexts.

Intercultural Communication in Second and Foreign Language Education

In staying faithful to the in-between, it is vital to explore intercultural communication in ESL and EFL contexts because this is one of the spaces from which I stage my inquiry and interpret the world. As teachers, educators, and researchers, we are constantly challenged and sometimes confounded by the ongoing question of how to be and live with the multiplicity of knowledge that we have or desire, and this, as Phipps and Guilherme (2004) pointed out, brings about new ways of understanding, criticizing, and bringing hope.

Language education scholars have often been preoccupied with questions of how language learning works, but also what language learning entails. In the 1980s, the notion of communicative competence was developed as a focus of language teaching to develop the communicative competence of language learners by bridging information gap activities, which enables learners to naturally attain native speaker linguistic competence. This goal of attaining native speaker proficiency has been variously denounced in the literature as both impossible and oppressive; I provide a closer look at the challenges of the native-speaker model of language learning later in this section. In addition, the communicative language-teaching model downplayed the role of culture in language learning, hence, the approach was often criticized for its goal of stripping language learners of their own identity and burdening language learners with the impossible goal of becoming like a native speaker culturally and linguistically. Highlighting the inappropriateness of the native-speaker model, Byram (1997a) contended that a model of competence whose goal is based on native speaker sociocultural and linguistic competence,

Would create the wrong kind of competence. It would imply that the learner should be linguistically schizophrenic, abandoning one language in order to blend into another linguistic environment, becoming accepted as a native speaker by other native speakers. This linguistic schizophrenia also suggests separation from one's own culture and the acquisition of a native sociocultural competence, and a new sociocultural identity. (pp. 11-12)

As the pedagogical goal of language teaching moved from communicative competence, there was a shift to the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) initially by language scholars (Byram, 1997a; Byram & Zarate, 1994). This new model of competence

embraced the role of sociocultural knowledge in second language acquisition and learning. Byram and Zarate’s (1994) model of ICC incorporates aspects of communicative competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences) and aspects of IC that integrates three dimensions (cognitive [knowledge], behavioural [skills] and affective [attitudes]). Byram and Zarate (1994) theorized these dimensions using the French origin term *savoir* (which means knowing). A few years later, Byram (1997a) introduced a fifth dimension, the *savoir s’engager* (knowing how to commit oneself). This fifth-dimension deals with the development of “critical cultural awareness” through political education in order to develop as “intercultural speakers.” Other language education scholars across the globe also made calls for a political dimension to language teaching: Kramsch (1993) writing from the United States context, Byram and Zarate (1997) in the European context, and Liddicoat and Crozet (2000) in the Australian context. They proposed the Intercultural Language Pedagogy (ILP), which advocates for a more ethical and political engagement in language teaching and education and, more recently, the Critical Intercultural Pedagogy (CIP), which is a more overt approach to intercultural pedagogy shown in the works of Guilherme (2002) and Phipps and Guilherme (2004). In the section below, I provide a more detailed overview of the advent of critical engagement in language teaching.

The Critical Turn

Scholarly interest in intercultural communication in the field of modern foreign language education and research developed in the last twenty years. Two important phases shaped the field of intercultural communication in language teaching, which led to a critical turn in the field as we know it today (Dasli & Diaz, 2017). The first movement was largely influenced by anthropological ethnography, fashioned after Geertz’s (1973) “The Interpretation of Cultures,” which proceeds on the premise of an understanding of a culture or community through

immersion in the natural settings and habitation of that group. Following such an immersion, Geertz outlined a methodology of “thick description” of culture-related observations and interactions, with the aim of creating “wider meaning systems” (Dasli & Diaz, 2017, p. xxiv). This process of wider meaning-making rejects essentialization of cultures along national lines and the pre-categorization of cultural differences based on national lines. Following evolving consensus to consider discursive resources in specific communication events, rather than national or cultural differences, Holliday (2009) argued for a small culture model of understanding intercultural communication because that allows for a consideration of “the composite of cohesive behavior within any social grouping” (p. 247). Inspired by such new understanding, a team of scholars using an interdisciplinary framework (Roberts et al., 2001), proposed a framework for intercultural learning that they referred to as “the language learner as ethnographer.” Within this methodology, language learners participated in residence abroad fieldwork-based research with the aim of studying, participating in, and developing an understanding of a particular community. So called ethnographic language learners engaged in a three-stage learning process that included a training course on ethnographical work, ethnographic field work abroad, and a written ethnographic report in the foreign language when they return to their home countries (Dasli & Diaz, 2017, p. xv). This learning model enabled learners to develop a socially constructed understanding of interaction with others that takes discursive, rather than abstract, contexts into consideration (Dasli & Diaz, 2017, p. xv).

A second significant movement leading to a critical turn in language and intercultural communication pedagogy has roots in the field of critical pedagogy. Unlike many educational fields, the role of research as social action has not been a key area receiving explicit attention in the field of language and intercultural communication (LAIC) (Zhu, 2020, p. 206). Often,

scholarship in the field was preoccupied with culture in near abstract ways that decontextualized it from discussions about social justice and action as seen in the areas of critical pedagogy. In more recent times, a number of scholars working in the field of language and intercultural communication pedagogy have started to call for and engage research concerns in the areas of social justice (Zhu, 2020, p. 206).

Given general consensus that language teaching cannot be reasonably separated from culture and the way these interplay in communicative situations, the field has seen a surge of interest from scholars writing in the areas of applied linguistics, socio-linguistics, and second language instruction. Inspired by Freire (1970)’s seminal essay “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” scholars in the field of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2009; Hooks, 1994a, 1994b; McLaren, 2009) suggest that education must proceed with the goal of developing students’ political consciousness and interrogating interrelationships between culture, power, economics, and ideology. Relevant to my own stance and criticism of the unequal power relations in language teaching contexts is McLaren’s (2009) concept of ideological hegemony, which highlights the systems through which those in power continue to ensure their dominance and ways in which the oppressed are unknowingly complicit in their own oppression. I believe that the concept of ideological hegemony is profoundly relevant to language teaching because it is useful for interrogating ways in which access continues to be denied to immigrant English language learners based on language barriers, as discussed previously. So robust has the growing interest in this area been in the last few decades that several scholarly resources have emerged, including the *Language and Intercultural Communication Journal* and a book series by publishers Multilingual Matters and Routledge, *Studies in Language and Intercultural Communication*.

Following the critical turn, a number of language and language teaching scholars started to theorize and consider ways in which language teaching could embed a socio-political dimension to language learning and instruction (Guilherme 2002; Kumaravidivelu, 2006; Pennycook, 1998, 1999). Pennycook (1999) contended that language teaching necessarily should include a transformative goal and create programs with a purpose of giving meaning to the lived experiences of teachers and learners. His research and analysis of two English-language classrooms in different parts of the world revealed that learners thought critically about their own cultures when they had a say and agency in the curriculum. Kumaravidivelu (2006) also advocated for a post-method pedagogy that recognizes the transformational power of critical pedagogy on language learning. Such a pedagogy, he clarified, should be based on context-sensitive approaches that give teachers autonomy to study their own practice, theorize from their learning of that, and apply findings to their own practice.

Guilherme (2002) published a groundbreaking work, “Critical Citizens for an Intercultural World,” in which she retheorized goals for language education that integrate critical intercultural communication. Critical intercultural communication, as theorized by Guilherme, is grounded in social inequality, social transformation, and a commitment to education that promotes a more reflective and proactive citizenry. Byram (2008) also drew on social identity theory to call for a model of language teaching that includes a dimension of global political consciousness that transcend geographical boundaries.

In spite of the attempts discussed above to integrate critical pedagogy to the area of language teaching and intercultural communication, many teachers and researchers in the field have remained skeptical, as shown by research in the last two decades (Dasli & Diaz, 2017; Diaz, 2013; Halualani & Nakayama, 2010; Holliday, 2011; Phipps & Guilherme, 2004). A part

of this skepticism stems from the problem with defining the term *critical* and the disparity in usage and meaning across scholarly work in the field. Pennycook (2004) argued that the term derives from numerous intellectual traditions that are not always concerned with social and political critique but are sometimes preoccupied with the teaching of thinking skills to students. Another much-debated gap in the field is the sparse attention previously given to the complexity of cultures and identities and the ways that intersectional elements of identity shape interactions. I will now provide a brief discussion of intersectional identities and critical intercultural language teaching.

Intersectional Identities and Critical Intercultural Language Teaching

Recent understandings of intercultural communication in language teaching contexts have undergone a shift, from perceptions of culture as merely the interactions of people from different cultures, to understanding it as an “interplay of various discourse systems, based on, for example, gender, age, profession, religion, or ethnicity” (Zhu, 2020, p. 207). This evolved understanding is all the more crucial in light of the intricate intersections of these discourse systems in the performance of self and understanding of the “other” in the language classroom. Thus, current research in LAIC scholarship rejects the notion of culture as a fixed and given starting point. There is a growing consensus in the field to encourage a consideration of various discourse perspectives and the ways in which interlocutors perform or do culture “discursively through interactions and negotiations, and how people make aspects of their identities relevant or irrelevant to interactions and negotiations” (Zhu, 2020, p. 207).

For instance, as an educated female immigrant, it would be grossly inaccurate to assume that I am drawing on my national and gender identity at all times in speech situations because, depending on conversational context, I might be bringing other notions of self and identity.

Against this backdrop, language and intercultural communication (LAIC) as an evolving field is primarily concerned with social action. More aptly put,

Intercultural communication could and should be studied as a series of social(inter)-actions mediated by a range of forces and subjectivities such as ideologies, societal structures, power (im)balances, self-ascribed and other-prescribed identities, memories, experiences, imagination, and contingencies. (Kramsch & Zhu, 2016 cited in Zhu, 2020, p. 207)

Such a critical focus on intercultural communication and language redirects research from simplistic or romanticized views to the more complex and weighty questions of “why,” “what consequence,” and “who bears the consequences?” Such considerations are crucial because:

Problems in intercultural communication are not just misunderstandings which can be made good if parties work hard enough. We need to talk about turbulence, the penalty of being different, the burden of adaption and unspoken pecking orders. (Zhu, 2019)

In response to calls for the field to engage with social action concerns, some researchers writing within LAIC have proposed various solutions. An important proposal in line with this trend is the concept of interculturality expounded by scholars seeking to understand and interpret ways in which interlocutors often make aspects of their identities (ir)relevant in interaction (Dervin, 2016; Dervin & Risager, 2014; Higgins, 2017; James, 2008; Nishizaka, 1995; Sercombe & Young, 2010; Zhu, 2019). Dervin (2016) defines interculturality as a critical view of the ways people we interact with are often represented and an awareness of our own biases in communication contexts. The process of developing interculturality involves a willingness to learn about and question ours and others’ culture (James, 2008). Interculturality also involves an analytical evaluation of our own values, beliefs, and representations in intercultural interactions

(Smolcic & Arends, 2017). In addition, other scholars deploying critical theory tradition have called for a critical engagement with how politicized and minoritized identities like race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, region, socioeconomic class, generation, and diasporic conditions intersect or influence intercultural communication (Dasli & Diaz, 2017; Guilherme & Phipps, 2004; Nakayama & Halualani, 2010; Piller, 2011; Zhu, 2020). In more recent times, other scholars in the field of LAIC have focused on the decolonization of language education and multilingualism (Bhattacharya et al., 2019; Bryant et al., 2019; Kubota, 2019; Macedo, 2019; Pennycook & Makoni, 2019; Phipps, 2019) and the issues of inequity and bias in language teaching practices and language teaching, learning, and use.

Intercultural Competence in Teaching Contexts

In spite of progress in the area, research on implementation shows that simplistic and narrow conceptions of culture continue to dominate language learning classrooms, and a focus on linguistic knowledge was the pattern, even when teachers were aware of interculturality as a key curriculum goal (Brunsmier, 2017; Cable et al., 2010; Diaz, 2013; Sercu, 2007; Woodgate-Jones & Grenfell, 2012). Most studies dealing with attempts to integrate intercultural competence perspectives into language teaching have mainly taken place within secondary school education contexts; in contrast, there has not been a corresponding amount of research in tertiary/post-secondary language education contexts (Crozet, 2016). Byram and Risager (1999), in a study of secondary school teachers of English and Danish in England and Denmark, found that teachers had a simplistic understanding of culture that did not include issues of dominance, oppression, prejudices, stereotypes, power, or cultural implications. Teachers in the study mostly associated languages and cultures by comparing two cultures: first culture and target culture. In a similar study, Sercu (2001, 2002) in Belgium, Denmark, and England, investigated how Flemish,

English, French, and German teachers’ pedagogical practices compared with Byram and Risager’s (1999) description of the profile of the intercultural foreign language teacher. Findings revealed that while teacher participants affirmed that they thought they had intercultural competence, evidence they presented showed their pedagogy was based on a “traditional information-transfer pedagogy” (Byram & Risager, 1999) that did not include a consideration of complexities and diversity within a country and culture.

Young and Sachdev (2011) conducted a study in adult English teaching contexts in the US, UK, and France to understand the views of experienced adult ESL teachers on the teaching and application of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) pedagogy, as defined by Byram (1997a). Findings from the study revealed that, despite school mission statements in US and UK contexts embedding ICC, the curriculum in all three contexts did not include ICC and were therefore not part of the assessments or lesson content. Teachers in the study also found Byram’s *savoir s’engager*, the critical and political dimension to intercultural language pedagogy, most challenging. Participants had concerns about the controversial topics that such a critical intercultural pedagogy would encompass and how such heated issues might in turn threaten the peaceful and “safe” classroom atmosphere they always strived to maintain. Thus, engaging real issues and meaningful dialogue in the language classroom about politically charged topics requires a tactful and interculturally aware teacher. Such a teacher would, therefore, know how to “engage with students on painful past history, unveiling personal opinion in an equally posited dialogue, a dialogue with students that is among equals and mutually respectful” (Crozet, 2016, p. 157). In reality, there are gaps between consensus on the importance of intercultural competence pedagogy and the focus of actual language pedagogy, which continues to be largely focused on teaching communicative competence. More research is

required to investigate the possibilities and complexities for teachers and teacher researchers attempting to implement intercultural perspectives to their practice (Crozet, 2016, p. 158). In the next section, I provide an overview of intercultural competence research and application in the Canadian context.

Intercultural Competence in the Canadian Context

In the Canadian context, Dunn et al. (2009) conducted a study investigating pre-service teachers' responses to the infusion of intercultural inquiry into subject-area curriculum courses in a teacher education program. They reported that the majority of participants had “limited personal experience with cultural, ethnic, or linguistic diversity” (Dunn et al., 2009, p. 551). This lack of experience, in turn, made the participants feel anxious, uncertain, and unprepared to engage issues of diversity and difference in their classrooms. This finding explains, in part, why study-abroad programs have been promoted in some quarters as a way of developing intercultural competence. Advocates of study-abroad programs as the sole means of gaining intercultural competence claim that the lack of opportunity for language teachers and learners to travel abroad makes it impossible for intercultural dimensions to be implemented in language teaching. This misconception, however, was criticized by Byram et al. (2001), who argued that, even when teachers and learners have opportunities to travel abroad, intercultural communication competence is not passively developed, but is rather a process of a conscious, deliberate stance that must be whiled over in language instruction and language curriculum development. They also cautioned that even with opportunities for foreign travel to learn a language, merely exposing students or teachers to other cultures does not lead to understanding, and such exposure, without an accompanying plan for a pedagogy of intercultural competence, could even lead to resistance and rejection of the encountered culture from students (p. 4). In Canadian ESL

contexts, elements of cultural diversity are already represented by the multicultural student population, so overlooking such a wealth of opportunities for intercultural engagement while seeking study abroad opportunities would seem counterproductive.

In considering a way to proceed with intercultural inquiry in the context of my research, a review of some relevant models of intercultural competence is necessary. This review of models and frameworks of intercultural competence is a way of navigating the terrain to see what addresses me and resonates with the paradigmatic commitments I bring to my research.

Models of Intercultural Competence

Byram's Model

Byram's (1997a) model of intercultural competence builds on work done in earlier models; it approaches intercultural competence from a perspective that does not overly depend on native speakers' norms and rules. The model promotes the concept of the “intercultural speaker,” instead of previous frameworks that promoted native speaker norms because in Byram's perspective, aiming to become an intercultural speaker is a more feasible, attainable goal (Byram et al., 2001). Often regarded as the most applicable model for language learning situations, Byram's model is centred on specific skills and attitudes that an intercultural speaker must demonstrate. The framework also details that components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills, and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups, values which are part of one's belonging to a given society. Demonstrating an intercultural attitude (*savoir être*), according to Byram (1997a), is displaying curiosity and openness, as well as a readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own (p. 5). Another important component of the model, knowledge (*saviors*), concerns demonstrating knowledge of social groups and their products in one's own

and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general process of societal and individual interaction. Byram’s (1997a) model also takes, as an important component of intercultural competence, skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*): the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own (p. 6). The model also details the skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (p. 7). The last component in the model is critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*), the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries (p. 7).

Byram’s (1997) model also provides a comprehensive catalogue of objectives, designed specifically for foreign language teaching, making it the most applicable for language teaching contexts (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001). In spite of the popularity of Byram’s model in language teaching settings, the catalogue of skills and attitudes the framework lauds as being indicators of intercultural competence is suggestive of a set of technical skills that could be mastered and switched on when needed. In my opinion, this model does not hold the holistic appeal that could bring teachers or learners to seek new ways of understanding our collective interconnectedness. An ethical model of intercultural communication is required to conceptualize ways that interactions with others might proceed with genuine desire to understand the other as a *relative* (Jardine, 2017) whose life holds profound truths for our own lives.

Chen and Starosta Model

Chen and Starosta (1996) developed a triangular model of intercultural communication competence (ICC) with each side of the triangle representing cognition, affect, and behavior. The main aim of the model is to build the ability of speakers in intercultural interactions to “acknowledge, respect, tolerate, and integrate cultural differences to be qualified for enlightened global citizenship” (Chen & Starosta, 1996, p. 362). For Chen and Starosta (1996), it is important for interculturally competent individuals to demonstrate knowledge of their own and others’ cultural norms by demonstrating capacities to respect and accept cultural differences (Chen 2014, p, 20). Again, like Byram’s framework, this model is based on a conception of human behavior as a determinable, measurable given that can be defined and explained and mastered.

Deardoff Model

Deardoff (2006, 2009) developed the process model of intercultural competence. Her model highlights four important concepts about intercultural competence. Firstly, she notes that intercultural competence is a continuous, ongoing process, and that individuals seeking to become interculturally competent must be given a range of opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their own intercultural competence. A second concept expounded in the model is that an assessment of speakers’ critical thinking should be an important part of assessing intercultural competence. An important foundation on which the model is built is the idea that to become interculturally competent, one must demonstrate attitudes of respect, openness, and curiosity. Finally, the model emphasizes the need for intercultural speakers to be able to see things from others’ perspectives.

All three of the models reviewed above have in common a stance of advocacy for attitudes of respect and open-mindedness. However, I find the fragmentation of different aspects into skills and behavioral indicators problematic—mostly because such a conceptualization of

intercultural competence often leads to requests for tips and strategies, which do not capture the complexity of intercultural competence in reality. This, in my opinion, is a reductionist approach to going along and striving with others that strips the concept of intercultural competence of the complexity and fullness it deserves. Criticizing the penchant for rendering things rationally and with clarity, Gadamer (1983) warns that “no amount of measured technique will save us from the ongoing task of deliberation” (p. 112). Similarly, educational conversations about understanding and learning are always unfinished, so any attempt to understand human nature must be done in ways that do not foreclose the possibility of ongoing conversation (Jardine & Field, 1996, p. 256). In addition to the limitations I have already discussed, many of the models, except Byram’s (1997) model, have often been criticized for lacking a clear definition of intercultural objectives for foreign language classrooms (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001). In response to the clamor for more practical models of intercultural competence that can be applied in the language classroom, the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) curriculum framework included a chapter on intercultural competence to support teachers in envisioning and implementing a pedagogy of intercultural competence (2011).

ATESL Model

The Alberta Teachers of English as Second Language (ATESL) curriculum framework expounds the need for explicit teaching of intercultural communicative competence in Canadian ESL settings, and beyond that, it includes a recommended framework and guide for teaching intercultural communicative competence. The guide explains the importance and relevance of intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching and learning. It further notes that, even though there seems to be a general agreement on the importance of teaching intercultural competence explicitly in the classroom, the more complex aspects of culture are

often passed over in ESL contexts as published ESL materials frequently take up Culture as objects and products, rather than “culture as processes and behaviours” (ATESL Curriculum Framework, 2011, S7-8).

Proposing a guide for how intercultural communicative competence can be integrated into the curriculum, the ATESL framework noted that intercultural competence is more of a stance than a body of content and that the most vital point to remember in teaching intercultural competence is that culture is always already inherently present in language. Building ICC into language curriculum, therefore, will mean “intentionally highlighting this dimension within existing program goals, language learning outcomes, tasks, materials, and assessments” (ATESL Curriculum Framework, 2011, S7-8).

Outlining seven standards, the model explains that language teaching with ICC outcomes should address tasks that engage students in analyzing and describing Canadian cultures, identifying culturally-determined behavior patterns, and examining ways of striking a balance between acculturation and preservation of one’s own culture. Other standards address more complex issues such as cultural stereotypes and discrimination, differences, and similarities in their own values and Canadian values.

The framework further goes on to suggest sub-themes within these standards that teachers could explore in their classroom. In my own experience as an ESL instructor in Canada, I have come across attempts, conscious and seemingly accidental, to integrate ICC in the ESL curriculum or textbooks. But like the ATESL framework notes, many of these attempts are reductionist in that culture and cultural differences are presented in many instances as reducible to food, clothing, flags, anthems, etc. More complex issues like those suggested for classroom practice by the framework have often been neglected. For instance, the framework suggests task

ideas on issues of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, rural/urban status, and sexual orientation; however, many ESL curricula I have seen continue to engage only peripherally with these more complex aspects of culture. Learning tasks in many of the ESL contexts I have taught seem to favor less controversial topics like national identity, food, and festivals. While there are often numerous tasks that explore the ways different cultures conduct business and what principles and behaviours count as good and acceptable business ethics, there are very few learning tasks related to complex issues like gender relations, race, religion, and sexual orientation and how such aspects of identity intersect. Mentions of religion are often limited to religious holiday observances in Canada and learners’ home countries. When race is mentioned, it is often mentioned only in passing in texts during lessons that focus on other outcomes and objectives. While some instructional materials have potential for valuable intercultural discourses, lesson objectives are often far removed from the teaching of intercultural awareness and competence.

In my experience as a teacher, I had also not encountered topics or lessons that explore immigrant students’ experiences of racism and discrimination in Canada or the barriers they face in negotiating a space for themselves in the Canadian context. While there were tasks that invited students to write about their experiences of culture shock when they first arrived in Canada, the questions were asked in ways that suggested that these experiences were in the students’ past.

Another suggestion from the ATESL curriculum framework is that teachers include tasks that invite students to “examine their own cultural adjustment process and the personal balance that must be struck between acculturation and preserving their own culture,” for example, “parental rights and limitations, multilingual/multicultural homes, ‘home’ remedies, religious and social practices” (ATESL Curriculum Framework, 2011, S11-13). Again, more complex

issues of intersectional identities, and how students daily navigate or juggle these identities are mostly neglected. Of all the sub-categories of tasks recommended by the ATESL Curriculum Framework for teaching toward intercultural competence, those that have been mostly taken up in the curriculum are those that are relatively less complex and less likely to stir up controversy or hard feelings. For example, tasks abound relating to ATESL frameworks’ recommendation to “compare and contrast differences and similarities in values and beliefs in their own cultures and in Canadian culture” (ATESL Curriculum Framework, 2011, S11-13). Also, there are many examples of tasks which require students to analyze everyday behaviors in Canadian cultures in comparison with their own culture—tasks like dressing, eating, personal hygiene, shopping, dating, greetings and so on. Such simplistic approach to inclusion resonates with Young et al.’s (2009) argument that language teaching has often represented culture in superficial ways like festivals, cuisine, and dressing (p. 150).

ESL and EFL Teachers and Intercultural Communicative Competence

As mentioned previously, discourses about language teaching and intercultural communicative competence do not often consider language teachers’ own intercultural competence or the role of teacher education in intercultural competence. This challenge mirrors a recurrent trend of new philosophies and theories that have steadily been adapted in language teaching, hence, the field is itself constantly in a state of flux, witnessing a steady infiltration of old and new methods. With each new trend, language teachers have been expected to quickly adapt their practices in line with such new methods. In reference to intercultural competence, Garrido and Alvarez (2006) raised an important question: “to what extent do language teachers want and are able to follow an intercultural approach in their teaching?” (p. 165).

Along these lines, Bickley et al. (2014) in their study contended that, within Canadian contexts, provisions for intercultural communicative competence within the ATESL ESL framework indicate the importance and relevance of intercultural competence for teachers and curriculum educators. Findings from their research about adult ESL teachers' views on intercultural competence indicate that even though majority of ESL teachers surveyed believed that intercultural competence should be taught explicitly in the classroom, only a few teachers systematically and intentionally taught towards intercultural competence. On the global scene, Young and Sachdev (2011) conducted a similar study of teachers from the United States, France and the United Kingdom, and their findings reveal that while most teachers see intercultural competence as a valuable curriculum goal, they are not teaching explicitly towards it. I attribute this disconnect between teacher beliefs and practices that both Bickley et al. (2014) and Young and Sachdev (2011) found in their research mostly to a lack of curricular support and teaching materials for teachers. Language teachers often find themselves in contexts where they have to develop their own teaching materials, and often, language programs have the additional pressure to get language learners to certain proficiency levels within the minimum time possible.

Another interesting explanation for the poor uptake of intercultural competence in language classrooms is resistance from teachers. For instance, in their study on fostering intercultural inquiry in pre-service teachers, Dunn et al. (2009) found that participants experienced feelings of anxiety and uncertainty while others resisted the very idea of intercultural inquiry. The latter group of participants did not see any value in promoting intercultural inquiry in curriculum courses.

Furthermore, teachers in other studies have also cited poor professional development support as a reason for language teachers' inability to implement a pedagogy of intercultural

competence. An important observation made by Alvarez and Garrido (2006) is that, where pre-service and in-service training have been provided, they have often been weak in two areas: firstly, no clear connection is made between theory and practice, and secondly, answers are not provided for questions about the ethical dimensions of intercultural competence development (p. 171). This inadequate attention to the ethical dimensions of intercultural competence discourses, appears to be an important factor for the resistance that teachers have shown toward intercultural inquiry in the classroom. In addition, there remains the question of the extent to which teachers have a responsibility to challenge or alter their students’ ethical perspectives. For instance, Timmis (2002) notes that teachers often ask, “how far is our right or responsibility to politically re-educate our students? When does awareness-raising become proselytizing?” (p. 249)

Similar questions have been asked by instructors in my context whenever they have been confronted with difficult conversations about culture in the classroom. For instance, they have often asked how much responsibility they had to address prejudicial comments made by students from warring countries to one another. Considering the historical pain and trauma that students from certain countries have faced from other oppressive, warring countries, what is the duty of a teacher if an aggrieved student constantly acts in inappropriate ways to students from a country perceived to be a perpetrator of such suffering? In response, Byram et al. (2004) noted that language teaching has a fundamental values position to teach toward a pedagogy that “acknowledges respect for human dignity and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction” (p. 7).

Addressing this gap in the literature of intercultural competence, some scholars (Guilherme, 2002; Nakayama & Martin, 2014) have called for an ethical framework for engaging intercultural communication. For the study of intercultural competence to be

meaningful, it should incorporate an ethical dimension; language education should combine theory and practice through a multidisciplinary approach that allows for the interpretive and exploratory practices in intercultural competence study (Guilherme, 2002). Despite the calls from the scholars cited above, the literature on intercultural communication and intercultural competence remains relatively lacking in ethical frameworks or discussion about ethics (except: Casmir, 1997; Johannesen, Valde, & Whedbee, 2007; Makau & Arnett, 1997).

My research will attempt to add voice to those scholars who have called for alternative ways of thinking about intercultural communication competence; firstly, that of Guilherme (2002) who admonishes the field of language education to combine multidisciplinary approaches to the study of intercultural communication and, secondly, in response to voices of scholars like Appiah (2006), Nakayama and Martin (2014), and Chen (2012) who have called for an ethical approach to intercultural communication that is informed by our interconnectedness as humans sharing the same planet, the need to draw attention to differences and disparities, and as humans who have ethical responsibilities toward other humans, other creatures, and our planet as a whole.

In light of these considerations, how might we re/envision a pedagogy of intercultural communication in ways that are ethical and ways that attend to the “deepest rhythms of life?” (Smith, 2008, p. 7). As the details of what ethical intercultural competence entails have been barely theorized for ESL instruction in Canadian contexts, I am aware that I choose a rather a difficult path; however, I bask in the awareness that it is only by suffering with this topic that I can seek out family resemblances for safekeeping the memories that have swept over me since the address of this topic. This memory must be kept in “a place it can take root, be restored and

recalled” (Jardine, 2008, p. iii). How is it that my connection with African wisdom is beginning to burgeon and beckon in resonance with that which must be recalled and restored?

Wisdom calls.

Chapter 3: Sticks in a Bundle Cannot Be Broken

Preface

The writing of this chapter is akin to telling several stories to illustrate a concept and because the stories I tell are as deeply personal as they are complex, I struggled to find a metaphor to capture the understandings I would like to discuss in this section. My deep reflections on how best to proceed with this chapter brought me to a recollection of an African proverb that says “sticks in a bundle cannot be broken,” a saying which provides me with a more holistic, non-fragmented lens for un-packing several issues related to ethics in intercultural competence research. In light of this, the proverb has also aptly served as the chapter’s title; however, I am also conscious that it is important to give you, my readers an idea of what to expect in this chapter. In order that you may find the right cues to journey with me in this complex chapter, I would like to clarify some terminologies and the context within which I use them. When I use the term “Western” or “Westernization,” I do not refer simply to a geographical location, but to a psychological and ideological designation, a worldview. In the same way, when I use the term “African wisdom,” I refer to a body of values and traditions that has been variously identified as sharing similarity across most African cultures. While I acknowledge the inherent nuances and differences in the individual cultures that make up Africa, many scholars working in the field have identified a broad range of values that run universally across African cultures (Gbadegesin, 1998; Gyeke, 1987; Mbiti, 1969; Wiredu, 1994). These are especially in relation to notions of self and other, individual and community, and belief about the nature of time.

More importantly, African wisdom/traditions refer to an ontological understanding in pre-colonial Africa. Since colonization, these values and worldview have themselves met with

cultural imperialism. I want to begin by lingering on the present dis-ease that prevent us from getting along as a collective, and how that in turn, brings up burning questions about the responsibilities of educators and education researchers to engage a discourse of ethical intercultural communication and wisdom in our practice.

A Pedagogical Problem?

These are complex and extremely troubled times for our world and our collective existence. Many scholars have decried the ominous pattern of destruction and dis-ease that has taken over our collective consciousness and attitude toward our own life, our relationship with others and the planet (Eppert, 2009; Bai et al., 2015; Smith, 2008; Purpel, 2004; Steele, 2014). These perilous moments in our history have something to say to scholars and researchers about the urgency of re(thinking) how we conduct scholarship on intercultural relations and communication. In the face of so much chaos and violence, discourses around intercultural relations must be approached with urgency, the task of seeking the heart of the dis-ease that is wreaking havoc on our world. As Martin Luther King (1967) called out in his River Side speech, “we are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.” However, to get to the heart of this malaise will require not just a change in how we approach intercultural relations, but a change in our mode of being in the world. We may have to be willing to lay aside the weight of approaching intercultural communication as a set of behavioral and affective skills and formulas and reach to the heart of the matter: which acknowledges that the entire creation lays in waste and destruction and corruption.

As inequities, inter-ethnic and inter-racial tensions are on the rise across countries and cultures, “we need to reconceptualize intercultural competence as a site of intervention, democratic participation and transformation” (Sorrell, 2014, p. 152). My research is concerned

with how we might conceptualize the study of intercultural communication that, as Sorrell (2014) suggests above, might be a site to explore the possibilities that our present unease poses to us in our relationship with others.

Sadly, attempts to justify the need for intercultural competence in the literature have often been arguments for educating students for global capital. But what is the usefulness of acquiring a set of skills or competence, as it is often called, without a corresponding ability to approach others in ways that are ethical? The intercultural competence literature in language learning contexts has not paid adequate attention to a key foundation for relating with others: an understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings. As Sorell (2014) asks further, to what end are we acquiring such intercultural competence or skills? What is the bigger purpose that our intercultural competence addresses? She, therefore, suggests a re-theorizing of intercultural competence to include consideration for the state of our human relations, and our relationship with our planet as a whole.

I Am Because We Are: The Ethical Turn

In this section, I return to my previous discussion of ethics and its application to intercultural communication. What does it mean to approach intercultural competence in ways that are ethical? This has been an overarching question on my mind as I ponder on my research. As I noted in the previous chapter, the literature on intercultural competence has largely explored issues of models and assessment, leaving a dearth of scholarship in the area of ethical intercultural competence. However, in recent times, a few scholars have become interested in the topic of ethical approaches to intercultural communication following a call from Kwame Appiah (2006) who advocated for an interconnected way of viewing others, because “every human being has obligations to every other. Everybody matters” (p. 2098). As already mentioned, Nakayama

and Martin (2014) provide one of very few writings in the literature of intercultural competence that explores ethical dimensions of intercultural communication. They propose a “humanness” principle of intercultural communication that proceeds with the understanding that to be human is to act ethically towards others (Nakayama & Martin, 2014). While the humanness principle may be a relatively new approach in the intercultural competence literature, the idea of our collective interconnectedness is a worldview shared by African and Asian wisdom around the world.

Along these lines, writing from the broader field of communication and media, Fuse, Land and Lambiase (2010) note that Western ethical approaches often fail to address the complexities of our present global world because they often prioritize the freedom of the individual above the interests and good of the collective, thereby erasing the sense of responsibility towards community (p. 437). As discussed in a previous chapter, Western ethics, predominantly rooted in individualism often proceeds with a utilitarian perception of the Other (Bai et al., 2015). Within such an ethics, others are only “worth” our care and attention to the extent that they further our own individual wants and desires. In order to overturn such an unhealthy orientation to others with whom we share the planet, Western discourses on intercultural communication might benefit from turning to non-Western philosophical foundations like Confucianism and African wisdom perspectives (Bai et al., 2015, Eppert et al., 2015; Fuse et al., 2010). Another obvious gap in the intercultural competence literature on ethics is that scholarship about our ethical duties to others and our collective interconnectedness is often entrenched in a fragmented worldview that excludes non-human beings. For instance, Appiah (2006), in his call for an ethical engagement with others, speaks primarily of humans, neglecting our ethical responsibility to other co-inhabitants of our planet like animals, plants, and all the elements of nature.

As a departure from such anthropocentric views of intercultural competence, a few scholars have attempted to theorize a more holistic ethics of intercultural competence based on non-western traditions. For instance, using the humanness principle as their approach, Xiao and Chen (2009) conceptualized a model of intercultural communication based on the Confucian cosmological worldview which is rooted in a holistic way of being in the world. The Confucian model is grounded on the Chinese concept of *gan-ying*, an expression of an interconnected worldview which “assumes a *feeling or sympathy towards other living beings* and the organism as a whole” (Nakayama & Martin, 2014, p. 104, emphasis in original). Due to my limited knowledge of Asian wisdom traditions, details of the Confucian philosophical foundation are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, “called” by the familiarity of African wisdom traditions, I will devote some paragraphs to whiling about significant aspects of the worldview and its relevance to discussions about ethics in intercultural communication.

In hermeneutic tradition, we are called to see the big picture in the details while simultaneously locating ourselves in the big picture (Smith, 1999). As Jardine (2008) similarly notes, whiling “pulls at us, because it seeks kinships, bloodlines” (p. ii). How exactly might African wisdom inform a discourse of ethical intercultural competence? What resonances and ancestral bloodlines might we stumble upon if we paused a little to think about African wisdom? A striking thing about African worldviews is the harmonious way in which humans, animals, plants and all other elements of nature are viewed. A common thread that runs through most traditional African communities is that various aspects of life and social behavior were not compartmentalized, every creature and area of life were all cyclically interconnected. An important feature of the African tradition is that it sees all life as sacred (Paris, 1995 cited in Dillard, 2008, p. 279). This is evident in the way traditional African peoples positioned

themselves in relation to nature’s elements like the rivers, oceans, plants, and animals. There is a cyclical continuity to the way being is viewed that though people die in the physical world, they continue to live on amongst the living and are accessible to be called on for guidance and direction. These connections with ancestors also form a significant part of the epistemological foundations of the African Indigenous wisdom. Like Cumes (2004) explains, in African traditions, “if your ancestors turn aside, you are defenceless, like paper blowing in the wind” (p. 5). Also, as with most Indigenous and traditional peoples, earth-centredness is a key concept in African wisdom as exemplified for instance in the stamping of the feet emphatically while dancing in connection with Mother-Earth. The African worldview recognizes that “Mother-Earth is our paradise” (Chivaura, 2006, p. 215); it is therefore an obligation to all to live ethically in ways that honour the earth and make it habitable for the next generation. Very aptly capturing this duty to care for the earth, an African proverb says that the earth is a loan to us from our children, so we must take good care of it.

This complex relationship with all of nature and the belief that human, animal and plant lives are fluidly interconnected confers on the traditional African a responsibility to honour and preserve other species of nature. Camara Laye, in his autobiographical book *The African Child*, gives a good account of this concept when he describes how, as a little boy, he confronted his father about a snake that moved freely around their compound, a snake they had also been instructed never to harm or kill. His Father replied:

“That snake,” he said, “is the guiding spirit of our race. Can you understand that?”

“That snake,” he went on, “has always been with us; he has always made himself known to one of us. In our time, it is to me that he has made himself known.” (Laye, 1954, p.17)

Self and Community in African Wisdom

Writing from a Bantu African wisdom perspective on collective interdependence, Tempels (1995) notes that to the Bantu people:

Created human beings preserve a bond with one another, an intimate ontological relationship, comparable with the causal tie which binds creature with Creator. For the Bantu, there is an interaction of being with being, that is to say of force with force. (p. 58)

This quotation points to the understanding that the self is always already part of another, a major ontological view underlying many African traditions. Along these lines, Nwosu (2009) contends that the Zulu word, *Ubuntu*, represents the significance the African worldview places on community and interdependence. Aptly captured in a proverb, ubuntu means that “a person can only be a person through others” (p. 168). Traditional African societies were built on the notion of interconnectedness of the individual to the whole and sustained by beliefs and values that are seen as transcending the individual person (Ikuenobe, 2006). The idea of the collective as the strength of existence, continuity or survival of any entity is probably the most fundamental and profound thread that runs through the African cosmology and worldview. These claims above remind me of something that I found very captivating when I was a young child.

One of the activities I found most fascinating as a little girl was watching the little black ants that would often “visit” our house...usually the dining room or the kitchen. Often, I would discover them accidentally while running an errand for my mother and stop in my tracks, as I watched those little black ants in a neat, singular row travel on an often partially concealed side of the wall of our kitchen. Almost every time, I would reach out and slap a finger in the middle of the procession and watch them instantly disintegrate in a zigzag and reassemble again in a neat file, changing their direction. No matter what I did, they were never distracted from this collective journey. I found this so intriguing. Sometimes, my mother’s voice would interrupt my near-trance observation of these creatures and I would hurry to deliver the errand before returning to watch the ants. Usually, when I returned, what would initially capture my attention was the sight of a moving piece of bread, or biscuit, or a crumb of fish, some food. Moving. On

the wall. And I would halt and peer deeply and notice that the ants, formerly in a row, were now huddled together like a tightly knit web, carrying the weight of a surprisingly huge piece of food crumb.

If we ponder on this story beyond the memories of a curious little girl, there is definitely wisdom in the idea that humans can learn from the ant. The ability of an ordinarily tiny and weak creature like the ant to synergize interdependently to carry out feats that would otherwise be impossible informed an *Igbo* proverb *Ibuanyi danda*, meaning no load is too heavy for *danda* (the ant). This proverb is usually used to mean that no task is too difficult for the collective to accomplish. It is in line with this that the Nigerian philosopher, Innocent Asouzu, (2011) has called on scholars involved in intercultural discourses to engage the principle of *Ibuanyidanda*, which teaches that everything that exists is a missing link of our collective reality, thus, “all culture, peoples, races, tribes, sexes, languages, nations, religions . . . are in mutual complementarity to each other, in their privileges and responsibilities” (p.142). In other words, we must acknowledge that no one person, culture or entity has all it requires to live independently; our strength comes from our mutual interdependence. I will conclude this section by emphasizing that African wisdom traditions also cannot say all there is to say about how we can live this life. African wisdom traditions do not stand on a pedestal, a spectacle to be adored; they are also subject to scrutiny and examination. For instance, in philosophical scholarship on communalism, many non-African scholars have easily dismissed African communal ideology as not giving any place to the place of the individual but many African scholars (Gbadegesin, 1998; Gyeke, 1987; Mbiti, 1969; Wiredu, 1994) have addressed these criticisms, explaining that the African worldview sees the individual as being inherently connected and, in fact, existing because of the collective.

The width and breath of the criticisms of African tradition is beyond the scope of my dissertation, but I mentioned some above, in order to show how we are constantly in a journey of exchange. An important wisdom that I keep in mind always is that, as Smith (2008) notes, no tradition can say all there is to say. Therefore, it is necessary to return to the in-between. Instead of being caught in the trap of dualism, we might return to and proceed with the African proverb that says “wisdom is like a baobab tree, no one person can embrace it.”

Echoes from Scholars in Education

While all of these discussions on wisdom are useful for rethinking intercultural communication in general, a tension still remains for me, in how this can be applied in education pedagogy and research. There is relatively little engagement of ethical dimensions to intercultural competence; the few writings there are on ethical intercultural competence have come from scholars in the field of communication and media. I now turn to Guilherme (2002) who advances the view that, in order to overcome these deficiencies, language education has to turn to a multidisciplinary approach that allows for the interpretive, the reflective, and the critical to emerge. Scholarly writings from education and curriculum scholars in the areas of intercultural dialogue (philosophy), wisdom and contemplative practices in education, particularly lend themselves to ethical intercultural communication (Bai et al., 2015; Eppert, 2009; Eppert et al., 2015; Purpel, 2004; Smith, 2008, 2010, 2014; Steele, 2014).

Writing on the need for educators to engage intercultural issues from a holistic perspective, Bai et al. (2015) suggest that those in education take up the challenge of examining worldviews and their values and how these affect our collective ability to thrive. In their view, in order to achieve this, philosophers of education have to see themselves as intercultural workers and take on the task of “inviting contemplative critique, challenging beliefs and values

underlying inequities, and shedding light on past and present ways of wisdom and being-in-the-world” (Bai et al., 2015, p. 637). Similarly, Smith (1999) suggests that the field of education needs a new epistemology that proceeds with an understanding of the unity of our world (p. 52). He recommends that such new ways of knowing and being should proceed with the hermeneutic assumption that “there is only one world within which everything coheres to form a unity” (p. 57). This idea of all creation in the world as an interconnected unit aligns with African wisdom and other Indigenous wisdom. Smith (2003) further reminds us that the foundation of any worthy ethics in the new millennium should consider how the “you” and “I” make up the “we” from which our shared existence emerges (p. xviii).

In my understanding, it is this sense of mutual dependence and interdependence that should inform education philosophies and curriculum, because as Palmer (1998) suggests, good teaching deepens the capacity for connectedness and to get to the heart of this kind of pedagogy, educators must be able to engage students in ways that prioritize what is important in life: our responsibility towards our self, others and nature. I believe that, just like African wisdom teaches us to regard and honour everything/everyone as part of a missing link of reality, our educational spaces must embrace other ways of being that honour the call of our collective humanity. It is our collective responsibility to rise and reclaim our world and planet from our self-destructive patterns because “whether we live or whether we die as a species, we live or die together” (Smith, 2008, p. 30).

I argue that a big first step in understanding an ethical approach to intercultural communication lies in rethinking Western ontological orientation, such a shift transcends the acquisition of a new set of skills. Again, to avoid the trap of dualism, let me point out that when I use the term “Western,” I do not refer to a geographical designation but an ontological construct

and worldview entrenched in modernity and its attendant preoccupation with individualism, technology and market economy. At the beginning of this paper, I detailed my own journey of imbibing a westernized worldview even while in Nigeria. This is an important pointer to the fact that the western worldview, especially since colonization and more recently, globalization, is no longer just a geographical designation. Eppert (2009) notes that even when western discourses have acknowledged others, it is often in self-serving, utilitarian ways. There is also an inherent disconnect with relationships with people and the planet. This detached and fragmented view of self in relation to the world produces a state of “hardened identity” (Huntington, 2003, p. 266) which in turn leads to “an exaggerated and often trumpeted sense of autonomous, self-secured and independently existing “I am” that is seemingly separate from any sense of or reliance on our worldly conviviality” (Jardine, 2017, p. 156). To counter such a fragmented view of the self, Loy (2002) suggests that the self is inherently interdependent and finding true joy is hinged on the ability to turn away from human greed and ill will to generosity, compassion, and wisdom.

As some of the scholars discussed above have observed, we would benefit from embracing other wisdom practices and exploring alternative possibilities for how we can be in the world. Along these lines, Dei and McDermott (2018) demonstrate practical ways that educators might centre African proverbs, indigenous folktales, and cultural stories in Western education curricula. I end this section with an African folktale because as Miruka (1994) asserts, it is through folktales that we see the philosophical essence of the society with regard to how they look at life’s issues, what they place value on and what they abhor.

It is said that long ago, in the early beginnings of the world, Kweku Ananse was the most sly and greedy among all the animals in the forest. One day, Ananse collected all the wisdom in the world and stored them all in a large pot he hid for himself and after accomplishing this task,

Ananse thought to himself that he had all the wisdom in the world and seeing as he didn't want to share any of this wisdom with anyone or risk the possibility that any other animal would stumble into his pot of wisdom and benefit from it, he decided that he was going to hide the pot in an even safer place. He decided that it might be best to tie the pot of wisdom around his neck and let the pot hang in front of him so he would see it at all times. Still, he worried that his pot of wisdom could still be stolen from him. What shall I do with my pot of wisdom? Ananse asked himself.

Finally, after much thought, he decided that he was going to hide the pot on the top of the tallest tree in the forest and after a long search, he came across the tallest tree, a thorny silk cotton tree. He hung the pot in front of him and attempted to climb the tree but the pot kept getting in his way. While he was struggling to climb with the pot constantly preventing him from accomplishing this, his son who unknown to Ananse has been watching him from the foot of the tree, finally asked him what he was doing. Ananse replied that he had all the wisdom in the world in the pot and he was now trying to take it to the top of the tree for safekeeping, away from the whole world and that way, he would be the wisest person in the world. The son after a moment said: “father, why don't you hang the pot behind you instead so you can climb the tree?” Ananse heeded his son's advice and hung the pot behind him and to his surprise, he easily climbed to the top of the tree with his pot. On getting to the top, Ananse sat on a tree branch fuming: “I thought I had all the wisdom in the World, how is it that my own son has wisdom that is not in my pot? Ananse after much thought said, “no one person can have all the wisdom in the world.” On his way back, he dropped the pot of wisdom, smashing it into many pieces and all the wisdom in it further scattered all over the world.

This fable is instructive for rethinking our stance in the West today that privileges scientific and technological cultures above all others, shutting out valuable lessons that could be learnt from other wisdom traditions and cultures. Wisdom is like fire, we take it from others (African proverb).

Lingering Around the Hearth with Teachers

Aoki (1991/2005) beautifully invokes the image of the hearth at home, where we gather around the fireplace to find warmth, with the burning live fire reminding us that the ambience and warmth we receive demands something from us, that there is an action required to keep that ambience. The hearth, described as the area in front of the fireplace or the floor of the fireplace, is also the symbol of sharing, ritual, and community in the home. The hearth, as a place of fellowship and communion, as Aoki (1991/2005) describes, holds promises for new meanings and new understandings because it is an “extraordinarily unique and precious place, a hopeful place, a trustful place, a careful place . . . devoted to leading out . . . from the ‘is’ to new possibilities yet unknown” (p. 164). This space inhabited within the hearth is also the “Zone of Between” that teachers dwell between curriculum as lived experience and curriculum-as-plan (Aoki, 1991/2005, p. 163). What I invite teachers to do in my research is linger before this hearth with me, that we might make meaning of what it means to explore an ethics of intercultural communication for language teaching. How might all of these be taken up in the context of intercultural competence in ESL contexts?

In recent times, instructors in my department have been sharing intriguing but difficult stories of intercultural incidents in their classroom. In some instances, some students find it difficult to work with other students due to tensions arising from their national histories, most often clashing and warring countries. There are instances where male students have openly

displayed disrespectful attitudes towards women who do not conform to their cultural beliefs about the roles of women. In other instances, students who have come from contexts with homophobic views about same-sex relationships have openly expressed their disapproval about having to work with students who do not identify as heterosexual. How could curriculum’s response to such living, breathing, experiential issues be a set of skills and behavioral attitudes? What is our ethical responsibility in the midst of such lived experiences? The more I have spoken with instructors at the biweekly conversation series, the more I realize just how much insight they bring to the dialogue on intercultural tensions in the classroom. More importantly, the fact that teachers are beginning to approach these issues with more urgency and keener awareness makes me reflect on Martin Luther King’s prophetic words:

Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us. If it is, let us trace its movement well and pray that our own inner being may be sensitive to its guidance, for we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seem so close around us. (*Beyond Vietnam: A time to Break Silence*, 1967)

In his story about the symbolic Miss O, Aoki (1991/2005) tells us that, as a teacher, Miss O dwells between two horizons: the space between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences with her students. In her work as a teacher, both of these horizons make a claim on her so that she is called to listen simultaneously (p. 161). While curriculum-as-plan continues to be a part of our conversation, in recent times, teachers in my context have started to reflect on and share even more about the tensions of their lived experiences in the classroom. For instance, I have had many more questions from teachers about ethical responsibilities in the face of difficult stories or inappropriate intercultural engagement between students. Giving attention to these living, pulsating puzzles that make a claim on us in the *now* is an important hermeneutic

endeavor. In a way suggestive of a collective awakening, instructors in my context are talking more about the tensions that punctuate their lives as teachers, these lived experiences address us *now*, in this very moment of time and we are obligated to pay attention. As Smith (1999a) details, “the concern must be with the present . . . the present is always a living, present, one vibrant in the NOW with memories, hopes and dreams” (p. 57). When I am faced with questions about how to engage ethically with students in various circumstances, I also become aware of my own limitations, because in spite of what little knowledge I have of ethical proceedings in the African wisdom tradition, exploring the questions that my research asks and for which teachers are also starting to ask, will require an engagement with those who teach and share these experiences with students. Smith (1999a) cautions that we cannot discern the pedagogic significance of what the new tells us if we interpret the new through old filters. Similarly, Gadamer (1989) warns that recognition goes beyond what we already know and “the joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing more than is already familiar” (p. 114). Stepping out into the *not yet* with teachers to explore possibilities of rethinking an ethics of intercultural competence involves lingering a little longer by the hearth with teachers. It is said that through fire comes family, may we find kinships by the warmth of the hearth.

Tima Usrah.

Through fire comes family.

Pedagogy of Discomfort

A consideration of ethics in intercultural competence education should also entail an ethical engagement of attending to the emotional landmines and tensions that ESL teachers navigate when they come face-to-face with some of these difficult stories. Hermeneutics does not seek to do away with this tension, but rather seeks to give voice to it. However, part of giving

voice to this tension might be a consideration of researchers’ ethical responsibility towards teachers who are asked to engage these difficult conversations in their classrooms. They are often first witnesses to the sometimes-difficult conversations in the classroom and, as the literature shows, many teachers have expressed their own discomfort about engaging in discourses around difference. For instance, Carson and Johnston (2001) in their study of teacher identity formation and cultural differences, found that many teachers displayed intensely emotional reactions and engaged in verbal exchanges whenever issues about race and redress in Canadian society came up. They caution that these reactions are evidence that there is more at stake than bargained for when we undertake the task of educating teachers about cultural difference (p. 76). It is vital to consider what Boler and Zembylas (2003) call the emotional labor that comes with engaging such tough conversations. They observe that when educators engage students in questions about their worldviews and ethical beliefs, profound ethical issues arise. In my final chapter, I provide a more detailed discussion of how educators might both respond to and proceed within the tensions posed by such “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998) and “complicated conversations” (Pinar, 2004) as they engage the courageous work of teaching language and intercultural communication.

I am conscious that the foregoing discussion is also deeply embedded in my own pre-judgements, pre-understanding, even prejudices about how we might envision an ethics of intercultural communication. As I reflect on ways ESL practitioners in my context might rethink an “intercultural” ESL curriculum, it appears to me that there is a way in which events in our lives are also lining up so we can find ourselves in the big picture. I realize that I am called to simultaneously respond to the questions I ask in my research and the tensions that I sit with; however, I do not have to dispel the tension, but proceed with it. I am curious about what

teachers may consider important ethical issues in a curriculum of intercultural communication.

Again, my research questions:

- What does it mean to engage an intercultural ethics of “original difficulty” in the context of ESL pedagogy and curriculum?
- What might constitute an ethics of intercultural communication in the context of ESL teaching?
- What do ESL teachers identify as the possibilities and complexities of teaching for intercultural communication?

Chapter 4: A Framework for Proceeding with Hermes

Understanding begins . . . when something addresses us. This is the primary hermeneutic condition . . . the essence of the question is the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities. (Gadamer, 1960, p. 266)

Preface

Hermeneutics inundates my life and consumes me. I have now re-written and discarded many sections of this chapter because something about how my understanding is evolving hermeneutically causes me to identify aspects of my work that do not ring true of the hermeneutic tradition within which I write. This is a painful process, especially given that I have to attend to timelines and deadlines set by my doctoral program. But. I am growing hermeneutically. And hermeneutics is also growing on me. I am reminded of Moran’s (2000) claim that understanding and interpretation in hermeneutics is an ongoing, “never completable” process that has its roots in human finitude (p. 248). Therefore, hermeneutic understanding cannot be rushed because we have to read “as if our lives depended on it” (Jardine, 2012a, p. 4).

At this point, it is important to articulate my orientations in this section very clearly, because they underlie how I view the world, how I understand, ask questions, choose data sources or interpret texts. This chapter would be typically referred to as the “methodology” chapter in traditional research papers, but in my paper, I will not be using terms like “methods” or “methodology” because they do not align with hermeneutic values or the living paradigm from which I proceed. In the hermeneutic research tradition, understanding is seen as a process that is always arriving and emerging, rather than a fixed designation of “knowing.” Instead of methods and methodology, I use terms like approach, strategies or inquiry. Also, I think it is important to provide more details about my research context and participants early on in this

chapter, so that you, my readers, could approach this chapter with a good grasp of the context of my study.

Let us heed the call of Hermes.

Hermes: The Border Crosser

Hermes is no stranger to me. The spirit and character of Hermes are no visitors to my world. I knew Hermes. Sitting under the clear blue skies and the scintillating after smell of rain, chanting and singing, scantily clad in underwear a little too big for me. I knew Hermes. Hermes made me laugh, made me cry, and held me in awe, sometimes disgust. Hermes is not a stranger to me. But I forgot him. And now I remember. I remember because he never really left me, despite my forgetfulness. And even though he “calls” me now, it’s a call I have heard before, his voice all too familiar. I knew Hermes. I know Hermes. We called him every night. Hermes was known to me. But we called him a different name.

It is a full moon. My grandmother’s loud, searing voice tears through our noisy chatter as she summons us all to the “atapa,” the family’s open courtyard. With feet swift and quick as sand, my cousins and I dash over with squeals of excited laughter. Grandmother will be telling us another story about the rabbit or tortoise.

Tonight’s story may be new or perhaps, one we have heard before. Because the stories never really get old. It was often about the wisdom of the rabbit or tortoise, their trickery and deception. Their wit and charisma was boundless. In one instance, the tortoise acts as an emissary from the gods to man. He also takes messages and supplications from men to the gods. Sometimes, the tortoise intercepted the messages and told a different version than he was sent to deliver. Sometimes for personal gain, sometimes for his own amusement. He was a known thief

and trickster. At other times he delivered timely messages that saved an entire kingdom. When it pleased him, he deliberately distorted messages so that an entire kingdom was ruined.

The tortoise. He was the wisest of all animals and he displayed exceptional skills in oratory and mastered the art of persuasion. In an instance, when he came face to face with a hungry lion who wanted to eat him, the tortoise engaged and distracted the lion with a story and, like one in a spell, the lion listened in awe even as the tortoise slowly backed away into safety. With the tortoise, one was to always expect the unexpected and unanticipated. The tortoise brought with him twists and turns and complexities. Once, when all the wild animals agreed to eat up all the smaller animals during a famine, the appearance of the tortoise in their midst brought about a confusion so that the wild animals could not carry out their mission. The tortoise traversed boundaries. He broke conventions. He held the keys to insight and understanding, especially in times of great peril. Hermes was known to me. The tortoise embodied Hermes in the African mythology. Hermes, the border crosser.

The realization that I have always had a connection with interpretive ways of knowing, came as a surprise to me at first, but upon further reflection, I discerned that it has always been part of my way of interacting with the world. The difference is that I am now choosing to recognize it and call it into play in how I interact with the world. As Wachterhauser (1986) notes, “human beings have always inherited a way of looking at things around them long before they begin to modify that way of looking” (p. 22).

Like a Thief at Night

In the year 2016, during one of the conversation series in my department, an instructor asked, “but how do all these discussions relate to our teaching? Are there no specific tips that teachers can implement in their classroom?” In that instance, I was “struck” by the familiarity of

this question to my own point of rupture when I initially commenced the Ph.D. program. I realized that, in some sense, even though this was a different context and a different question, I had experienced this before. And then I knew that this incident was making a claim on me and revealing something to me about our lives together (Jardine, 1998). Something about this question from my colleague was “addressing me” (Gadamer, 1987) because, in an inexplicable way, what Jardine (1998) refers to as an “unanticipated eruption of long familiar threads of significance and meaning in the midst of a wholly new situation” (p. 40) *spoke* to me about the way I must proceed with my research.

I began to reflect deeply on how I was constantly being pulled up short on many levels with regard to my desires for curriculum re-design. First, I thought that if we were to just have a conversation series with instructors about intercultural communication and language teaching, then that would be enough to bring about an illumination in our collective approach to intercultural issues that arose in the classroom. As our conversations evolved over a period of three years and became richer, it became apparent that the applicability of intercultural communication was a more complex conversation than we could address through “strategies.” When an instructor asked me for strategies and tips for engaging intercultural communication, it dawned on me that the conversation series alone was not necessarily bringing us to a place of curiosity but instead, engendering a quest for mastery. I was pulled up short and I initially wondered at how unfolding events in my conversations with instructors constantly thwarted my expectations. However, I have come to understand that, as Kerdeman (2003) notes, everyday kinds of shattering punctuate our life and “even transformations in self-understanding that arise when we are pulled up short are susceptible to being pulled up short” (p. 297).

The question posed by this colleague asked something of me in how I must proceed with regards to methodology in my dissertation and, in response, Hermes showed up in our midst and whispered to me. I came to the realization that what I needed was a paradigm that allowed me to keep the conversation open, not one that brought final answers and foreclosure. As I have discussed in previous chapters, my research is about reaching into the messy, tangled spaces of intercultural communication and giving voice to the tensions and the intractable. How can we engage a deeper conversation about intercultural communication that allows us to re/turn to original difficulty? Hermes called, and I answered the call.

Tracing Ancestries: The Relevance of Hermeneutics to My Research

Hermeneutics has its etymological roots in the Greek noun *hermenei* and verb *henneneuien*, which translate as “interpretation” and “to interpret.” The word “hermeneutics” has its first documented usage in the Oxford English Dictionary in the year 1737. In Greek mythology, Hermes is the wing-footed god whose task was to translate mysteries beyond human understanding. The interpretation of mysteries and riddles of humans’ daily existence were the preserve of Hermes. Hermes is also said to be the bearer of the gifts of language and writing and according to mythology, he was both charming and deceptive.

As an epistemology, the hermeneutic imagination conceptualizes a world that is both contextualized and relational instead of linear, sequential and decontextualized. The hermeneutic imagination finds its dwelling within the interpretive research paradigm. As Jardine (1998) explains, interpretive research begins with a different idea of what is given. Instead of starting from the ideal of clarity and methodological controllability and then attempting to fit the given image into this given ideal, “it begins in the place where we actually start in being granted or given this incident in the first place. It begins (and remains) with the evocative, living familiarity

that this tale evokes” (Jardine, 1998, p. 39). What researchers do when they engage in interpretation, therefore, is to explore this given, no matter how ambiguous, tangled and messy and to pursue all the possibilities of meaning and significance that the interpretation evokes. I am called to ask the important question of how ESL teachers may re-envision a curriculum of intercultural communication that re/turns to original difficulty.

Hermeneutically speaking, the task of inquiry is not to dispel the tensions inherent in holding to original difficulty, but to live and speak from within it. Approaching my topic from a place of tips and strategies in response to the question I was asked by my colleague would have offered an escape from engaging the murky, sometimes contradictory difficulties that daily punctuate the experience of being teachers or researchers; but the hermeneutic tradition goes against the temptation of trying to “break things down” or simplify things; instead, it dwells in the tension and proceeds with it. Such dwelling and proceeding in difficulty, it is said, has possibilities to bring about creativity and newness of life.

As a black, immigrant woman, researcher, teacher, and curriculum developer in the field of ESL teaching, where I am myself a second-language speaker, my daily experience of inhabiting these different spaces that make up my identity is one of tension. In my research, I am faced with the task of finding ways to proceed with the tensions of complexity, making meaning of and from them and speaking from within these tensions. Working from within a post-secondary institution that prepares students largely for industry, I am constantly battling the contradictions inherent in my work: namely, my own interest in pursuing a curriculum that gives place to the lived experiences of teachers and students, and pressure to develop a curriculum that clearly outlines how objectives and outcomes prepare students for industry. In staying true and open to who I am as an educator and researcher, it is important to work within a paradigm that

allows me to give voice to this “tensionality” (Aoki, 1991/2005) that inheres the totality of who I am as an educator. As Aoki (1991/2005) notes, “to be alive is to live in tension . . . it is the tensionality that allows good thoughts to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck” (p. 162). The very nature of intercultural encounters presupposes tensionality because the ability to communicate with and be attuned to otherness demands a certain level of comfort with tension. Inviting teachers to re-envision a curriculum of intercultural communication speaks to a dialectic engagement and, as Aoki (1991/2005) contends, “indwelling dialectically is a living in tensionality . . . living simultaneously with limitations and with openness, but also that openness harbors risks and possibilities as we quest for a change from the is to the not yet” (p. 164). My research is, thus, in many ways, a quest for this *not yet* and such a project necessitates that I work from a paradigm that makes room for that which is yet to arrive, anticipating, whiling over and turning around as I wait in earnest expectation.

Hermeneutics and Education Research

In this section, I draw heavily on Jardine’s (2000) scholarship because I appreciate his concise discussion on the relevance of hermeneutics to education research. The applicability of the hermeneutic tradition to education research has been thoroughly articulated by several scholars (e.g., Jardine, 2000, 2012; Moules, 2012; Smith 1991, 1999). Jardine (2000) asserts that “education is concerned with the ‘bringing forth’ (educare) of human life . . . the emergence of new life in our midst, and what it is we wish to engender” (p. 115). The hermeneutic tradition is preoccupied with how we could respond to the emergence of this new life in our midst in a way that life together can go on and not foreclose the future (Jardine, 2000; Smith, 1991, 1999). As educators in multicultural contexts like Canada, how might we approach teaching in ways that are attentive to what the new lives in our midst are saying to us about how we might go along

together regardless of our differences? As teachers, there are presuppositions we already bring to our practice and Jardine (2000) notes that the goal of hermeneutic inquiry is to “educate” understanding and bring to light the presuppositions in which we already live (p. 115).

Curriculum materials in today’s schools are designed such that complex human nature and problems are sometimes theorized into “formulas” that make it all seem so easy, “masterable” and devoid of any ambiguity or surprises. Little wonder, too, that in respect to discourses about ESL students and inclusive education, the default position all-too-often seems to be “give us a checklist of how students from different cultures behave and how we should respond in the classroom,” a formula (read: checklist) of dos and don’ts with different groups that will finally put an end to the challenges of intercultural communication so that there will be no need for endless conversations. While this desired prescription is a demand to “make it simple,” such simplistic approaches to pedagogical endeavour is precisely in contradiction to what hermeneutics seeks. A hermeneutic understanding of education is concerned with the ambiguous and difficult nature of life itself and denounces any attempt to render such ambiguity “objectively presentable . . . but to attend to it, to give it a voice” (Jardine, 2002, p. 120).

However, accommodating the ambiguous, the difficult, and the intractable is not a common strength in the present skills-driven systems of education where the quest to apprehend precise knowledge of all things has become a project in itself. In the midst of technical-scientific reconstructions and attempts to master human life and present it objectively, the original difficulties of life have been concealed. Furthermore, technical-scientific discourse poses more problems because it tends to offer language that is already foreclosed. In developing curriculum for a post-secondary institution whose mission is geared towards providing “applied knowledge” to students and getting them “industry-ready,” it is definitely a necessary requirement within this

setting that I am able to “show” or “demonstrate” how lesson plans and curriculum “prepare students for the industry.” The language for excelling in an industry-driven educational setting by and large has to be technical, scientific, sure, confident and, leave no room for doubts. In the same sense, it is expected that the curriculum generally be designed in ways that are failure-proof, in ways that promise to eliminate uncertainties in the classroom both for teachers and students. Teachers and instructors are themselves constantly barraged with teacher development training sessions that are so “skills-driven” that they leave little room for conversation. Speaking to this tendency in education to reduce knowledge to a narrow understanding that is evidenced by the acquisition of skills, Jardine (2000) articulates the implication of such skills-driven culture:

Education then becomes a matter of technical specification and manipulation. Nothing is truly difficult and risky; it is simply effortful, simply a matter of finding the trick and applying the correct techniques appropriately. The possibility of failure, of error, must be reduced to technical matters that can be fixed by technical means open to anyone and everyone. (p. 126)

As Jardine (2000) further details, conversations that invite us to ponder the complexity of life, that invites a dwelling with the ambiguous nature of life all-too-often are identified as waste of time that do not bring about any identifiable, specifiable sense of acquiring a technique or skill (p. 126). It is this foreclosure of conversation that hermeneutics offers me a way to move away from. Because teaching and learning about teaching, in itself, is such a living thing, so intertwined with lived experiences, experiences that cannot be pre-determined or controlled, there will always be room for the new or a revisiting of the old. The hermeneutic imagination

allows me to “remain young” at heart because Hermes was a “young god always” (Stapleton, 1982, 141).

Hermeneutics asks how we can proceed with the difficulty of conversation with other cultures in the classroom, co-habit with difference and sameness without attempting to eliminate the difference, deny the difference or exaggerate the sameness. A hermeneutic understanding allows me to dwell within the ambiguity and tensionality in a way that allows new life to spring forth. In my opinion, it is crucial to adopt a research approach that does not attempt to foreclose conversation or offer permanent solutions, but one that opens up opportunities for more conversations, more questions. It is this sitting-with-difficulty, going on with puzzles and unanswered questions that teachers, by their very image as reservoirs of knowledge, find very discomfoting. It is precisely this discomfort, this place of uncertainty and vulnerability that I seek to travel with teachers in this research.

Within the pulsating cosmos of the hermeneutic imagination, I am able to find a “home” for questions that have constantly troubled me about my conversations with instructors. How can we have a conversation about intercultural communication that does not make absolute statements, conclusions or absolute claims to mastery of human nature? How can teachers have a conversation about intercultural awareness in ways that leave more to be said? In ways that accommodate the unknown, that acknowledge that we all are learners in the process—curriculum developers and instructors and learners? How can I have this conversation with instructors in my department in ways that burst my heart open to my limitations, in ways that keep me faithful to learning from the process, instead of going in with “theories” and answers?

Strategies of Inquiry

Pursuing interpretive inquiry is a potentially painful process, because it is not produced of a method which (ideally) will keep everything under control by severing all the tendrils of sense that can pull you in so many different often incompatible ways. There is a risk involved in such work, a risk of ‘self-loss’ and a recovery of a sense of self that is different than the one with which we begin such inquiries. (Jardine, 1998, p. 49)

As Jardine (1998) notes above, there are no set methods or set ways of doing hermeneutic research. Methods are politically charged “as they define, control, evaluate, manipulate and report” (Gouldner, 1970, p. 50). Methods and other approaches to research design do not exist in a vacuum as these are (e)pistemologically-guided (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009), so that, in very much a similar way, a researcher’s theoretical approach, parameters and tools point to particular world views (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Similarly, Greckhamer and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) note that researchers cannot “collect data without keeping in mind their (e)pistemological purpose, nor can they use particular analysis methods without considering their appropriateness to produce the type of knowledge desired” (p. 733). In line with the above, I offer a discussion of my strategies of inquiry, bearing in mind that these are only but a guide; the very nature of hermeneutic research is such that the researcher must always be open to new possibilities and unexpected and unanticipated directions. I provide a discussion of my strategies of inquiry below, not as way of controlling the process of this inquiry, but as part of the requirement of a doctoral dissertation. I will remain open to the calling of Hermes.

Data Collection

This doctoral research took place in a post-secondary institution. I conducted five individual interviews and a focus group interview. The most common data collection method for

hermeneutic research is the participant interview. There are, however, other forms of data collection strategies like archival materials. In this section, I will be drawing on my readings from Moules et al. (2015) in their book *Conducting Hermeneutic Research*, because they offer a concise discussion on the applications of hermeneutics as research methodology.

Individual and Focus Group Interviews

I invited participants with a letter of invitation (please see Appendix #B for Information Letter). Based on demonstrated interest, five participants were selected for the study, and each interview lasted two hours. I provide a detailed introduction of each of the participants in the analysis chapter. The individual interviews took place in one of the private meeting rooms at the institution. The meeting room was chosen for its privacy and noise proof environment. Due to staff schedules, interviews were scheduled and conducted at times participants identified as convenient. After each interview, participants were asked if they would like anything deleted from their interviews and reminded of the time duration within which they could make such a request. The focus group interview took place after all the individual interviews had been conducted, it was a semi-structured style conversation designed to seek, build on, and clarify issues that have been raised by individual participants in the individual interviews.

Interviewing in Hermeneutic Research. Moules et al. (2015) assert that the interview is the most common way of gathering data in hermeneutic research and interviews have a place of importance because of the value placed on language and conversation. Interviews in hermeneutic research are dialogic and, as Smith (1991) asserts, each interlocutor (researcher and participant) must come into the conversation with a sense of openness and “forgetfulness” of self that allows them to risk having their perspective changed. Each person must come to the conversation open to learning, and open to the possibilities of interpretations of an idea. Similarly, Gadamer (2013),

detailing the nature of conversation and dialogue in hermeneutics, notes that a dialogue is an art of testing and questioning in which participants remain open and, as he notes, “the first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us . . . to conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter” (p. 375).

Conversation comes from Latin *conversa*, which means, “turning around together,” and *conversari*, which means “to dwell with, to keep company with, to wander together with.” Conceptualizing a curriculum of original difficulty will entail going beyond a conversation that seeks to merely gain information or understanding of another’s perspective. Conversation, in the context of my research, entails being open to the process of being acted upon by the topic, wandering with my participants in the dense, unfamiliar paths of ethical intercultural communication, turning around together and pacing backward, forward and returning to the middle. This type of conversation allows for meanings to be made collectively because as Smith (1991) notes, meaning is always a function of referential and relational negotiations. Even though hermeneutic researchers do not go into the interview with an uncompromising list of questions, the topic being investigated determines the structure; hence, in my own research, I have kept the topic central in the conversation while mindfully listening and asking questions (Moules et al., 2015). Please see Appendix #A for a list of broad questions asked during the interviews.

The interviewer in hermeneutic research is an important research instrument because they have to show great skill in the ability to determine which direction to stir the conversation. In the hermeneutic research tradition, the interviewer, not the participants, directs the interview because, as Moules et al., (2015) note, “it is not just about them telling their stories and

recreating them or preserving them to explain human experience . . . but rather what in their stories and experience has something to say to, and about, the topic” (p. 89).

In line with hermeneutic research, I did not create predetermined themes. Categories for analysis were developed based on things that “called me” from interview transcripts. While focus groups have strengths like discovering the collective perspective, and synthesis and validation of ideas (Gibbs, 2012), they have also been criticized on the grounds that they create issues of confidentiality, problems in managing groups especially in cases of conflicts. To mitigate this, participants signed a confidentiality agreement indicating that they understood that issues discussed during the focus group interviews should not be further discussed outside the group once the interview was over.

Ethical Considerations

I received ethical approval for this research from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board and Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Research Ethics Board in the year 2019. As mentioned in a previous chapter, I carried out the data collection portion of this research while I was in my previous role of curriculum specialist. Being a curriculum coordinator in the context of my research raised ethical issues of power relations. To explore ways that I could conduct research ethically in my context, I searched the literature to find out how other scholars have addressed similar dilemmas, and my most valuable insights have come from scholars writing about ethics in action research (Howe & Moses, 1999; Parsons, 2015; Ritchie, 2006; Zeni, 1998). While my research may not be explicitly considered action research, it shares the characteristic of an “insider” research. Conducting such insider research raises ethical dilemmas because the researcher is intricately part of the context and relationships being investigated. Addressing such dilemmas by traditional ethical guidelines for research sometimes

poses problems. Speaking about such ethical conflicts, Zeni (1998) details that research by teachers, curriculum coordinators and other insiders fall in the category she refers to as “qualitative research by insiders” (p. 10) and traditional outsider researcher guidelines that apply to many other research studies may not apply to insider research. Similarly, Parsons (2015) notes that when conducting insider research, following the ethics of outsider research can negatively impact the desire for collaborative communication and conversations with colleagues. I therefore provide an explanation of my role in the department at the time of data collection, and discuss issues of power (e.g., who wields power over me and who I exercise some power over).

My Role

As the curriculum coordinator at the time of data collection, I collaborated with instructors to design and review lesson plans, assessments, and all other instructional materials. I also coordinated professional development sessions on topics that are relevant to ESL teaching and learning. At the professional development events, teachers often led sessions on pedagogical issues they were passionate or curious about. I also led several sessions.

Power Relations

Data collection for this research was started and completed before I assumed the role of academic chair. As already mentioned above, at the time of data collection, I was a curriculum specialist and I reported directly to the chair of the department. All instructors consulted with me on issues of curriculum materials. In relation to their teaching, they reported directly to the chair, who is also responsible for performance appraisals, in-class observations, and contract review and termination. The chair did not confer with me or consult me about decisions regarding performance, review, contracts, hiring, or termination of appointments. Still, it is important to consider what implicit or indirect power may exist between the curriculum coordinator and

instructors. I had some power in making the final call on what curriculum documents may be reviewed, updated, or changed; however, this power could only be exercised after consultation and meetings with instructors. If there were problematic lessons or assessments, instructors took that up with me and I had a duty to review said lessons and work with instructors to improve them.

Losses and Gains of Conducting Research in My Teaching Context

During the research design phase, I considered whether it was a good idea to carry out this project in my context instead of a different teaching context where there would not be complex relationships. Following my reflection on this question, I decided that carrying out this research in my context is in response to a need and an address that might be better understood in context and in conversation with those who have jointly identified and expressed these needs. As Parsons (2015) noted, much education research is conducted by people who have little or no understanding of the context of the research, and while such studies may be of benefit for research and scholarship in the specific field or study, they often do not have direct benefits for the teaching and learning contexts in which they are carried out.

On the other hand, my research topic, as I detail in Chapter One, came from the relationships and conversations built with instructors in my context. My research emerged out of a collective yearning for the group to explore possibilities of classroom applications in intercultural communication. My response as an educator who places value on the co-construction of knowledge is to engage instructors in a conversation that invites us to re-envision intercultural communication pedagogy for ESL instruction. We were able to ask such complex questions of one another because of the community of sharing, history, and relationships that had existed for nearly three years at the time of data collection. I do not share this relationship with

teachers in any other context. The complex and sometimes uncomfortable nature of dialogue about intercultural communication makes trust, vulnerability, and context crucial for meaningful conversations; it would have been a nearly impossible task to invite such qualities from teachers in unfamiliar contexts. The relationship and trust we already have as a community made it possible for there to be conversations that allow concerns and hopes to be frankly expressed. Pine (2009) rightly captured this importance of context and community in research when he noted that “human actions always take place in context and must be understood in context” (p. 31).

Addressing similar ethical dilemmas in action research, Ritchie (2006) suggests that researchers or program coordinators who research teachers or students may re/position themselves as colleagues and researcher during interviews in order to open up alternative ways of generating new interpretive resources about the teachers’ lived worlds. In such situations, Ritchie and Rigano (2001) emphasize that teachers need to be made aware of the changed purposes of the research and the alternative positions the researcher and program coordinator are assuming. Positioning myself as a researcher-colleague working with instructors in my context offered alternative ways to proceed in spite of the implied power I may have had in the department. Such positioning was already at work in the collegial atmosphere we had built over the years in the conversation series. Ethical guidelines for research also invite the researcher to consider and disclose what they potentially stand to gain from the research and what potential benefits and losses might be for participants. In the following sections, I discuss some benefits of my proposed research to instructors in my teaching context.

Benefits to Participants

Howe and Moses (1999) argued that educational research should be “for teaching,” not just “on teaching” (p. 34). Similarly, an important ethical consideration when conducting research is the general good that such study will bring. My study directly addresses an existing gap in the lived experiences that instructors have themselves shared: the need to explore ways of taking up intercultural communication more explicitly in their classrooms. An indirect benefit of the research to instructors, especially now that I am the department chair, is that their views and perspectives, as shared in this dissertation, will now shape the way that the department proceeds with curriculum reviews. This comes from my own deep-seated conviction that teachers should have agency in educational reform instead of being treated as objects of reform.

On a larger front, the institution has also, in the last few years, included intercultural goals in its mission statements, and there is an expectation that departments in the institution tease out practical ways that intercultural communication could be taken up in the curriculum. To this end, a campus life department was started in 2018 to explore ways in which intercultural perspectives can be infused in curricula across the institution. Conducting my research in my context, with my participants, provided an opportunity for teachers to explore the challenges and possibilities of what is already being implicitly asked of them by the institution. Even better, they were able to explore these possibilities and challenges in the context and limitation of their specific teaching situation and learner demography. In this sense, I did not invite participants to do extra work that did not serve them any purpose; participating gave instructors professional development opportunities and support to do work they were already expected to do.

Giving Credit to Participants

While this research enables me to meet part of the requirements for my Ph.D. degree, I also considered ways to honor the contributions of participants whose input partly inform my

work. Parsons (2015) urges researchers to consider whose data might in some way be used in their work. He further suggests that researchers find ways to give credit or recognition to colleagues and participants. To appropriately acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues and accord them the recognition they deserve, I sought participants' approval to use their real names in the study. Zeni (1998) asserts that for insider research such as mine, “instead of anonymity, it may be wiser to seek full . . . credit for colleagues” (p. 15). Along similar lines, Zeni (1998) further notes that ethical procedures like anonymity of informants, disguised settings commonly used when outsiders participate in qualitative research, may truncate the very essence and goal of those wishing to conduct insider qualitative research. Similarly, Lincoln (1990), reflecting on the gains and losses of open acknowledgement, noted that “privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity regulations were written under assumptions that are ill suited” to qualitative research and further suggested that colleagues participate in research “as full, cooperative agents” (pp. 279-280). This raises some other ethical questions about the nature of information that might be shared and whether or not open recognition will cause harm. To mitigate this possibility, I included a statement in my information letter that gave participants a choice to participate openly (and be identified by their names) or anonymously. I also included a clause in the consent letter giving participants the choice to waive anonymity or consent to open recognition. See Appendix #C for a copy of the Consent Form and Appendix #D for the Anonymity Waiver Form.

Losses and Gains of Anonymity and Open Acknowledgement. Zeni (1998) admonishes insider researchers to consider the loss and gains of anonymity, and the loss and gains of open acknowledgement. While there are gains and losses of going with anonymity or open acknowledgement, a major ethical step I have taken is to leave that choice in the hands of

the participants because as Howe and Moses (1998) contend, “research participants have a responsibility to weigh the risks and benefits associated with participating in a research project and it is up to them to then decide where to take part” (p. 24). Participants in this research have chosen to be openly acknowledged for their contributions. In order to ensure ongoing consent, I invited participants to review my data analysis chapter to give them another opportunity to choose open acknowledgement or anonymity. After they had a chance to review the data analysis, all participants indicated that they would prefer to be openly acknowledged for their contributions. I have therefore used participants’ actual names throughout my analysis chapter.

Negotiating Authorship and Intellectual Property

A vital point to consider when undertaking a study that involves contribution from others, is intellectual property. Zeni (1998) urges researchers to consider making arrangements with participants regarding issues of “credit in manuscript, publication rights, royalties, other recognition” (p. 17). For instance, in a collaborative study like mine, negotiating authorship and ownership early on was important. This is why it was clearly stated in my information letter that this study is in partial fulfilment of a doctoral degree.

Informed Consent

Zeni (1998) suggests that, in insider research, the researcher describes their method of obtaining informed consent and also consider how many different kinds of consent are needed at different stages of the research. In my study, I presented prospective participants with an invitation letter that detailed important information about my proposed study. I also included two consent letters, the first, a consent to participate in the study and the second, a special consent to eventual publication. Both consent forms asked teachers to indicate if they wanted to remain anonymous in the study or be openly acknowledged. Due to the intimate and open nature that

interpretivist research relies on, interpretivist researchers have also suggested that informed consent be viewed as an ongoing dialogue which involves periodic reaffirmations of consent (Cornett & Chase, 1989; Howe & Moses, 1999).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in hermeneutic research takes on a uniquely different approach than with other research paradigms. In the hermeneutic research paradigm, Moules (2002) argues that data analysis starts with the consciousness that the meaning of data is always dependent on the researcher and reader. Analysis within such a tradition becomes understood as interpretation that requires the researcher to read the text over and over again to uncover general impressions and give attention to whatever calls on the reader and lingers, “perturbing and distinctive resonances, familiarities, differences, newness, and echoes” (Moules, 2002; p. 14).

To analyze my data, I read and reread all the individual transcripts of interviews to see what “called” me. In doing so, I did not look with an aim to find similarities and commonalities to generate themes as is common with many other methodologies, because, as Jardine (2008) explains, hermeneutic interpretation favors the instance, the event, the occurrence, the “fecundity of the individual case” (p. 51). A hermeneutic analysis is an exploration of the richness of meaning of the individual case, the individual subjects, and hence a similar pattern in the data is not a goal necessary for validation. I considered each individual idea or instance that my participants brought in their interview as already self-validating and authentic, so it did not require an external endorsement via repetition. As Moules (2002) eloquently puts it, “hermeneutics . . . pays attention to the instance, the particular, the event of something that does not require repetition to authenticate its arrival” (p. 14). I provide a more detailed discussion of my data analysis process in the next chapter.

The Hermeneutic Circle

While growing up, I often heard stories about the *dibia*, the traditional diviner in Nigerian society. When an ailment or misfortune falls on a person, the *dibia* is charged with the task of seeking the face of the ancestors and gods in order to interpret what that circumstance had to tell the person or family about their lives. Very often, people talked about seeing strange signs or premonitions accompanied with specific strange occurrences that signaled impending changes in circumstances. However, the people concerned were often not able to decode the full meanings of these premonitions, so they would visit the *dibia* for interpretation. Each *dibia* was not just a member of a generic skill or craft, every *dibia* was identified beyond their given name. Every fortune teller, seer or diviner, was identified by a family name, ancestral line and place and this was the unique signifier that informed the gifts of each. As a result, people in the community knew which *dibia* to visit for a different range of issues because it was believed that, for interpretation to take place, the *dibia* had to be possessed by the spirits of the entities that make up who they are: family lineage, ancestral bonds, geographical place and personal god. The way of knowing and seeing and, by extension, the interpretations of the *dibia* was guided and informed by these factors. Interpretation could not be made by people who had not donned the fullness of their personhood. To engage in interpretation and foretelling, the *dibia* had to physically don regalia that signified various aspects of their identity, this act was in itself a conscious calling forth of their personhood. In like manner, the researcher in the hermeneutic tradition must enter the hermeneutic circle with the totality of their being which include gender, culture, understandings, experiences, prejudices, anticipations, expectations because as Moules (2002) notes, it is these elements that are “brought forth as understanding” at the end (p. 15).

The hermeneutic circle is a metaphoric place of creativity where the researcher becomes immersed in their data in whole and in part by reading and re-reading until they are called by the particular. To submerge myself in data, I will have to wear the garments of my total being-ness. Who I am as a researcher, teacher, mother, daughter, woman, friend, all have to be brought to play in the art of interpretation. Gadamer (1989) asserts that the hermeneutic circle is not a formal space and it neither operates objectively nor subjectively. Interpretation emanating from the movement of interpreter and tradition in the circle is one borne out of the “commonality that binds us to the tradition” (p. 305).

Important Issues in Hermeneutic Research

Believability

Moules (2002) claims that qualitative research is evaluated by different criteria of judgment, validity and credibility than those used in other kinds of scientific inquiry. A hermeneutic research paradigm, while acknowledging that many interpretations could exist for an incident, also maintains that the better account will be one which rings true (Gadamer, 1989). Throughout my data analysis process, I tried to “reside in,” question, and return to my data long enough that my interpretation may ring true to my readers.

Credibility

In hermeneutic research, the issue of credibility is taken up in a different way than it is in some other qualitative research methodology. In research traditions like ethnographical research, for instance, credibility is perceived to come through as the researcher returns back and forth with interview subjects to validate and confirm their original meanings, hermeneutic research does not need this to show credibility. Instead, the researcher could invite other readers to offer their own interpretations and the advantage to this is that it opens up the possibilities for a range

of interpretation (valued in the hermeneutic tradition) that offer a departure from the narrowness of the researcher’s vision because, as Moules (2002) notes, “hermeneutics honors that all things can be answered differently” (p. 16).

Prejudices

From a hermeneutic standpoint, prejudices are not necessarily negative, as they are often understood to be in everyday usage. Gadamer (1989) notes that we all come to a subject with pre-understanding and fore-meanings and such pre-understanding shape what we notice, give voice to, or ignore. Until the Enlightenment, the concept of prejudice did not connote negative associations as it does today because prejudice “means a judgement that is rendered before all elements that determine a situation have been finally examined” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 283). As a black African woman, immigrant, teacher, mother, researcher, what fore-meanings and pre-judgments do I bring to my research and how do they shape the way I interpret the world? Engaging prejudices in hermeneutics is not denying them or refusing to acknowledge them. It is bringing them to the fore and subjecting them to examination and scrutiny. Prejudices only start to adversely affect our horizon when they are not brought to the fore and examined and, as Gadamer (1989) further explains, when we engage in interpretation, we exclude “everything that could hinder us from understanding it in terms of the subject matter. It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition” (p. 283).

In the next chapter, I step into my data and grapple with Hermes’ numerous tricks. As my interpretation unfolds, embedded in it is also a contextual discussion of my participants’ individual background and professional qualifications. I am choosing to introduce my participants in the next chapter in order to situate their individual stories within the context of the

knowledge and perspectives they share. This interconnected approach, in my opinion, helps to better read and interpret their perspectives in conjunction with their individual journeys.

Chapter 5: The Place of Masks and Spells

For me, writing this chapter was akin to a combination of discovering and uncovering spells, (un)casting spells, entering masked and veiled spaces, and pondering the nature of masks and concealment. Standing amidst such thick, rich, and fertile terrain masked in obscurity, should the goal then be to uncover and unmask? After much trial, I came to the realization that the more I attempted to unravel, the more portions of my work became concealed. This tricky game of concealment and unconcealment had me for months because I was trying to lay everything bare. I was stuck. Today, instead of peering behind veils and masks and attempting to strip things bare, I am choosing to work, walk with, and hold conversations with and about coverings, masks and obscurity, and unmasking. This darkness that seems to cloud my ability to “get it over with” is not the enemy; my occasional relapse into linearity and clarity is. I must let all of the elements of this dark wilderness speak to me, and, in turn, I have to find my voice and speak to and about them. Like the Biblical Moses, I must embrace the lone voice in the wilderness.

So, today, I read my transcripts for the umpteenth time and gave voice to my keyboard.

A Silent, Masked Face: Listening to My Data

I may have spent too much time wondering how I might compose myself around my data, how I might respectfully approach these rich conversations and develop an understanding that is worth sharing. I tried many ways to get started; I listened to the interviews over and over again: transcribing, listening again, and then re-reading transcripts. I listened in between for silences. And laughs. Shaky voices. My data held me spellbound and the conversations awed me. But it was the act of writing about and interpreting conversations that I am so intricately implicated in, which caused me to stay transfixed, unable to write. At first, I was fixated on the people—the

participants and myself—but thinking about the data only in relation to each participant’s story obscured the topic and caused me to lose focus. Similarly, thinking about the data only in terms of my own stories and experiences also kept me stuck. In order to find a way to navigate, I went back to reading about hermeneutic research and I was reminded by the wise and timely admonition of Moules et al. (2015), who cautioned that though the researcher is situated in the hermeneutic work, the work is neither an autoethnography nor an autobiography. As researchers, we are “situated in a conversation with the topic” and not in a conversation with ourselves, nor the participants (Moules et al., 2015, p. 120).

Once I was brought into remembrance of the fact that the topic, not the researcher, should be the driver of the research, I fell into the slippery path of trying to approach my data without being too involved. Consequently, my initial attempts at interpretation had me either trying to work too hard to detach myself totally or unable to reach beyond my own experiential complicity in the data. Again, my eyes of understanding were (re)illuminated by calling into remembrance the words of Moules et al. (2015), who clarified:

the point is not to remove subjectivity from the work, which is impossible, but to acknowledge how it allows us into the interpretive process. We can then take it up with a sense of responsibility in recognizing how it translates into the way we listen to participants, what we hear, what stands out to us, and how we interpret it. (p. 120)

These wise words revealed my own forgetfulness: I had been struggling to choose a side, to somehow write this chapter without remembering promises I had made in my earlier chapters, promises embedded in a hermeneutic inquiry—the promise to “reveal my baggage” up front. Objectivity and subjectivity are not contradictions, but aspects of human understanding that are inter-related because “we cannot see the world but from within the horizon of our own

experience, and yet experience is not fully our own, separate from the world. We share in histories, communities, and languages” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 278). Similarly, Moules et al. (2015) wisely added that “subjectivity is a resource, to be handled carefully, but nonetheless available to the research process” (p. 121). I therefore proceed with this renewed knowledge of how I may proceed with the resources available to me.

Leaning into Self as Resource

While conducting the interviews, I found myself drawn to some leads, probing further along some lines, considering some lines of inquiry and dropping them. These decisions were made as I listened to my participants and allowed myself to be “called” by particulars of the conversation. The ideas that seemed to catch my interest—those that made me nod vigorously in agreement, those that got me on the edge of my seat—were those that “pulled me short,” in ways that I could never have prepared for in advance. Why did some statements strike me like a bolt of lightning? What was this compelling familial, true ring that some expressions, words, and stories stirred in me? And why did I let other statements go? I went over my transcript again, noticing a pattern in the statements that “called” me. I realized that they were prejudices which Gadamer (1970) called prejudgments, and riding these prejudices instead of suppressing them made it possible for them to whisper unspoken words to me. As I read transcripts over and over and listened to recordings for the umpteenth time, these prejudices, like a road map, alerted me to the call of something said and heightened my awareness to the silent message being spoken to me. My prejudgments acted like oxygen and gave life to, quickened the logos of, and gave spirit and life to otherwise dead, clichéd expressions. It is our prejudices that give us the ability to be alert to and hear something that we may have missed otherwise; they shape what we can see and relate to and give us access to the world (Moules et al., 2015, p. 121).

Contemplating the Individual Mask

An Object of Curiosity

Thinking about the data as a whole has its place in hermeneutic research, and such contemplation is always in relation to the parts that make up the whole. Jardine (1992b) reminds us that hermeneutic research is preoccupied with the fecund, the individual case, the call of the instance. While contemplating the instances that addressed me in my data was important, an undeniable part of my developing understanding of my data was the concept of context and how interpretations are always situated and contextual. My attention was, therefore, constantly returning to the concept of the ESL classroom as a pedagogical site around which experiences can be interpreted and understood. The ESL classroom is the physical and conceptual space within which my research and interpretation unfolds, and as a result, it deserves to be whiled over.

As both a physical and conceptual space, it seems to me that the ESL classroom has not often been given a chance to *speak itself into our understanding* in a way that demonstrates the living character that it embodies as a pedagogical space. In order to proceed in ways that honor my hermeneutic paradigm, I must pause and contemplate what teachers, educators, and researchers really mean when they refer to “the ESL classroom.” Is the ESL classroom an immovable, unfeeling, inscrutable structure, caught and fixed in time, unmalleable, unchanging? While ESL methodologies, students, and teachers have often been scrutinized, in my opinion, not nearly as much attention has been given to understanding the space, the place, the *topos*, the *life* that is enacted in the ESL classroom. How might we devise research recommendations for a *topos* we have not come to fully behold? As a researcher working within the hermeneutic paradigm, I understand that every silenced entity must be given voice and

allowed to speak to us. Every entity that may have been dead to us must, in the light of an enlivened paradigm, come alive and be illuminated by light, so that our eyes of understanding may receive light.

As a site for ESL instruction and practice, it is possible as educators, to take the ESL classroom for granted because of a natural human tendency to omit the scrutiny of things that are considered aspects of our everydayness. Freire (2005) aptly explained this predisposition by noting that the mind does not work epistemologically in relation to the spontaneous orientation of the world because the mind is “not directed critically, questioningly, methodologically, rigorously, to the world or to the objects to which they are inclined” (p. 166). Consequently, researchers like me, looking to engage in interpretation, may have to examine a taken-for-granted aspect of their daily life as an “object of curiosity” (Freire, 2005, p. 166) in order to gain a better epistemological understanding of it. Such a scrutiny of the object of curiosity, according to Freire (2005), involves a “distancing” from the object to allow the possibility of developing an epistemological intimacy with it (p. 167). Similarly, we can come to more understanding of how an object functions in relation to others by drawing the object “into the centre” and holding it up to scrutiny “in a way that all other things organize themselves around this centre” (Jardine, 2016, p. 10). Further, Jardine (2016) contends that contemplating the specific object provides insight into the paradox that “every object is a unique center around which all others can be gathered, and, at the same time, that very object rests on the periphery of all others, proximal to some, distant to others” (p. 10). The ESL classroom as an enlived pedagogical space is *already* in the “homeground” of everything else while maintaining its own “homeground,” as beautifully captured below:

A thing is not itself means that, while continuing to be itself, it is in the home-ground of everything else. This way that everything has being on the homeground of everything else, without ceasing to be on its own homeground, means that the being of each thing is held up, kept standing, and made to be what it is by means of the being of all other things, or put the other way around, that each thing holds up the being of every other thing, keeps it standing, and makes it what it is. (Nishitani, 1982, p. 149)

This “drawing to the center” entails a contemplation of the topos and an unpacking of the topography of the ESL classroom. Etymologically, the term *topography* has its roots in Greek *topos*, which means “place” and *graphia* which means “writing.” In its noun form, topography also means a detailed graphic depiction of the surface characteristics of a place or object. Several professional and research fields (e.g., medicine, anatomy, humanities) have often engaged in describing the topography of a place in order to develop a fuller understanding of it. For instance, in medicine and anatomy, topography is used to describe a part of the body in relation to the area it is located. Some researchers working in the fields of social sciences and humanities have engaged topographical studies in order to understand place-based human experiences. Katz (2001) noted that topographical studies “can provide literal and figurative grounds for developing a critique of the social and political-economic relations sedimented into space and for examining the range of social practices through which place is produced” (pp. 720-721). Now, my readers, indulge me as I attempt to draw the ESL classroom into the center and listen to what its topography has to say to us.

Let us lift the ESL classroom up

And hold it up in the light

Behold it

Consider it

Contemplate it

While on it

As a living entity

A thing

A topos

Let us describe it in the image of a thing.

Somewhere

There is something to be said about “matters ecological, matters of place and settling down, of interrelatedness, of breath, and learning the ways of that place” (Jardine, 2017, p. 2), as these help educators while over “curriculum topics as living topographies” (p. 2). Consider things like being raised *somewhere*, attending school *somewhere*. Considering *place* as a pedagogical object allows for the emergence of valuable “fields of relations” (p. 2) that can shape a deeper understanding of a topic. Something about the *somewhere* of our journeys, of being born, raised, educated, married, divorced, and/or changed, can be brought to the center, under the pedagogical gaze. The ESL classroom as *somewhere* embodies a range of students’ and teachers’ experiences that are brought from *elsewhere* into the ESL classroom and how it is, in turn, shaping as it is being shaped by a range of the experiences that students and teachers bring from *elsewhere*.

Every interpretation makes sense only within a context, and I explore the ESL *somewhere* within the confines of my specific research context. In my geographical location, the ESL instructors in the context are mostly White, middle-aged, and educated, and they enter the ESL classroom as *somewhere* significantly different in look and feel as the surrounding predominantly White spaces outside their classroom. For these White ESL teachers, stepping into the ESL classroom can be like entering a sub-culture within the bigger culture of an institution and community. The students in this specific ESL classroom context do not speak English as a first language; nearly every student is an immigrant, born outside Canada. As a result, many White ESL teachers in this context experience the classroom as *somewhere* they modify their own pattern of language in order to accommodate the English language limitations of students in their classrooms. Sometimes, for this group of teachers, this may mean realizing

too late that the reason no student laughed to their hilarious joke was because they (students) missed the underlying cultural markers necessary for understanding the joke in context. Consequently, ESL teachers in this context have often shared that they do not tell jokes spontaneously; often they would weigh the joke over and over again, against the language competencies of the specific class. Hence, seemingly spontaneous jokes are often one the teacher has told successfully in the past. In this *somewhere* of the ESL classroom, teachers in my research context are constantly modifying their own intonation and cultural mannerisms in order to ensure intelligibility for students who may not be able to follow fast speech. These ESL teachers, therefore, often have to speak in ways that are different from their speech in non-ESL classroom contexts, using a modified speech rate, relatively few idiomatic expressions, few references to Canadian popular culture, etc.

In another profound way, the ESL classroom appears to be the *somewhere* that holds physical memoirs of travel and travelling stories and experiences—a kind of cultural exchange that brings the travelers to a recollection of memories of another *somewhere*. ESL students in my research context come from a range of countries—the most common countries being China, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Brazil. For these students, the ESL classroom may represent a *somewhere* very different from classrooms in their own countries, as they collide with a new educational culture in the Canadian classroom. Sometimes, this collision is experienced by a Canadian teacher in my context whose Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese students remind of their own time in these countries as tourists or language teachers. In this sense, the ESL classroom could here be viewed as somewhere that allows for rich recollections for the teacher and new cultural experiences for students.

In order for these diverse communities to interact and create a worthwhile learning experience, they often rely on kinships, familiarities, and ancestral connections to create a new *somewhere* in the ESL classroom. Sometimes these glimpses of connections beautifully and integrally reinforce the idea that everything is already always connected to everything else. This connection is found when a student shares a story of fleeing a war that claimed the lives of their known relatives—or when students share experiences of receiving news about a family member murdered by a terrorist organization. These stories are permanently engrained in the minds of participants and the walls of the classroom as learners and instructors take in such unplanned moments of vulnerability. Such sharing is possible in the *somewhere* of ESL classroom in my context.

It is the somewhere that a student whose country outlaws homosexual relationships gets to share a pair discussion with a gay classmate. While each of these students and teachers may be able to avoid gatherings of people they deem culturally and ideologically different than them in other contexts, their ESL classroom functions as somewhere they come face-to-face with both their compassionate and intolerant sides. It is the place that unusual alliances are formed, and a place a student gets to sit with a classmate from a country whose xenophobic attacks led to the death of the former’s family members.

In this *somewhere* of the ESL classroom in my research context, the best and worst feelings can be experienced. The big smile on the face of the student who discovers an interesting commonality between the Afghan culture and their own. The pleasant surprise of a student as they realize their Syrian classmate does in fact speak perfect Russian and lived in Moscow for five years. And there are other moments, when a male student expresses that a recipe topic would be useful in everyday life to their female classmates because “women need to

cook for the family,” and the awkward silence that follows when a female student or the teacher calls that bias to question. Or the female student who avoids pairing up with the Black male student during class discussions.

These are common experiences. *Somewhere* in my research context.

And these experiences must be brought under scrutiny. The ESL classroom is not just a place where grammar learning activities take place.

It is somewhere.

And life always happens somewhere.

The ESL classroom is a place of “ecological intimacy” (Jardine, 2017), which already contains stories and images of living, hurting, gathering, fleeing, journeying, homecoming, returning, failing, triumphing, being the same, being different, laughing, crying, interpreting, misinterpreting, sharing, holding back, giving, withholding. Now let us consider how living and sharing this space can be safer, richer, and more radiant.

The World in the Classroom

Perspectives of ESL instructors are crucial for understanding what intercultural ethics means in ESL teaching settings and how specific intercultural interactions may be interpreted and understood. In addition, ESL instructors’ perspectives provide authentic input into ways that an intercultural curriculum might be conceptualized, theorized, and problematized. A good starting point would, therefore, be to explore ESL teachers’ understanding of what intercultural communication entails, and attitudes or attributes they consider to be important in the development of interculturality. In order to explore my participants’ understanding in context, I present short profiles of each of my participants within the context of my conversations with them and what they said. Reminiscent of my cultural way of acknowledging elders, I offer a

symbolic chant to each participant in honour of their personal and professional background as I navigate their views on issues of intercultural communication and ESL instruction. Further, in recognition of their contribution to this research, and in line with their wishes, I refer to participants by their actual first names.

Open to the World: Instructor Jyoti

Jyoti is one of those educators who truly enjoys teaching: she is present, knowledgeable, firm, efficient and above all, humane and compassionate. One of the ways she views her role as a teacher is that she has been placed in the unique and privileged space of the classroom in order to make a difference in the world, one student at a time. Jyoti is interested in issues about culture, difference, and inclusion because she has had numerous experiences of being on the other side of discrimination. She arrived in Canada at the age of seven from her home in India after losing her father. In Canada, she grew up in a small orchard town in British Columbia, where her family was one of only two visible minority families in the community. Living in the predominantly White neighbourhood in the first few months of arrival, she often cried in frustration at her own inability to understand or speak the English language. The helplessness that she felt while faced with a language barrier remains one of the biggest influences on her practice as a teacher of ESL students who are in a similar language learning situation as she was.

As a result of her own personal experiences as an immigrant child, intercultural encounters and discussions about difference were always already a part of her life and daily experiences. She brings her own experiences of navigating life in Canadian society as a brown-skinned woman of Indian descent into her classroom teaching. Jyoti has a Bachelor of Education degree and taught elementary school kids in British Columbia and Australia before moving to western Canada. Before joining the ESL program in the research context, she worked in other

roles: as career counselor, settlement English instructor, and funding advisor. She has now been teaching ESL at the research department for over eight years.

In response to the question of attributes she values in students as it relates to intercultural interaction in class, Jyoti shared that she often starts each term with an admonition for her students to notice the diversity in the classroom and cultivate an attitude of openness toward others. In her words:

Look around. Do anyone of us look the same? We all look different. This is it. And the ones [students] that are more open-minded are the ones that are just loved, right? There is love. Their love towards humanity, right? And I've had really gracious students who are just open. They want to sit next to different people. They're curious. "How do you say your name? What does this mean? Do you want to try my food? What food are you trying?" And trying to find some common ground whether it's kids, family, siblings. Whatever it is, they're trying to reach out. (Jyoti)

However, some learners are not always as open-minded as others, and this may impact the learner's own learning negatively as well as create a negative class environment for other students and the instructor. The attribute of being open-minded is therefore a necessary starting point for students to cultivate an intercultural mindset:

Yes. I think open-mindedness is necessary for growth, for learning, right? I've had experiences, not a lot, but some students who are close-minded, who are very specific about, "I don't want to work with this gender or this nationality." And that just creates negativity in the classroom. And I think they're cutting their own toes off, because down the road, they're not going to have a choice. So that's something that I immediately say in

the first week is you don't get to choose who you work for and who you work with. So, if you want to be more successful, this is it. The world is in this classroom. (Jyoti)

Open to the World: Instructor Kelti

Kelti is a thoughtful, sensitive White teacher who always strives to be alert to the “climate” in the classroom and cultivate an attuneness to her students’ feelings and experiences. She is self-aware and interested in conversations about difference and diversity. She was an active regular at the biweekly conversation series and always had insightful perspectives to share with the group on topics related to diversity and difference. Born and raised in the northern territories of Canada, Kelti grew up within a society with a higher Indigenous population than is common in other areas in Canada. Her early life was shaped and impacted partly by the influences of Indigenous neighbours, elders, and leaders that she was surrounded by. However, she did not have much early contact with people from other cultures, like Africans or Indians. Her earliest remembrance of engaging critically with race, diversity, and difference was when she first moved out to another province in Canada. As a young professional, Kelti “started her journey outwards,” travelling to see other countries of the world to develop an understanding of different ways of being in the world. Since then, she has continued her “journey outwards” by travelling extensively to all continents of the world for extended periods of time. She holds an undergraduate and Masters’ degree in psychology and an Ed.D. in educational psychology and joined the research department about five years ago as an ESL instructor. I find her most endearing quality to be her ability to remain curious, unsure, open to learning, and at once sensitive and full of understanding when it comes to how difference plays out in her classrooms.

When asked what attributes are necessary for developing intercultural competence, she cited openness as an important attitude and provided a relatable explanation of why open-mindedness is crucial:

I think of just a willingness to be open to other cultures. I find it can be a little bit difficult, if they come, and many of them do come with some biases at the beginning. Some cultures seem to have a bias towards other cultures that are in the classroom. And I'm like, "Okay, that was a different kind of racism than- than I would expect" with White and dominant groups to other [minority] groups. But then seeing the different students that sometimes have this type of racism to other students was kind of a big surprise for me. (Kelti)

Kelti went on to explain her own observations—that some students tend to arrive with bias, assumptions, and preconceived notions about other cultures represented in the classroom. She attributes such bias to a lack of exposure to diverse worldviews or a lack of contact with diverse cultures, which is prevalent in predominantly monolithic cultures. In such monolithic cultures, information about other cultures and peoples tends to come from the media, with an exaggerated focus on negative representation. In the ESL class, she noted that apathy and aversion toward other cultures could be so profound that a student may blatantly refuse to interact with or work with classmates. The incident below is one such instance:

a few semesters ago, I had a student who refused to work in a group, and, she was Korean I think, and he was, I can't remember exactly what country. So, I suspected, uh, a racial bias. And I asked her, you know, because it was also a female and a male, but there are other guys. It's not like he's the only guy in the class. So I asked her, "you know, I can't really change groups, because you don't like somebody, has something to happened?"

And they're like, "Well, no, but we're afraid something will happen." I said, "Based on what?" Because, you know, my experience with this particular, other guy was that he's very respectful, but he's outgoing. You know, he is, demonstrative. Right? And so, I don't know if she was taking that as aggressive, so I let her change groups. And now I wonder if that was the right thing, right decision? So again, just an openness to listening to others perspectives and trying not to make assumptions. But how do you tell that to a student again. Right, if they're open or not? Sometimes you can tell by how they answer questions—I guess, part of it would be how they interact with other students from different cultures. Are they listening to them? Are they asking questions? Do they seem like they're interested in learning about the other people's cultures? (Kelti)

Instructors Jyoti and Kelti in their discussions above, highlight the importance of approaching intercultural encounters with the disposition of staying open to conversation and dialogue. As they further share, some learners are not often open to the possibility of dialogue with the other, such unwillingness to remain open to the possibility of understanding other perspectives, is also prevalent in many other contexts. In a wide variety of contexts today, both public and private, we face an outbreak of conflict and division in which there exists a disturbing failure to understand one another in the most vital of matters. Closely partnered with this phenomenon is what seems like a widespread rejection of all dialogue in which such an understanding might take place. From my perspective, we see this manifestation of a breakdown in communication on the global scene where there is a dangerous abandonment of dialogical relations and the turn to force abounds between nations, cultures, religions, and tribes. Some leaders around the world declare that the time for talk is over and that negotiation is futile. The most horrific expressions of such closed-mindedness and its effects have unfolded before our

eyes in recent times through police shootings of vulnerable populations over infractions that could have been resolved by dialogue.

Similarly, the inability to be open to conversation is also seen in a proliferation of a rhetoric based on the conversation ending “you just can’t understand me” because of a difference in gender, race, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity (Vilhauer, 2010, p. xi). To explore possibilities for addressing these intercultural issues in ESL education, I turn to Gadamer and curriculum specialists. My interest in Gadamer’s hermeneutics is inspired by his preoccupation with the questions of how we might communicate, understand, and approach others whose “ethos” differs from ours. Gadamer’s hermeneutics as extrapolated in his *Truth and Method* provides a lens for grappling with the conditions that make understanding possible, and a reconceptualization of an ethics of genuine human engagement and ways such engagement might lead to true dialogue which in turn nourishes the human life form. My aim is, therefore, to draw on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics to shed light on ethical conditions necessary for intercultural communication and dialogue to transpire in educational settings; more specifically, ESL settings.

To develop an interpretation of openness as a vital attribute for cultivating interculturality in ESL classrooms, I draw on Gadamer’s notion of ethical dialogue as explained by Vilhauer (2010) in what she calls “ethics of play.” Openness, as explained by instructors Kelti and Jyoti above, appears to be a desirable pre-existing attribute that if learners brought to the classroom space, may enhance their ability to engage more dialogically with others. Within the ESL classroom space, there is already the inevitable encounter with otherness: gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality, nationality. While all learners come into the pedagogical space with some level of understanding, they must inevitably encounter some conflicts in interaction with others

because “every new experience presents us with the possibility of alienation, confusion, and a rupture in understanding” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 114). Such a rupture is a vital component necessary for initial understanding to grow and become more enriched. The intercultural quality of openness in the ESL classroom, therefore, presents an opportunity to engage a dialogic relation with the other knowing that such an encounter may leave one changed forever. When faced with unfamiliarity of new meaning, new ethos, approaching with openness allows for interlocutors to confront their fears of such unfamiliar encounter through an “open-ended process of grasping the unfolding truths of our shared worlds” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 114).

The friction that comes with such a stretch in previous levels of understanding is often evident in many ways. In the ESL classroom, as tasks present scenarios that deal with more complex cultural values and beliefs, learners immediately start to experience a rise in confusion and puzzlement. For instance, when discussions of gender roles, family structure, or gender equality come up, both male and female students often struggle to comprehend how differently gender works in some cultures. However, an attitude of openness is what propels some students to move from stuck, learn from this other, and develop a richer understanding. For some learners who do not have similar attributes of openness, when confronted with the unfamiliar, they shut down, unable to carry on with the conversation. In the face of such debilitating breakdown and finality, educators are faced with two poignant questions: “what causes dialogue to break down? And, what do we do once it has?” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. xi). Throughout this chapter, I attempt to explore ways that dialogue often breaks down in the ESL classroom, and how we might reopen the possibility of conversation.

To understand how a curriculum might ethically reopen the possibility of conversation in the face of such a shut down, studying the other as a detached object of investigation to be

analyzed can only lead to essentialization of cultures. For instance, previous attempts at integrating dynamics of culture in second language education often focused on studying cultures through national categories. However, every attempt at understanding another must include a consideration of the one who is looking to understand in the communicative dynamics at play. To cultivate an understanding of another in the hermeneutic tradition, “we must open ourselves to a kind of listening in which we allow our own prejudgments to be truly challenged and transformed.” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 115). For the ESL curriculum, then, this might mean engaging in tasks that truly challenge students’ worldviews in order that learners might reach a place of rupture, and subsequently, understanding. However, an important lesson we learn from Gadamer’s hermeneutics is that both interlocutors have to go into the dialogue with “shared ethical commitment and mutual openness” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 115), speakers must share the goal of wanting to understand each other. We also know from the accounts of instructors above that not all learners come to the learning context with such ethical commitments. Gadamer has been criticized for this limitation because not everyone might come into the conversation with openness, and not everyone might be willing to be spoken to (Vilhauer, 2010). Aptly put,

Gadamer’s guide past the various roadblocks that we set for ourselves, in our dialogical relations with others, begins where the biggest and most threatening contemporary obstacle to dialogue and understanding has already been overcome—namely, the refusal to listen. (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 115)

It is that kind of closedness, and refusal to engage that participants in this research expressed concern over. When a student outrightly rejects an unfamiliar idea, concept, or person and refuses to listen and has become closed to dialogue, how might educators get such learners to

engage? This chapter is preoccupied with that question and ways that conversation might be reopened once there has been a breakdown as there often is in the ESL classroom.

Courage to Face the World: Instructor Greg

Greg offers a story of how curriculum “play” might engender students who do not necessarily come to the learning context to “notice” opportunities for intercultural learning, and, perhaps, begin to work toward the possibility of listening to and about the other. He was born to a British father and a Ukrainian mother. Raised in an upper-middle class community in Ontario, his earliest recollection of cultural orientations was within his own family, where he and his siblings were raised in a predominantly Ukrainian cultural way, in spite of his father being of English descent. He did not see himself as similar to other White kids at his school, as his family’s values were not quite traditional for White Europeans in the 1960s and 1970s. While this cultural identity shaped Greg’s early understanding of difference and diversity, he is even more knowledgeable about difference, inequality, and social justice from his own experiences as a gay White male in Canadian society. As an openly gay man, Greg often shares his unique experiences with colleagues, and provides curriculum input for integrating and including diverse sexual orientations in curriculum materials. Previously trained as a lawyer before joining the ESL teaching field, Greg has been teaching in the research context for about five years. In response to the question of attributes necessary for developing interculturality, he identified courage as a desirable starting point. He noted that ESL students already possess this courageous attitude, evidenced by their decision to move to an entirely new culture and country. This courageous nature of immigrant ESL students is an attribute that ESL teachers could tap into when they consider how topics around intercultural competence might be broached in ESL settings.

A way to tap into the courageous and curious attitude that ESL students already bring into the learning context may be to integrate content into curriculum that covertly draws students' attention to meaningful topics capable of engendering questions from students who would otherwise not engage in more direct ways. For instance, in one of Greg's lessons, a pre-task reading referenced a young girl whose two fathers were planning her birthday. A male student found the concept of such non-conventional family composition shocking and disturbing. Though the focus of the pre-task reading activity was scanning information for preparing a party invitation, the covert reference to two fathers was enough to catch this student attention. Because the student found the concept of two fathers problematic, he spoke up to raise his concerns. However, this student was able to go past his own initial confusion and he demonstrated some openness to learn by asking the instructor to explain how it was possible for a child to have two mothers. In predominantly traditional families of the world, understandings of family are still based on a notion of “father” and “mother,” so the idea of two fathers or two mothers, while comparatively more common, is bound to be a rapturous discovery for learners from parts of the world where such is unheard of, or even criminalized.

Curious About the World: Instructor Jim

Jim has been teaching at the research department for nearly seven years. In my earliest interactions with him, I recall musing on how easygoing, even-natured, and friendly with everyone he is. Born in western Canada to Christian parents of Irish and Gaelic background and having attended elementary and high schools with classmates who were predominantly White Canadians of German, Polish, Italian, and Portuguese background, his earliest understanding of intercultural awareness has been largely shaped by some incidents in his adult life that he did not quite understand or pay attention to in his earlier life. As a young adult, a personal encounter

with his own family’s racial prejudice toward a Black friend of his sister sparked his own interest in race and oppression, as it started to become clear to him that a vital part of the experiences of Black and Indigenous people in Canada did not quite align with his own childhood experiences of growing up a White male in a predominantly Judo-European Christian community. Jim views the cultural diversity represented in his ESL classroom as an opportunity to “travel the globe.” He joined the research department about seven years ago as an ESL teacher and, since the start of the conversation series, he has actively participated in the research sessions.

Moving from one’s country to a totally different country and culture could be perceived as a bold step. Jim put it best when he explained that immigrant students already demonstrate an intercultural attitude by the sheer act of relocating to a new country with a different culture. He asserts that a common intercultural attribute that ESL students already have is curiosity, which gives them the will to seek to move to, settle, and thrive in a new country. He explained that such students are already open to learning about other cultures and, so, curiosity and openness go hand-in-hand:

Well, I assume that most of my students are curious. Because they've come from a different culture, from, you know, they're very brave, they've taken this big jump to come to this, this new country, to a brand-new environment. So I would expect there is-- there is some curiosity, otherwise, why would they come here. Even if it's done for, you know, economic reasons-- I'm seeing that right now, in both my speech and com classes. I have a large contingent of Spanish speakers and Brazilian speakers and Vietnamese speakers. And it's, I'm noticing a lot of oh, really? Well, oh, that's what you do, oh, really? Oh, yeah, what are you doing? What are you doing? What are you doing? So, I've seen a lot

of that. Well, along with curiosity is openness, Just the willingness to try to understand other cultures, other perspectives. (Jim)

Empathy for the World Around Us: Instructor Holly

Holly was born in Canada to parents of German and Ukranian heritage, and generations of both sides of her family have lived in Canada for over a century. Her paternal grandmother, though born in Canada, was a *Doukhobor*—a member of a highly religious Russian group that lives a communal life much similar to the Amish or Hutterite. The *Doukhobors* did not much believe in modern medicine and technology, so they grew their own food naturally. While Holly’s Ukranian maternal family believed in modern medicine, her paternal family believed in growing medicinal herbs to treat ailments and getting every human need from the earth. In her early years, she was raised in a predominantly White community with hardly any visible minorities until her family moved to another community with a vibrant Indigenous community.

While Holly had some contact with Indigenous people as a result of growing up in that community, she had little to no contact with other racial groups until adulthood. To make up for this non-exposure to diversity, as soon as she was of legal age, Holly immediately started to travel as a way to understand the world better. This curiosity about other cultures led her to travel to teach ESL in several countries abroad before joining the research context as an ESL teacher nearly eight years ago. Much of her professional interests have been in the area of inclusion and inclusive classroom practices. Her commitment to diversity is evident in her constant self-reflection, her intuitive connection to her students, and her ability to unpack the nuances of intercultural communication in her classroom.

Holly views curiosity as an inherent attribute that some immigrant students, depending on their personal predispositions, possess. However, she notes that not every immigrant ESL student

necessarily arrives in the classroom with the attribute of curiosity. In her own observation, students who are curious about other cultures tend to succeed better in tasks centred around culture. As she explains:

We usually see students that are maybe more successful with tasks that are centered around cultural issues, they usually have a major interest in difference, right? And so they come in almost curious and you'll see two different kinds of students, students who are not interested at all that are here just for the language [learning] and maybe to go back home or get a job. But then there are other students who are really interested in one another as well as the things that we talk about that are related to Canadian and cultural contacts, so I think that the curiosity maybe. This interest or just wanting to know more [about other cultures] and understand and you don't get that in every student, right?

(Holly)

In Holly's perspective, empathy is an often overlooked, but vital component of developing intercultural competence. She explains that curiosity is not necessarily useful for understanding someone else's reality, (as is often required in intercultural encounters) and understand their reality, but empathy is.

What I have tried to do in the sections above, is establish an understanding of some of the attitudes and attributes that students either come into the ESL classroom with or not. I will now turn my attention to a discussion what participants identified as aspects of intercultural communication that shape interactions in the ESL classroom.

Chapter 6: Lingering at the Intersection of Race and Religion

Preface

This chapter and the next one directly engage the ways that discursive aspects of identity like race, gender, sexuality, and religion influence and shape intercultural encounters and dialogue. My interpretation of data shows how discourses about intercultural communication are always intertwined with issues of identity. When people engage in a dialogue with others, they enter such conversations with the totality of who they are—for example, as female, Black, Christian, straight. All these facets of identity frame our worldviews, biases, and prejudices, and they are all brought fully into our communication with others and the ways that we interpret our understanding of others and our world. Consequently, in this section, I draw upon previous scholarly attempts at theorizing discursive aspects of identity and the ways that these discursive aspects of identity function to include or exclude others in pedagogical contexts. I am choosing in this chapter to deploy critical theory to language identity in ways that philosophical hermeneutics does not quite explicate. In recent years, it has become clear in the field of second language teaching that discursive aspects of identity shape intercultural encounters, and there has been increased recognition of the relevance of these discursive elements to meaningful engagement with intercultural communication pedagogy. Many scholars in this area have, therefore, advocated for a critical intercultural communication.

Commenting on earlier drafts of this chapter, my supervisor encouraged me to consider questions of difference, power, oppression, and inequality, and how these can be addressed as I attempt to theorize a hermeneutic framework for intercultural communication in ESL contexts. My supervisor’s questions around questions of power and difference within a hermeneutic and African wisdom paradigm inspired me to dig deeper into how I could frame a hermeneutic

understanding of intercultural communication that acknowledges and engages issues of difference and power. As mentioned in earlier chapters, philosophical hermeneutics is often perceived as lacking direct engagement with issues of difference and power and the ways these come to play in any intercultural dialogue where people attempt to understand each other. This concern has also been echoed by scholars writing about intercultural hermeneutics (see Spariosu, 2014; Simpson, 2021; Warnke, 2016; Xie, 2014), a field concerned with the “theory and practice of interpretation between cultures” (Xie, 2014, p. 3). In order to make more direct connections to intercultural communication, hermeneutics, power, and difference which philosophical hermeneutics does not as yet directly address, I turned to the literature of intercultural hermeneutics. Scholarship in the field of intercultural hermeneutics has drawn on critical theory to interpret issues of power and difference within a hermeneutic framework for intercultural communication. There is emerging understanding in the field of intercultural hermeneutics that any worthwhile intercultural hermeneutics framework must also engage a critical dimension of power and difference, and must attend to the ways these come to bear in a hermeneutic understanding of intercultural communication.

Consequently, there has been increased attention to critical intercultural hermeneutics as a framework for engaging intercultural communication (for example, Warnke, 2016; Wong, 2014; Xie, 2014). A critical hermeneutic framework aims to draw on a critical function of hermeneutics for intercultural communication to explicate what might otherwise be hidden or unconscious in our understanding in order to make them available for questioning and critique. This critical function of hermeneutics, especially in the realm of intercultural communication and identity discourses, has often been perceived as a missing component in traditional hermeneutics (Simpson, 2021; Warnke, 2016; Wong, 2014; Xie, 2014). Within a critical intercultural

hermeneutic framework, critique seeks to engage with issues of intercultural stereotypes and prejudices and the underlying values that inform them, but more than that, critique has the goal of leading one towards a self-reflexive understanding and the scrutiny of the long-held assumptions of one’s own culture. Critique, in the sense that it is adapted in critical intercultural hermeneutics, aims to promote genuine intercultural understanding and dialogue by starting out with the premise that such understanding is only possible through a thorough consideration of different systems of assumptions (Xie, 2014, p. 5). While my engagement with hermeneutics in this research paper is primarily within the lens of philosophical hermeneutics in an ESL research context, I am dialoguing with critical intercultural hermeneutics here to develop an understanding of how hermeneutics might dwell side by side with issues of difference and power.

An important question for any hermeneutic engagement with intercultural communication is how we might reconcile the tensions posed by questions of similarities and differences in hermeneutics (Wong, 2014). Philosophical hermeneutics calls us, on the one hand, to understand others as being like us and interconnected with us, and on the other hand, to acknowledge the different worldviews others hold. Cultivating such a fine balance requires an engagement with issues of difference and power; as Wong (2014) puts it, “to plausibly interpret others as being like us, we need sufficient diversity within the ‘us’ . . . whom we decide to include in the ‘us’ depends on relations of power” (p. 165). This chapter leans into critical theory’s description of identity groups that are often engaged in dialogue in the ESL classroom so that we may fully understand these relations of power and the processes of inclusion or exclusion that happen in the intercultural context of the ESL classroom. After presenting the range of differences that learners bring to the ESL classroom, I pick up the thread on a

philosophical hermeneutics that is aimed at ethically engaging with others in spite of these differences and that offers ways we might remain open to the possibility of being transformed by an encounter with another’s way of thinking and being. While I agree that a hermeneutic framework must speak to issues of differences and power that punctuate intercultural encounters, I do not adapt the theory of critical intercultural hermeneutics framework for my data analysis but instead call on critical theory to describe and language issues of power discussed in this chapter. While critical intercultural hermeneutics has been valuable for describing the importance of engaging issues of power in a hermeneutic framework for intercultural communication, the length and breadth of critical intercultural hermeneutics draws from multiple scholars including Gadamer, Habermas, Foucault, Ricoeur, and many others. For the purposes of this current research, I find it problematic to attempt to lump together the work of these different scholars given their multiple divergences and sometime contradictory philosophical stance. In the sections that follow, I attempt to interpret the ways that discursive aspects of identity shape intercultural communication in the ESL classroom.

As I reflect on the Black Lives Matter protests and the All Lives Matter rebuttal, and on the more recent occurrence of the Capitol Hill attack by far-right groups whose loyalty lie in the preservation of the ideal of a “superior White America,” I am reminded of why my research matters in the first place. As I watched one media coverage of racist attacks after another across the world, an interesting and ubiquitous phrase used to deny, dismiss, and minimize these intolerable acts of racism is the explanation that these acts are perpetrated by “bad eggs.” When the Canadian police force was accused of systemic racism in their policing of Indigenous and minority groups, some top representatives of the force claimed that these “unprofessional” acts were being perpetrated by “bad eggs” in the force. In the U.S. context, police response to the

unwarranted killings of innocent Black men in the past decade has often followed the rhetoric of “a few bad eggs in our midst.” What purpose does this denial and minimization serve in the wider society? As I contemplated this concept of bad eggs, I wondered about educational contexts, especially my own context, and its responses to issues of race and racism. The more I reflected on the topic of race in relation to my data, the more I realized that within my own specific research context of ESL pedagogy and curriculum, more than race, there are other discursive aspects of identity at play simultaneously among ESL students and teachers, and in the ESL classroom. I realized also that there was no way to do justice to the topic by isolating individual aspects of ESL learners’ identities and experiences. Many ESL students in Canada are at once impacted by multiple intersecting issues of marginalization and discrimination, even as they in turn also demonstrate some bias in their own interactions with those they consider “different.” In order to proceed hermeneutically with a topic so complex and multilayered, I now look inwards to my African wisdom roots again to contemplate the idea of interrelationships and interconnection.

I often wondered, even worried about a most curious thing as a child. I would be taking a leisurely walk with an older relative and, every so often, we would come across a huge bowl of food and bottles of drinks right in the middle of the road. “Don’t step over it. Don’t ever step over the sacrifice,” my aunt would sternly warn as she hurriedly grabbed my arm and nudged me to the other side of the street, away from this spectacularly packaged, freshly cooked meal that someone had left right in the middle of the road. As we walked away, I would turn around and see others doing the exact same thing, moving away. When I grew older, I realized that the commonality in these “food offerings” or “sacrifice” was that they were always placed at an intersection, what Nigerians commonly referred to as a “T-junction.” When I grew old enough to ask questions, my grandmother explained to me that sacrificial offerings of any kind were always placed at an intersection, the place where several paths met. The intersection, much unlike the Western traffic intersection, was most often connected to footpaths, the very spot

where everyone going different directions or routes would unavoidably “meet” and continue on their separate journeys. The place of intersection was an important cultural site in traditional Nigerian society in my childhood days. It was a place of encounter, convergence, offering, sacrifice, negotiation, and terror. Terror, because the offerings were often jarring and shocking, no matter how frequently one had seen them. Clandestine, because no one ever actually saw someone put the offerings there. The intersection held stories of private secrets and burdens that a seemingly homogenous group of people lived with in their everyday lives. The intersection was a site of remembrance, that despite our similarities and shared lives, there were individuals in our midst, tortured and beaten, from private pains and unique circumstances not shared by all.

This concept of intersection has been useful to me for contemplating the varied and overlapping ways that issues of identity function in everyday settings, and in this case, ESL contexts. Participants in this research raised issues of sexuality, race, gender, and religion as discursive aspects of identity that would benefit from closer engagement in the ESL curricula. However, a closer look at my data also revealed that these aspects of ESL student identities were also so intricately interwoven in their impact on students’ lived experiences that there might be no meaningful way to analyze the data by isolating each individual aspect of student identity.

This overlapping intersection of marginalization is commonly referred to as intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Originally theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw within a Black feminist field, intersectionality was adapted as a lens for exploring African-American women’s experiences in order to understand ways that systems of power and oppression impact them in multiple ways. In her ground-breaking articles on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) argued that there was a lack of effective language for addressing the internal disputes within antiracist movements, which were both sexist and patriarchal. Crenshaw further argued that, as long as antiracist and feminist movements were seen as separate struggles, there was not much hope for significant progress. Instead of such a fragmented approach for thinking about oppression, Crenshaw contends that intersectionality is a useful theory for contemplating power

and the ways it clusters around some groups and excludes others. Intersectionality, therefore, attempts to uncover the systems of subordination and the multifaceted ways that those systems are experienced by those marginalized and those privileged by same system (1991, p. 1297). Such a reconceptualization of the ways that identity, power, and oppression is analyzed can be useful for developing a better understanding of groups.

In addition, intersectionality as a lens can provide the clarity and courage needed to “challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, ‘home’ to us, in the name of parts of us that are not made at home” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299). I find that the ESL classroom is in many ways “home” to ESL students, who are often new immigrants facing a range of challenges ranging from their sudden “minority status” in a foreign country, the loss of “speakership” as a result of language barriers, and the feeling of displacement from one’s own kith and kin. The commonality of challenges shared among ESL students could be said to provide a comparatively more comforting sense of being “at home,” especially given the opportunities that the ESL classroom provides learners for connecting with people from same nationality or similar cultural background. However, this “home” that is the ESL classroom does not always extend an “at home” welcome to every facet of each individual student’s identity because each member of the ESL classroom arrives with their own prejudices and bias. In a sense, my dissertation is an attempt to “call out” and challenge ESL classrooms to be more of a home to all the identity parts that each individual learner brings. Intersectionality theory provides the language and framework to “better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299). Later adapted for theorizing identity and power issues across academic scholarships, intersectionality proceeds with the notion that analyzing systems of oppression from a singular

lens “omits the experiences of those whose multiple identities work in tandem to impact their experience navigating social institutions” (Roland, 2017, p. 15).

In this chapter, I would like to contemplate the ways that race and racism function in the ESL classroom, but especially, I am interested in exploring how race shapes intercultural communication in the ESL classroom. Because racialized groups also often suffer other forms of intersecting oppression, I will explore ways in which gendered racism intersects with religious bias and Islamophobia in the ESL classroom and what these mean for reimagining ethical intercultural communication for ESL pedagogy and curriculum. Lastly, I problematize the ways that the ESL classroom, despite its outward appearance of “at-homeness,” often excludes non-heterosexual identities, how such exclusion impacts intercultural dialogue, and ways that ESL practitioners might engage the topic ethically.

At the Intersection of Race in the ESL Classroom

How does one speak hermeneutically to topics of racism, religious identity or bias? How do I “rethink” a topic already so profoundly divisive, in ways that stay true to the hermeneutic notion of our collective interdependence and unity? How do we *see* difference respectfully, even as we hold on to the threads of our familial, interwoven kinship? I am pondering the topic of difference and discrimination in the hope that I may open new spaces for how we might go along together. There is a way in which the topic of race in the ESL classroom is often evasive. But there is also a way in which race always shows up, without fail, because the ESL classroom is often made up of learners from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Because students in the ESL classroom are from such a diverse racial background, it is often possible to assume that the classroom is free of racism. Without a critical lens, racialized students might be assumed to just “get” it when it comes to racism. Sometimes, instructors may see the similarities in students’

histories and experiences on arrival to Canada as an indication that ESL students would naturally get along. This likelihood for ESL instructors to sometimes miss racial discrimination among ESL students in their classroom is discussed in more detail below by one of the participants:

I have been troubled since the interview, I have been thinking, and I am wondering why I didn't seem to have mentioned race and inter-racial relations as an area that could be taken up with more complexity in the ESL classroom. I have been beating myself up over it, I mean, does this mean that I do not see race as important? I don't think so, I mean do I not see my students interacting? Do I not watch out for inter-racial interactions, why did I not have much more to say about this? Do I really believe that race is no longer an issue in our classroom or even curriculum? I don't know . . . but I have had a sleepless night about it...just wondering why race did not seem that important to me at the time of interview. (Greg)

During the interview, I was slightly surprised at the relatively fewer references to race and inter-racial tension as an area that needs attention in the curricular engagement of intercultural communication and dialogue. A few days after his initial interview, Greg revealed that he had himself been conflicted about his relatively scant engagement with the topic of race during the interviews. He wondered if this omission was an indication that race was already adequately taken up in the curriculum or if the omission signaled a blindspot on his part. Greg also further explained that this omission might also be attributable to the discomfort associated with discussing racism. Likewise, some participants did not volunteer much information about ways race could be taken up in the curriculum. Greg, in his first interview, for instance, noted that students in the ESL classroom seemed to be more accepting of racial differences than other kinds of differences:

You know in the few times that it comes to play, it's really interesting to see that I don't have to step in when it's interracial issues because the students seem much more culturally accepting of racial differences than they do of gender or sexuality issues, or religious issues. It's a much more-- it's much more acceptance of interracial issues than those others. Definitely. Really, there is and if they are not accepting of those visible differences or racial differences, they don't express that lack of acceptance as clearly as they do with sexuality, gender, or religious issues. They don't accept maybe because they know it's not okay. So that's interesting, but it certainly—it's not where I meet that wall of a misunderstanding that you do when you're with those other issues. (Greg)

In my opinion, this comparative comfort level with racial difference may also partly be because racial difference is already such a prominent visible feature of the ESL classroom that it would reasonably appear that to survive even the first few days in an ESL classroom, a certain level of racial tolerance would be a vital skill many students cultivate very quickly. As Greg noted, the Speech curriculum taught in the teaching context already integrated lots of role-plays that provided opportunities to highlight and bring attention to issues of appropriateness in Canadian cultural contexts. For instance, reading, writing, and listening texts often depict Canadian cultural contexts in relation to work, social communication, family structure, and texts often integrate ethnically diverse names. But there is also an assumption in these instructional materials that ethnically diverse names, conversations about cultural differences might naturally lead to conversations about race or make students more likely to bring up discussions about race and racial differences. As discussed in the previous chapter, it would seem that students who travel to other countries for study or work already have a certain kind of openness and curiosity and perhaps familiarity with being in the same spaces with people from multiple racial

backgrounds. These intercultural attributes that ESL students are perceived to already possess may also partly explain why some instructors believe that ESL students are tolerant of racial difference. However, discussions about cultural diversity and differences, while they may sometimes overlap with race, are not often effective ways of interrogating issues of racial inequality, power, and oppressive systems that subjugate groups of people because of their race. A cultural lens to the teaching of race may also not provide opportunities to interrogate and dismantle harmful and ingrained tropes of racial discrimination that show up in several ways in ESL research, teaching, and learning contexts.

As a discourse, racism is present in every facet of society life and shapes institutional structures (Kubota & Lin, 2006). A growing body of research in the field of TESOL has drawn on Critical Race Theory (CRT) to theorize ways in which imperialism and racism are at the centre of ESL practices and to interrogate the historical and ongoing role of the English language in promoting Whiteness (Aboshiha, 2015; Amin, 2000; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Canagarajah, 2002; Faez, 2011; Holliday, 2005; Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Javier, 2016; Kramadibrata, 2016; Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013; Kubota, 2004, Rivers & Ross, 2013). Race, in the ESL teaching context, is both clandestine and relentless. The power of racial discrimination in this setting lies on its ability to both appear to be “doing something” about bringing people of different races and ethnicities to a better understanding of one another while surreptitiously ignoring manifestations of race (including gender, sexuality, class) as a system of power, marginalization, and privilege. More specifically, in the teaching context in which this research was carried out, race and racial interactions, according to participants in this research, are assumed to be the most represented in curricula because curriculum content often references cultural similarities and differences and how people of other cultures work, study, eat, and

generally live life. In addition, on the first day of each term, every instructor delivers an orientation that includes a discussion of the human rights charter as it related to protected groups, and students are advised that both the institution and the program have zero tolerance for racial discrimination. Findings from this study shows that despite limited attempts to address racial discrimination described above, one of the most conspicuous and damaging workings of race and racism in the ESL context continues to be an ongoing challenge to overcome. In the next section, I provide a discussion of the “native-speaker” and “non-native” speaker dichotomy in ESL pedagogical contexts.

Native and Non-Native Speaker Dichotomy

As mentioned in earlier chapters, many ESL practitioners and curriculum developers often perceive that the sheer presence of diverse racial and cultural groups in ESL classrooms automatically means that ethical intercultural communication is taking place, an assumption that often has ESL classrooms commonly referred to as “intercultural spaces.” As a result, discussing racism is “often uncomfortable, particularly in TESOL and applied linguistics” (Kubota, 2002, p. 86). However, discomfort does not excuse the responsibility to “examine how racism or any other injustices influence its knowledge and practice” (p. 86).

One of the ways that racism and racist ideologies are enacted in the ESL field is through the discourse of “native” versus “non-native” speakers of English and, by extension, “accent” as a designation for the “other,” foreign speaker. Years of research in the field have often focused on comparing “native” speaker speech patterns as a basis and benchmark around which EFL and ESL speaker language acquisition and development is conceptualized and understood. Beyond language acquisition theory, references are often made to “mother-tongue interference” for describing limitations that language learners may face in their learning journey. In contrast,

“native speaker” and “first-language speaker,” are terms often used to describe those whose superior competence in the English language is unquestionable as a result of having “inherited” the language at birth. Such language, accepted almost unquestionably earlier on in the field, has now come under scrutiny by language scholars (Canagarajah, 1999a, 1999b; Amin, 1997; 2000; Kubota, 2002). The concept of the native speaker is in itself rooted in nativism (Amin, 2000), which is an “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign . . . connections” (Higam, 1965, p. 7). In his study, Amin (2000) suggested that the “native speaker of English” construct is so “embedded in myth, that it is daunting to attempt to disentangle fact from fable” (p. 6) and such a biased stance is not only about language competence but entrenched in discourses of racism and colonialism that shape individual and institutional perceptions of and assessments of non-White speakers of English.

Further, the native-speaker construct establishes a notion that there is only one right kind of English and that the right kind is spoken by those who have inner-circle status (Thomas, 1999). If native speakers define the “right” standard, therefore, then it goes without saying that how a native speaker sounds would represent a benchmark for measuring a correctly enunciated spoken English. Against this background, it would, therefore, make sense that those who sound “native” may qualify better to teach the language in the minds of ESL students, who, in turn, earnestly anticipate their own “native-speaker-like” mastery of the language to navigate Canadian society successfully. Consequently, on arrival in Canada, in my observations, ESL students exhibit a range of microaggressions towards non-native teachers of English who happen to be their teacher. Jyoti shared her experience of discrimination at the hands of ESL students who questioned her competence as an English language teacher due to their own perceptions of her as a “foreign” other:

I've had an experience with my old Manager where someone [a student]-- the week before classes began, saw my name, contacted her, and said, "I don't want to be in that person's classroom." And the Manager said, "Why? Classes haven't even started. You don't even know her." And she said, "I don't understand those people's accents." So that person judged me before seeing me based on my name. (Jyoti)

Jyoti shared that prospective ESL students often looked up their instructors prior to the start of each term, and on discovering that she was to be a teacher, would reach out to the program manager requesting a change of class to a “White” teacher. As a visible minority herself, she has always been invested in topics of race and inclusive practices in the classroom because she has always felt that her “place” as an ESL teacher in the ESL classroom was questioned and challenged, forcing her to “earn” her existence in the field by going through a range of “performative” acts with each class in the first few days of class. These performative acts include an overly detailed introduction of herself, with emphasis on her educational and professional credentials. Jyoti noted that while “White” colleagues did not need to justify their presence and position as ESL teachers, at the beginning of each new course, she always had to “break the ice” by pointedly starting a discussion about her suitability and eligibility as an ESL teacher. Despite having moved to Canada at the age of seven, her status as a visible racial minority invoked prejudicial responses from her prospective and actual students, who often doubted her competence solely on the basis of her race. Such bias by ESL students aligns with observations in a study in Ontario (Amin, 1997), which found that minority ESL female teachers reported similar tropes of discrimination based on perceived “foreignness.” That Jyoti, despite having lived in Canada since the age of seven, continues to encounter such discrimination speaks to the interconnectedness of discourses of accent and racism. It would appear that Whiteness

seems to be the benchmark for assessing a teacher’s competency to teach ESL and, in similar ways, being “Canadian” is also associated with Whiteness in the national consciousness, leading to a perception that only “White people are ‘real’ Canadians” (Amin, 1997, p. 580). As Amin (1999; 2000) further noted, “whiteness and the native speaker construct are in a complicit relation” (p. 87).

Black Bodies in The ESL Classroom

Discourses about Black bodies as fearful, threatening, and suspicious, have permeated historical racial profiling of Black people and invited police brutality across the globe. Such rhetoric is often characterized by the “I feared for my life” trope, in order to justify disproportionate violent reactions to Black people. ESL classrooms in Canada often present racially tense platforms for such harmful rhetoric promoted in the media, to play out. As an object of gaze, the black, non-English speaking body also doubly invokes the bias. While racism has been explored extensively in relation to the justice system, much research has not explored ways in which racialized ESL (especially Black) students experience racism at the hands of their White-European classmates. Kelti was surprised to discover that Black ESL learners could suffer racism at the hands of European and other light-skinned Asian learners. As she narrates:

A few semesters ago, I had a student who refused to work in a group with another student and she was Korean I think, and he was . . . I can't remember exactly what country. So, I suspected a racial bias. And I asked her, you know, because it was also a female and a male, but there are other guys. It's not like he's the only guy in the class. So I asked her, "You know, I can't really change groups, because you don't like somebody, has something happened?" And she responded, “Well, no, but I’m afraid something will happen.” Then, I asked her, "based on what?" Because, you know, my experience with

this particular, guy was that he's very respectful, but he's outgoing. You know, he is, um, demonstrative. Right? And so, I don't know if she was taking that as aggressive. So I let her change groups. And now I wonder if that was the right thing, right decision? (Kelti)

Kelti struggled to process the Korean student's response as racism initially because prior to the incident, she had never had to consider the possibility that racialized minority students could in turn discriminate other races based on their color. She explains:

At the beginning, some cultures seem to have a bias towards other cultures that are in the classroom. And I'm like, "Okay, that was a different kind of racism than I would expect from the White or dominant group in Canada to others." But then, seeing the different students that sometimes have this type of racism to other students was kind of a big surprise for me. When it's students from more monocultural societies—and [students from] darker skin cultures, there is quite a bit of racism. And I think it's just because of not having at all encountered much of it. And so maybe the only knowledge they have is from the news, which is, you know, always bad. (Kelti)

While much research has not been done on this kind of racism in education settings, a study by Ritter (2016), which was conducted at UCLA, revealed that international students often arrive with their own views about race, internalized through media representations of different racial categories. Their findings showed that East Asian international students had developed their own system of global racial hierarchies in an order of racial superiority: Whites, East Asians, African Americans, Southeast Asians. The study found that the ranking of African-Americans and Southeast Asians was attributed to their darker skin colour.

A similar study by Hanassab (2006) at UCLA revealed that Middle Eastern and African students reported the most discrimination on and off campus. In the context of Hanassab's

research, “African-American” was a generally delineated category for all Black students including African and Caribbean Black students. In Kelti’s classroom above, it can be assumed that internalized perceptions of blackness as dangerous and threatening perpetuated by the media, can lead to minority students confronting Black students as a threat to safety. Because the discourse of racialization is itself fluid and often irrational, racialized people are often othered by a denigration of their mannerisms. For example, Black people are often perceived as excessive on physical gestures and loud in voice pitch. These are then read against White standards of communication and re-read as aggressive and frightening. Many East Asian students, as revealed by Grant & Lee’s (2009) study, have a hierarchy of desired cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Kim, 2008) which places White English-speaking cultures at the top, and other less desirable cultures at the bottom. Some minority students may therefore avoid interactions with certain racial out-groups in order to avoid jeopardizing their own pursuit of such a cultural capital (Ritter, 2016).

The problematic posed by such bias is further complicated by its obscure nature. For instance, because instructor Kelti had no prior knowledge that such kinds of discrimination was possible, she was unsure how to best address it because as she noted, race usually interacts with other identity categories like gender. Was her student, for instance, asking to leave the group because she was uncomfortable with the Black student’s maleness? Perhaps both. After placing the Korean student in another group, Kelti observed keenly and found that the Korean student worked well with her new group members who happened to be Korean too.

Racial relations in the context of the ESL classroom also intersects with issues of class. Ritter (2016) notes that a growing niche of wealthy students from “China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia are flocking into American universities” (p. 368) and this trend is similar in

Canada. Referred to as the Students of the New Global Elite (SONGEs) (Vandrick, 2011), these affluent students can often afford high tuition costs, can take vacations around the world (Ritter, 2016), and are looking for the extra prestige of a Canadian education. In the ESL classroom, where students represent a wide variety of races and where most students often belong to minoritized racial groups, a perception of similarities constructed through other social identity categories like gender and class might inform how ESL students negotiate relationships and interactions within that space.

As Kelti and other scholars (Gilliam et al., 2002; Ritter, 2016) have rightly observed, media has played a primary role in shaping negative perceptions about other races, mostly African-Americans (often including all Black people) and Latinos. American media often portrays African-Americans as “villainous, dim, and indigent, while European-Americans have been portrayed as heroic, intelligent, and powerful” (Ritter, 2016). In a Rocky Mountain University study (Smith et al., 2007), East Asian international students reported being the least comfortable interacting with African-American students but felt the most comfortable interacting with White students. The researchers attributed this to media portrayal of Whites as desirable and successful, this stance has also been taken in other studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2007). A majority of Asian international students interviewed in Ritter’s (2016) study cited films like *Crash*, NBA basketball games, and hip-hop videos for inculcating them with ideas that African-Americans were dangerous, aggressive, good at dancing, and athletic” (p. 378). These findings are also echoed in other studies (Fujioka, 2000; Johnson, 2007; Russell, 1991; Talbot et al., 1999; Tan et al., 2009).

In addition to racial discrimination from other racialized minority students, Black ESL are also, for similar reasons discussed above, discriminated by White students. Kelti shared an

incident in her class in which a White female student blatantly refused to be paired with three Black male students. One of the Black students reported the incident to Kelti, citing his own suspicions that the student had declined to work with him and other Black men because of their race. Kelti, however, struggled with best approaches for handling such a matter because she was wary about making conclusions that a behaviour was racially motivated when it could have been a gendered bias or a range of other reasons. She also did not feel very comfortable about approaching the female student with the report from her classmates and eventually chose the option of encouraging the Black student not to pay mind to how others chose to view him.

The above discussion raises question of why racism is still going on in the ESL field despite several calls in the last three decades for ESL teaching to include critical frameworks for studying culture and the power dimensions of language. In the sections below, I present an interpretation of how participants think race might be more meaningfully taken up in ESL curricula.

More Curricula Focus on Power Systems

Despite the incidences mentioned above, participants in this interview often did not notice cases of overt racism amongst students in their classrooms. This is partly due to the perception that ESL students are open to and respectful of other cultures. More significantly, the perception that ESL students are generally more accepting of race may also be attributable to the way the topic is (not) taken up in the curriculum at the specific context of my research, and in many post-secondary ESL contexts. In my context, issues of difference are often explored through the comparison of cultural values around time, physical space, politeness, “appropriate” workplace behaviour in Canadian settings, with the target culture often being the ultimate standard. Stereotypes are also often explored in lesson materials without an accompanying

discussion on ways in which such stereotypes produce socio-economic inequality, deny access, or perpetuate the oppression of certain groups. For instance, students in the research context are often invited to write daily reflective journals on their cultural experiences in Canada. Journal questions encourage students to compare their experiences in Canada to experiences in other countries they have lived, explain the challenges of adapting to a new culture, and what they do daily in order to improve their English language and Canadian cultural knowledge. This focus on comparing cultural similarities and differences is in line with prevalent practices in Europe and elsewhere as shown by research in the field which I discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Such uncritical engagement with culture often creates the illusion that all is well and everyone is getting along fine. Jim for instance, notes that his students typically get along together, demonstrate curiosity about each other’s cultural stories, and show genuine curiosity when they listen to other students’ cultural perspectives about workplace culture, etiquettes, time, punctuality, entertainment, and similar aspects of cultural life. However, in my experience, discussions around such topics are usually never designed to be problematic or critical to begin with, and very rarely, is there a cause to challenge underlying questions of values, equality, discrimination, or power inequality. This aversion to creating topics that could likely stir up difficult conversations and emotions may be partly due to the fact that the ESL classroom is already such a profoundly emotionally charged space inundated with newly arrived immigrants who are grappling with a new culture. It would appear reasonable to keep tasks focused on topics that do not further stir division or rile up difficult emotions in students.

For instance, in the Communications course taught in the research department, selected readings for some tasks include content that make references to race and racial relations.

However, the focus of the actual reading and writing task is usually on task completion and language features used to perform functions of describing, making a report, expressing concern, completing a form, etc. As discussed in previous chapters, this tendency to focus exclusively on language outcomes to the detriment of socio-political realities of in ESL learners has been decried by various scholars (Guilherme, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Pennycook, 1999, 2001). The focus on language outcome makes it difficult for both students and teachers to engage with important issues of race and power inequality that may be contained in students’ own writings or the reading and listening texts provided. In a Level Four Communications course, for instance, the language function for one the tasks is completing a complaint form or incident report. The students are required to either make up stories or use actual real-life experiences in completing a form-filling task about a time they faced harassment of any kind. Students often get very creative and present a range of interesting scenarios of a time they faced harassment or discrimination. As part of the Task-Based Language Teaching lesson stages, selected learners present their tasks to peers in front of the class and feedback is provided to the presenter on language use, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and grammatical accuracy. Within such a pedagogy that focuses on language outcomes, there is often no opportunity to engage with the content of the experiences shared by the students or an opportunity to interrogate systems that drive such discrimination and bias. Instructor Jyoti explains the specific task:

In Communication [Level] Four, we have the harassment task, right, where it's a made-up situation. Students have to fill-out a form. And part of it is based on race, right? So the pre-task—and then students will have to make up a situation where they've experienced some sort of harassment. And a lot of times, I found the situation had actually happened to them. right? So just as an example. The last time I taught Level Four Communications

a few terms ago, a student had come up to share. I usually don't hand-pick anybody that day [for this task]. It's always, "If you're comfortable, come up." Because it's touchy. And I don't want anybody to break down or anything or make them uncomfortable. So she was happy to share. And it was apparently, where she started working, people had come out into the lunchroom. And she goes, "Everyday, I would find things that said 'Made in China' put into the middle of the table." So, someone was intentionally putting products, because she was the only Chinese person there, to make her feel uncomfortable, right? And so there is times when that happens, that just broke my heart. You just stop, because I just can't believe someone would do that to someone else, right? So then there is this awkward moment where everyone's uncomfortable now. No one's really saying anything in the class. And then you just have to say, "Unfortunately, that happens." Right? "There are people, but you don't have to take it. Don't let people run over you, because you look different than them. You have rights." Cause a lot of our students don't know they have rights. They think, "I'm here. I'm at the bottom of the barrel. I got to pay for stuff. I got kids to feed. I just have to suck it up." Right?

Despite Instructor Jyoti's own attempt, whenever such situations come up, to spend a few minutes to address what she calls "the humanity of it," she finds that the fact that the lesson plan allows only for a focus on language or at the very best, a short discussion of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of language used in the text. In Jyoti's opinion, a critical engagement is never possible without compromising a huge part of the lesson outcomes. She suggests that in order for ESL instruction to truly develop interculturality in students, the discussion of political dimensions of immigrant experiences which often includes racism, must be explicitly included as a lesson outcome. She further contends that within such a framework, the romanticization of

Canada as the “nice” country of benevolent people must be challenged and deconstructed and students must be equipped with information about inequality in Canadian socio-political structures, and how they might navigate and stand up for their rights. As she further explains:

It would be nice to see lessons that are empowering, too. We focus a lot on diplomacy and tact, right, but it is great to tell students, "This is how you should be handling it. Canadians tend to be polite and all these. But there is a lot of wrongdoing in Canadian society, too." There's a lot of ugliness, right, but how we communicate to students, it's too much like, "Be polite. Say your 'please' and 'thank you's.' And don't do this. And don't rock the boat. You got to be nice to your Supervisor. Handle it diplomatically." That's all important. But then there's another part where people can take advantage of you, right? And mistreat you and abuse you. And it could be racism. It could be gender. It could be age. It empowers our students to say, "Hey, you have rights here. And this is how you stand up for yourself. So you don't always have to “please and thank you.” You can also fill other form. Here is where you go." Because I do think, once you start talking about it, a lot of heads start coming up and sharing. And maybe we need to have more of these types of lesson. (Jyoti)

This tendency for Canadians to view Canada as “above” racism and oppression, and as a country benevolently welcoming of diversity has been identified as a major troubling factor in social justice pedagogy and activism (Lund, 2006, p. 206). Boyko (1995) captured it aptly when he argued that “Canadians are often guilty of ignoring or warping our past while sanctimoniously feeling somewhat removed from, and superior to, countries struggling with racial problems and harbouring histories marked by slavery or racial violence” (p. 15).

A More Explicit Focus

Jyoti’s excerpt above raises a number of key arguments for why the topic of race might need a more explicit engagement in ESL curricula. To begin, covert curricular attempts at addressing the topic often rely on instructors’ ability to make connections to class tasks and issues of race. For such an indirect strategy to work, instructors must not just have capacity to “notice” opportunities to teach about race, they must also be willing to do so and comfortable with engaging the topic of race. For instance, instructors Greg and Jim both believed that ESL students generally get along well with one another. Greg also further commented on the fact that learners in the context demonstrated more interculturality in relation to racial difference than they did for other identity categories like sexuality or gender.

However, there may be a generalization on Greg’s part which may be attributable to not paying enough attention to racial tensions. In contrast, Jyoti and myself, two racialized minority women have always been conscious of how race works in the ESL classroom because of our own experiences of being discriminated as “non-native speakers” in ESL settings. In order for instructors to consistently address race as an important discursive element that shapes intercultural dialogue and encounters, ESL curricula has to attend to the topic of race more explicitly.

Due to the covert nature of racial bias in ESL classrooms, and the accompanying awkwardness or defensiveness that typically meet discussions of race and racism in classroom settings, many instructors, (especially White instructors) may find it difficult to call out racism or engage with the topic. In such circumstances, as Kelti shares, White teachers, unsure of how they might best approach a situation with racial undertones, may make the difficult decision to let the event slide rather than address it. Kelti was herself extremely disturbed by her own response to the race-related incident in her class and was conflicted as to what the right way to approach the

issue would be. Eventually, she broached the topic in one of our conversations, and it was insightful to find that many other colleagues also expressed that they would have found it equally challenging to deal with the situation. On the one hand, they expressed concerns about wrongfully accusing anyone of being racist and, on the other, they felt they had a responsibility to make their classroom space equitable and just for everyone. This reluctance on the part of some instructors is, in part, due to the common perceptions about the significant import of the “racist” tag, as such, they may prefer to extend the benefit of doubt to students especially when such racist incidents are not overt. Further, limited curricula guidance on how teachers may unpack nuanced issues of inter-racial tensions and limited focus on teaching about discrimination are all factors that contribute to instructors’ reluctance to address issues of race.

Overall, limited understanding of what constitutes racial discrimination and the reluctance to engage students in conversations about their own racial bias speaks to the subtle nature of how race and racism work in the ESL classroom. In addition, the workings of race in ESL classrooms often intersect with gender-bias, classism and even islamophobia, rendering it difficult to spot, analyze, or address. For instance, many scholars in Canadian settings have written about ways in which Muslim students, especially male Muslim students experience racism differently in educational and societal contexts. This disparity further highlights the importance of framing discussions about identity and intersectionality in ways that allow for the acknowledgement that just belonging to similar racial and religious category does not necessarily mean that individuals would have similar experiences. For example, while Muslim students might appear to battle against similar discriminatory government policies in the West as they navigate casual and institutionalized Islamophobia, it is also true that male Muslim students face more heightened discrimination because of the cultural imagery of the immigrant Muslim male

as “terrorist.” In this specific instance, the experiences of immigrant Muslim males highlight how “race, religion, and nation are already working through gender” (Yep & Chivers, 2017, p. 4). Along similar lines, Muslim women are also usually stereotyped as victims of their religion and culture.

Based on the foregoing, attempts to develop a framework for ethical intercultural communication for ESL settings must, therefore, consider other intersecting factors of identity. More than that, an effective approach to intersectionality acknowledges that “our personal, intersectional lived experiences are ongoing, perpetual, imperfect, dynamic, emotional, and consequential” (Yep & Chivers, 2017, p. 4). Within such a framework of “thick intersectionality,” we can understand ours and others’ intersectionality as fluid and subject to change from “moment to moment within the context of history, geography, and politics” (Yep & Chivers, 2017, p. 4). In the next section, I provide a discussion of findings from this research on the ways that religion interacts with race and gender to alienate categories of learners within the ESL classroom and ways that ESL curricula might more actively address religious diversity in the ESL curricula.

At the Intersection: Race, Islamophobia, and Religion

It is crucial that discussions about race also includes a focus on the ways various forms of oppression intersects. Within such a conversation, educators must also pay attention to developing an understanding of how racism intersects with islamophobia by adopting a critical framework (Zine, 2006). Such a framework will entail interrogating “the construction of Islam as a threat, dangerous, and unwelcome, and for considering the impact such perception will have on Muslims” (Zine, 2006). Islamophobia can be described as “a fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systematic forms of oppression and

discrimination” (Zine, 2003). Also important for engagement are critical conversations about nation states’ sanction policies against Muslim students. Post 9/11 and the “war on terror,” Muslims have been cast as the enemy of and threat to peace in the West. Within Canada, the discourses of citizenship, nationalism and security inordinately target Canadian Muslims (Zine, 2012). In the context of this research, I am interested in the ways that such harmful construction of Islam impact intercultural dialogue in the ESL classroom. If we understand that all kinds of discriminatory perceptions of people might not only shut down conversation but limit the possibility of interaction in the first place, then it is important to rethink how ESL curricula might ensure that a conversation with another can go on.

In the research context, participants expressed that the curriculum is silent on all kinds of religious references. Discussions with participants also revealed that they thought Muslim students were the only religious group who significantly faced discrimination or negative bias from other students. This kind of discrimination appears to be borne of some fear of Muslim students as dangerous and unhinged, a perception perpetrated by state-sponsored propaganda in the West. Often, the possibility of conversation is instantly foreclosed as soon as a student shares their “Islamic” name, or for female Muslim students, as soon as they show up in class with the hijab. Instructor Jyoti describes a situation in her class and how she handled it:

So, I told you about the name Mohamed, right? There is this uncomfortableness, that shift in the class. People start moving around fanning in their seats. I have a student right now who wears a hijab. And someone asked her if her husband makes her wear it, right? So to kind of give some context, she's the only student in my class who wears one. So I showed a video that I found on TED Talks. And it's titled *What Does My Headscarf Mean to You*. And it's about an Australian woman from Somalia who grew up in Australia. She does

this amazing 14-minute TED Talk where she is like, "If you look at me . . ." She comes in fully-covered, "What would you think?" And then she goes, "Would you think that I work on a rig?" And then she takes off her clothes. And she's wearing an overall. And she's like, "'Cause I do." And then, "Would you think that I'm a race-car driver?" And then she shows that she's a race-car driver. She's a kick boxer. She's been in wrestling championships. And I could see that student wearing the hijab just so proud. Just sitting there like, "Hell, yeah. And don't you guys judge me because I wear . . ." Right? So empowerment? I think I said that. It would be nice because there's so many groups that don't have power in this culture. And it's for things that they can't control. You know, who they are. What kind of religion or culture they're born into. If we could give them empowerment through showing the other students, too. Because I'm sure students that are from Asia and have only grown up in that part of the world have no idea about Middle East or vice versa. It would be nice for them to see. (Jyoti)

Jyoti's excerpt above is an example of the ways that intersectional oppression might often impact some ESL students. The male student Mohammed (not actual name) cited above has to navigate the Canadian society, and the ESL classroom, facing discrimination and phobia invoked by his name and race. In a study conducted in Canada, Zine (2001) found that the experiences of Muslim youths in Canada are made even more difficult by racism and Islamophobia, which in turn "target the maintenance of Muslim youths' religious, racialized, ethnic, and gendered identities" (p. 401). In the study, Sajjad, a Muslim immigrant student whose family had moved from Guyana when he was seven years old, narrated his experiences of dual-alienation as a racially and religiously minoritized student who felt like an outsider on account of his skin color and culturally different lifestyle (Zine, 2001, p. 411). The Muslim woman Jyoti describes above,

in addition to challenges of access that all immigrants face, deals with bias that her hijab often invokes within some Canadian settings. In another study of Muslim girls in Canadian schools by Zine (2006), Muslim girls and women who practice veiling were shown to be susceptible to the dual oppression of racism and Islamophobia within the larger society, and patriarchal oppression and sexism from within their own communities. Similar to perceptions about Black students, bias about Muslim students is often shaped through harmful media representations of Islam as a violent religion. In addition, microaggressions, performed through questions like, “Does your husband force you to wear the hijab?” foreclose conversation on both sides and make the task of intercultural dialogue near impossible until something is done pedagogically and curricularly that reopens conversation.

Participants in this research all mentioned that despite religion, in this case Islam, often being a significant component that shapes interactions in the ESL classroom, the curriculum is often silent on the topic. I was particularly intrigued by Greg’s discussion of religious diversity in response to the question of components of intercultural competence he would like to see in an ESL curriculum. He was particularly interested in the global socio-political sanctions of Islam and ways in which that excludes Muslim ESL students and incite discrimination against them at a micro level in classroom settings. Greg further argued that religious beliefs, or the irrational fear of another individual, based on their religious beliefs, are some factors that underlie intercultural interactions in the ESL classroom and, as such, any attempt at fostering interculturality in ESL pedagogy must take issues of religious inclusion into consideration. He explains that, while the department’s curriculum and inclusion workshops have sometimes touched on issues of racial prejudice, and religious accommodation, more needs to be done to engage underlying values that drive intolerance for people who identify as Muslims:

I think religious diversity. Absolutely, it needs to be dealt with because increasing tolerance about religious diversity is something we have to deal with. Who would have thought 20 years ago that this would be happening to us [humanity]? So, I think tasks around accommodation of religious diversity would be a great task and I don't think I see any in the stuff that I have taught where we dealt with the issue.

I think it's necessary—because our students are increasingly uncomfortable with traveling to the United States, because of the populous movement, I hate the term because it's not popular at all. I think they'd also see—and I see religious intolerance in Western Europe, the debacle of Brexit. The refugee crisis in Southern Europe. The rejection of Muslims coming to places like Italy and Greece, and Spain. So, of course, our students are feeling under siege. And hopefully one of the reasons they're here is because they don't feel that way but that needs to be a discussion. And this increase in the movement to intolerance and to closing borders and then closing doors is something I think our students feel very, very acutely. So when I see students from any country that's Middle Eastern or North African Muslim, those students I think they feel under siege at times.

(Greg)

Asked what he means by “under siege,” Greg responds,

The idea that they can't practice their faith openly and safely, certainly would make that a difficult discussion, a difficult feeling for them. I think that is case in point. (Greg)

In the excerpt above, Greg's discussion highlights the importance of pedagogical considerations of issues beyond individual acts of discrimination to macro, international socio-political systems that perpetuate systems of oppression against minoritized groups. As he further clarifies, so long

as Muslim students in ESL classrooms continue to be “under siege” based on their faith, educators have a duty to address the topic as a matter of pedagogical concern.

I was immediately “addressed” by the expression “under siege.” What does it mean for Muslim ESL students to be “under siege”? The phrases “laying siege” and “under siege” are often used in military and combat contexts because, in literal terms, both expressions refer to a state of being “surrounded by the armed forces of the military or police, unable to leave or escape.” In metaphorical usage, the terms often refer to the condition of facing increasing pressure or difficulty or being subject to criticisms or personal attacks from various different sources or angles. In educational contexts, “laying siege,” “being under siege,” and “being besieged,” have been variously used by scholars in describing current socio-political climate in education settings (Smith, 1999; Jardine, 2015; Donsky, 2015). For instance, Smith (1999) used “monstrous stages of siege” to describe present socio-cultural and political conditions under which children are taught in schools. Jardine (2015) and Donsky (2015) also referred to the condition of teachers “being besieged” when they are constantly subjected to performance appraisals and review that suggest that they are not doing enough. However, this interview with Greg was the first time I had heard the expression used to describe Muslim students.

While Canada has historically been suspicious of non-Christian immigrants in general (Kaplan, 2015), Muslims, as a group, have been under sustained, systematic verbal attacks globally. Such relentless hostility fits into a figurative meaning of *being under siege*. This siege on Muslim students, as Greg explains, is also demonstrated in systematic actions of Western governments against immigrants from Muslim countries, an example being the case of the United States border closure against new and prospective immigrants from countries associated with the religion of Islam. In 2019, a US government unilateral ban on travellers from Muslim

countries is an example of many sieges that have hugely impacted Muslim students and their abilities to pursue their studies in the United States. The ubiquitous nature of these overt and covert attacks is reflected in the media, government policies, and personal encounters in public and private spaces.

In educational settings, much research has revealed that Muslim students indeed feel besieged in schools (Hoodfar, 1993; Kahf, 1999; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2001). Zine (2001), for instance, noted that Muslim students in and out of school settings deal with experiences of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. In school settings, Muslim students continue to be besieged by systematic oppression and oppressive school practices. Rezai-Rashti (1994), reflecting on her first-hand experience of working in a Canadian school board as an antiracist and gender-equity practitioner, noted that non-Muslim teachers, students, and administrators often interacted with Muslim students from a biased lens “reminiscent of the long-gone colonial era” (p. 34).

The Ontological Issue of Silence

Recognizing the implicit bias Muslim students are often met with in diverse ESL classroom settings, instructor Jyoti often takes it upon herself to challenge conscious and unconscious bias by taking the personal initiative to integrate videos that could help her students develop a more layered understanding of their Muslim classmates. Because intercultural tensions related to religion are not explicitly planned for in the curriculum, instructors like Jyoti rely on their own discretion to decide whether to address such incidents or ignore them.

Considering Canada’s reputation as a multicultural country and a home to immigrants from many countries and cultures, the silence that greets issues of systematic discrimination especially as it relates to Muslim students is somewhat baffling (Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2001).

In Canadian ESL classes, for instance, a significant population of the student body is comprised of visible minorities like Muslim students, yet, while topics about cultural prejudices and bias are often integrated into curricula, not so much attention has been given to religious diversity. Greg shares his surprise on the silence of curriculum on this topic, especially since ESL curricula in Canadian settings is often preoccupied with comparisons of students' own cultural values and the culture of the target country. He asks an important question about why a curriculum built around “Canadian workplace culture” is totally silent on religious diversity, despite the topic of religious beliefs and values being an important point of contention in Western socio-political discourse:

I really don't know because it's a brilliant curriculum in many ways. But I think the curriculum itself, because it was so focused on “this is the workplace language,” that we didn't take time [to include religious beliefs]. I mean, workplace language also includes cultural language and perspectives. And it doesn't do that. I think it was in that way very intentionally focused on training people for the workplace. The challenge in it is, how many cover letters and resumes can you write without actually getting to something more meaningful than just that? I think there was a problem in the definition of what this curriculum is going to be. Why can't it be about embracing cultural issues in the workplace? We do that in our first presentation in Speech class very deliberately or place awareness very deliberately to push those envelopes. But in the day-to-day stuff, it doesn't do that as much. It really doesn't. (Greg)

While there have been some attempts to address and engage other social and cultural issues, why is there a startlingly disparate silence on matters of religion, religious tolerance, and accommodation in the curriculum when the very culture within which we function is rife with tension and suspicion around certain religious groups? It is important to understand that, at

institutional levels, there are peripheral ways in which an attempt has been made to embrace some semblance of religious inclusion. For instance, in many Canadian post-secondary education settings, policies have been developed around religious “accommodations,” which allow for students to be excused from classes during religious observations. However, more complex engagement with religious difference is often missing in curriculum discourse.

In broader public education research, a few scholars have begun writing explicitly about religious diversity and inclusion in Canadian public schools (Hillier, 2014; Zine, 2001). However, Hillier (2014) notes that the larger bulk of discussion about religious diversity often comes up only as peripheral preoccupations in the fields of multicultural and anti-racist theories (Banks, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Connelly et al., 2003; Dei & James 2002). In these research studies, the focus is often on the impact of culture and race on students’ performance and outcomes, with limited attention to religious diversity (Hillier, 2014). While the bulk of literature identified above focuses on experiences of discrimination faced by Canadian high school students, in my literature search, I have encountered relatively few studies which approach religious diversity as an attempt to foster intercultural communication in education settings. This relatively limited attention given to topics of religious inclusion in educational spaces is itself symptomatic of a widely held Western construct: a general discomfort, suspicion, and paranoia about discourses that involve faith or religion. Such topics are often dismissed as personal and, therefore, inappropriate in public spaces. Consequently, when the topic shows up in public spaces, it tends to provoke awkwardness or discomfort, and sometimes, hostility or confrontation.

The separation of the spiritual from public discourse is itself rooted in Western ontological and epistemological orientations—a worldview not often shared by a large majority of people elsewhere in the world. In many cultures that make up the immigrant community in

Canada, religious beliefs are not seen as separable and detachable from discourses about values, traditions, and actions. This disconnect between immigrant students’ orientation about religion and Western worldviews about religion presents a dilemma for immigrants who, while in Canadian classrooms, are expected to engage in classroom discussions in ways that preclude their faith or religious beliefs. Because the experiences of visible religious minority student groups are sometimes shaped by Western stereotypes and perceptions, the non-attention to the topic of religious values could be likened to an act of aggression. Holly, for instance, sees some value in teaching students about religious diversity because it is an important part of culture; however, she also expresses her fear and trepidation about engaging in such a difficult and often tense topic in her class. Explaining why she thinks the curriculum is silent on the topic, she noted:

I think it’s easier to avoid it, because it can get really heated. I think as an instructor, I’d feel afraid to talk about it or bring it up. Usually when students will ask me what my religion is, I’d just say I don’t have one and try to move on because I didn’t want them to probe and then say “why not”? Yeah, I mean, because we’re multicultural and because all religions are supposed to be welcome and embraced here, that’s a reason and it’s not separated from culture--because I’m so afraid to bring it up, I just don’t even know if it would be valuable. We should [bring it up]. There is a silence about it, and I mean, even in the workplace, right? So, that silence is real in society too. I don’t know the religious beliefs of anybody at work. So, I think because there’s a silence in society, I almost can justify...that we can have the silence in the classroom too because no one is going to talk about it. But maybe we could have a task about what if somebody in the workplace asks you your religion, how would you handle that? ‘Cos in some cultures you can ask that

right away. I've been to countries where that's the second question they ask you. "Oh, what's your name?" "What religion are you"? And, for me, that was so shocking cos I thought "what does that have to do with who I am?" Right? I mean it does have something to do with who you are, it's almost like they were going to form a judgement about me because they were asking right away, you know. I don't think it's an inappropriate question---if the intention is good. (Holly)

Implications for an Ethics of Intercultural Communication Curricula

In light of the fore-going, and my research questions, it is important to consider questions of complexities and application in ESL curricula and instruction. In school settings, instructors taking on potentially volatile topics may face a range of fears. Fear of unhealthy confrontations in class stemming from the charged nature of the topic of religion, is one reason that educators may be reluctant to take the subject up in classroom spaces. Holly grappled with the idea of taking the appropriate action of including the topic of religious diversity in curricula and instruction but also wondered about the negativity that could erupt as a result of engaging in such a controversial topic:

I mean, I do like the idea of maybe of . . . hmm. That's even tough. I Like the idea of religion. But I can see it going sideways (laughs). Just because it's a belief system right? And it often leads to debates, but not always healthy debates. And when people speak about their beliefs, they're so passionate, right? It's the reason for everything they do. So the difficulty I see is that if someone's belief system is challenged, it could get ugly right? If we created a lesson around religious beliefs or religion, we would have to be very controlled, I think. I worry about causing offence. Or just having to call security. I think it could get really heated. For me, it's not [a problem] . . . I think I'm open-minded

to them and I'm not really a religious person, so if somebody tells me about their beliefs, that's their belief systems, that's working for you. But I think when people are really, I don't know, biased, it's just at the core of everything they do so, if that gets challenged, that's maybe discrediting how they lived their life, every decision they've made, right? I think that's just so heavy. For me, I would have no problem cos I'm not religious so I'm not bothered by a discussion about it, some people are. For instance, I've had people ask me if I'm Christian and I've said no, and they would give me a look of disgust. And you can see like “what are you?” (Holly)

A complex engagement of religious diversity may only be possible with an epistemological and ontological shift, which may include freeing up spaces and allowing for the possibility of the arrival of the new. As a starting point to such an uncomfortable pedagogical engagement, Western teachers may need to cultivate a certain openness to an epistemological and ontological shift in order to become more comfortable with the idea of engaging in a critical discussion of religious diversity in their curriculum. This epistemological shift may also involve a conversation about the limitations of approaching conversations about religion and faith from a “good versus evil” stance. Some of the fears expressed by participants in this research relate to assumptions that discussions about religion in the curriculum may be organized around differences and criticisms of others' faiths. Further, as educators, we must become attuned to the idea of “teaching in discomfort” and make space for conversations that do not necessarily make us feel good.

A more complex engagement with religious diversity could, in turn, enable students to gain valuable insight into others' worldviews while evaluating theirs. For instance, teachers often report of students who reject feedback from a female teacher because they belong to religious

and cultural orientations where perceptions of women include a rejection of the idea that a male person or student should be subject to knowledge produced by a female teacher. ESL curricula would, therefore, benefit from creating pedagogical tasks that could provide opportunities for students to focus on their own intersectionality. Such pedagogical tasks might be framed as inquiry instead of just including empowering texts that show Islam and Muslims in a positive light. Any attempt to foster ethical intercultural communication must, in my opinion, avoid putting minorities “on the spot” to affirm their identity. There is certainly a valuable place for integrating curricula materials that counter or challenge dominant stereotypes about minoritized religious groups, but even more important, is the need to frame discourses about Islam within the bigger framework of religion as an important cultural factor that shapes our orientation to the world.

An inquiry-based approach to framing tasks about religion shifts attention from minoritized religious groups like Muslims and draws everyone’s belief to the centre as subjects of interrogation. Task-based language teaching may invite students for instance, to reflect on or discuss how their world view and interactions with others are shaped by their religious (or lack of religious) views, and how what they understand as right, wrong, good, bad, safe, unsafe, is shaped by their own views about religion. Following that, tasks could also invite students to reflect on ways in which their own beliefs about religion might affirm or harm those with differing belief systems. Within such an inquiry-based framework, there might be more opportunities for all students, including the non-religious, to examine ways that they perpetuate negative stereotypes about others. Participants expressed the relevance of task-based language teaching for such a dialogic approach to understanding the “religious or non-religious Other” because the methodology recommends that tasks be authentic and relevant to real, every-day

experiences of learners. In the next chapter, I explore the topic of sexuality as another important element of identity, and a fuller discussion of inquiry-based task types as a framework for cultivating intercultural dialogue in the ESL classroom.

A Hermeneutic Understanding of the Other in the ESL Classroom

The insight and wisdom that hermeneutics offers for understanding race and racial relations lies in the possibilities that hermeneutics provides us to scrutinize the historical factors that shape our (racial) prejudices. From the West’s history of slavery to colonization and neocolonialism, racism has been an underlying driving factor for which a designated other is constructed as “less than” based on skin colour. Gadamer’s extrapolation of prejudice offers a hopeful way forward, in that the racial prejudices that learners and instructors bring to the ESL classroom could be drawn upon as a “resource” and a starting point for a meaningful deconstruction. According to Gadamer, these prejudices, also understood as fore-judgments, are associated with the particular traditions that we were born into and that are handed down to us. To him, we all, as humans, are finite and historical beings situated within traditions within which we were raised, and which shape our worldviews. In the modern global world, these traditions are further handed down to us by the media and by global vehicles of cultural exchange.

However, instead of being static, the prejudices that learners bring into the ESL classroom constitute the “horizon of a particular present” (Gadamer, 2000 p. 306), which provides a useful context and starting point for engaging new perspectives about a given topic. In simple language, these prejudices can in themselves be channeled for good, as they make “new understanding possible by first by anticipating meaning in advance, and then subsequently being tried, tested, or ‘worked out’ so that the revision necessary for us to improve our understanding can take place” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 56).

An important mandate for ESL educators and curriculum developers, then, is to create tasks that allow for these assumptions to be foregrounded so that they can be questioned because, as Gadamer explains, through foregrounding, “prejudices are brought into play” (2000, p. 306). That is, our prejudices and assumption systems are provoked from the background to the fore, where they may be examined and tried, thereby opening such prejudices to the risk of being proven to be wrong. More succinctly put, “risking our prejudices means making them questionable and suspending their validity” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 57). When ESL learners encounter tasks that provoke previously unnoticed prejudices and bias into the forefront, an opportunity is created for them to interrogate earlier taken-for-granted assumptions about others. In addition, engagement in language tasks that allow for such “risk” to happen can also provide a useful opportunity for racialized ESL learners to examine systems that disempower them. When educators create language tasks that allow learners examine their own racial biases, they give learners an opportunity to “talk back” to their own traditions. Through Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, we understand that tradition “is language” and it has the capacity to speak to us and address us. Therefore, learners, in their daily interactions, are constantly relying on what their traditions have said to them about others: for instance, the ways to engage (or not to engage) with a Black person, what a person’s racial designation says about their character or achievement levels, what a desirable racial category is, and how they might rank people’s worth based on racial hierarchies.

We also know through Gadamer that while tradition is a starting point from which learners interact with the world, that does not have to be the only way that learners can engage others. When language learners are provided opportunities to engage in true dialogue, true understanding is made possible because the prejudices that we have inherited from our traditions

are in such dialogic contexts “constantly being worked out, confirmed, denied, and revised through our own encounters with the subject matter” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 55). In other words, when we encounter other worldviews, we not only learn to understand, but to understand differently (Gadamer, 2000).

However, such meaningful language tasks and dialogue also pose the risk that harmful opinions and worldviews might be expressed that could be damaging to hear in classroom spaces. I specifically address the perils and challenges of complicated conversations and difficult knowledge in my final chapter.

Closing Reflections on the “This” and “That” of Hermeneutics and Critical Theory

In my introductory chapter, I had mentioned that instead of an “either/or” binary, I was attempting in this study to allow critical theory and hermeneutics dwell side by side and speak to the topic in an embrace of “and-ness,” and “this and that” (Aoki, 1992, p. 268). One of the greatest lessons we have learned from hermeneutics is the mutual interpenetration and intersubjectivity of everything, and by deploying critical theory in this chapter in the way I have, I have attempted to exemplify those very lessons: that all things are interrelated.

This chapter has heavily relied on critical theory both to language and engage discursive identity issues that shape dialogue in intercultural communication. While hermeneutics has been instrumental for showing how we might go along together, critical theory has been vital for naming the issues of power, privilege, marginalization, and difference, which are all central components of any attempts to understand intercultural encounters. Pairing hermeneutics and critical theory in this way is an important disruption I hope this dissertation brings to epistemological essentialization. I have drawn courage from the insightful writings of Warnke (2016) and Simpson (2021) who contend that hermeneutics is relevant to conversations about

global justice, racism, inequality, and other issues of oppression. Warnke (2016) further contends that “hermeneutic approaches to social justice may well be best positioned simultaneously to do justice to cultural difference” (p. 23). What I have attempted to do in this section, therefore, is to delve into an unfamiliar terrain and open up new channels of communication that can hold space simultaneously for hermeneutics and critical theory. In my opinion, this act of engaging with tension and shifting the usual responses to the topic of hermeneutics and critical theory are key messages and challenges of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I continue this delicate dance between hermeneutics, difference, and similarity by engaging an interpretation of masks and masked bodies in ESL pedagogical spaces.

Chapter 7: Masks and Masquerades

As mentioned in previous chapters, conversations about intercultural dialogue must include a consideration of the discursive elements of identity that interlocutors bring to each dialogue. While the previous chapter explored the ways that race and religion, as discursive aspects of identity, shape intercultural dialogue, I also attempted to underline how race often intersects with religion and gender to create intersectional experiences of discrimination. In furtherance of that, I now turn to a discussion of sexual identity as a discursive element of interaction that caught my attention in my data. My discussion of sexual identity in this chapter is in relation to the specific context of ESL teaching and learning.

Speaking From Silence

As I sat contemplating the best way to approach the ideas around sexuality that I engage in this chapter, I somewhat lost my writing “voice” because of how sparse my knowledge of the subject matter from an African wisdom perspective is. Like in many contexts, the topic of sexuality is often treated as a “personal” affair that does not deserve public discourse or acknowledgment until one is confronted with nonconforming identities. As I wrote and rewrote drafts of this chapter, I struggled with the awareness that I could not readily speak to an African wisdom perspective on sexuality due to my limited knowledge of the topic from an African wisdom perspective. While I often have personal memories of folklore that applied to many topics, my memories and experiences do not speak to the topic of sexuality. My confusion was abated when I came to the realization that *nothing* was probably the best place to start. This nothingness does not mean “a void.” It means a silence, and if I lean in closely enough, perhaps, this silence might speak—or be spoken to.

The ESL Classroom and Heterosexism

This silence on issues of sexuality was also prevalent in ESL before the 1990s. As we already learned, silence is, in itself, a privilege that is not afforded to all groups of people. The function of the silence of ESL curricula on issues of sexuality is the reinforcement of heteronormativity and rejection of queer and nonconforming sexual identities who show up in the ESL classroom. This kind of silence is not just neutral but dangerous on so many levels to the safety and wellbeing of students (Kappra & Vandrick, 2006). Similarly, Nelson (2005) notes that scholarship in Teaching English as Second Language (TESOL) depicts a world “in which straight people—albeit from various national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds—were interacting only with other straight people” (p. 109). Similarly, English as Second or Other Language (ESOL) commercial course materials and curricula across the world confirm the heteronormative nature of English language learning (Kaiser, 2017). For instance, Paiz (2015) conducted a quantitative study of 45 ESL textbooks and findings confirmed the prevalent nature of heteronormativity in ESOL curricula. Liddicoat’s (2009) study documented ways in which queer students in a university foreign language class attempted to question prevalent heteronormative assumptions. The study recounted ways in which attempts by the queer students to answer classroom questions in ways that align with their nonheterosexual identities were often misconstrued by teachers as grammatical errors. Further, the report highlighted the ways that heteronormative identities were centred in the ESL classroom to the exclusion of other sexual orientation. Despite the relative silence on the topic of sexuality, the importance of queer identities and their experiences has become increasingly clear in English language teaching (Nelson, 2016) as evidenced by growing scholarship on queer identities in the ESL classroom in recent years. In the sections that follow, I provide a discussion of current scholarship on queer

identities in the ESL classroom and a discussion of my data in relation to sexual identities in ESL contexts.

ESL Classrooms and Non-Conforming Identities

The last three decades have seen multitudes of scholarship on the topic of queer identities in the ESL classroom (Cummings & Nelson, 1993; Kappra and Vandrick, 2006; Laurion, 2017; Liddicoat, 2009; Lim, 2018; Moore, 2016; Neff, 1992; Nelson, 1991, 1993, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016; Paiz, 2015, 2018, 2019; Summerhawk, 1998; Wadell et al., 2011). Earlier scholarship on the topic was often preoccupied with ways that English teaching might incorporate gay-friendly pedagogies (see Mittler & Blumenthal, 1994). These gay-friendly approaches often aimed to make English language teaching more relevant to gay and bisexual students by incorporating media and reading texts about lesbian-gay issues (Nelson, 1999). In her seminal speech, Nelson (1993), argued that gay and lesbian teachers have a different experience of the ESL classroom than heterosexual teachers because gay teachers often feel compelled to hide their sexual identity. Nelson (1993) also questioned prevailing assumptions at the time that ESL students were not capable of handling topics related to gay and lesbian people, asserting that students would be willing to discuss gay issues if it felt safe to do so. Since Nelson's (1993) seminal speech, many ESL practitioners (see examples above) have conducted classroom research on issues of sexual identities in the ESL classroom.

The topic of sexuality particularly lends itself to contemplation in the ESL classroom because it may be even more challenging for queer students to successfully construct their identities in the ESL classroom (Liddicoat, 2009). This difficulty is partly because ESL classrooms can be hostile spaces for queer students (Benesch, 1999; Vandrick, 2001; Wadell et al., 2011). For instance, Kappra (1998) reported on the ways that gay ESL students experience

homophobia and heterosexism. The study followed an ESL student who chose to move to a liberal U.S. city for study with the expectation of a more friendly environment for queer people but who was instead met with homophobia in his ESL classroom. The study further shed light on the assumption in many ESL teaching settings that all students in the ESL classroom are heterosexual. Contrary to this wrong assumption, ESL classrooms are in fact, “multisexual spaces” (Nelson, 2006) as much as they are multilingual and multicultural. Another study by Kappra and Vandrick (2006) reported on the experiences of three gay ESL students in a San Francisco Bay Area in the United States. Findings from the study revealed that unfriendly ESL classroom atmosphere and unsupportive teacher responses to homophobia often caused gay students to feel alienated or unsafe. As a result of such safety concerns, gay students in the study chose to keep their sexual identity hidden in their ESL classrooms.

The ESL classroom is a particularly crucial space for queer ESL students because of the access that English language proficiency grants into the global queer community. For some ESL students, their motivation for learning English is directly linked to their sexual identities. For instance, a study by King (2008) involving gay Korean men revealed that their queer identity was a significant reason for learning English since a mastery of the English language gave them access to a wider queer community that provided them more legitimacy. Along similar lines, Moore (2013, 2016) highlighted how a queer identity is often a strong motivation for learning English in Japan. His studies revealed that for several gay, Japanese men, the need to find a welcoming community and the desire to be able to perform a gay identity, was often a huge inspiration for learning English. Nelson (2010) aptly captures this connection between English language learning and queer sexuality in her assertion that for many ESL students, “the English language functions as a sort of gay lingua franca that facilitates entry into a global community”

(p. 448) and for this category of ESL learners, their sexual identities was “the impetus for pursuing fluency in English and for migrating to an English-speaking country” (p. 458).

Another reason queer students may choose to learn the English language is the desire for ideal identities, images, and capital which could be material, cultural, linguistics, or symbolic (Motha & Lin, 2014). Consequently, the ESL classroom should have a goal to understand what these desires of students are in order to better serve learners’ needs. Creating a conducive space for students to engage with and explore possibilities for meeting their language-related desires will enable students to approach their English language learning journey in self-reflective and regenerative ways that could lead to an increased sense of control of their own life (Kaiser, 2017).

To achieve the goal of supporting students’ language learning goals, ESL curriculum developers and educators must proceed with an understanding that learning English necessarily requires the negotiation of identity, a requirement for effective interpersonal engagement in new physical or imagined communities of the ESL classroom (e.g., Kaiser, 2017; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Vitanova, 2005). That is, the ESL classroom must be reimagined and understood as a contact zone, and a “social space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt, 1999, p. 584).

Queer Approaches for ESL Pedagogy

Following the growing consensus that it is important to integrate sexual identity issues in ESL curricula, and the acknowledgment that ESL curricula is grossly lacking in representation of LGBTQ issues, many scholars have proposed a range of approaches to make ESL curricula more inclusive. Summerhawk (1998) proposed a human rights approach for integrating gay and lesbian topics in the ESL classroom. Practical ways to source relevant material, according to

Summerhawks (1998), would include inviting gay and lesbian guest speakers to ESL classrooms and using relevant material from films and other print media sources.

Building on insights from Summerhawks (1998), O’Mochain (2006) suggested a queer narrative framework as an effective approach for engaging gender and sexuality issues in the ESL classroom because it lends itself to the possibility of fostering “empathetic values and open-ended imaginations of gender and sexuality for all students” (p. 64). Vandrick (2001) suggested that sexual identity issues in the ESL classroom be introduced as part of a “multicultural/equity approach, in the context of fighting racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination” (p. 10). Curran (2006) recounted his own (mis)handling of students’ questions about homosexuality in one of his ESL classrooms and following his own critical self-evaluation, suggested that an inquiry-based approach, as already theorized by queer theorists (Jagose, 1996; Kumashiro, 2002; Nelson, 2005, 2006), might be a more suitable framework for engaging topics of sexual identity. Nelson’s (2005, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2016) ground-breaking scholarship theorizing queer inquiry for ESL pedagogy, continues to lead the way for scholars in the field to grapple with the challenging and nuanced topic of sexuality in the ESL classroom. Much later in this chapter, I provide a more robust discussion of Nelson’s Queer Inquiry (QI) for ESL pedagogy.

Queer Approaches in Canadian ESL Classrooms

To foreground my discussion in this section, it is important to ask: “What might it look like to think queerly and transnationally—in tandem—about, and what modes of inquiry can provoke new thinking on these sometimes-contentious matters, among multiple audiences?” (Nelson, 2009, p. 110). Though many ESL scholars and practitioners have debated about best ways to take up sexuality in the ESL classroom in the last two decades, actual uptake of the topic in mainstream Canadian ESL curriculum has been inadequate at best and nonexistent in some

instances. For instance, the Alberta Teachers of English as Second Language (ATESL) curriculum framework engages the topic of gender diversity and explores ways that gender may be integrated into ESL curricular. However, the framework does not provide any guidelines for taking up the topic of sexuality in ESL curriculum and pedagogy. As observed by scholars discussed earlier in this chapter, many ESL curricula continue to be based on heteronormative standards. In some cases, engagement with sexual identity is often achieved by inserting gay or lesbian references in ways that may not generate a critical discussion of the topic.

In the teaching context of this research, while there is no explicit focus on sexual identity in the curriculum, cursory mentions of “husband-husband” or “wife-wife” partnerships were inserted in the curriculum a few times to disrupt the heteronormative idea of marriages and partnerships. There are at least five tasks in the entire curriculum containing such cursory references to homosexual relationships, however; these casual nods to diverse sexual identities are not set up to invite critical engagement from students. In the sections to follow, I explore participants’ perspectives on the relevance of sexuality to discourses of intercultural communication in ESL teaching and learning. I also present a discussion of ways that sexual identity might be taken up in an intercultural ESL curriculum.

Discourses of identity are always complex and contested, and discussion of sexual identity is even more complex and messy. As a Nigerian woman raised in a culture of conversational subtlety and the art of tact when engaging in difficult conversations, I must approach this section—a matter so profoundly personal to my participants—like a conversational art, or dance: unhurried, in circles, formation, and layers. Unrushed. I ask you, my readers, to tarry with me, but not just that, to immerse yourself in the art of it—the flow of it.

Masked Bodies

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I use the metaphor of “masks” to frame my discussion and ideas around sexuality and LGBTQ+ as a component of intercultural competence, which participants identified as a gap in the ESL curriculum. Similar to previous chapters, in contemplating my data and thinking about ways to best present ideas and concepts that stopped me short, I found that it was the metaphors used by participants to describe a concept or experience that offered me a path and language around which I could navigate and unpack this particularly dense, difficult, personal, and contested topic of minority and queer identities in educational spaces.

The TBLT curriculum taught at the research context makes occasional reference to gay/lesbian relationships in selected reading texts or listening texts, but rather than being a focal part of the lesson, they are often distant references. For instance, one of the tasks in the Level Five Speech course invites students to take on the role of wedding planners and plan a wedding day program of events for four different clients/couples. Each task group is required to choose one of four couple clients, create a wedding day program of events, and share details of wedding plans with the class. Though one of the clients in the task is a gay couple, the lesson plan does not provide any instructions on how instructors might either broach the topic of same-sex marriage with students during the lesson, or how they might address usually muffled snide comments from students who often gasp in horror upon realizing that they have to plan a wedding for a gay couple. So, in this instance, while the inclusion of a gay couple as one of four heterosexual couples aims to reinforce the inclusion of all sexual identities, such vague references do not always lead to a critical engagement or dialogue.

Instructor Greg, himself a gay man, explains that it is important that sexual identities are discussed within an intercultural framework of ESL teaching because cultural values play such a

significant role in how sexual identities are either accepted or criminalized. He however expressed concern about the discomfort of a gay-friendly framework for gay teachers like himself, and by extension, gay students. As a gay teacher invested personally in the topic of minoritized sexualities, Greg explains that he has mastered the art of “masking” his gay identity in the classroom, and vague curricular references to gay marriages or gay couples do not necessarily require a deep emotional investment from him because the “mask comes on.” He therefore finds that a more explicit focus on sexuality in the curriculum might be problematic to him and other queer students who might have already found a comfortable coping method of “masking” their identity. This “threat of exposure” was also a concern shared by Jim, himself a gay man who also admits to masking his sexual identity in his classroom.

As I read and reread my data, I was drawn to the word “mask,” and the metaphor began to assume more meaning in my understanding of specific identities in the classroom space. The rest of this chapter is a tribute to masked bodies and masquerades in the ESL classroom—an attempt to “see” that which we have never been privileged to see, and a reflection on how such “sighting” forever changes the masked bodies and the “beholders,” and perhaps even the culture. How could we pursue intercultural understanding of others without an engagement with the masquerade hiding in plain sight in the ESL classroom? Hermes was with me throughout this chapter, and I ask you, my readers, to indulge him as he plays with you. Hermes, the deceitful trickster, must have drawn on an unending supply of masks to pull off his tricks. As a trickster, he is the master of obscuring and revealing, concealing and unconcealing—important hermeneutic elements that permeate this chapter.

Alethia.

I proceed, knowing that this is a layered path replete with masking and unmasking rituals, knowing that something is already being hidden as I engage in this dance of masquerades.

Masked Bodies in the Classroom

I am contemplating the “mask” as an object of epistemological inquiry in order to develop a better understanding of how it has come to be a resource that a teacher could adapt in teaching contexts. What purpose does a mask serve? What does the mask conceal? Who else partakes in the masking ritual in classroom spaces? How might we theorize masks and their function in classroom spaces? As I whiled over these questions, I was immediately catapulted to my years growing up in Nigeria and my earliest encounters with masks and masquerades. Below is a flashback of some of my earliest understanding of masks.

Memories From My Childhood

I ran the whole length of the muddy street screaming, hands flailing in the air, my tiny nine-year old feet digging into the soft, muddy earth as quickly as they could. My terrified heart threatened to give way to fear as I ran into the outstretched arms of my grandmother, who did a good job of suppressing a giggle. “Eku! Eku avee!” I shouted, pointing in the direction I had come from. My grandmother took me into her bedroom as my younger cousins quickly perched behind closed doors, peeping from slightly open windows in fright and excitement. The older men and women stepped out of their bedrooms, temporarily abandoning their various chores. From my grandmother’s bedroom, I peered gingerly as a now familiar jiggling sound of cowries announced the arrival of a colourful, 12-foot-tall creature with a curiously intimidating head mask that gave it an unfathomable, other-worldly look. His feet were covered in long, colourful embroidered shoes with strings of white cowries, which jingled with each step. It was the Echeane Festival, and this was the first of dozens of masquerades that would make their appearance and terrify children within an inch of their lives.

The very idea of masquerades was an enigma to me for a long time, but a question that really preoccupied my mind was my continuous puzzlement about why they went to such great

extent to disguise themselves. But would the festival have been as much fun if we knew that it was our neighbour, my friend Rali's father, who brandished those long whips and canes that sometimes fell hard on other people's backs? Why was there such special attention to the heavy face masks, which must have weighed several kilograms? And why were people, especially women and children, forbidden from looking in the face of the masked bodies? Children were told that it was an abomination to make out the real identity of the person behind the mask because, in the adornment and form of a masquerade, they were no longer their real selves; they had taken the form of gods and spirits and, in order to perform in that capacity, their real selves, especially their faces, had to be hidden from view. Since they stepped into a different role than they led in their daily lives—a higher calling, the role of a clan or community god or deity—their mortal bodies had to be fully disguised and their faces heavily masked to conceal their identities.

It was a terrible abomination to unmask a masquerade inadvertently or on purpose. It was the most disgraceful thing that any masked body had to experience because following such a humiliation, the spirit behind a masked personae or deity was believed to die, never to be celebrated again in the festivals of masquerades. With a revelation of the mortal human behind the mask, it was believed that the glory of the deity was gone, its power, mystery, and also, name. The one who looked on the face of a masquerade would never remain the same. Once, there was a loud uproar outside, and my uncles and other men who were watching masquerades outside ran inside frantically and shut the door behind them. A man had, in a fit of anger, unmasked a masquerade. It was a chaotic evening with long whispers amongst the men of the community. I would never know what became of the defiant man who did the unmasking or the fate of the masked man because these things were discussed in whispers amongst the menfolk. What I do know, however, is that, in subsequent masquerade parades, we never saw that

particular masked deity or the man who unmasked him, the following year and other years after that. In the rare occasion that a masquerade was unceremoniously unmasked, it was believed that the real persona behind the mask had been revealed and their divinity had, therefore, been diminished to a state of mortality. Things could never remain the same for the masked deity. The mask was the covering, the mystery that ensures respect, but when the mask is stripped, that mystery is gone, so the deity ceases to exist. The mask was really why the persona of the masquerade existed. The mask.

This reflection on my cultural understanding of masks made me wonder if a discussion of sexuality in curriculum and classroom spaces was going to disempower masked bodies who can only thrive with the masks on and render them vulnerable, hurt, and without power or respect. To further understand and interpret the performative role of masks in classrooms, I looked to historical and contemporary Western meanings of the term *mask*. Etymologically, the word *mask* is closely associated with masquerade, derived from Spanish *mascarada*, meaning “masked party or dance,” and Italian *mascarata*, “a ball at which masks are worn. In contemporary usage, it is used figuratively to mean a false outward show. In everyday usage, it is a covering worn to conceal or disguise one’s identity or body part for protection and safety.

Instructors Jim and Greg’s discussion of masking their own sexual identities in the classroom provides us a lens to interrogate ways in which some students may also be participating in a masking ritual in the ESL classroom. Further, the metaphor of masks provides a trajectory for interrogating ways in which dominant pedagogical practices and ESL curriculum might further mask the topic of sexuality. When people in the margins enter into the classroom spaces where they are outliers, masks serve as mediums of entry and equal participation because they enable the wearers to conceal unpopular aspects of themselves and become “just like

everyone else.” The limited attention to the topic of sexuality in educational spaces affirms these orientations as either out of the ordinary, or “abnormal,” and as a result, teachers (like Jim and Greg) who fall outside heteronormative sexual identities contend that there is safety in anonymity. This tendency for gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals in the ESL classroom to mask their sexual identity is echoed by other participants who say they have never encountered a student who directly or indirectly indicated that they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Even when lesson materials in some Levels contained texts that challenge heteronormative sexual identities, gay or lesbian students are not likely to engage with the topic in any way that might risk “exposure” of their sexual identity. As a result, gay students also engage in a process of masking to protect their identity. Other scholars writing in the general field of education have already discussed this tendency of gay students to engage in self-regulation in educational spaces to protect their own sexual identity (Kocsis, 2020; Woolley, 2017). This self-regulation is due to the fact that in many ways, schools operate much like Jeremy Bentham’s (1791) panopticon because they act as “unverifiable yet omnipresent means of surveillance” and “offer a disciplinary mechanism through the conscious and permanent visibility of people” (Woolley, 2017, p. 86). As Kocsis (2020) noted, “in a school setting where sexuality and gender identity are heteronormative and binary, expression outside of these norms results in social visibility” (p. 21), teachers and students who do not fit into the heteronormative identity become socially visible as deviant bodies, and in order to conceal themselves from supervisory gaze and judgment, they resort to self-regulation. This is because schools act like churches and “moral leaders, policing and repressing the body’s participation in public life” (Darder, 2011, p. 336). However, sexual identities have a way of showing up anyways, invited or not. Let us now turn to ways that

masked identities show up in the ESL classroom and how these “guests” shape intercultural dialogue.

Peering Behind Masks in the ESL Classroom

Despite the curriculum’s sparse attention to the topic, sexuality still has a way of presenting itself as the “uninvited guest” in ESL classroom spaces, generating a mirage of strong reactions from students. Gilbert (2014) noted that as the uninvited guest,

sexuality shows up both predictably and unexpectedly—in the student’s, the teacher’s body, and the curriculum. Indeed, its foreignness may belong to its mobility; sexuality travels across bodies, disciplines, identities, and experiences. We can never be sure where it will turn up or in what form it will manifest. (p. 85)

The curriculum is itself masked, in that it obscures and renders certain identities invisible and inaccessible for engagement and normalization. To the extent that the curriculum masks minoritized sexualities, it also functions to render such minority sexuality “exotic” and “outside” the norm so that when glimpses of such deviant bodies are gleaned in classroom spaces, they become objects of dismissal, curiosity, or disregard. Such moments often arise when a curriculum text makes indirect reference to an image that departs from a heteronormative orientation. For instance, Jyoti observed that her students often find the topic of sexuality awkward, especially when it borders on homosexuality or non-binary ideas of sexuality. During a lesson she taught, the task was a speech role-play requiring students to assume the role of an event planner, then review and develop a presentation about wedding-day event plans for various clients. Images were provided of four couples, and each image included the couple’s preferences for their wedding day ceremony. One of the images had the picture of a gay male couple. While the focus of the task was not necessarily focused on diverse sexualities, the image of the gay

couple was deliberately placed in the mix during curriculum development to provoke “noticing” and “awareness raising,” but no teacher notes were provided as to how that image itself may “disrupt” classroom conversation and how teachers and students may take up discussions and questions that could consequently arise. The presence of such a disruptive image is itself pedagogical and can provoke a reflection or a conversation about sexual orientations, but there is no guarantee that students would necessarily start a conversation about whatever questions or comments they might have regarding the topic. Occasionally, however, some students verbalize their feelings about such a substantial disruption to their own personal values around sexuality, providing an opportunity for teachers to speak to the delicate issue. Jyoti shared her handling of difficult conversations about sexuality:

I always say, "You don't have to agree with it. But you do have to respect it. So you're not going to bash somebody." I had a student who said, "If I saw two men holding hands, I would tell my son to look the other way." (Jyoti)

As a sensitive and compassionate teacher who is committed to expounding values of social justice in her students, Jyoti often seizes every opportunity to engage with and discuss difficult, awkward, but relevant issues when they come up in her classroom. When issues of sexuality are explicitly or implicitly brought up, she rises to the occasion to educate students because she believes that educators’ duties go beyond just presenting subject-matter content. She also understands that given students’ diverse cultural and religious beliefs, it is not the duty of teachers to force students to change their personal views about something, but to get students to change how they react to difference.

There's times when students don't agree with something that I've just said or someone else has just said, and it becomes quite uncomfortable, because someone's really rigid.

And that's where you have to be kind of smooth in saying, "Okay. Yes. You have a point. And that is maybe true. But this is how I see it. And this is how this person sees it. And all of us, it's not . . ." I use this line quite a bit in writing especially but in life, too. "It's not black and white. It's gray." Right? It's very complex. And things are complex as a result. So how you act in one situation is okay for you. But it might not be okay for me. I would not tell my kid to look away from a man to a man holding hands. (Jyoti)

Another way students tend to react to texts that reference sexual diversity was shared by Kelti. During one of her lessons, Kelti played an audio recording as part of the post-task exercise, and the recording had a female speaker who referred to her “wife” in a workplace conversation that was totally unrelated to marriage. Some students immediately reacted, muttering, “*Did she say her wife?*” In that instance, Kelti felt a responsibility and duty to answer the question, even if “the wife” had no relevance to the task and its completion. She saw that opportunity as one of the very few that provide a teachable moment to challenge students to reflect on their values and biases about non-binary sexuality. Explaining that it is often an uncomfortable topic to discuss for both students and herself, Kelti noted that it is important for teachers to engage in topics that enhance chances of a more inclusive classroom space regardless of how uncomfortable and awkward the conversation gets.

I mean sexuality is such a tricky one. But I think it needs to be in there [in the curriculum] as well. And even if you don't agree with them-- all of these, like I think we need to let students know it's okay if they don't agree with the behavior. But that they need to know how to respectfully still work with people even if they don't believe in that behavior, right? We're trying to prepare them for the Canadian workplace where they could very well encounter these situations. And some of them already encountered, you

know, just with other students or you know in their workplaces and don't really know what they should say or do. (Kelti)

Greg and Jim, however, cautioned that while the topic of sexuality may be valuable to explore in the ESL context, homosexual or queer students and teachers who already found a way to “mask” themselves for protection may be suddenly thrown into a hot spot they are neither ready for nor appreciative of. Greg’s and Jim’s discussion of their masked personae in the classroom, stemming from a need to conceal and protect their own identity as gay men, provides a trajectory for interrogating classroom atmosphere for gay students in the ESL classrooms and how the topic of sexuality may be taken up in ethical ways that do not disempower the student groups it is intended to protect and represent. Greg further cautions that the topic might be even more volatile and difficult to engage given that many students in the ESL context come from countries where gay relationships are criminalized.

Maybe most of them will be just fine. Maybe that would be great for most of them, maybe even all of them in some classes, but I mean we teach students where people are killed in their home country if they're gay. Stoned to death, they're put in jail. And asking those students to come around and see this [gay] instructor as valuable is a 360-degree turnaround and I am just not-- I'm not willing do that, it just-- it would be too tiring for me. That's the biggest cultural challenge I face and I think maybe the issue needs to be taken up by people who aren't gay or lesbian in our faculty and it needs to be taken up by somebody who's not so personally invested. (Greg)

In light of my discussion above on ways that the topic of sexuality presents in the ESL classrooms, and the complexities that accompany the engagement of such a difficult topic, I now

turn to a discussion of what it might mean to ethically integrate the topic of sexual identities in an intercultural curriculum.

Making Room for the Masked Guest

Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before an anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an uninvited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (Derrida, 2000, p. 77)

The fears expressed by Greg and Jim about bringing the topic of sexuality to the centre of their teaching are also echoed in studies of gay educators (Gilbert, 2014; Silin, 1999). This is because sexuality “affects how classrooms function” (Gilbert, 2014, p. x) and there is no way to tell in advance how the topic might impact classroom teaching and learning experiences. Gilbert (2014) invited educators to begin by contemplating the *place* of sexuality in education. “Where will it arrive, and in what guise?” I find the questions above relevant for the ethos that informs my own research because it calls on the need for a new space and a renewed kind of engagement with topics of sexuality and minoritized sexualities. Consideration of these questions is relevant for rethinking more ethical ways to approach an already charged but necessary topic. In the educational discourses, the topic of sexuality has not often been broached in ways that invite an ethical contemplation of its relevance to our inter-connectedness as fellow inhabitants of the world, as explained by Gilbert (2014):

when LGBTQ sexuality has emerged in the spaces of education it is often as a controversy: battles over sex education, primary students reading about lesbian mothers,

and fears of gay teachers seducing their students—all these examples illustrate the ways that sexuality sits in an often antagonistic relationship to education. (p. 81)

Often, when the topic of homosexual and nonbinary sexual orientation is taken up in school settings, it is rooted in antihomophobia education that prioritizes curing homophobia and avoiding controversy (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004). Contemplating the question of what place and in what guise the topic may arrive in curriculum enabled me to rethink how sexuality is connected to intercultural dialogue, cultures, and language learning. It is my belief that an educational goal that prioritizes inclusion and representation for all should begin and proceed with a desire to provide space for connection that opens the possibilities of learning about new ways of life and an understanding of what it means to meet others as an ancestor and a descendant whose life has something to say to and teach us.

Such a shift in thinking helps educators and students see encounters with difference as a “time of hospitality” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 82). If we meet all beings as our ancestors, how might we entertain and usher in a relative we have never met? What stories might this relative bring of their journeys that will enrich our own understanding of the world? Developing a framework of hospitality as a pathway for navigating issues of sexuality in ESL classroom settings also involves the acknowledgement that an unknown or unfamiliar relative poses difficult questions that must be acknowledged and not idealized: “Can education be hospitable . . . can education welcome . . . whatever and whoever turns up? When standing at the door of education, who will be invited in and under what conditions?” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 82).

In the context of the ESL classroom, the topic of sexuality has already demonstrated that as a relative, it is present, whether welcomed or not—present and vocal about what it needs, calling loudly, sometimes silently. Being hospitable to this presence, this guest, means first

opening the doors and acknowledging that there is a seat at the table, and that in fact, the table could never have been deemed complete otherwise. It is as much a welcome into something new as it is a receiving of something new and refreshing for the hosts. However, at this dinner table, the sharing and exchange that takes place leads to an encounter that, in turn, could lead to difficult engagement with new knowledge and that which is not yet understood or known. Therein lies the opportunity for intercultural competence—the chance to grapple with the complexity of ideas that challenge one’s worldviews and values. This space between familiarity and strangeness is the middle-space that we must make and hold within ESL teaching settings; like labour pangs and childbirth, it is the uncertain space that births new life and understanding. Within this space, we must be courageous and comfortable with the possibility of making errors in our hospitality roles because such errors are also pedagogical moments, and even “when we enact an imperfect welcome, we must also be striving for an unconditional welcome” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 85).

Who is Hosting? Applications for ESL Settings

An important consideration for application in ESL settings is ways that notions of hospitality might work without reinforcing dominant power structures and further disempowering the marginalized. Any framework that sets heteronormativity as host already places non-binary sexual identities at a disadvantage. In this section, I am digging further, to contemplate ways that we can all be hospitable to one another without putting anyone on the spot. Nelson (1999, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2016) provides a framework that I find very relevant to my interest in exploring ways that the topic of sexual identities might be “treated” ethically within an intercultural ESL curriculum. While the inclusion of gay-friendly topics might encourage some conversation, Nelson (1999) suggests that an inquiry-based queer theory

approach provides a better way to promote intercultural dialogue in ESL settings. Within such an ESL curriculum conceptualization of unconditional welcome, Nelson suggests that a queer theory approach might facilitate even more welcome of all, because instead of isolating so-called minority sexualities as subjects of inclusion, it allows for a space to be made for a range of sexual identities. As she explains, queer inquiry entails working with learners to:

[Unpack] the language acts through which sexual identities are constituted and enacted and made to seem normal or not normal . . . it means seeking out not just straight but also lesbian, bisexual, gay, and other perspectives, while at the same time recognizing the limitations of producing such categorizations in the first place. (Nelson, 2009, p. 209)

In addition, proceeding within an inquiry-based queer theory lens also promotes an intercultural dialogue about ways that languages and cultures play a central role in how sexual identities come to be normalized or demonized. Heteronormativity, then, also enters the curriculum as subject to inquiry, not the usual taken-for-granted, unquestionable given that other sexualities are measured against. In addition, gay identities within such a framework, might not be perceived as the one needing tolerance from others, but also part of a bigger conversation. While gay and lesbian characters continue to be a focus of curricular texts, a hospitable queer pedagogy allows for the tensions in these interactions to be investigated, and a dialogue between students to strive toward an understanding of one another.

Nelson (1999) contends that while the gay and lesbian framework has been useful politically for mobilizing civil rights, it is far less useful pedagogically. She suggests that the goal of a gay-friendly framework is usually to engender appreciation and tolerance of gay identities, and to legitimize them. However, she proposes that a queer theory framework might be better suited for addressing sexual identities in the ESL classroom because as she clarifies,

Queer theory shifts the focus from gaining civil rights to analyzing discursive and cultural practices, from affirming minority sexual identities to problematizing all sexual identities. Pedagogies of inclusion thus becomes pedagogies of inquiry. (Nelson, 1999, p. 3)

Queer theory has its focus on the linguistic notion of *performativity*—which means that utterances do not just describe a word but act on it (Butler, 1990), in line with the linguistic notion that identities are “communicatively produced” through language (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1983, p. 1). This intersecting relationships between sexual identity and other identity formations makes it near futile to attempt to focus on gay and lesbian identities as a separate, detached, object of curricular interest. As Nelson (1999) suggests, a good understanding of ways that sexual identities shape intercultural encounters is possible only when other discursive aspects of identity are also considered simultaneously. As she summarizes, a queer inquiry approach provides such a framework because it considers the ways discursive acts and cultural practices position only heterosexuality as normal. To engage in queer inquiry, according to Nelson (1993, 2003, 2006), is to first summon the courage to situate sexual identity as a valid component of our daily understanding and discourse. To validate the topic, in the sense that Nelson describes, is to dare to utter words that have previously been shut out of ESL classrooms. Each time a word is uttered, there is a corresponding energy that is released, prompting curiosity, conversation, exploration, even anger and trepidation. But also, within these emotions, there is an actual learning that takes place, because as soon as the word comes under scrutiny, meaning starts to manifest, and with it is some semblance of understanding. We know this because:

every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment,

carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 474)

This learning space that is hospitable to queer inquiry can be likened to the space provided by Aoki's (1996/2005) “bridge.” This is not in the conventional understanding of a bridge as allowing movement of people and objects from one end to another, but a bridge as a “meeting and dwelling place” (Aoki, 1996/2005, p. 316).

However, it is also true, from participants' discussion of this topic of sexuality, that it is quite a complex one to engage. Duncan and Rivers (2012) assert that teaching about gender and sexuality is “risky business” for teachers because of the contested nature of the topic and because it includes matters that can “invoke a moral or ethical response and, if not conducted properly, can set up blame and shame” (p. 155). Nelson (1999), writing specifically in the ESL context, similarly cautions that a gay-friendly pedagogy focused on including minorities might also inadvertently “reinforce their minority status” (p. 377). It is also further true that whether taken up explicitly or ignored totally, nonbinary and minoritized sexualities show up in our midst often, asking urgent questions of curricula that demands urgent answers. In addition, contrary to some ESL teachers' arguments that gay references are invasive and irrelevant to English teaching, the ESL curricula is already in fact engaged in the topic of sexual identities in every task that reference “wife,” “husband,” “boyfriend,” or “bridal shower” because such references are “the currency of everyday social intercourse for the heterosexual” (Harris, 1990, p. 103). Within an intercultural context like the ESL classroom, instead of just inserting gay-inclusive teaching materials, it might be more beneficial to proceed with pedagogies that facilitate inquiry, “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2011, 2019), and a contemplation of how linguistic and cultural practices manage to normalize certain sexual identities and not others (Nelson, 1999).

Rhodes (2019) in her frank recount of her experiences of teaching sexual identity issues in her ESL classroom, described her own conflicted feelings about the best way to respond to extremely homophobic comments from a middle-aged, Eastern European male student in her US-based ESL class. She explained that rather than just accept the student’s harmful views as his rights to have an opinion, perhaps she could have asked more inquiry-based questions that provide opportunities to deconstruct inherent heteronormativity and the source of such heteronormativity. According to her, she could have asked “what makes us believe that being straight or gay is natural . . . and what do we think we base that on”? (Rhodes, 2019, p. 163). In Nelson’s (2009) examples of queer inquiry in practice, she writes an account of a US-based ESL class for immigrants and refugee students and the ways in which the teacher used an image of two women walking hand in hand to explore students’ own interpretation of the meaning of the act. The teacher applied queer inquiry by inviting an interpretation of the image based on several factors, including the apparent gender of the people, age, and geographical context. Such an inquiry-based approach might also take the pressure to “know it all” off teachers because learning about sexual identities become, as Greg suggests, a conversation. As Greg aptly puts it, it becomes, “let’s have a talk about that.” In the next section, I turn to a discussion of how gender discourses further intersect with sexuality and race in the ESL classroom.

Becoming Experienced Learners: Hermeneutic Wisdom for Teaching about Sexuality

Engaging ethical intercultural communication in the context of ESL pedagogy will involve building pedagogical spaces that allow for learners’ prejudices to be called to the fore by an encounter with some new meaning or new worldview. When such an encounter occurs, learners’ fore-understandings or prejudices, often unnoticed, are suddenly brought to the centre, making them subject to scrutiny. Such a drawing to the centre of previously hidden prejudices

creates the possibility for such a prejudice or presupposition to be challenged and transformed. Such a provocation that calls our prejudices to the fore in an educational context is not possible without deliberate engagement with something or someone else (Vilhauer, 2010) that shows up with their own meaning and validity. This is the important opportunity and gap that curriculum and teaching can take advantage of: creating opportunities, tasks, and conversations that could both challenge and transform learners’ prejudices. To risk our prejudices entails making them questionable and suspending their validity (Valhuer, 2010). Engaging learners in such a process provides the opportunity for learners to become experienced and to “know better” Gadamer (2000, p. 306).

How do learners become experienced in the topic of sexuality? To be experienced here does not refer to the idea of mastery and expertise. Experience, according to Gadamer, is a negative process that dashes our expectations and disappoints us. Within experience, “false generalizations are continually refuted,” and previously unquestioned and taken-for-granted assumptions are “shown not to be so” (Gadamer, 2000, p. 353). When learners are consistently engaged in tasks and topics that challenge and stretch their current understanding, they encounter conflict, even resistance with the uncomfortable new. For instance, learners from countries where homosexual relations are criminalized, and who have been told all their lives that non-heterosexual relationships are evil and unnatural, might encounter some ethical conflict when they are suddenly faced with dialogic encounters in their ESL classrooms that question such long-held beliefs and values. However, such a conflict of worldviews that learners experience in such a situation is considered positive, not negative; Gadamer (2003) refers to this encounter with the new and different that pushes the boundaries of our own values as genuine experience (*Erfahrung*).

For instance, a common fear of curriculum specialists and instructors when topics of sexuality are raised is that learners are often not expecting such controversial topics to be of curricular concern. However, the goal of educators should not be to align themselves solely with learners' expectations or to coddle learners' own values and worldviews; educators might often need to lean toward the not-so-pleasant option of giving learners an experience in the ESL classroom which thwarts their expectations. It is my stance that to achieve true transformation in our intercultural engagement with one another, educators must be open to the possibility of “disappointing” learners when we expose them to tasks that provide learners opportunities to have a genuine experience. Genuine experience, in spite of its negative and shocking quality, is in fact a positive kind of pain, akin to growing pains, with an abundance of benefits because “opening ourselves to such new, negative experience, and the difficulties proper to it . . . means entering a process in which we can revise what we thought we knew before and, ultimately, know better” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 65).

When educators courageously create “risky” curricular tasks and conversations that allow learners to risk having their values questioned and transformed, we hit the real heart of curriculum and pedagogy, and the very soul of what it means to teach about co-existence in a shared world. When a student who previously did not understand or question the ways that culture, education, and society reify heteronormativity as the only “normal” starts to question their own values and contemplate other perspectives about sexuality, they are simultaneously going through a process of transformation that enriches their self-understanding. In such a context, “what was perplexing and resisted us, what we experienced as alienating and what thwarted our expectations, we have now come to understand and make our own” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 65). And such a transformation is what true education, pedagogy, and learning is all

about. This process of human development made possible by the bravery of engaging the difficult new and entertaining the possibility of being transformed by it is what Gadamer referred to as *Bildung*.

Here Comes a Full Moon

I start this section with a playful reflection on some taboos surrounding gender and gender roles and acceptable behavior that I was raised by when I was growing up in Nigeria. One of the clearest visions I have of my home country as a child was running around with my cousins as the full moon appeared regally, illuminating the skies and the dark crevices where my cousins and I played hide and seek. The full moon brought newness and calm. But it also brought clarity and signaled the commencement of a range of traditional rituals.

Remembrance From My Childhood

On a warm, moonlit night, I am out in the huge dusty compound, running around with my little cousins. One of my favourite uncles strolls in, casually whistling his favourite song. I do not remember what time of night it was exactly, but the gorgeous moon had fully bloomed, standing lone and proud in the stark dark cloud surrounding it. It must have been quite late at night because when I formed my little lips to mimic my uncle's whistle, one of my aunts rushed straight from behind me, slapping my cheek. I spun around in agonized surprise, asking what I had done wrong. "Shhhh!" she yelled, "You must never whistle, especially at night." I was incredulous; my uncle had just sauntered in whistling and was met with welcoming smiles from everyone. "But Uncle Simpa was just whistling," I whimpered. "You're a girl! A girl! A woman!" my aunty yelled, inching intimidatingly closer with each breath, "it is a taboo for a girl or woman to whistle, and even worse, at night."

In traditional African society, gender, and the awareness of one's role in society, was an important knowledge acquired very early in life through societal rituals designed for that purpose. Family members and other people in the community took it upon themselves to educate

young children about gender expectations and norms, so in my own experience, being told “a girl should not” was quite commonplace. In fact, in pre-colonial Nigerian society and until the last century, official initiations and rites of passage were vital for heralding the official entry of children into their gender designation, which was, at the time, primarily male or female. In the Ogori-Magongo tribe of Kogi state, the popular Ovia ceremony is held annually to transition young girls into womanhood. In Ethiopia, the rites of passage for boys include a ritual of “Jumping of the Bulls,” where they must jump over anything between twenty to forty bulls to demonstrate their manhood. One of the primary purposes of initiation is to teach gender norms and values, and the excellent demonstration of expectations for one’s gender was the hallmark of being a respected member of society. These gender-based initiation rites were based on male-female binary, many African cultures demonstrate no recognition or understanding of non-binary gender identities.

Across other parts of the world, many other cultures engage in a range of socialization processes, both formal and informal, to educate young children about gender norms. In the research context, for instance, male students often express views about gender roles that indicate that male and female members of society have fixed, unalterable roles in societal and family spaces. In the following sections, I examine ways in which gender is performed in the ESL classroom, ways in which teachers have approached the topic, and gaps that make a more complex engagement with the topic challenging for teachers.

Dark Skies and Recipes

During her interview, Jyoti noted that the current ESL curriculum used in the teaching context has done a good job of providing class activities and tasks that may be useful in discussions about gender inequality and gender roles. However, she also pointed out that since

such opportunities to discuss gender are often not included as an outcome of the lesson, individual teachers are left to decide to ignore or engage in the underlying teaching moments about gender. One of her lessons involves a “recipe” task, and she found that male students, during the role-play portion of the task, often openly expressed that they believed recipes would be a more appropriate and relevant topic for their wives or other women. Jyoti often uses this task as a teachable moment to draw attention to and problematize values that underlie such assumptions:

In classrooms where I’ve had male students, if it’s a task where they have to explain a kitchen gadget, they will say something, or about a recipe. There is a task where there’s a recipe and they have to take notes. And they say, “That’s women’s work. I don’t know how to cook.” So, that right there is an opportunity to say why is it just a woman’s job, right? This is a household which consists of two people and it’s like two wheels on a bike. You have to have balance, right? You can’t just put all the weight on one and expect it not to go flat. So, in that task, it would inevitably come up, sadly, every time that the recipe task came up. “I don’t know enough about this. I didn’t do a good job because I’m not a woman and I don’t work in the kitchen.” And so, that whole gender system, I think, needs to be shaken up a bit. And just because you’ve only seen your mom and your wife cooking, that role should not remain the same. We need to do something different here. (Jyoti)

Jyoti further explained that her own personal experience of discrimination for growing up female in an all-female household, raised by a single female parent in a culture that prized the male child over female children, shaped her interest in the topic. As an adult, she is also a mother

to two female children, and she sheds more light on her own experiences with gender discrimination:

I grew up in a culture where women were subdued. I’m one of three girls and I grew up being told by my aunt, “you’re just a girl. There’s no boys, you don’t have a brother, you don’t have a father.” So, I’m sick of it. And then I gave birth to two girls, not having a son. And that’s another thing. It was just like, “you don’t have a son, Oh my God, poor Jyoti. She doesn’t have a husband. She doesn’t have a brother. She doesn’t have a son, she doesn’t have a father. She has no men in her life. (Jyoti)

Jyoti’s discussion above buttresses my earlier argument about how personal experiences shape how students’ and teachers’ respond to a range of topics and underlie what they are likely to notice or ignore in teaching and learning spaces.

Know Your Place: Female Teachers Teaching Male Students

An even more harmful orientation about gender that requires more complex engagement in the ESL learning context is the tendency of male students to demonstrate sexist attitudes toward female teachers and students. Holly, a White female teacher, discussed stark examples of being discriminated against by her male students on grounds of cultural perceptions about roles of women:

As an instructor, I get those students who don’t respect women. There are two that really stand out. So, my first one was when I was teaching new immigrants and this guy would make comments all the time about women. For example, a female student would give an answer to a question and he would kind of chuckle and go “Uh, yeah, women don’t have any good ideas.” So I had to have a one-on-one meeting with him and tell him, “this behavior doesn’t apply here. You can’t do this. (Holly)

She went on to explain a meeting she had with the student to further admonish him about respectful classroom spaces because it was important that the student heard it from her, a female instructor, rather than a male instructor stepping in on her behalf. She shared yet another experience, which this time happened at the research context.

And then another one was right here in this program, and this was also years ago. It was a man who would never accept my feedback, he just refused. He failed the course because he didn't change his writing the whole term. He wouldn't take anything I said. He would just flat out refuse to my face. So, if he was presenting [a task] and I pointed out something, he wouldn't listen, it would fall on deaf ears. He just looked at me and he said, “well, I think that the way I did it is fine.” And I'd say, “Well, okay. It's not but...” and I even remember one time just saying, “I'm here trying to help you, right? I'm trying to make you become a better writer. Uh, our goal is the same. You want to pass, I want you to pass and this feedback is intended to help you.” And he still refused, and he failed the course because [his writing] it's the same as it was on day one, weeks later. (Holly)

Holly's male student in the example did not believe, based on his own cultural orientation around gender roles, that it was a woman's place to be in any position of authority over him; neither did he think he should listen to feedback of any sort from a female teacher. Holly pointed out that there were limited opportunities to delve deeply into issues around gender in the current curriculum and what little opportunities there were didn't provide the space to unpack attitudes and values about gender in a complex or explicit way.

She Can't Have Two Fathers

Greg, a gay White male, also spoke passionately about issues of gender roles and cultural values around gender that students brought to his class. For him, the issue of gender roles and gender bias, even sexism, has shown up in class in many ways:

The most vivid one is the one I mentioned, where this young man refused to accept that the father and daughter didn't have the same name and I saw him shut down and he got frustrated and angry. He shuts down and he says “I don't, I can't do this” and I will say “Rufus, why can't you do this” and he says “It's just too different.” I see his real struggle with cultural diversity and cultural differences. In this task, a daughter does not have the same name as her father and in every patrilineal society where many of our students are from, very patrilineal, they can't see this. This young man could not get past it. So it's a real challenge to what is paternity and maternity and how can you be a father without the same name as your daughter? What does that family look like—and a mature mid-Eastern woman said “well maybe the husband was a jerk and she might not want anything to do with him. So, she said, “and my daughter's not gonna have your name and I'm not gonna marry you.” And so there's a discussion of what the family looks like and another young Muslim woman said “Maybe she has two fathers and mothers” and it was a great discussion because he was not afraid to vocalize his difficulty with it. I think part of intercultural competency is also being able to say “this is my culture and I'm having trouble with your culture and let's have a talk about that. (Greg)

Yet Another Unknown Guest

In the earliest conversation series, when I had just taken on the role of curriculum specialist at the institution, we often touched on gender inequality and inequity as it intersects with other identity groups in education and professional spaces. The focus was often to critically

review ways that our class tasks challenged or reinforced gender inequality or harmful, disempowering views about women and their roles in the workplace. While we focused on the duality of male and female and thought of ways to be hospitable to both genders in our classroom and curriculum materials, another guest crept up on us, uninvited, unmoving, demanding our attention, asking something of us, making room for itself. While instructors and I had informal conversations about students who appeared to be transitioning or gender nonbinary, there was not much discussion around ways that our classroom practice would be altered by the presence of these “guests.”

In this research interview, all five participants were quick to mention transgender inclusion as one of the areas that an intercultural ESL curriculum must embrace and make room for. They cited difficulties they each had in dealing with students who were non-gender conforming, admitting that both instructors and students could do more to be inclusive but lacked knowledge or understanding of the right language to use. In addition, there were often cases of subtle microaggression towards non-gender conforming students, and the participants were often not sure if they had to call out offending students or if it was best to avoid getting involved altogether. Many participants acknowledged that the usual suggestion to use “gender-neutral” pronouns that are often prescribed may not necessarily be applicable to all situations, neither is that a fit for all situations. Holly, for instance, recounted her experience of teaching students who appeared to be of nonbinary gender and her challenges of trying to appropriately address the student:

I’ve had multiple incidents, but there’s one case that is really memorable for me because with this student, I thought I had it all worked out. So because I had it [the experience of teaching gender non-conforming students] before and usually my strategy would be to

address the student by their first name. Avoid pronouns at all cost, because you might say the wrong one. But this one term, it was the very first day and the student had chosen an English name which was also gender neutral. So, because at first I said “Oh give me your English name?” This is going to be my clue. Then the gender-neutral name. Oh okay, so my next idea was to have all the students make name cards with their first language, making it sound like I do this every term. So I said, “Okay I’m going to give you guys recipe cards. I want you to put your preferred name and preferred pronouns. So they did that, and I could not wait to get the cards back. I thought to myself, “this is the answer,” but the student wrote “it doesn’t matter.” So, I was still stuck. So the student actually said they don’t have a preferred pronoun, but I also felt uncomfortable using “they” because I felt like that was an admission that I didn’t know. So then I had to resort to my old trick which is just always to say the first name, for example, “Look at his work, look at Jordan’s work.” I had to always say their name, but use pronouns for everyone else. I think this is an interesting thing to talk about in curriculum because I don’t think everyone, even people living in Canada for a long time or Canadians are totally comfortable, or totally know what to do either. So I think that it’s something to explore because it’s new for everybody, instructor included. For example, what do we [teachers] do? (Holly)

One of the consequences of having a guest that the host did not know previously and had also not prepared for is the awkwardness that comes with such surprise. Since ESL curriculum materials have pronouns like “he” or “she,” students who identify as male or female see themselves represented to some extent in class materials every day. However, the presence of such gender-specific language also serves to alienate, exclude, or obscure those who do not fit

into that binary. Consequently, while most students may have knowledge of transgender designations from pop culture and the media, they may have never had to confront their own understanding of it or even their bias. Participants noted the awkwardness or lack of response from other students when transgender issues were taken up in class. Jyoti, for instance, recounted her attempts to be more gender inclusive in her practice by bringing up conversations about gender diversity and gender-inclusive language. She also noted that her attempts to engage her students in such conversations often did not yield significant results since students stayed quiet each time she brought up the topic.

In my email signature, I have “she and her” as pronouns, and so I’ll bring that up. “How many of you have noticed, when I sent you an email, did you scroll to the bottom? I have that. What do you think that means?” Now, it’s common to ask someone what pronouns do I use for you. That’s a whole new concept for students. They’re kind of scared of it. Because it’s like “What the hell? I have so many other things to worry about. There’s usually not much discussion. There’s not much questioning. There’s kind of looks between students, especially male or older students, that kind of look at each other and kind of like, whatever. So, that tells me they’re not really open to that. So we could do something in that sense, right? To have tasks that kind of push that a little because we don’t have anything like that, right? (Jyoti)

In the broader literature of English language teaching, there is a dearth of scholarship in the area of transgender or nonbinary identities (Paiz, 2019). To signal their own limited knowledge of transgender issues, a few scholars writing on the topic of queer identities often choose to frame the scope of their discussion as LGBQ instead of LGBTQ+ (e.g., Rhodes & Coda, 2017). Nguyen and Yang (2015), another one of the few scholars in the field to have

explicitly written about transgender identity in ESL classrooms, noted in their study of a transgender ESL student that English was crucial for the student’s transitioning because it offered her linguistic resources for engaging with a broader queer community. This silence on transgender issues in the field poses a problem of erasure for transgender learners in the classroom and makes it impossible to develop ESL students understanding about the topic. This critical knowledge gap in the field (Rowlett & King, 2016) continues to be problematic for ESL teachers who often do not feel like they know enough to engage the topic at all in their classrooms. At the research institution, gender-neutral bathrooms have visibly sprung up in the last two years, in acknowledgement of the gender-diverse population of students. However, such tokenized forms of gender inclusion do not suffice to address the complex conversation that is gender inclusion. For instance, ESL students around the campus notice the gender-neutral bathrooms without necessarily understanding what gender-inclusion means in their classroom space or engagement with gender “otherness.” This gap in knowledge often leads to awkward situations of unintended microaggression in the classroom space. Holly recalled an incident from her class:

There was a case where a student didn’t seem to fit into the gender binary and one other student used both pronouns for that gender-non-binary student and the student went totally red in the face. Like saying, “she or he” when addressing the [gender-non-binary] student in front of everyone. And I remember feeling so sorry for the student in that moment because you could see visibly that they were embarrassed. (Holly)

The Alberta Teachers of English (ATESL) ICC curriculum framework provides exemplar tasks and activities for how ESL teachers may take up the teaching of gender to foster intercultural communication. The document provides broad descriptions for questioning and

interrogating assumptions about gender and within the document is a “learning” section which has a focus to “analyze and describe diversity in Canadian cultures” (p. 102). The learning outcomes also seek to develop students’ understanding of diverse cultural perspectives about gender norms and roles and to “communicate personal and social perspectives on gender norms” (p. 102). The ICC framework also provides some useful reflection questions that invite teachers to think about their own comfort level with teaching the lesson content and their knowledge of the content. Instructors are also invited to reflect on their attitudes and knowledge of how their language stereotypes may differ from those of their students (p. 109).

However, a critical component missing from the document, is that communicating about and trying to develop an understanding of how other people view culture does not necessarily provide a framework for questioning harmful values around gender. Students may find it difficult to respect others’ views even if they do understand it, so this volatile component of the topic of gender needs to be accounted for in curricula framework. In addition, the language of gender in the documents also provides for the binaries of “man and woman” but as has been revealed by findings in this study, these are problematic categorizations for teaching gender not just because of a need to be more inclusive but because the ESL classroom and the ESL teacher have already been presented with students who do not identify as “man” or “woman.” One of the recommended speaking tasks for the gender lesson in the ATESL document was “where do we often learn about how to be a man or woman” and “how does it make you feel when you see that not everyone has the same ideas about being a man or woman?” (p. 105). Such polarized language for referencing gender ignores the possibility that questions about non-binary gender identities may come up in ESL teaching settings especially, and teachers would therefore need a more inclusive curricular approach to gender. In addition, ESL teachers will benefit from

professional development opportunities and curriculum resources that help them understand and respond to more complex notions of gender.

A Tricky Dance

We must abandon completely the naïve faith that schools automatically liberate the mind and serve the cause of human progress; in fact we know that it [sic] may serve any cause. [It] [sic] may serve tyranny as well as truth, war as well peace, death as well as life . . . In the course of history, education has served every purpose and doctrine contrived by man [sic]. If it is to serve the cause of human freedom, it must be explicitly designed for that purpose. (Counts, 1962, p. 62)

In this section, I devote attention to an important point that addressed me in the course of the interviews about the ways in which ESL teachers feel that their ability to engage with intercultural competence more robustly is hindered by both cultural, institutional, personal, and educational systems. All five participants, at some point in my conversations with them individually and in the focus group interviews, grappled with the disconnect between the ESL planned curriculum content and outcomes, and the “real” issues that emerged in the course of “doing” teaching. One of the issues that stands out is ways the lesson materials often skip over a topic without allowing for a meaningful engagement with such a topic. Participants revealed that while reading texts may contain references to race, gender, and sexual orientation, a direct engagement with these topics is often not the focus of the lesson. While there is an explicit goal of teaching Canadian workplace culture and language, that goal is not often balanced with an engagement of how social justice or inequality works in said Canadian workplace culture.

Instructor Jyoti noted:

We [the curriculum] focus a lot on diplomacy and tact, right, which is great to tell students, "This is how you should be handling it. Canadians tend to be polite and all these. But there is a lot of wrongdoing in Canadian society, too. There's a lot of ugliness, right, sometimes there's too much, "be polite. say your please and thank you's. And don't do this. And don't rock the boat. You got to be nice to your supervisor. Handle it diplomatically." That's all important. But then there's another part where people can take advantage of you, right? and mistreat you and abuse you. And it could be racism. It could be gender [bias]. It could be ageism. It empowers our students to say, "Hey, you have rights here. And this is how you stake up for yourself. So you don't always say 'please' with 'thank you'. You can also fill the other forms [to report discrimination]. Here is where you go." I do think, once you start talking about it, a lot of hands start coming up and sharing. And maybe we need to have more opportunities for those sharing. (Jyoti)

This focus on not “rocking the boat” and on keeping things light make it possible for classrooms to be free of the “heavy stuff” but also create a disconnect between students’ classroom learning and their lived experiences. While such “moments of disruption” constantly present themselves in class, the divide between the outcomes and objectives that teachers are expected to cover in each lesson makes it impossible for them to confidently journey to unplanned, meaningful possibilities presented by each disruptive question.

Jyoti suggested that a more direct approach to teaching intercultural communication would be both beneficial and worthwhile for students. Creating curriculum topics in a way that allows for messy conversations and vulnerable sharing allows both the teacher and learners to stay attuned with the humanity of everyone in the classroom space. Jyoti also believes that the act of teaching could be empowering, and educational spaces should be more accommodating of

students' lived realities. She shared an example of ways in which the curriculum often misses an opportunity to engage a topic in ways that are truly meaningful:

Sometimes it's so intricately woven that it might not be obvious. And it's hidden and masked as a form filling exercise or something, where it's not like we're tackling this issue. This is like a by-product. So, maybe sometimes it's nice to actually say, "This is the uncomfortable monkey work. Look at them." And everybody, let's take our gloves off and this is what we're going to talk about. So there was this task, it was a form that you fill in for H.R. on workplace harassment. So, before the students get the form, they are told about different types of harassment. So, it's like sexual, physical, emotional, verbal abuse, all of that. So, then they're just looking at vocabulary. If someone is swearing at you, if they are physically threatening you, what kind of harassment is that? So, it's just vocabulary. Right? And then they get this form and they get a situation that they can make up and say, you're filling out this form and basically pretend that one of these types of harassment is happening to you and make up a scenario and fill out this form. And then afterwards, we ask the students that are comfortable to come up and show us [their completed form on the projector]. And the focus is on how much detail is required, Did you answer the right thing? If you answer yes here, then you have to fill more, if no, then you don't fill the next question. So, it's more on the linguistics. So, a student can pour their heart out that they were like cornered and beaten. And you [the teacher] say, "That's cool. I love that you used the past verb." Right? So, it's easy to focus on the grammar and present perfect continuous form. And then you'd never have to talk about it, the humanity of it all. (Jyoti)

The opportunity cost of addressing “the humanity of it all” could sometimes be the high chance of not covering the day’s outcomes and objectives because one of the constraints of teaching a prescriptive task-based language teaching curriculum is time. Jyoti noted that when opportunities present to engage meaningfully, and look beyond linguistic considerations, the teacher still has to engage in a tricky dance with time. When asked what the biggest factor is that determines if she would go with the flow and engage a topic in the moment or if she would let a teachable moment slide and focus on language outcomes, Jyoti responded:

Timing. And to be honest, TBLT [Task-Based Language Teaching] always feel like it's a time thing. So, you have to go with it. So, I do try and push the agenda as much as I can to find places 10 minutes here, 15 minutes there to go beyond what the lesson has told me to do. But at a certain point, I can't talk about something deeper, usually that can lead in to 45 minutes. It's very easy to do it because when you have 20, 25 people, at least half of them are vocal, there's questions. There's conversation. There's experiences that are shared. So, time would probably be the biggest thing because there's just not a space for it. (Jyoti)

Split Identities

In his discussion of some challenges that he associates with teaching intercultural communication in more meaningful ways, Jim cited the clash between worldviews as a potential drawback. He observed that such an engagement would require a huge shift in the ways that many Canadian teachers have been told to conduct themselves in relation to others. Holding spaces for students’ lived experiences requires a commitment from the teacher to “transgress” (hooks 1994) commonly understood boundaries about what teachers and students can share in classroom spaces. In addition, Jim noted that many Canadians were raised to frown upon any

kind of personal sharing in public spaces, like the workplace or schools, and even more, a key focus of the curriculum in the research context is to teach students about “appropriate” conversations in various contexts. Enabling vulnerable sharing in school settings, he noted, may pose an ontological conflict for White Canadian teachers like himself, who have been told all their lives that they have to refrain from “oversharing.” Jim further shares his views on this ontological conflict:

At times I do talk about it, often regularly about how Canadians compartmentalize their lives, you have a work life, you have a home life and this life and often they don’t mix. So don’t expect that you’re going to become best friends with people you work with. It just doesn’t happen here. And I even, (laughs) it does sound kinda weird, (laughs) the more I think about it, it sounds weird to me. (Jim)

Asked why he found that weird, he further explains:

Well, the people that we spend . . . and I tell my students this as well . . . often we spend more time with people we work with than anyone else and yet our relationship with them is not very deep, there are things about me that my workmates might have guessed about, but I don’t tell people. That’s how I was raised, that’s fine, and I naturally gravitate to that, I am very happy most of the time to go “okay work has started” (laughs) but what makes it okay (laughs). But I understand intellectually that it’s a good idea . . . to introduce something else will be good for me but I still shrink back from it many times. (Jim)

Purpel and McLaurin (2004) observed that there has not been adequate attention given to education and meaningful connections to students’ lived experiences. This disconnect is partly because educators often prefer to separate discourse about education “from our discussion of our

most serious and profound matters” (p. 22). To teach for meaning in education means urgently confronting cultural issues that educational institutions would rather not engage. As Purpel and McLaurin (2004) further argued, Western culture tends to “equate education with particular institutions and processes, which are, if at all, only vaguely linked to deeper social, cultural, economic, and political matters” (p. 22). This detachment, or non-engagement, also directly connects to the cultural paranoia that both the larger society and educators may sometimes feel about showing care and compassion openly. While schools have always encouraged caring for others at some level, the dominant focus on individualism can often act as an impediment to the desire to show care to and nourish others (p. 53). As a result, individuals, educators included, have “come to find ways in which indifference is valued—in some quarters, it is considered good to be ‘cool,’ to be stoic, to avoid feeling guilt” (p. 53).

This stoicism, this practiced detachment, becomes the standard response for some Western teachers who are faced with the horrid realities of students’ lives. In the research context, there are students from warring countries who receive messages that their parents were killed by warring factions. How shall a teacher respond to such an unsettling information? Stoicism. Remaining stoic and “not losing it” would seem appealing in the face of such difficult circumstances because it helps the teacher “maintain their sanity.” Such emotional distance helps the teacher focus on what is important: the curriculum, getting through the day’s lesson plans, finishing grading, and preserving their own sense of individuality. In fact, being adept at detachment is often touted as the practice of “self-care,” a skill everyone should apparently develop in order not to get overwhelmed with the daily challenges of teaching in difficult circumstances.

Given the challenges that punctuate teachers’ daily lives, the immense pressure teachers often have to deal with in relation to expectations, assessments, evaluations, and job security, practicing detachment seems like a safe way to avoid overburdening themselves mentally. However, as Purpel and McLaurin (2004) noted, such a detached mindset serves to “truncate the human spirit, especially that part that yearns for human connection and social involvement” (p. 54) because it is antithetical to our true nature as living, interconnected beings. This dis-ease is often masked as “Canadian culture,” and language learners are taught that vulnerability in educational spaces is “inappropriate” in Canada. Along these lines, Jyoti discussed her own initial struggle about being vulnerable with her students. She has since learned to see her identity as female, teacher, mother, visible minority, Canadian, and as a single intersecting unit instead of her previous orientation about separate selves. As she explained:

In my teaching philosophy and mine has changed, I was probably that person who got uncomfortable when people told me personal stuff. But I think I have seen a lot in my own life of ups and downs that now I just can’t close my eyes to others’ suffering because I’ve been . . . so I have suffered, and I’ve had people open their eyes to me, so I don’t want to close my eyes to people that are suffering. If I can make a difference, why wouldn’t I? If someone tells you in class “I’m in an abusive relationship at home.” Are you going to say, “Yeah. Let’s talk about your subject-verb agreement.” I don’t understand that. (Jyoti)

However, she cautions that many other instructors and teachers, especially those from a different cultural background than hers, may push back at the idea of going against the ingrained cultural tendency to distance emotionally and mentally from students’ personal struggles. She noted that

in her decade-long ESL teaching career, she has often heard teachers in a range of school settings distancing themselves from the responsibility to listen to and connect with students’ struggles.

Some instructors often think “my job is to improve their writing, paragraph structure.

This is what I know how to do and I don’t want to deal with the rest of this.” So, that, I

think is the biggest problem. And others that want to help, they might just not be

comfortable in their own skin because I think you have to make yourself vulnerable

before other people do. And I wasn’t like that before, but like I said, over the last few

years, I’ve come into myself. Before now, I had a teaching Jyoti and a personal Jyoti.

Now, they’re the same person, they’ve merged . . . because I felt like I had to have this

other persona because that’s professional. I felt like I was being unprofessional if I just

shared a personal experience. Now, I may be older, I am more comfortable with my own

self. I can say I’m still being professional without breaking down that respect. (Jyoti)

Will Management Have My Back?

One of the concerns raised by Kelti in response to the challenges of teaching intercultural communication, relates to the security of instructors’ jobs in the event that conversations got somewhat heated between students. In addition, she noted that while teachers may try, there is no foolproof way to determine in advance how students may react to a conversation about charged topics like race, religion, gender, and sexuality. In light of that, there is a chance that a disgruntled student may for one or more reasons decide to file a formal report to management about controversial topics discussed in class. She expressed that in the event of such a formal report being filed, she would need to know in advance that her manager would “have her back.” For teachers to cultivate a pedagogical space conducive for meaningful connection, institutional support is a vital starting point. Teachers would need to feel that as they learn the ropes and the

language of teaching about delicate topics, their supervisors and managers will provide curricula support and be on their side in the event that things do not go as expected. At the teaching context, like in many ESL settings, instructors often work on hourly contracts renewable by the term or by the year at best. The sense of insecurity created by such working arrangement might be further heightened by the possibility of increased students' complaints against instructors in the event that uncomfortable and difficult conversations become part of the curriculum.

Resistance from students have been cited by other ESL practitioners engaging in difficult curricula topics with students. Such resistance might be in the form of making official reports, requesting class change, or leaving the program altogether. As noted in earlier chapters, ESL students often see the classroom as a pathway to achieving a future goal of either working or studying a career program. Often, they are professionals who believe themselves to have set values and who also expect that their ESL classes are purely for improving their language. They might be surprised at attempts to integrate political conversations into the topic and may refuse to engage.

Now that I have explored possibilities for application of intercultural communication in ESL settings, I will now turn my attention to a discussion of the ontological conditions necessary for an ethical intercultural pedagogy to come alive.

Chapter 8: Returning to Original Difficulty

The war creates no absolutely new situation; it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself. If men [sic] had postponed the search for knowledge and beauty until they were secure, the search would never have begun. We are mistaken when we compare war with “normal life.” Life has never been normal. Even those periods which we think most tranquil, like the nineteenth century, turn out, on closer inspection, to be full of crises, alarms, difficulties, emergencies. Plausible reasons have never been lacking for putting off nearly all activities until some imminent danger has been averted or some crying injustice put right. But humanity long ago chose to neglect those plausible reasons. (Lewis, 1939, pp. 49-50)

As I have navigated twists and turns in the past several months, to which the Covid-19 pandemic seem to be a personal climax, C. S. Lewis’ wise words above render a perfect description of turmoil that exists within me at this point in my own life and adequately frame the dis-ease I see ravaging the human race as a collective. These words also provide me the impetus to put pen to paper and press on, regardless of what rages within and without. Pressed on all sides, perplexed, afraid, and hanging on the very threads of our collective lives, there has to be some way that life can go on, and that process begins with the conviction that life *must* go on.

On a personal level, I have taken stealthy steps, like an acrobat on a tight rope, struggling to keep the balance. As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, about two years ago, I assumed a new role as the academic chair of the English language department within which I conducted this research, a professional high point for me. A high point even as I, at the same time, maneuvered

through a separation and divorce and grappled with the unsteady ropes of single parenthood. At the professional level, in the past few months, my institution has been impacted by governmental policy changes and education funding cuts, leading to workforce adjustments that saw an unprecedented loss of jobs for educators. In ideal times, perhaps I could look to a thriving career and job for some reprieve during the particularly difficult personal travail of the death of my marriage partnership, but I was also faced with an equally escalating series of events at work. Sitting with a beloved staff member and sharing that there will be no work for them in the coming semester feels like a whirlwind that threatens my balance on the tightrope. Arms flailing in the air desperately, I hang on—barely, as one new announcement after the other heralds the death of something orchestrated by government cuts. “I will get back to writing as soon as my heart stops racing in fear of falling off the tightrope,” I thought to myself. I was waiting to write until I could find a balance.

I did not find balance. Instead, there was a new wave of attack, this time a global health crisis that impacted the entire human race. Like a whirlwind, Covid-19 moved swiftly, dangerously cutting down structures—human structures, medical structures, scientific structures, educational structures, family structures, economic structures, societal structures. As I pondered the possibility that I would ever find an ideal and tranquil time to return to my writing, I stumbled upon Lewis’ (1939) article and realized that these times are, in fact, not peculiarly extraordinary times; humans were always already fighting some kind of war. This illusion of “normal life” that I seemed to be waiting for may never have existed in the first place, and as Lewis (1939) put it, “even those periods which we think most tranquil, like the nineteenth century, turn out, on closer inspection, to be full of crises, alarms, difficulties, emergencies.” Similarly, Saunders (2020) pointed out that what we like to refer to as “normal life” has always

included “corporate mismanagement and collapse, accident mismanagement, resource or technology mismanagement, ponzi schemes, fraud, robbery, trafficking, homicide” (para. 2). Humanity has always been at war against itself or an invisible enemy, and the Covid-19 pandemic has “like most disasters, caught us in a horrid weft of natural evil, vice and folly. It is a macrocosm of everyday common evil” (Saunders, 2020, para. 2).

In the face of the dawning reality that life as I have lived it has always been fraught with tension, disasters, wars, and imbalance, the common-sense way forward for me would be to attempt to *live*: and write about how we may live better and enact a space to continually pursue wisdom in the face of our confusion and turmoil. Perhaps instead of packing up my books and retreating to an idea of a future time of “normalcy,” I should be holding myself in self-embrace, thankful that, as researchers and educators, we can, alongside our students, continue to pursue wisdom by “studying things that have outlasted wars, plagues, and natural disasters—such as the nature of human beings and the human community, the virtues and vices and how they play out in the narratives, the deep bases of war and peace” (Saunders, 2020).

A Bridge and a Fireplace

There is a certain character of patience required to live and work hermeneutically, and while I find that not one singular description captures that character, the more I write, the more I have come to see that understanding, for the hermeneut, often lies in the ability to allow ourselves to *turn* with the work. Sometimes, such a turning with the work requires whiling on the topic and allowing the topic to speak to and at us. It is within such whiling that a topic can assume its own life and “stand there,” separate from all our doing. As I approach these sections, I do not get a sense of an “ending” to my dissertation; instead, as I turn with the topic and contemplate the difficulty of what it is I am asking of myself and educators, the ideas that I find

myself drawn to extrapolate in this chapter are really reflections. In this section, I reflect on various interconnected concepts on how we may rethink an ESL curriculum within an ethic of intercultural communication. I do not offer “nuggets” or “strategies” for “developing” said curriculum, but reflections and stories around concepts I consider to be central to navigating a way to make free spaces available to engage intercultural competence in the ESL curriculum and classroom.

A Time That Does Not Pass: Rethinking the Notion of Time in the ESL Classroom

It was the year 2008 and I was an English language teacher at a British school. On a bright, sunny afternoon, the head of the English department was in my language class to “observe” my lesson. Every lesson in the department had to be planned in such a way that blocks of time were assigned to each stage of the lesson: starter activity, main lesson, task, review of task, conclusion. I passed a copy of my lesson plan to my supervisor and carefully wrote lesson objectives on the whiteboard. I had made sure to print lesson handouts and lay them carefully on students’ desks before the start of class. My students, all thirty of them, looked on in a peculiar kind of awkward discomfort that, in retrospect, probably mirrored my own unease. It was the “big day” I had told my students about all week—the day we would have a “visitor.” I had chosen the topic of travel experience for the lesson because I had hoped that such a topic would make for active engagement with my students. My students, avid travellers themselves, had lots to say and, while my supervisor made notes in her pad quietly, I steered the lesson in the direction I had planned all week. Until I could not.

“Why are Nigerian nationals treated differently at foreign airports? When I fly with my Nigerian passport, I am treated differently than my younger sister who has an American passport.” As one of the more outspoken students suddenly shared this experience, class discussions took a different direction than planned; many students raised their hands to share their own similar experiences. Glancing nervously at the gigantic clock staring judgmentally at us all, I had to make a quick call right there and then: entertain this surprising cameo that I had not planned for and risk falling behind in the day’s lesson or

cut this conversation short, finish the lesson “successfully” and receive good feedback from my supervisor on effective time management.

Tick tock!

“Ok, OK, I admonished. Let’s get back to the topic. What sentence structures are required to make requests . . .” As my students grudgingly got back to peering into their notes, I heaved a sigh of relief, I was not going to be one of those teachers with poor time management skills who always got criticized for engaging “off topic” or “off-task” conversations in class. There was just no time to spend on extraneous topics like students’ experiences of discrimination at foreign airports.

Another glance at the clock.

Five more minutes and the bell was due to ring.

I had to get on with it. (Rekiyat Siyaka, Personal Story)

In an ESL classroom, much like other curricular subjects, time, and how much of it is “available” for a lesson, is often a big consideration in the development of a lesson. Then, the question of “timing” follows, as lessons are chunked into determinable and designated stages that can be timed. In my experience as a language instructor in Canada and elsewhere, I have found that each stage of a lesson falls within a pre-specified time, set by individual instructors or other program personnel responsible for curriculum. As shared by participants in this research, time, then, becomes an expensive currency against which every other incident, discussion, or occurrence is planned around or negotiated. This fixation on time and time management is part of a larger obsession with competence in education. Several scholars (Aoki, 1984; Collier, 1989, 2015; Donsky, 2015; Koester & Lustig, 2015) have pointed out the unhealthy effects of evaluating teachers’ competence by how much they can conform to this factory-line notion of productivity and efficiency. In the story I shared above, a rich opportunity to explore meaningful conversations about travel and discrimination was passed up by me in favour of “covering” the lesson plan. I did not make room for the “unexpected guest,” the real-life experiences of my

students, because I believed there was not enough time available for “unplanned” and “non-language-related” conversations. Participants in this research also cite time constraints as a big challenge for teaching toward intercultural communication. Like me in the story above, participants in this research perceived “time” as a constraint that prevented them from often engaging meaningful lines of conversations that emerged in their classroom. Because carefully planned time guidelines for each phase of a lesson often do not allow for “disruptive episodes,” teachers who choose to accommodate unplanned but valuable discussions about students’ lived experiences, often deal with some guilt about not covering the language goals of the day. In this sense, time becomes the invisible driver that determines and controls what teachers may or may not engage with in their classrooms. This tendency to view time in a utilitarian way as something that is always never enough is itself an ontological orientation around which Western economic and educational systems are built. In such a commodified view, time is understood as a blank and decontextualized substance that can be “used up,” “finished,” “available,” even “banked.”

Within such an imaginal shift, it is then possible to also conceive of time as something that can run out (Jardine, 2017, p. 181). Gadamer (1970) used the term “empty time” (p. 342) to describe such a view of time because it requires a detachment of temporal forms measured from what is being measured; hence, stripping time from its content “empties” it and makes it available for use as one deems fit (Ross, 2006, p. 110). Time, then, inevitably becomes nothing but an “empty sequence or stretch” (Jardine, 2017, p. 181). In order to strive toward an intercultural curriculum that holds space for engagement with “original difficulty,” Western education systems may have to reconsider their relationship with time. In its current state, teachers and students, controlled by the big-time machine, are in a constant rush and frenzy to meet up with lessons, activities,

program of studies, curricula—all of these planned around a notion of time that is constantly in short supply and always running out.

The challenge with such a view of time is that the minds of educators are consequently fixated on time rather than the convivial life that is unfolding right there in the classroom. The student who wonders aloud if it is ethical for international students to pay thrice as much as domestic students in tuition is told by the instructor that *there is no time* to delve into such ethical questions of the domestic-international student tuition divide. Within such a framework, the teacher can glide past a writing submission within which an Asian student shares a horrific racist experience while scanning for grammar errors. In the present organization of curricula around “timeable” pieces, disruptions like students’ lived experiences have little to no place either in the pre-task, task, or post-task phase, so the teacher feels a burden to complete prescribed lesson outcomes while sometimes also being conscious that they had missed a rare opportunity to connect with students. Teachers, aware that by ignoring such teachable moments, they are passing up an opportunity to engage with valuable wisdom, grieve silently, forever carrying the burden of not feeling like they are connecting enough. Like machines, teachers become time-controlled vessels, slaves to the clock and the timed work that they have been assigned. This focus on a machine notion of time in turn appears to shorten whatever time teachers have available and chips away at the quality of whatever they achieve within the specified machine times because “time is always running out for machines. They shorten our work . . . by simplifying it and speeding it up, but our work perishes quickly” (Berry, 1983, p. 76).

To counter such a shallow, unhealthy orientation of time, and to build a curriculum that allows for the difficult, the complex, and the meaningful, I am drawn to the wisdom of Ross (2006), who admonished educators to pursue and live a life of “abiding inquiry” (p. 111) within

which we may begin to develop an orientation “enveloped in a time that does not pass” (p. 106). Such a notion of time has been similarly referred to as “full-filled time” by Gadamer (1970). Working within such an understanding of full-filled time is “working in the *presence* of the topic and working to bring that topic to presence” (Jardine, 2017, p. 248).

In the current state of curriculum and instructional organization in the ESL classroom and education in general, a notion of time as being unending seems impossible because it requires first of all to pause and consider how such is even possible. How might educators begin to cultivate a different kind of relationship with time at this point in history when they are, more than ever, required to teach in ways that align with outcome-based funding models that are hinged on the ability to tick boxes on governmental performance checklists? As Jardine (2017) admonished, educators must first remember that “this is not the real world in some intransigent, ontological sense. Rather, it is how the world has turned out” (p. 181). Once we make space for this new shift, then we might be able to proceed on the arduous but rewarding task of conceptualizing what an ESL curriculum might look like if time were viewed as “time that does not pass” (Ross, 2006, p. 106). When we approach teaching like this, educators can focus on the “stories” that every lesson, every topic holds, understanding that the fullness of knowledge around the topic can depend on the living story, the living topica, as told by both students and teacher, even as they are in turn “told” by the story and topic.

Another Word on Time: That Which is Fully Here for Us

It thus involves the *gatherings and the re-gatherings*, where what we’ve found, where we are “now,” and “what is to be done next” are gathered together into the presence of “that which is [emergently] fully here for us”—the topic being investigated. (Jardine, 2017, p. 248, emphasis in original)

When such work goes well, we lose a sense of the dominance of the empty measure of clockwork time and fall unto the time of the story, of the work itself, of “that which is fully here for us.” (Jardine, 2017, p. 248)

These quotations above are a reminder to me of the ongoing task of composing ourselves in ways that allow us to embrace a shift in the way we think about time. As I write this section, I am looking at the length of my writing and wondering about “how much time” I have “used” up and the demand I am placing on my readers’ time in this section. For a second there, I had an overwhelming urge to “move on with it” and “finish up.” But instead of finishing up, I closed my eyes and whiled on this topic further.

The ESL classroom has a curious relationship with time. A deeply disturbing relationship—perhaps more so than other subject areas. As you will recall, in my earlier chapters, I explained how the inability to speak a new language in a new country tasks the individual, placing an urgency on them to earn their “place” in by learning the language. An individual living in Canada without adequate proficiency in the English language may face a range of crippling consequences: the inability to work, participate in social life, complete vital forms, and explain symptoms at the family doctor—these limitations demand an urgent approach to language learning. Often, ESL learners take courses for better communication and to meet language requirements for securing a seat in a post-secondary program. The language class, therefore, is often a stopover in the journey toward the ultimate goal of studying or working. ESL learners think of time until the end of a course, time until they can be “competent,” time until the expiry of a previous language test, time until the career program starts. These pressures concerning future goals profoundly shape the learner’s relationship with time. Students in the ESL programs are often pre-career, meaning they often have accompanying financial pressures,

which makes the need to move very fast all the more urgent. Instructors, faced with programs often designed to meet these “timed-needs” of learners, are themselves often forced to focus on students’ futuristic language needs in the workplace or professional programs. Time seems to never be enough and must be “used wisely.”

As I reflect on this present situation in the ESL field, a vital question to ask is how we might lean into “a time that is fully here for us” with an understanding of the constraints discussed above. How might educators approach an ESL topic in ways that allow them to treat the topic as a story, composing it, and allowing themselves be composed by it? Jardine’s (2017) quotations at the start of this section are instructive for how educators may dwell in, and work within, a notion of a time that is “fully here for us” (p. 248). It will entail first “losing” ourselves, and how we have come to perceive and understand time, knowing that the topics we teach are:

Living and often deeply contested “inheritances” that have been handed to us and to which we have been handed. They are living, ongoing gatherings into whose life of gathering we must enter in order to come to grasp them, in order for each of us to “gather” something of these gatherings. (p. 248)

In the ESL classroom, instead of a focus on the grammar forms used in accomplishing a written task on discrimination, we may approach the topic tentatively, respectfully, slowly, and purposefully as a story that unravels in the “fullness” of class time. Approaching discrimination as a story whose telling is not yet complete would enable educators make room for the “arrival” of the unplanned and unknown. The Covid-19 pandemic and its attendant curves and turns has a lesson for our generation about time. As the number of victims increased in the second week and third week in the United States and Europe, I spent a significant part of my day watching the news—taken in by the frantic “modelling” of the pandemic by top public health scholars. As

schools, companies, and entire country systems shut down, and as silence enveloped the world, I watched the unease in our culture around time. When can we get back to production? When can businesses reopen? When will kids be able to go back to school? When will we be able to watch live sporting events? When can we go to the movies? These questions reveal something we already know about our present relationship with time: we fear activities or events that do not have specified timelines or end dates. For the first time in most of our lives, we are being asked to literally “sit this out,” with no idea when life can return to “normal” again. Normal, being our carefully timed daily routines of rising, a quick work-out on the treadmill, getting ready for work, and driving back home. “When will this end?” people frantically ask governments and medical experts. Just give us a date and timeline to help us visualize and adjust to this enemy, this endless time that cannot be allocated as freely as before. I mused aloud, as decades of dependence on a given, predictable world is called to question and as we collectively grasp for straws. The truth is, *nobody knows when* with this pandemic. We have seen many of the models and predictions fail woefully. This pandemic, and our reaction to it, reveals our own machine-time addiction and an important lesson that sometimes, an event must “full-fill” its time.

To truly teach meaningfully toward a curriculum of intercultural communication, we must make room for such disruptive moments as part of an unfolding story that we do not have the power to censor or control. To engage a curriculum of original difficulty, educators will need to open their minds and practice to a “karmic attunement” that attends to life’s “rhythms, paradoxes, and indeed, mysteries” (Smith 2014, p. 52). Educators must lean into that which is fully here for us.

A Word on Why We Teach and Learn Language

A significant insight from my research is the paradox inherent in many language learning programs in second language contexts in relation to overall program design and goals. For many English language programs within Canada, an over-arching goal is to prepare learners to “integrate” into the Canadian workplace or community. While such posturing is problematic in many ways, as already discussed by participants in this research, the futuristic nature of such a pedagogy that disadvantages the “now” also creates challenges. At many ESL schools, the goal of preparing students with appropriate skills for the Canadian workplace and community is the starting point around which curricula is developed. This idea that teaching and learning is preparing a learner for a future makes it challenging for pedagogy to focus on what is meaningful and needed in real time. Such fixation on the future, to the detriment of the now, is partly due to a Western worldview that perceives the act of educating as a future tense, often to the neglect of the past and present. Speaking on this futuristic notion of the purpose of education, Smith (2002) contends:

the West lives in a kind of frozen futurism in which what was expected to be revealed *has* been revealed, and that what the revelation discloses is that the future will always be more of this, a perpetual unfolding of more and more of this. In this context what education becomes is nothing but more and more of what it always was. (p. 28)

When a curriculum is set in the future in ways that do not give an opportunity for teachers or students to engage in the “now” of students’ lives and needs, then both instructors and students could be caught in an unending web of disconnected activities in masked states. In such a disconnected state, education then would appear to be like an unending “preparation for something that never happens because in the deepest sense, it has *already happened*, over and over” (Smith, 2002, p. 28). Educators and curriculum developers who take seriously the task of

fostering intercultural communication in second language instruction must start with revisiting, unpacking, and re-envisioning the goals of ESL education. Such re-envisioning may involve unpacking what a curriculum built to prepare learners for the *now* may look like and how such a goal may both be articulated and unpacked. What might an ESL curriculum with a goal of educating and preparing students for their present realities look like? A curriculum based on the *now* allows teachers and instructors to focus on the true meaning of education; and addressing “real” issues without fears about going “off-topic.” In the earlier draft of this section, I spent time reflecting on what an education that focuses on the *now* may look like, in ways that I can attempt to express in this section. Hermes played his trick and took that predicament off my hands. Due to the Covid-19 situation and the attendant uncertainty around virtually all areas of our previously taken-for-granted lives, educators have thankfully experienced a glimpse of what education for the *now* may look like.

Personal Journal, March 14th 2020

It was Thursday in the second week of March and I had just convened a meeting of all teaching staff to inform them that the institution’s management had given all programs a mandate to spend the following few days re-developing and re-conceptualizing courses to fit into an online delivery model. There were a thousand questions about tests and assessments, and placement procedures that neither the institution nor myself could answer. Students were not sure if they would still be able to study in their career programs in the fall, nor did colleges know how admission placements would look in purely online settings and if or when schools would reopen. What does curriculum planning look like when no one has an idea about what the future will look like, when no one is sure how their lives, health, and jobs will hold up to the tsunami of infections that threaten the collective existence of all beings in the world?

*With my teaching team, we came up with adjustments for the curriculum that addressed the needs of the *now* using basic principles. No plans could be made for the following term because we did not know how long or how short schools and classes would be*

closed. No plans could be made for the future. Just the now. Then, we thought about the content of curriculum and agreed that the current circumstances would determine what was practical and realistic and what could be done or achieved in classes. In other words, our collective circumstances and the needs of the present drove what stayed in the curriculum. For instance, assignments asking students to go to specific buildings or programs in the college to interview other people suddenly would not work. Assignments requiring students to present content in PowerPoint slides before their classmates suddenly did not work for the context. The awareness that college libraries were closed and many students had no access to computers in their homes allowed us to modify lesson materials and expectations accordingly. Suddenly it dawned on me that this is really what it means to plan for the now. Students' needs in the moment were prioritized: mental health services, information on financial support, food banks for impacted students, modified assignment requirements. Not much worry was devoted to how these students would fare in some imaginary future job in three years, just a focus on what they needed to know now, in the moment, in deference to their current circumstances and needs. Why can't education adapt some of the lessons for how we might approach teaching and learning in the future?

Restoring Language to Its Fullness

Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole worldview that underlies it to appear. Thus, every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 474)

It is my position that what the field considers important shapes the knowledge that is deemed to be worth engaging in the English as a second language classroom. There appears to be a fundamental problem with the way the concept of “language” continues to be perceived in our ESL setting as a “neutral” set of linguistic codes and signs. Within such an understanding of the meaning of language, learning becomes focused on the mastery of a set of grammatical and linguistic guidelines. I argued in earlier chapters that it was impossible to engage an ethical

approach to intercultural communication in ESL instruction and curriculum without first reconsidering how the field defines language and language teaching. In this study, participants provided instances of being unsure as to whether they may pursue a line of conversation with students about undeniably meaningful topics related to students’ everyday realities. This hesitation, as explained by two of the participants, was partly due to their own guilt about “going off topic” whenever they had to engage questions about race, gender, religion, sexuality, and other profoundly relevant aspects of daily life. While some instructors seem to know deep in their hearts that these are relevant questions about how we live, work, study, communicate, grow, and die as a collective, these issues did not immediately seem to connect with language teaching.

In order to engage an ethic of interculturality in language teaching, there will need to be, first and foremost, an “urgent recovery of the fullness of language” (Aoki, 1999, p. 273). Such a recovery of the fullness of language will require a certain shift in the way we think of and understand language. This rethinking involves acknowledging the presence of something that is already always at work—that the world is presented through language and to learn a language is to learn a worldview (Gadamer 1975, p. 459). Within such an understanding, topics about race, gender, sexuality and every other in between are both anticipated and engaged as a necessary part of teaching a language and worldview. A necessary first step in shifting to a more robust understanding of language is acknowledging that language teaching inherently entails an engagement of worldviews, and a second step is to include intercultural communication as a language-learning outcome in ESL curricula. As long as a disconnect continues to exist between what is considered valuable knowledge in language classrooms and the lived experiences of students and teachers, a meaningful engagement with intercultural communication pedagogy

may prove elusive. A return to the fullness of language will start with a shift in our understanding by acknowledging language classrooms as a place where worldviews are shared. Instead of denying that language teaching is inherently political, it is possible for educators to embrace the unique middle space that can be explored between the learners’ own orientation and foreign world views. Educators will benefit from embracing the understanding that “every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 474) and deploying that understanding to scrutinize the worldviews that come into exchange in the ESL classroom.

With Our Ancestors and Descendants: A Word About Relationships

It is not so much that this bear is an “other” . . . but that it is a *relative*, which is most deeply transformative and alarming to my ecological somnolence and forgetfulness. It is not just that I might come awake and start to remember these deep, Earthy relations . . . It is also that, even if I don’t, they all still bear witness to my life. (Jardine, 2017, p. 77)

Field Journal. April 4, 2019

Today is the focus group interview day. The meeting room is way bigger than the ones in which I conducted the one-on-one interviews. I arrange the soft, black swivel chairs in a small-circle arrangement that will make for a more comfortable and inclusive atmosphere. As soon as I start setting up, I regret my decision to use chairs—I should have changed things up, maybe a mat on the floor would have made for an even more intimate story-telling circle. Today, all five participants will be “meeting” for the first time, as they each had no idea who else was involved in the study. I readjust the lighting in the room to allow for better illumination. Holly, Jyoti, Greg, and Kelti all arrive first, chatting excitedly, and Jim joins a few minutes later. As soon as everyone is in the room,

the participants start moving the chairs so the circle becomes even smaller. This reminds me of the camaraderie and friendship that exists amongst these teachers. They seem comfortable.

Two minutes later, I start the session and we go through my unstructured questions. Jyoti refers to collective humanity as “us.” At this point, I spontaneously ask who is included in the “us” when they think of the world of education. The answer: students and teachers, management. At this point, because my study is so preoccupied with the interconnectedness of all beings, I ask if they thought any other kind of life mattered for how educators think about the world. A moment (maybe two) of uncomfortable silence. Then, one of the participants, Holly, starts sharing the relevance and importance of “animal life” as a vital part of living in the world. At this point, other participants seem somewhat uncomfortable, and perhaps a little perplexed. Holly stops her discussion of the relevance of animal life abruptly. The awkwardness in the room is palpable—almost akin to “what are you going on about?” I quickly return to my initial interview questions.

Participants are mostly concerned, in this focus group setting, about support from management. They express that all of the valuable arguments for the importance of teaching intercultural communication would mean nothing if there was no support from management. Later in this section, I provide some reflections on what such support might entail.

12 pm. I have been thinking about the reaction of participants to the inclusion of non-human life in the understanding of “others,” and I do see how they could have been confused. Not in any one of our conversation series have we ever explored an eco-

pedagogical approach to intercultural competence. We have always talked about inclusion in ways that focused on human-human considerations. This is such a big topic to introduce to teachers. The reaction of my participants also provides a glimpse into how an eco-pedagogical lens to intercultural competence, explored through the hermeneutic values of interconnectedness of all beings, could be both challenging and necessary in ESL settings. Challenging, because it is such a radically new way of thinking about education for teachers in the ESL context, and necessary, because it is a crucial approach to rethinking our work as educators.

ESL teaching research is rife with debates about how students’ cultures influence their learning styles and language performance. ESL teachers often mentally prepare for their classes by thinking about their students’ countries of origin and cultures in order to better understand and address their needs. In classroom settings, ESL students are also often conscious of the cultural and racial designation of their classmates, sometimes responding to one another based on assumptions and prejudices about culture or race. Research in intercultural communication has also often focused on the cultural values drawn from polarizing national stereotypes, citing ways that different cultural groups respond in hypothetical situations. Participants in this study discussed ways that students in their classes have often responded appropriately or inappropriately to classmates based on cultural perceptions about gender, gender-roles, sexuality, and other categories; all of the above point to the fact that students and educators grapple with ways to understand and engage the plurality of identities and values represented in the ESL classroom.

Throughout the research interviews, I paid particular attention to the ways in which participants described students’ responses to other learners, and how teachers and the institution

at large perceive and respond to the diversity embodied in the ESL classroom space. I sought a different language to frame relationships between diverse groups that captures a more enduring, deeper, and ecological connection that we have with others. In my reading of Jardine (2017), I was drawn to his discussion of our collective inter-connectedness in his admonition that we meet all humans as our ancestors. As he further expanded, “If we are to meet all beings as our ancestors, we must also meet all those very same beings as our descendants. This odd, fluid, difficult, shifting edge point between the ancestors and the descendants is where our humanity lives” (p. 78).

What does it mean for learners to meet each other as ancestors and descendants? It is about kinships and familial connections, tasks that call to remembrance of not just our collective similarities but how, even when we differ, we are still so fundamentally connected to one another. In current ESL settings, there are numerous tasks and activities that invite learners to share an aspect of their own cultural practice, value, or norm with the goal of comparing with another classmate. While these activities tend to invite an engagement with commonality and differences, and sometimes incredible moments of joyous connection, it is still quite easy to return to a state where students once again shake their heads and scornfully sneer at other classmates whose cultures differ from theirs. I do not intend to romanticize the complexity of approaching education from such an interconnected orientation. I offer these thoughts instead as a disruption to the more common-place critical approaches to engaging conversations about difference. As I stated in earlier sections, my intention is to co-dwell with hermeneutics and critical theory. The unique place of both research paradigms is exemplified by how my discussion of the hermeneutic notion of interconnectedness also immediately raises questions about the place of systemic oppression. Does emphasizing collective resonances and

togetherness risk disavowing or eliding attention to difference and inequality? At the same time, how might such an orientation of togetherness address discursive issues of sexism, racism, homophobia, and other kinds of systemic bias? I attempt to address some of these questions later in this section.

In the opening quotation at the start of this chapter, Jardine (2017) described how his encounter with a bear, which is usually out of sight and in its own world, suddenly appeared in his line of vision, causing him to realize and acknowledge that this *other* relative that he typically would not encounter was always there. Similarly, learners in the classroom, whether they had previously known it or not, are also on a journey that brings them face-to-face with a previously unknown *relative*, an ancestor, to whom they share familial connections. Approaching previously designated strange or foreign *other* as a *relative* could bring about a shift in the way learners in the ESL classroom connect with not only each other and the teacher, but also other people they encounter outside the classroom community.

To unpack this concept of ancestral connections, perhaps it is worth whiling over the concept of ancestors and ancestral connections. While the concept of ancestors and ancestral relationships may be perceived as less common in Western orientations (though often used in contexts of genetic testing and celebration of heroic deeds of forefathers in the lineage), the concept of descendants is quite easily understood within the Western paradigm. Recently, I saw an advert of an ancestry-tracing service playing on TV and listened to testimonies of some patrons expressing their delight at finding out they were “10% German, 0.5% native-American, 80% Indonesian” and so on. These categorizations directly establish biological and genetic connections to someone no longer present, but whose genes continue to be embodied by their descendants.

However, I was immediately drawn to the different ways in which myself, an African woman, understands the concept of ancestors and ancestral connections. In African and many other Indigenous world views, the ancestor never really dies or departs. They are always present, guiding, protecting, leading, quickening, comforting. They are as present as living relatives, which is why a libation is poured to ancestors at family meetings or gatherings, and at mealtimes to formally acknowledge someone already always present: our guardian spirits. Sometimes, it is said that on a particularly arduous task or season of one’s life, they could “run into” an ancestor (in a dream or a trance-like state) who provides them guidance or sometimes just comforts them. Sometimes, the ancestor is called upon to accompany one on a journey that is rough, dangerous, historical, or long. As a young girl, I was often shocked to hear my grandmother or other family members scream “ozu amo!” (“my ancestor”) when they heard or came across something shocking or dangerous. I found it shocking and perplexing that my family members felt the presence of a “departed” person closer than other surrounding family members. I evoke this African-cultural understanding of ancestors to underscore the traditional African belief that, sometimes, when one travels to a foreign land or country, an ancestor is always already waiting there to make sure they are not alone. It is very common for my family members to refer to a kind person they had met in a foreign land as an ancestor who met them there to ensure they were never alone.

With such an understanding of ancestors, it is easier to frame a notion of learners in the classroom as *relatives* who have deep lines of connection that defy space and time. Cultivating an understanding, therefore, of every classmate as ancestor or descendant changes our orientation to how we engage intercultural conversations and relations with others because all cultures already have values about the importance of *family* and *relatives*. If I consider someone to be

family, I may then be more likely to see and acknowledge ways in which we are interconnected. It would also then be possible to understand that just like family members are not exactly alike in looks and orientation, we are first and foremost *relatives*, regardless of how our worldviews differ. More than a mere acknowledgement or tolerance, perhaps learners may then open their minds to the stories and experiences of the relative, thankful for opportunities to learn about and connect with a long-lost *relative*. Again, in practice, cultivating such an orientation to another is difficult and novel work. It requires a different kind of pedagogical space and attunement, and a reconceptualization of the classroom community.

To further foreground this concept of viewing another as a relative, I look to Indigenous Canadian wisdom. Like African wisdom traditions, wisdom of the Indigenous people of Canada also proceeds with a relational understanding of the interconnectivity of all beings. The Cree concepts of *wicihitowin* and *wahkohtowin* promote “ethical relationality” (Donald, 2016). Ethical relationality refers to the awareness of organic connectivity that humans become conscious of as they honor all creation. Such an understanding of ethical relationality is preceded by engagement with *wicihitowin* and *wahkohtowin*. *Wicihitowin* describes the life force that is generated when people respectfully engage each other as relatives and allow love and respect to be the bane of their encounters with others (Donald, 2016). *Wahkohtowin* describes the relationships of kinships that we must nourish and foster with other creation and more-than-human beings who we inhabit the earth with. Within the *Wahkohtowin* concept,

We are called to repeatedly acknowledge and honour the fact that the sun, the land, the wind, the water, the animals and the trees (just to name a few) are quite literally our relatives; we carry parts of each of them inside our own bodies. We are fully reliant on them for our survival. (Donald, 2016, p. 10)

To see the other as a relative means seeing points of contact with them, but we must also be cautious to balance that awareness of similarity with the understanding that the other is not a passive object for our interpretation. When we dialogue with another as a relative, we must allow them talk back to us in order to develop a deeper understanding of them. Such an openness to learning about another’s perspective sets the tone for “genuine conversation” (Gadamer, 2003). Genuine conversation is never the conversation we set out to conduct in the first place, but one that happens over and beyond our own wishes—a truly genuine conversation lies beyond the will of either partner in the communication context (Gadamer, 2003). What I am imploring ESL educators to do in this section and the sections that follow is to engage “counter-visions of education” (Dei & McDermott, 2018) that lean into indigenous worldviews to enrich language pedagogy.

In my concluding section, I address ways that teachers and learners may begin to reimagine an understanding of the “other” as *relative* in ways that acknowledge power relations within the group.

On the Bridge: A Word From Teachers

A most important learning curve for me throughout this research journey is the recognition of how many “real experiences” occur in the classroom through the shared and negotiated experiences of teachers and students. I watched as the lines edged deeper on Greg’s face while he shared the experience of walking a student over to counselling, and his joy at realizing how much “more of themselves” the student became afterwards. As he shared his own concern and worry for Muslim students and the constant siege that they face, his voice broke and tears welled in his eyes, and as he reflected on the disruptive incidents that emerge in his classroom, totally outside of the curriculum-as-plan, and ways in which he “makes room” for

such authentic conversations, I saw his eyes light up with hope. As Jyoti reflected on her idea of love being central to teaching and education, her privilege to be trusted with stories of students she teaches, and the opportunity to shape how learners view and interact with the world, I saw her humanity shine through. As I listened to her reflections on ways she employs mindful practices to re-center her students from anxiety and worries that they inevitably bring with them to the classroom, I heard a passionate, genuine ring to her voice. In her opinion, teachers have a duty to teach more than grammar tenses and linguistic forms; they are in a pedagogical space in a historical time such as these in order to honour a certain call to teach in ways that may create a “better world for our children.” Holly shared about holding a space in her classroom that honors the challenging realities of her students’ lives, realizing that students in her classroom embody stories of resilience, hope, and struggle. In her opinion, teachers are not just there to glaze over these stories but to engage with each student in a way that honor students’ stories and lives.

As I listened to each participant’s account of meaningful moments in their work as educators, something connected deeply in their individual stories: the belief that teaching well requires a certain kind of awareness that transcends just subject-matter expertise. These instructors, going beyond the demands of the subject-matter instruction, invoke the image of the teacher as one who has answered a *calling*. Hearing words like “love” and “collective humanity” used to describe how they perceived their role as educators resonates with Aoki’s (1996/2005) notion of teaching as a *calling*. Very often, *calling* is used in connection to appointments into some spiritual role or authority, usually by a higher deity. In Christian parlance, there is the notion of the calling of a “bishop,” and answering said “call” usually entails a total commitment to and devotion to that which one has been called. Aoki (1996/2005) explained that the *call* of teaching deploys language reminiscent of Biblical prophets as he referenced “voices of

teaching,” and admonished teachers to compose themselves appropriately to honour the spiritual calling that is teaching (p. 316).

Within such an understanding of teaching as a call, teachers and educators are able to transcend ephemeral and shallow notions of teaching as a “banking system” of education (Freire, 2005) and lean toward an engaged pedagogy (Hooks, 1994) that connects meaningfully with students’ lived reality. A key feature of a calling is that it is always already a difficult and complex responsibility. The calling to teach demands that those “chosen” from the multitude are also able to compose themselves to tarry in the middle space between “curriculum-as-plan” and “curriculum-as-lived” (Aoki, 1991/2005). However, curricula limitations and the fixation on separating the student persona from the human persona is often a challenge to engaging meaningful conversations that allow for openness and vulnerability between teachers and students. This subject-object split, and the expectation that teachers and students must “drop” all personal baggage and engage the more “serious” task of learning school subjects is counter-productive and antithetical to the nature of the role of a teacher who has been *called* (hooks, 1994b). Being vulnerable, and opening up spaces for engaging the lived curriculum is, however, a difficult space that requires a certain kind of cultivation and attunement (Aoki, 1991/2005).

We see an example of how teachers can balance on this bridge of tensionality when participants in this study discussed the ways they created space for awkward and uncomfortable knowledge and engaged in difficult conversations when they could have taken the easier route of getting back to the topic at hand. Much like Miss O (Aoki, 1991/2005), who embodies a teacher par excellence in her ability to live in the middle space of tensionality, participants in this research exemplified what happens when a teacher builds a relationship of care for their students. As the teacher comfortably dwells in that space between two curricula worlds, “the quality of life

lived with the tensionality depends much on the quality of the pedagogic being that she *is*” (Aoki 1991/2005, p. 162).

To build the character of this pedagogic being, an educator always has to create time “for meaningful striving and struggling . . . time for singing, time for crying, time for praying and hoping,” and much like Miss O, remain open to “the possibilities of our pedagogic touch, pedagogic tact, pedagogic attunement” (Aoki 1991/2005, p. 164).

A Word on Difficult Conversations: Pedagogy of Discomfort

The educators who endeavor to rattle complacent cages, who attempts to “wrest us anew” from the threat of conformism, undoubtedly faces the treacherous ghosts of the other’s fears and terrors, which in turn evoke one’s own demons. (Boler, 1999, p. 175)

Boler (1999) sounded a profound caution and reminder to educators in the quotation above explaining that even with the very best intentions, the work of engaging a pedagogy of intercultural communication and holding a space for original difficulty around intercultural competence invites both students and teachers to an engagement and dialogic involvement that could be both rewarding and unsettling. These unsettling feelings, often not named, engaged, or welcome in educational settings, often impact the willingness of students or instructors to participate in difficult conversations.

Previous research in the field, and my own conversations with participants of this research, have shown that engaging in the topics of culture, difference, equity, race, and cultural values often provokes a range of negative emotions, even from the most well-meaning educators and students. It is my own perspective in this research that rather than ignore these feelings, creating room and space in the classroom to name and unpack them may lead to healthier engagement. In the incredibly insightful moments I sat with Greg and Jim, who shared their own

fears about what it means to discuss the topic of homosexuality in their classrooms, and the associated fear of loss of authority, discomfort, and loss of credibility, I began to catch a glimpse of how it is that we may bring blindspots to various issues of marginalization and privilege. An engagement with intercultural competence that allows for more sharing may further bring such feelings to the core. Beyond that, these sorts of complex conversations may also provide room for some students to express harmful ideologies, and participants in this research all had concerns about ways they might manage charged emotions in the classroom.

Acknowledging this tension that the ethical work of engaging difficult conversations may pose in classroom spaces, Boler (1999) noted that listening to and paying attention to others' views may be an important component; some of such views may be difficult and even dangerous to hear because they “are reiterated throughout the dominant culture in harmful ways” (p. 179). While teachers may agree on the need to allow such discussion of values and cultural beliefs, they are also aware that there is no predicting the direction a conversation may go, the nature of values that a student may choose to express, and the harmful and immediate impact such views may have on other participants in the conversation. For instance, it is very common in my ESL teaching setting for students to express agreement with the view that all races of people should be treated equitably; many ESL learners understand the politics of racial discrimination and how it impacts them as visual minorities. The same students, however, may also often question the idea of inclusion for people of all sexual orientations. Addressing the importance of proceeding ethically in engaging such affect-laden and charged topics, McDermott (2014) writing specifically about affect in anti-racism pedagogy aptly warns against putting marginalized bodies on display and asking them to “carry the burden of proof” for dominant bodies (p. 222).

Boler (1999) notes that LGBTQ rights and equity issues often present more volatility, hostility, and resistance in classroom settings than race, partly because sexuality is often perceived as a “private” matter while issues of race, gender, and social class may be more likely welcomed as a relevant topic for discussion in educational settings (p. 183). The intense emotions that spring up within the context of highly charged conversations can also in turn, influence and condition the sociospatial context in which they occur (Zembylas, 2015, p. 53). So powerful is the potency of these emotions that they can be vital determining factors in how individuals unite *toward* or *away* from others (Ahmed, 2004). This “sociality of emotions” (Ahmed, 2004) underlines the idea that emotions are never just private or static but always situated in movement between other bodies. More succinctly put, “emotions do not come from inside us as *reaction* but are produced in and circulated between” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 53). McDermott (2014) similarly notes that affect and emotion are always already present in educational spaces whether difficult conversations are being engaged or not because “embodied bodies encounter one another, as well as the material aspects of social spaces in educational relations” (p. 217).

Understanding the relational nature of emotions and how the movement of emotions in educational spaces impact other bodies is aligned with the hermeneutic notion of interconnectivity and relationality of all things. Educators would need to engage with “emotional geographies” (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Bondi et al., 2005) in order to explore the ways in which the relational and spatial nature of emotions in turn lead to a range of complex emotions that are formed through movement, and the ways notions of self is altered and challenged as a result (Ahmed, 2004; Zembylas, 2015). However, understanding this prominent role of emotions in shaping the sociospatial classroom space is not enough. Educators

must also be willing to undertake the difficult work of creating space for such a discomfoting phenomenon. In light of these challenges, a good question with which to foreground conversation is “What do we—educators and students—stand to gain by engaging in the discomfoting process of questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions?” (Boler, 1999, p. 176). I have argued throughout this dissertation that remaining silent in the face of oppressive systems is an act of violence. The choice to be silent is a privilege, “allowing oneself to inhabit a position of distance and separation, to remain in the ‘anonymous’ spectating crowd and abdicate any possible responsibility” (Boler, 1999, p. 184).

In order to step into an ethical and pedagogical space that allows for engagement and feelings, Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort invites educators to dwell in a “more ambiguous and flexible sense of self” (p. 179). Similar to the place of tensionality that Miss O inhabits, the pedagogical space created within a pedagogy of discomfort enriches our ethical language and understanding of responses that transcend binaries of “guilt vs. innocence” (Boler, 1999, p. 179). Engaging a pedagogy of discomfort also entails asking “what does it mean to remain in spaces of discomfort, or what can discomfort do?” (McDermott, 2014, pp. 211-212). Such a question invites educators to go beyond just naming and describing affect and emotions but instead strive to engage those moments, amplify them, and “struggle with, in, and through them” (McDermott, 2014, p. 222).

Participants in this research noted that developing empathy might be an effective way for them to learn to sit with the discomfoting pedagogical space that difficult conversations invoke. However, Boler (1999) invites educators to engage in “collective witnessing” noting that such an active process of collective witnessing transcends empathy. While empathy, as I already discussed earlier, is a feature of intercultural engagement, a more ethical engagement with

understanding others requires more because empathy could often work by altering a discomfoting other in ways that renders them nonthreatening and familiar (Boler, 1999, p. 177). Empathy can also come with risks of pity and voyeurism (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2015). Similarly, it has been noted that cultivating empathy could be a near impossible task in situations where there are perceived “perpetrators” and “victims” (Jansen, 2009; Zembylas, 2015).

In my own teaching experience, I have found this perpetrator-victim dichotomy to be quite prevalent in ESL settings where refugee students from warring home countries may find themselves in the same classroom. It may be near impossible, in such circumstances of justified apathy, for educators to promote empathy as a way of engaging such an incredibly complex issue. Consequently, a more effective approach might be to explore “reconciliatory empathy” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 165) which allows for ambivalent feelings among teachers and students and makes rooms for paradoxes. Within this framework of reconciliatory empathy, educators must be able to hold space for the possibility that “students coping with their suffering must deal with the scenario of the other feeling ‘wounded’ as well” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 166). Within the notion of reconciliatory empathy, each “emotional encounter is rehumanizing because it recognizes the other as sufferer too, as an emotional human being, to empathize with one who wronged someone is to struggle to get over resentment, anger, and hatred” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 166). In classrooms where such outright apathy is not apparent, intercultural communication still poses a number of significant challenges. To hold a meaningful and ethical space for intercultural competence, educators may also once again turn to “collective witnessing” (Boler, 1999), which allows for understanding of oneself in relation to others’ “personal and cultural histories and material conditions” (p. 178). Such an understanding connects with the hermeneutic notion of the

interconnectivity of all things, and it shifts attention from a preoccupation with the idea of self and self-knowledge that is not situated within a wider understanding of how the self is always already in relation to the other. Like the hermeneutic notion of the topic being always bigger than the researcher and the researcher’s own understanding, collective witnessing is a way of taking up the conversation that “directs us to something larger and other than ourselves” (Houston, 1998, cited in Boler, 1999, p. 178). A pedagogy of discomfort is an invitation to transcend familiarities of one’s own learned habits and beliefs and “swim further into the ‘foreign’ and risky depths of the sea of ethical and moral difference” (Boler, 1999, p. 181).

Language, Ritual, Healing, and Community

It is possible that we have been brought together at this time because we have profound truths to tell each other. (Somé, 1999, p. 17)

There is a need for ritual to make sure that the damage done to you by society, to the point where your enthusiasm is tampered with, is repaired, so that you can embrace your purpose fully. Being born into this world is a trying experience. Whatever enthusiasm you bring with you here can be toned down and radically edited simply as a result of being here. (Somé, 1999, p. 34)

My earliest interest in this research was stirred within the community of practice that instructors and I had maintained. I started this research to explore ways that my colleagues and I could revise the curriculum to better reflect more complex and meaningful ways to integrate interculturality into the ESL curriculum that the department currently uses. Following a biweekly conversation series that enabled us to build a strong community of practice, we had unanswered questions about the complicated nature of intercultural communication pedagogy and I wanted to

explore those questions further. This dissertation has been an attempt to explore instructors’ perspectives on the challenges and possibilities of making the development of interculturality a curriculum outcome. A bigger professional goal for me was to use ideas and findings from this research to initiate a curriculum revision in order for the curriculum to better reflect our evolving understanding of how interculturality might be taken up more directly.

Now that I am approaching the “end” of the writing of this dissertation paper, it is vital that I discuss how my findings and discussion in this paper will shape our curriculum and practice in the coming months. Because my experience of rupture, and the address of this topic occurred within the ethos of our community of practice, it is all the more important that my discussion of the implications for practice be framed within the context of our practice. While a dissertation must necessarily be brought to some kind of ending, hermeneutics, just like curriculum work, is never ending, always ongoing, and always open to new interpretations. Therefore, my reflections in this section are only a screenshot of what I understand at the moment. There is always more to be said, and more to be explored. However, an appropriate closing for this paper, in my thinking, may be to address the “so, what now?” of things, and, provide a discussion of how I might work with my colleagues in the months ahead to reimagine our ESL curriculum.

Thinking about the regular conversations with my colleagues that first led to this research idea, I could not forget the place that ritual and community played in shaping our understanding of intercultural communication, and it appears to me that given the nature of the complicated task ahead of us, a meditation on ritual is instructive. Ritual, in this sense transcends the usual discourses of school rituals as “doings,” and actions like marking, playing, etc. Ritual, for us, was the deliberate act of creating and holding a space for difficult and uncomfortable

conversations over a four-year period. The term ritual, as I use it here, is not from its popular Western connotation of recurring activities or ceremonies in school or community settings. In my discussions in this chapter, I invoke ritual in an African Indigenous sense of its meaning which is “the weaving of individual persons and gifts into a community that interacts with the forces of the natural world. A gathering of people with a clear healing vision and a trusting intent toward the forces of the invisible world” (Somé, 1999, p. 22). If educators understand that something is significantly limiting in the way things are currently done, it also makes sense to cultivate spaces where the root cause(s) of such drawbacks may be better addressed with clarity and support.

Building Community Through Ritual

Ritual is the technology that allows manipulation of these subtle energies. Community is important because there is an understanding that human beings are collectively oriented.

The general health and well-being of an individual are connected to a community, and are not something that can be maintained alone or in a vacuum. Healing, ritual, and community—these three elements are vitally linked. (Somé, 1999, p. 22)

In the wake of global civil protests and outcry for a more equitable world for people of all races, I have been thinking more about the emotional labour associated with the work of intercultural communication education and Boler’s (1999) call for educators to undertake “collective witnessing” instead of spectating. I am thinking about the emotional labour of this work even more now because I had taken the blessing of community with my colleagues, who I also now happen to lead, for granted. Recently, I was invited to provide workshops to non-ESL instructors in other faculties on ways they might integrate inclusive pedagogical practices for ESL students in their programs. Entering a room with instructors who I shared no previous community with, I delved into my usual discussions about inclusive language and culturally responsive pedagogy

but was shocked at the immense resistance and rejection that these concepts elicited from attendees. While I struggled through my slides, hoping for a miracle that could somehow help me get through to them, a realization suddenly dawned on me. I had assumed that I could successfully broach difficult topics like inclusion, privilege, discrimination, and unconscious bias with a group I was unfamiliar with, whose values, burdens, and experiences I had not yet navigated or understood. I was trying to press toward some kind of fellowship without ritual. That was the real problem.

But what would ritual mean at a two-hour workshop to instructors who had been teaching all day? I immediately decided to take everyone outside for an adapted version of the “Privilege Walk” that I had put together to address privileges in educational culture. When we returned to the meeting room, there was more participation, but the walk itself had raised even more difficult questions of privilege, which in turn led to defensiveness, outbursts, denials, and guilt. In my opinion, these emotions are a good starting point. What I had not anticipated was my own stress and anxiety of dealing with the difficult emotions that erupted. Over the years, I had become so used to instructors in my own program being open to discussions about the duty of educators to consider ways that the curricula might include or exclude groups of students that I was totally ill-prepared for the possibility that these conversations are often volatile and emotionally charged.

As I contemplated my work, I realized that what I felt at the workshop described above, and the impact of these difficult conversations on my own wellbeing, were a reflection of what we are asking teachers to do each time we ask them to undertake the work of intercultural education in the complex ways I have discussed throughout this paper. In my own case, I was all the more troubled over a period of weeks because in the absence of the community of practice, I had feelings of loss and loneliness that troubled me for days. I craved a ritual space, a

community where I could name my own feelings and “heal” momentarily from the antagonism I had encountered. As Somé (1999) eloquently explained:

Ritual itself is one of the roads to experiencing the other dimensions of nature through the recognition that one carries within oneself an emotional heritage, an emotional gift. When there is a place for people to listen to the voice of their own emotions, it leads to the opening of a wider door that can allow people to start communing. Communion happens when the emotional body is involved, when we enlist the kind of energy that is expressed in emotional intensity. (Somé, 1999, p. 55)

This kind of ritual space described by Somé (1999), is only possible through a community of practice; it is what educators in all contexts doing the difficult work of intercultural education might need to stay grounded. The task of doing the work of ethical intercultural communication requires a village, not just one instructor. Community is crucial for the work of interculturality because “ritual is central to village life . . . it provides the focus and energy that holds the community together, and it provides the kind of healing that the community most need to survive” (p. 24).

Given that tertiary language institutions do not often have the scope of government support for in-service teacher development, the village of instructors will thrive only by cultivating a fireplace where ritual can continue to rejuvenate participants in the community, provide healing on the difficult days, and celebrate victories on curricula moments that rejuvenate. During my interviews, it was refreshing to see how participants relished the opportunity to share their thoughts. Also, during the focus group interview, participants reported feeling connected when they shared their thoughts in the same space as a group and heard some of their own ideas or concerns echoed back. The task of doing intercultural language education in

the ways that I have discussed in this paper is a huge ask, perhaps a burden for instructors and educators. However, as gleaned from the dispositions of participants in this research, it is a challenge that instructors are likely willing to undertake should they have the right professional community of support.

“Hosting” Difficult Knowledge and Complicated Conversations

The emotional upheaval I experienced following the encounter with the resistance to new knowledge I recounted above, caused me to think more reflectively about the herculean nature of the task of engaging complex intercultural issues in education. As I pondered on my own bewilderment at the adverse responses I received from the instructors at the workshop described above, I looked more closely to the literature to understand why the participants and I reacted the way we did. More importantly, I sought to understand how teachers who are asked to undertake such difficult pedagogy might be better supported to manage the range of reactions they may expect to face from their students. I also wanted to understand the ways that instructors might better understand their own responses when having difficult pedagogical conversations related to intercultural communication.

The complexities of intersectional identity I have explored in the past few chapters underline how challenging—sometimes perplexing it could be to engage such personally and socio-culturally charged topics especially in ESL settings where there are already a range of differing world views. In spite of the emotional and psychological discomfort these issues may pose for both instructors and students, I also believe that an understanding of language and culture must necessarily integrate pedagogical outcomes for the ways we can “go along together.” Such a going along, much more than simply “getting along,” requires that participants in ESL pedagogical spaces be able to sit with and engage “difficult knowledge” (Britzman,

1998). Difficult knowledge is a term used to describe “representations of social traumas in curriculum and individual’s encounter with them in pedagogy” (Britzman, 1998, p. 5).

Pitt and Britzman (2003) ask two important questions to contemplate in relation to encountering and dealing with difficult knowledge in educational spaces: What makes knowledge difficult, and what does it mean to represent and narrate “difficult knowledge”? According to them, while the first question is preoccupied with the content of knowledge, the second question “foregrounds issues of encountering the self through the otherness of knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755). For such a rich learning to occur, we must be able to hold space for the idea that learning resides “within the tensions exercised when the knowledge offered through pedagogy meets the knowledge brought to pedagogy” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 5).

In the context of ESL education, teaching ethical intercultural communication requires educators to think about the pedagogical dimensions of the difficult knowledge that may emerge from discussions of issues like racism, aggressions, and other social violence that daily punctuates the lives of learners within and without the classroom. Beyond engaging with the traumatic experiences of others, educators must also be prepared to accommodate the internal conflicts that learners bring into the learning encounter. Just because one learner shares a vulnerable moment, a riveting story of discrimination, or a traumatic experience with bigotry does not mean that other classmates will automatically understand and alter their own perspectives or worldviews that may have sustained such harmful tropes. Consequently, educators must be aware of, and prepare themselves for resistance, an important component of what it means for students to learn from difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1998). In my own ESL geographical settings, some learners find topics with vague or direct references to queer identity

uncomfortable and unnecessary. Sometimes, the response of instructors to perceived resistance of students about such topics is to discontinue any related conversation. Preparing instructors to engage such topics in curricula might involve preparing them to view learning as a psychic event punctuated by resistance to knowledge (Britzman, 1998). Such an understanding may help educators prepare to hold room for learners who blatantly resist a new perspective on long-held values. Britzman (1998) aptly captures this conundrum:

The resistance is a precondition for learning from knowledge and the grounds of knowledge itself. And yet this insight—that difficult knowledge may be refused—is painful to tolerate when the subjects studied are genocide, ethnic hatred, and the experiences of despair and helplessness. The reach of this refusal touches the educator’s desire for the learner to just accept and understand the tyranny of hatred in all its guises. Such a wish however, also can be a symptom of the educator’s own struggle to master her or his own difficulties. (p. 118)

Within the limited discussion of sexual identity issues in the curriculum, participants in this research unanimously expressed that the topic of sexual identity and more specifically, non-heterosexual identities, often meet the most resistance for learners. While many learners could almost often relate with the traumas and ills of racial, religious, or gender discrimination, they however seem to struggle with some internal conflicts when faced with the opportunity to alter their own perspectives or embracing new knowledge about homosexual identities. However, instead of getting upset, frustrated, or even giving up as is often the case when instructors attempt to engage difficult knowledge and fail to “win” every student over, educators may instead learn to proceed with an understanding that every exposure to new knowledge is an invitation for an alteration of oneself, and a repudiation of one’s own long held values, beliefs,

and investments. This significant conflict is first processed as a threat to self and one’s own perception of the world and consequently, the learner might reject this new knowledge through a process of reversal because “the desire to learn can reverse its course, transforming itself into a wish for the removal of knowledge (or a removal of the teacher)” (Britzman, 1998, p. 128). Upon encounter with knowledge that one does not necessarily want to learn, there is a tendency to lose balance (Garrett, 2017) and as such, to engage with difficult knowledge is to “focus on what gets in the way of learning a lesson from history” (p. 21).

To overcome the foreclosure of conversation that often occurs when difficult knowledge meets resistance from students, educators must go beyond providing pedagogical spaces for difficult knowledge and further attempt to wrestle with learners’ response to the internal conflict within (Garrett, 2017). Instead of presenting these charged topics as “good” and “bad,” educators may organize pedagogical approaches in ways that make room for ambivalence by “provoking new conditions of learning that can tolerate times of losing and being lost, when the contentious history of the diary meets *those other contentions: our selves*” (Britzman, 1998, p. 136).

The very nature of the work that educators do often positions them in opposition with the widely held values in larger society and even those of our students. However, we must continue to find ways to hold space for ourselves and others to unpack the inner contentions of confronting new knowledge, thriving within such a space further requires an ongoing conversation because curriculum is itself an ongoing “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2008, 2011). The intent of such a complicated conversation is not to arrive at a universal objective “truth” or conclusion that everyone must agree to. Grappling with such complicated conversations enables educators to reimagine a new kind of curriculum that fosters a dialogic and co-constructed understanding of knowledge (Pinar, 2008, 2009, 2011). To confront the inner

tensions generated by new knowledge, educators must proceed with an allegorical understanding of curriculum (p. 50). An allegorical understanding of curriculum allows participants in the learning context to “self-reflexively articulate what is at hand, reactivating the past so as to render the present, including ourselves, intelligible” (50). Through allegory, we can make connections between the specificities of our own unique situations to the otherness of others’ pasts. Such an allegorical understanding of the ethical, political and intellectual nature of complicated conversations that’s possible in our classrooms activates “educational experience” (Pinar, 2008, p. 50).

Equally important to bear in mind, according to Pinar (2008), is that the teacher in this context is an artist, and complicated conversation is their medium. The starting point of the teacher’s allegorical work is the teacher’s own study, and then curriculum design or teaching. However, allegory ends at how students respond to the conversation or what they choose to make of the conversation as that falls outside the realm of the artist’s control. It is absolutely possible that a well-thought-out lesson could fall flat and as Pinar (2008) wisely concluded, “What students make of their study may not be known for months or even years, and then only by the students themselves” (p. 55). This submission by Pinar encourages teachers to lean into the possibility that the impact of what is taught may not always be immediately evident and as such, educators should become comfortable with not knowing the benefits, if at all, of complicated conversations that they engage in their classrooms.

For Curriculum: TBLT, Rituals, and the Slow Classroom

The Slow Classroom

There is a certain loss of memory that underlies a collective psyche of individualism, ethnocentrism, racism, homophobia, and bias of all kinds. Jardine (2017) referred to the

condition as a forgetfulness. This forgetfulness and memory loss is further aggravated by educational systems that prioritize speed and a focus on the future, neglecting the present. These, in turn, create a generation that goes through the motions of the “rat race” of modern society with little inclination or time to reflect on what the true meaning of life is. Our educational spaces have an opportunity to counter such harmful preoccupation with productivity and neglect of the human spirit by deliberately planning a “slow curriculum.” My notion of the Slow curriculum is inspired by Berg and Seeber’s (2016) concept of the “slow professor.” They suggest that educators approach their practice by drawing wisdom from the Slow movement, which has “the capacity to disrupt corporate ethos of speed” (p. 11). According to Berg and Seeber (2016), a return to an ethos of slow movement is not synonymous with laziness or lofty imaginations of a world devoid of responsibilities, but an attitude to everyday life and practice that gives attention and care to being present to the meaningful issues of life. A slow curriculum in the context of this research will deliberately be planned to counter the speedy pace of learning by working in opportunities for ritual in the classroom community. Instructor Jyoti already makes a deliberate effort to “slow things down” and refocus her students’ energy on the present by building in mindfulness activities in her lessons. She does this by staying attuned to her students’ “energy” so that, following a heavy conversation or topic where she feels that her students have become overcome by anxiety or stress, she slows things down and initiates a ritual of meditation. Recentring the students through mindfulness practices in the classroom is an important consideration that I plan to explore in our future curriculum. For instance, following tasks that are expected to generate difficult conversations, a few minutes of mindfulness activity may be planned to follow right after. Instructors like Jyoti and Holly already integrate these mindfulness practices in their teaching in various ways. Holly, for instance, often starts her classes with two

minutes of meditation. She also does the same at the start of final tests. Looking at a broader curriculum infusion of such useful contemplative practice could offer a robust way to build community and cultivate ritual in the ESL classroom.

Intercultural Communication as a Curriculum Outcome and Objective

As previously mentioned, the mismatch between many ESL curricular outcomes and growing interest in intercultural communication in ESL instruction, continues to be a significant drawback for implementation in the field. While instructors in my contexts understand that some effort has been made in the curriculum to integrate intercultural consciousness-raising content in curriculum texts, it is also apparent to instructors that as long as lesson outcomes and objectives do not explicitly include interculturality, linguistic competence will always be the primary focus of the most well-meaning instructors. In order to address this gap, revised curriculum outcomes and objectives will be undertaken by instructors and me to include goals for intercultural communication. Such inclusion opens the question of how a curriculum outcome of intercultural communication might be assessed, especially since all language outcomes and objectives are always assessed. As discussed in previous chapters, the idea of assessing competence as it relates to intercultural communication does not align with my own ethical stance on approaches that have been adapted for teaching intercultural communication in ESL settings. However, the subject merits some thought and consideration because students need to see a connection between what they are learning and how they are assessed.

I find reflective writing or journaling to be a crucial activity that might help students develop a meaningful engagement with what they are learning, journaling is also useful for helping students reflect on their shifting understanding about the other. The curriculum in my department already has a weekly journaling component; in addition, a reflective writing piece at

the end of each class might be placed in students’ intercultural learning portfolios. By the end of each eight-week term, students may be required to write individual or group reflective journals.

Intercultural Communication, Ritual, and Task-Based Language Teaching

An interesting connection between task-based language teaching (TBLT) and ritual is that they both have the capacity to make room for the unplanned, the unexpected, that which is not in the curriculum-as-planned. However, in the research context, the adapted model of TBLT lesson stages comprise the pre-task, task, and post-task (analysis and practice). The instructor sets up students for the task by engaging them in a pre-task activity that helps students generate ideas they might need for task completion. After the pre-task stage, students complete their tasks, then read their tasks aloud (or project on a screen) to peers for feedback in the report planning stage. The instructor subsequently leads the debrief stage and provides feedback on language and grammar features. Finally, students complete a grammar exercise to practice language used for the task. Within such a structured lesson routine, it is difficult to invite the “new.” We would need to create new rituals that are not nearly as rigid. If the way we think of, understand, and teach language has to be expanded in meaning, then our understanding of language tasks must change as well. Tasks in language instruction have often been utilized for the purposes of setting up scenarios for practicing authentic language scenarios in classroom texts. Skehan (1998, 2003) for instance, theorizes a cognitive understanding of interaction and “task” whose aim is to promote attention and cognition. A sociocultural understanding of tasks aims to foster the co-construction of meaning which in turn equips students to communicate in ways that are considered socioculturally appropriate. However, I agree with Liddicoat and Scarino’s (2013) claim that such perceptions of interactions and tasks in language learning do not consider the interpretive and reflective dimensions that teaching with an intercultural perspective affords.

Within an intercultural language teaching framework, the place of interpretation of self and others is highlighted as learners engage in a reciprocal negotiation and interpretation of meaning using language in a range of diverse communication situations.

Reconceptualizing our understanding of tasks to encompass the interpretive nature of tasks is a necessary first step for expanding what we are capable of doing through language tasks within an intercultural language teaching framework. Such an “expanded concept of task” (Liddicoat & Scarrino, 2013) provides opportunities for students to explore ways in which contexts and culture come to bear in communication, one’s own and others’ ideas, opinions, perspectives, and practices—ways in which experiences are understood across cultures and languages, and approaches for responding to the variability that show up in communicative contexts (p. 81). This process is in itself hermeneutic because an expanded notion of tasks allows for students to engage in interpretive process by bringing “their own interpretive resources, and their own stance to language learning—how they see the subject, the language, and culture being learned, the process of learning and themselves and their roles as interactants” (Liddicoat & Scarrino, 2013, p. 81).

Further, language learning tasks should be carefully re-envisioned as an opportunity to expand what is possible in the world view of learners. Such re-envisioning is especially important because we understand hermeneutically that language learners could never truly forget their own world views or language views by learning a new language. Instead, the learning of a new language and the conversation that is possible within that learning gives learners a new perspective on “one’s own previous worldview” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 407). Thus, language learning brings learners into collision with another world, a new world that is profoundly both foreign and related to us that “it has not only its own truth *in itself* but also its own truth *for us*”

(Gadamer, 1975, p. 458). As a result of this possibility that language learning holds for learners to be able to sit with and even gain new understanding of their own world view whilst also developing a relational understanding of the world of the new language, language learning presents a magical learning space that expands what we currently understand to be possible because “to learn a language is to increase the extent of what one can learn” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 458).

For Institutions and Managers

In the past five years, I have served in a myriad of ways in the institution’s growing attempt at diversity and inclusion in both curricula, faculty support, and student support levels. My most profound learning in the process is how much the success of initiatives in the area of inclusion depend on institutional support and, more importantly, support from managers and institutional stakeholders. During the focus group interview, the most pressing concern that instructors in this research had about teaching for interculturality was the question: “Will management have our backs if something goes wrong?” Managers should not only say that they support teachers; they should not only provide facilitators and teacher-trainers; it is important that managers actively show that they practice what they ask of teachers. In addition, “having teachers’ backs” will also entail providing time and spaces for teachers to continue cultivating and nurturing communities of support.

In recent times, I have attended conversation series as a manager to continue to learn from and affirm my membership in the community. Being present not only allows me to continue to be a witness in mine and my colleagues’ evolving; being present is also saying “I believe this work is important and you are not on your own.” Institutional attempts at integrating inclusion and diversity are often missing active participation of key management personnel. Such

a lack of representation from leaders makes it “teachers’ business,” which in turn causes instructors to worry that their jobs may be jeopardized if conversations become too heated in the classroom. If we are asking teachers to venture out into sometimes unfamiliar terrain that they often do not know the most current language for, then the least managers can do is demonstrate that instructors will always have the support they need. Management must also demonstrate a commitment to the unfolding process by continuing to ensure opportunities for ongoing professional development for instructors to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the area. They must also hold space for errors in the process.

Where We Stand

In an auspicious way, I temporarily bring the conversation to a halt by returning to the middle: starting another conversation with my colleagues about ways to take up intercultural communication in more explicit and overt ways in ESL learning, instruction, and curricula. While Gadamer has given me a way to rethink dialogue and understanding of the other in educational spaces, it is critical theory that provided me the initial and ongoing framework for describing the most obvious challenges of intercultural encounters posed by our ever-more-globalized world. Hermeneutics and African wisdom, however, gave me an ontological framework for centering the root source of the present human and global condition of unrest and peril and to reimagine ways that we could meaningfully go on together. While Gadamer provided ways that the human problem of understanding and dialogue might be reimaged, I find that it is budding stirrings of my African wisdom traditions and the sound admonition of curriculum scholars working in the field that “initiated” me into a coming of age understanding of how to engage the ritual of educating in ways that attend to life’s deepest rhythms (Smith, 2008).

In many ways, this research topic, and the process of writing this dissertation, has been a tedious coming of age rite: painful, illuminating, a test of perseverance, and a cocktail of unexpected turns. Like a rite of passage, there were tears and uplifting moments. More than anything, what this process has done most for me is to help me recover my own memory. As mentioned in the first chapter, I had come into my doctoral studies with full-blown cultural amnesia that the process of studying, thinking, writing, and rewriting, has “healed.” Now that I am fully present, I will leave those whose rites of passage come after mine with some wise words about what purposes my rite of passage serves for the ESL field in particular and the field of intercultural communication in general.

Many attempts at theorizing intercultural communication (intercultural communicative competence as it is commonly called in the ESL field) has been done from a Western onto-epistemological position. The concepts and models that guide scholarship in the field have mostly been conceptualized by Western language education scholars writing from within a Western paradigm. To that end, there is a dearth of scholarship from non-Western language education practitioners about non-Western approaches to intercultural communication in ESL settings. My research brings a fresh lens into the discourse. Further, attempts at examining ways that intercultural communication can be integrated into ESL curricula have often been in the context of secondary education. My research contributes to the field by bringing perspectives from post-secondary ESL teachers. In addition, this study foregrounds the questions of “ethics” which have received comparatively little attention in ESL scholarship.

Finally, this research has focused on ways that discursive aspects of identity that shape intercultural communication might be engaged in more wholesome ways in ESL curricula. An important contribution of my research is that it bridges the gap between curriculum and practice,

because I undertake the research not as an outside observer, but as an insider within a shared community of practice in the teaching context. While much scholarship in the field have been carried out by scholars writing *for* teachers, my research presents an account *by* teachers of how a curriculum of intercultural communication might be reimagined. My research presents an interpretation of experienced instructors’ perspectives on curricula conditions that have either enabled or limited their attempts to integrate intercultural communication into their practice.

The Substance of This Unfinished Conversation

As I contemplate this dissertation paper and the entire study for the umpteenth time, one final thought that sticks with me is the realization that hermeneutics is what happens beyond and above our original plan and thinking. While the work has certainly entered into a life of its own and taken flight, it is important that I reflect on the questions that I set out to explore in this research and how those questions have been answered. In truth, hermeneutics is always an ongoing conversation, so no question is ever truly answered completely. However, I can ponder on the dialogue that I have had with the questions throughout this paper. It is fortuitous to return to the place I began, the address of the question, because hermeneutics always starts with the address.

Primarily, I wanted to understand what it meant to return to “original difficulty” in an ESL curriculum of intercultural communication. The ideas and discussion of what language means, how we might re-envision tasks in language teaching, how we might re/think time and enter into a time that does not end—all these are very complex, I dare say difficult, ways of thinking about taken-for-granted concepts in the daily lives of ESL practitioners. What my study has done is to challenge the shallow ways that we have often thought of and talked about these concepts in order to restore a more complex understanding of them. This was one of the key

goals I had set out to achieve with my question. Furthermore, in this research, I had sought to understand what instructors perceived to be the possibilities and complexities of teaching for intercultural communication. We understand from the previous two chapters that instructors generally think there is a necessity to take on the topic of intercultural communication in more complex ways, and that this uptake must include difficult conversations on religious diversity, sexuality, race, and gender. With a more open-minded and explicit integration of these concepts into ESL curricula, instructors would be more likely to engage the topic without feeling that they were going “off task.” Looking to the rich, interconnected and relational paradigms of hermeneutics and African wisdom traditions, I theorized a number of ways that educators might engage richer and more complex conversations that are bound to emerge with an expanded understanding of what it means to teach and learn language in these times. As I reflect on what this dissertation paper does accomplish, I am simultaneously conscious of what else could have been explored. However, as a hermeneut, I am aware that a hermeneutic research is an ongoing conversation. And so, this conversation reopens right where it ends because,

We actualize reality, without ever completing it, with stories. Our stories are never finished; and therefore never unfinished. If reality itself is always incomplete, each moment becomes complete itself, lacking nothing. (Loy, 2010, p. 40)

(Re)Turning

Now, it is not the function of . . . hermeneutics to put an end to . . . games, like a cold-blooded, demythologizing scientist who insists that the clouds are but random collections of particles of water. . . its function is to keep the games in play, to awaken us to the play, to keep us on the alert that we draw forms in the sand, we read clouds in the sky, but we

do not capture deep essences . . . if there is anything that we learn in . . . hermeneutics it is that we never get the better of the flux. (Caputo, 1987)

An “address” of a topic is both beauty and burden. When I was first addressed by this topic, I carried it delicately in my heart, my mouth, and my hands, speaking and calling forth what already existed into a more physical and palpable space of paper and keyboard. But unlike the penmanship of a journalist, the experience of being addressed by a topic in hermeneutic research is “the feeling of being caught in something’s regard and of being guided by the thing itself rather than someone else’s version of it” (Moules, 2002, p. 13). While I gingerly let the address direct and order my steps, sometimes ordering me to a standstill, awe, movement, stunning moments of clarity, and absolute intermissions of confusion, I am constantly reminded that my research is not an attempt to create something out of the void, because hermeneutics understand that “before the researcher arrived, it already existed and something was at play. Hermeneutics lets what is already at play move forward” (Moules, 2002, p. 13).

An important existential function that hermeneutic research does is declutter our minds to be able to call to remembrance that which was forgotten. In a world where schools and educators have been conditioned to educate for the sole purpose of preparing students for a pre-determined future that has to be mastered by building a set of skills, intercultural curriculum serves as a disruption to that order, a call to “remember, recollect and recall” (Moules, 2002, p. 2) that which we have forgotten as educators and students. A conceptualization of curriculum as an intercultural construct is really a return to “original difficulty,” and a remembrance of a way of “doing things” in education. In this state of original difficulty, we realize why we were in a state of forgetfulness in the first place.

Aletheia, which conjures up the metaphor of opening up the lid of a well, allows us to see what had hitherto been hidden beneath the mask, exposing our festering wounds and letting us feel the pain, for the first time in a full wakeful state, without anaesthetics. Both a process and an experience, Aletheia is the “ongoing, historical, epochal process by which things emerge from concealment into unconcealment” (Caputo, 1987, p.). This process is precisely what my research has undertaken in the previous chapters.

The open well also simultaneously reveals and conceals something from us. This study has attempted to contemplate and give words to that which has been *revealed* and made penetrable to my understanding, all along aware that a whole lot more has become concealed to me and by me. My research has been a quest for wisdom to proceed in these times but also for ways that we may do right by this glimpse of illumination that we have been trusted with.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What attitudes do you value in students in relation to learning/cultural differences in the classroom? What attitudes do you value in teachers around intercultural awareness?
2. How do you understand intercultural competence? What does it mean to you?
3. Would you consider yourself to be interculturally competent? What does it look like to have or not have intercultural competence in your classroom or in student interaction?
4. In your experience, what are some challenges you have had in teaching for intercultural competence?
5. What are some important components you would like to see in an intercultural ESL curriculum?
6. What would an intercultural ESL curriculum look like in a task-based teaching and learning setting?

Appendix B

Information Letter

February 05, 2018

Dear Instructor,

I am currently working on my doctoral study at the University of Alberta, and I am conducting an interpretive research study about intercultural competence in English as a second language (ESL) instruction. You are receiving this letter for two reasons: firstly, to inform you about my doctoral research project due to commence in the next few months and, secondly, to invite you to participate in the project.

The title of this University of Alberta research project is Re/turning to “Original Difficulty”: Toward an Ethics and Curriculum of Intercultural Competence. You are being asked to participate in this study because I am seeking collaborative ways to explore possibilities for integrating intercultural competence in ESL curriculum. The research seeks to engage in conversation with ESL instructors about meaningful and ethical ways to integrate intercultural competence in ESL curriculum, instruction, and learning. The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis and also to inform a future curriculum review in our teaching context. In consideration of your valuable time as teachers, your only role as a participant will be to engage in a maximum of three conversations with me. There will be two individual interviews and one small group interview, depending on the availability and willingness of other participants. Each individual interview will last approximately one hour and will be recorded digitally.

If you choose to participate in the study, your contributions will be acknowledged and recognized. You will also be accessing a valuable professional development opportunity that will directly impact your teaching practice. Should you choose to participate anonymously, I assure

you that whatever you say during the interviews will not be shared with your employer, supervisor, or colleagues.

Accepting or declining to participate in this study will in no way impact or influence your performance appraisal or annual evaluation.

All digital recordings of the interview will be destroyed according to the University of Alberta ethics guidelines.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me in the following ways:

Phone: (780) 394-0013

E-mail: siyaka@ualberta.ca

If you would prefer to communicate directly with my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Claudia Eppert, about the research project, you can contact her via:

Phone:

E-mail: eppert@ualberta.ca

University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Thank you.

Rekiyat Siyaka

Appendix C

Consent Form

Re/turning to “Original Difficulty”: Toward an Ethics and Curriculum of Intercultural Competence

I, (please print) _____ have read the information on the research project Re/turning to “Original Difficulty”: Toward an Ethic and Curriculum of Intercultural Competence that is to be conducted by Rekiyat Siyaka from the University of Alberta and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact.

I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time without reason or penalty. My responses will remain confidential (except I waive anonymity) and any documentation, including audio/visual tapes will be destroyed once the project is completed. My identity will not be revealed without my consent to anyone other than the investigator conducting the project.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Appendix D

Anonymity Waiver

I, (please print) _____ consent to the use of my actual names in the study.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix E

Notification of Approval

Date: February 11, 2019

Study ID: Pro00086444

Principal Investigator: [Rekiyat Siyaka](#)

Study Supervisor: [Claudia Eppert](#)

Study Title: Re/turning to "Original
Difficulty": Toward an
Ethic and Curriculum of
Intercultural
Competence.

Approval Expiry Date: Monday, February 10,
2020

Approval Approved

Date Document

[Focus Group](#)

Approved Consent Form: 2/11/2019 [Confidentiality](#)

[Agreement](#)

[Informed](#)

2/11/2019

[Consent and](#)

[Anonymity](#)

[Waiver Form](#)

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Stanley Varnhagen, PhD.

Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).