University of Alberta

At the edge of reason: Three language and literacy educators' classroom experiences teaching born-digital students

by

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Dedication

To my wife, Carol, and our three sons, Kieran, Liam, and Aidan for their love and support through the many challenges and changes this work brought into our lives.

Abstract

Contemporary English language arts (ELA) teachers engage students who have been born into a digital world where emergent literacies challenge the traditionally authoritative perspectives and physical boundaries of books and classrooms. This qualitative case study inquired into the classroom experiences of three senior English language arts teachers located in two western Canadian provinces in our digital-based communications age. Analyzed through a cultural studies lens, this inquiry's data were collected through the methodological triangulation of classroom observation, semi-structured interview, and online journal responses. The study's findings reveal the significance of the three selected teachers' textual stances and pedagogy to their students' new literacies in this time of epochal communications and cultural change.

A broadening horizon of textual choice and compositional possibilities complicated each of the three teachers' classroom practice in a subject area whose content, traditionally, relies upon reading and responding to print-based canonical texts. Each of these teachers was working *In medias res* to understand which texts and textual practices should be held on to, and which could be relinquished for the benefit of their students' language learning.

A major concern that emerged for each of these three educators was a perceived loss of deep critical readings by their students. This concern was counter-balanced for the subject area specialists by an emergent understanding of

the affordances of a broadening set of texts and textual practices – a developing awareness that students' critical literacies can emerge in a rhizomal manner, and that teachers and students can co-author their literacy experiences within the (con)text of the ELA classroom. For these three participants, teaching ELA has become an 'ellipsis' in a digital-based age where certain previously privileged texts and a sense of authority need to be relinquished in order to achieve the co-constructed understanding of word and world so valued by these educators and their students.

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A teacher's stance

…words give meaning to contexts just as surely as contexts give meaning to words. Words and context are two mirrors facing each other, infinitely and simultaneously reflecting each other (Gee, 2003, p. 86).

Kate is standing at the front of the classroom holding a book in her hands separated from her students by a few steps. She is reading aloud, stopping here and there at intervals amongst the ordered lines on the page to explain key passages, and at other times to ask questions. She holds the book in one hand and turns to write a student's response on the blackboard; building a semantic organizer. I am seated near the back of the class observing Kate's teaching experiences. I am working to understand her stance – not her physical posture but rather her attitude towards conceptions of literacy and text, and how this reasoning affects her teaching experiences within this senior language arts classroom located on the edge of a small prairie city in a digital age.

Today, Kate has asked her students to look for supportive evidence in the content of their novel, *Lord of the Flies*, to exemplify the theme they are studying in this fall term's ELA unit. Having the students read, interpret, and create a visual organizer will address several learning outcomes required by the provincial ELA curriculum. Some students have a pen in hand taking notes as Kate talks, others are leafing through their handouts distributed at the beginning of class,

while others shift in their seats situated at tables organized in a large semi-circle in the classroom. I take particular notice of one student; a white tendril of an iPod ear bud trails out of her jacket pocket. She glances briefly out the classroom windows whose filtered light makes me squint slightly when I also look out to the distant horizon, and I stop taking observational notes for a moment.

Kate's teaching moment is situated, yet it reflects many others both inside this classroom and other English language arts classrooms that I have been in as a student, teacher, and now as a researcher. The printed page has been central to English language arts' curricula, teachers' pedagogy, and students' schooled literacy practices for many decades. Arguably, the printed page is what education, in the Western tradition, has been built upon for generations. Manguel (1996) writes of this relationship – literally etched in stone: "A marble sculpture from the mid-fourteenth century shows a teacher seated on a bench, a book open on the desk in front of him, looking out at his students. He is holding a page open in his left hand, while his right hand seems to be stressing a point, perhaps explaining the passage he has just read out" (pp. 74-75). What happens, then, to teachers and teaching when students migrate, or are born into a digital world with interactive technologies that change notions of text, and challenge the authoritative boundaries of brick and mortar classrooms?

This dissertation, through a qualitative research inquiry, examines the classroom experiences of Kate, David, and Michelle as they teach English language arts in these nascent digital times. Chapter one locates my own

understandings of literacy and notions of text at key points in my personal and professional life through a suite of five time-referenced writings. Through a review of research literature in chapter two, I further contextualize, and make links between the broad social-historical structuring of literacy education and specific contexts of schooled literacy practices. I also examine the changes that have occurred in ELA curricula and students' communicative practices during these emergent digital times; the studied and perceived impacts of both on ELA teachers. Chapter two's literature review, then, frames the importance of my study's main research question, while chapter three explains the research methodology I used to answer that question. My observations of Kate's, David's, and Michelle's classroom teaching, along with their answers to semi-structured interviews and online written reflections are presented as data in chapter four. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I discuss the importance of this study's findings to English language arts education and curriculum development in a multimedia and textually saturated world that is becoming increasingly diverse yet interconnected.

Chapter One

Locating myself as literacy educator and researcher

Every moment is two moments. Each speech act, each event (whether noticed or not) is the confluence of history and memory. Interpreting and theorizing any moment is another moment bearing the character of that which is remarked (Sumara, 2002, p. 24).

Looking out and looking in

To illuminate the socio-constructivist and critical literacy perspectives that I hold as an educator and researcher, I work throughout this chapter – through a suite of time-referenced writings – to locate personally and professionally transformative literacy events and practices. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) note, “the notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context” (p. 7). In these spaces of memory, place and page I feel cloistered; closely connected to my developing sense of literacy within Educational D/discourses (Gee, 1996). I believe that the relationship between broad socio-cultural literacy ‘Discourses’ and personal/ professional literacy ‘discourses’ are inseparable and interdependent. Here, and throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I understand the term Discourse in relation to Gee’s (1996) view of ‘Discourse’ as cultural phenomena that share complex identities, beliefs, and ways of thinking (e.g., the broad cultural phenomena of schooling or

ELA as a discipline), and ‘discourse’ as any stretch of language (e.g., spoken, written, signed) which ‘hangs together’ to make sense to a community of people (members of a classroom, or author and reader).

Embedded within the socio-cultural Discourse of new literacies studies, literacy events are characterized as “activities where literacy has a role… events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). These moments are as much interior as exterior, and consist alternately of memory, bricks and mortar, page and screen. They involve personal processes with accompanying values, attitudes, and feelings. At the same time, these literate life practices are the social processes that connect people with one another (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1995). Such practices include people’s awareness of literacy, conceptions of literacy and discourses of literacy; how people talk about and make sense of literacy.

Within the discourse of this chapter, I work to represent my emergent understandings within the broader western educational Discourse of evolving literacies – a personal vocabulary built within a larger socio-cultural grammar. I connect past to present, and present to past in an attempt to provide a perspective on the interplay amongst the personal and social contexts of my evolving personal and professional understandings of literacy as a process and discipline while I was a middle-years student, a beginning classroom teacher, and a beginning academic. The purpose of representing these events is not only to locate who I am and what biases I house in relation to the broader educational Discourse around expanding

notions of text and literacy, but also to contextualize why I decided to conduct my inquiry into three selected educators' experiences teaching English language arts to adolescents in recent times.

1978: My middle years library

I am looking out into the sunshine, my eyes squinting reflexively. I am twelve years old, facing south looking through the open-slatted blinds of a second-storey window in my middle years school library. I am looking across a tree-lined street onto an old residential neighbourhood in a small prairie town in the late 1970s. Somewhere on the horizon, unknown to me at the time, horses are running alongside rail-lines in the blue-shadowed hills of southwestern Saskatchewan; European postmodernists write of 'dead authors', semiotics, and constructs of power; and young California-based university dropouts are putting together breadbox sized personal computers and writing binary-based programs in their parents' garages.

I am standing in the midst of an architectural dichotomy. This middle years school is a modern and modernist building constructed on the edge of a Victorian-era neighbourhood. The neighbourhood's houses, with their towering maple and poplar trees, were among the first to be built in my childhood hometown that grew rapidly along a branch of the Canadian Pacific railway 100 kilometers north of the American border. At the turn of the last century the town of 2500 people was predicted, by some, to become a city in less than five years. That did not happen. But this structurally and philosophically modernist middle

years school and its library were built in the equally heady and progressivist days of the mid 1960s – during a time of population and economic growth marked in Canadian prairie schools by a new generation of young teachers from eastern and western European immigrant stock, and an influx of recently recruited teachers from the United Kingdom.

I turn and look back from the second-storey window into the library. It is a long broad space, equaling the size of four classrooms. To me it is more interesting and more welcoming than any other space in this school, if not in the whole town. Windows at either end of the room – allowing in southern and northern light – frame broad brick walls lined with wooden shelves that reach floor to ceiling. These shelves are filled with fiction and non-fiction books; Cold War era maps; filmstrips; three dimensional working models of the human body and its various systems; bas-relief globes of the Earth and Apollo-era moon. There also stand, along a far wall, muted grey cabinets full of annotated newspaper and magazine clippings, coloured transparencies, cassettes and vinyl records of classical and pop music, and renderings of stories such as Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

Situated throughout the library are groupings of tables frequented by early and middle years students and teachers who read, write, or quietly engage in conversation during the school day. Library science and other subject-area classes/projects are carried out here regularly. Behind the librarian's desk and returns area sit stacks of new materials waiting to be catalogued, audio visual

equipment such as film projectors, cassette recorders, and record players waiting to be delivered to classrooms, and a trolley full of books to be shelved. Stands of paper-backs and multimodal jackdaws intermittently dot the middle space of the library where I often linger, viewing reproductions of historical photos, maps, and print documents; my favourites pertaining to the Battle of Britain and the American Civil War.

Long low shelves of reference materials split the middle of the room and provide a physical demarcation between fiction and non-fiction materials. This is where I sit, cross-legged on the floor often until my legs fall asleep, leafing through sets of *Encyclopedia Britannica, World Books,* and the *Canadian Centennial Library*. I live memorably in this library's complex literate space. This space is my second home; my mom is the teacher-librarian and my dad the principal of this school. In so many ways education has been my world context. It is here that I explore and construct a sense of the world as well as the word. I do this on the periphery, in the space between brick and mortar of home and school during the many late afternoons and weekends of my childhood as my parents mark, prepare, and organize throughout the busy school year. As a reader and viewer in this library, my out-of-school and in-school literacies are enriched and emboldened by the multimodal interplay of the visual, audio, and print materials around me.

Within three years, after I have entered high school, the first few new Apple Macintosh personal computers with basic 'literacy' and 'numeracy'

software packages to be purchased by the town's school division will be placed in this library. These computer screens' angular text, graphics and green-on-green palette manifest the first forays by programmers into binary code for mass and educational consumption. It is many years before I begin my own career as an English language arts teacher during a time of provincial curricular renewal. It is before my completion of undergraduate degrees in English literature and secondary education. This is nearly twenty years before the New London Group (1996) writes of *multiliteracies* characterized by multimodal forms of communication and plurality of identity through digital platforms that could house all of the books, tapes, maps, and so forth not in one large room, as my middle years school library did, but rather within the space of a few DVDs, a hard drive, or the many websites of the ever-expanding Internet.

1998: Beginning my teaching in '*New Times*'

I am looking in an educational journal. I am thirty-one years old and in the middle of a winter term near the beginning of my career as a middle years and high school ELA teacher. I am situated on an unsteady swivel chair in the quiet basement study of our small home in an east central Saskatchewan city. Leafing through the latest edition of the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* after supper, while my wife Carol is away for the evening preparing to teach her Kindergarten class the next day, I am stilled for a moment, intrigued by a title: *New Times literacy*. Emerging from the New London Group's (1996) discussion of "multiliteracies," A. Luke and Elkins' (1998) editorial challenges me as ELA teacher to consider the many literacies

that the present generation of students, including my own, will need to meet the global citizenship and economy of the next decades. In the rapidly evolving economies and institutions of what A. Luke and Elkins (1998) term "New Times," secondary students are faced with the challenges of navigating negotiable community and academic discourses and of balancing forms of identity, new work practices, as well as the demands of new technologies and popular cultures. Included in this Discourse on New Times multiliteracies are students' emerging multi-modal, digitally-based literacy practices and the implications of those practices for language and literacy teachers' pedagogy. "The advent of (new communication technologies)…are not a *fait accompli*, nor are they, as many teachers working in print traditions are convinced, simply negative forces to be opposed at all costs. Rather they are still evolving, shapeable technologies that can be used for both constructive and quite destructive social and cultural consequences" (A. Luke & Elkins, 1998, p. 5). They further suggest:

> The most useful component of the tool kit for all literacy educators may not be a mastery of a particular method, but rather a vision of the future of literacy, a picture of the texts and discourses, skills and knowledges that might be needed by our students as they enter new worlds of work and citizenship, traditional and popular culture, leisure and consumption, teaching and learning. (p. 4)

The authors of this editorial note an educational exigency in light of evolving communication technologies, and the plurality of students' cultural and constructed identities, as well as the importance of critical perspectives and practices within these

social discourses. They state that the challenge to literacy educators is "to sift through the maze of ways with words of new technologies and new cultural forms, to decide how to best situate and position our teaching, our curricula, and our learners in relation to these new worlds" (p. 6).

Later that night, after Carol returns from school, I bring the journal with me as bedtime reading, and then take it to read on our couch under a pool of incandescent light when I find myself unable to fall asleep. As I read on, I find that Luke and Elkins are not alone; they ground their perspective in relation to other socio-culturalists such as Barton and Hamilton (1998) who describe literacy as "… primarily something that people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed" (p. 3). The concept of literacy events is linked to the wider social structures in which these events are embedded and which these events in turn help to shape. These events are aspects of literacy practices that are linked to broader sets of values, attitudes, feelings, and relationships.

It is clear that I have begun my teaching career during a challenging time; one in which socio-cultural ideas, qualitative research, and a newly revised Saskatchewan ELA curricula are taking hold within the educational Discourse of my home province and beyond its borders. The recently revised Saskatchewan senior ELA curriculum (1999), the first new ELA curricula in this province in twenty-four years, is entitled *Evergreen* to reflect the recursive and renewable potential for curriculum

development by all stakeholders in education from teachers, to students, parents, administrators, and academics. “The philosophy that serves as the foundation for English language arts curricula is based on research that demonstrates the interdependence of language, thinking, learning, and instruction” (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999, Introduction). I am teaching two regular streams of Grade 12 Canadian literature, two classes of the new Grade 11 Media Studies and Creative Writing courses. These last two courses, along with Grade 11’s Communication and Journalism courses are also part of the curricular renewal in Saskatchewan ELA education. It is a time of great promise, but also much consternation for many teachers in the field. I witness this frustration in the hallways, in staff room discussions, and at professional development in-services. The ELA Evergreen curriculum broadens conceptions of what it means to be literate, and adds the processes of ‘representing’ and ‘viewing’ to the traditional practices of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the ELA classroom. Perhaps most disconcerting to many ELA teachers is the indeterminate nature of terms such as “communication acts”, “language processes”, and “interrelatedness”, as well as the de-privileging of literature evident in the curriculum’s (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999) rationale:

> The following principles guide the development of Secondary Level English language arts curricula and classroom practice:
>
> 1. Language learning thrives when students are engaged in meaningful use of language.

2. Whether students speak, listen, write, read, represent, or view, they are engaged in communication acts that have purpose, audience, and context.

3. All forms of communication are equally important. Mastery of all strands — speaking, listening, writing, reading, representing, and viewing is essential for competence in using the English language. One is not competent in the language until one can demonstrate that competence in all strands.

4. Mastery of all language strands is best achieved through an integrated program that recognizes the interrelatedness of the language processes and the interrelatedness of language and content…. (Curriculum Principles section)

In addition, the Evergreen curriculum expands the definition of what a text is, and how it can be used in the classroom: "Students in the English language arts courses use language to develop their language abilities as they learn about the nature of the English language, its literature, and various media" (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999, Introduction). Again, it remains for each individual teacher to recognize and address the important changes taking place between page, screen-based, and digital texts such as those found on CD-ROMs, in email communications, and the quickly evolving content of the World Wide Web in each of their classrooms. I am invigorated by this openness and opportunity in the new Evergreen curriculum; many of my colleagues are not. They have been trained in their teacher education, and remain most comfortable, with grammatical skill and drill books and literary anthologies that have comprehension and extension questions at the end of each story or poem.

Later, during the following afternoon, I am back at school looking towards my students. The light from the various computer screens in our school's crowded computer lab finds little competition from the early February light that filters through the computer lab's adjacent windows. These windows are closed. My students are opening new windows. They are engaging with new interactive communications technologies during a class time that I have booked in the computer lab – ostensibly to do an expository paper on an author of their choice. They are crossing distinctions between print and multimodal texts; negotiating their own literacy practices in spaces beyond our classroom walls that have a highly intriguing and uncertain bearing on their schooled and out-of-school practices. I have learned to leave spaces within the assignments and time that I give them on computer. It is while I engage in these literacy events, between personal and social practices, that I decide to create another space through a Master's degree to further my understanding of students' evolving literacy practices.

2002: Master's research

I am multi-tasking; listening to Glenn Gould's last recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on a CD, drafting a paper for my final Master's class, and intermittently checking my email account while hooked up to the modem located on a nearby writing desk. It is the summer between completing my Master's research and my return to classroom teaching as head of a comprehensive high school's English language arts department. Carol, our infant son Kieran, and I are

visiting my parents' home. They are retired now from their long and successful teaching careers. I am sitting so that I can overlook my parents' backyard and garden, and I open a new window on my computer's desktop to begin writing:

Intertextuality

It is nearing evening with a waxing moon
and the day falls back from me
as my wife sits on the open porch
feeding our four month old baby
holding him
at the half moon of her exposed breast
while nearby
slugs and wasps
cut dark garden earth
feeding on blue cooling air.

We are all
slugs wasps and my family
bathed in these small movements
words and moments referring to each other
sometimes without knowing
in the steady hum and shimmer
of an arching summer moon
reflected now on my laptop's screen

And I wonder if this space that I write on
will affect my son in any way directly
as the sweet summer raspberries picked and eaten
by my wife during mid-day sun
while all…
the moon the slugs the wasps and our son
slept.

This is one of several poems that I write that summer from a short series I entitle *Reading Bakhtin*. I have immersed myself in Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) writings. There are direct connections between his ideas of appropriation, intertextuality, and the data I have collected during my recent investigation into three students'

literacy experiences in an online Grade 12 ELA course. I turn ideas over in my mind; my gaze moving from page to screen and back to the garden. My hands rest at my sides, the music plays on. An appropriation begins between Gould's playing and my thinking. I begin writing again, and later will revise and publish:

> The art and act of combining two simultaneous lines (of music, intention, thought…) emerged in musical composition during the 14th century. The term "contrapuntal" has re-emerged since that time, from Bach to Gould, to denote music or voice in counterpoint with another. This re-emergence has occurred alongside, or because of, developments in society – especially evolving musical and communications technology. In our own liminal/new times, with its evolving digital communication technology, the term contrapuntal poignantly characterizes the emergent online writing practices witnessed through this study. 'Contrapuntal writing' then adeptly denotes the multi-layered and polyphonic nature of these students' online writing. It also appropriately captures the paradoxical nature of the students' online writing, at once meta-cognitive in its critical manner – allowing for fluid and emergent constructions of self and understanding of culture in relation to the counterpoint of other's perspectives – yet adhering to strict non-transformative rules of schooled engagement…. It is important to note that those who historically worked within the contrapuntal format in their own transitional eras, such as Bach and Gould, also pushed at the edges of composition. The contradictions in

> contrapuntal writing seen within this online World Literature course complicate modernist notions of writing. Perhaps, most importantly though, these students' online writings serve as a critical counterpoint to writing practices and pedagogy still bound to the pages of many English language arts classrooms in 'New Times.' (Nahachewsky & Ward, 2007, p. 59)

My Master's research focused on the question: *What are three students' literacy experiences in an online senior English language arts course?* In this qualitative study, I examined the nature of three selected students' literacy experiences while they were using asynchronous computer-mediated communication in a senior English language arts class. I documented and interpreted their online literacy experiences using methodological triangulation and case study methodology. I collected data for this qualitative study during 16 weeks. Halliday's (1978) sociolinguistic model of register with its component elements of field, mode, and tenor provided a useful, systematic framework to explore the nature of students' classroom-contextualized asynchronous communications. Within-case analysis grew to cross-case analysis to understand the nature of these three students' online literacy experiences. Upon my study's completion, during the writing of my thesis, I arrived at more questions than answers; most notably regarding the teacher's experiences:

> … throughout this exploration, the role of the 'classroom' teacher remained integral to the experiences of the students. It was obvious that

> the teacher mediated the three students' online experiences: their negotiation of self and constructed meaning within the class' discourse, their communication objectives, and their development of text-internal and text-external inter-textualities. I believe that it would be very important to gain an understanding of the nature of emerging literacy experiences for contemporary language arts teachers as they engage their students in 'New Times.' (Nahachewsky, 2003, p. 122)

McClay and Weeks (2002) also remind me that a teacher has the final responsibility and authority for what transpires in their classroom. Inquiry into the perspectives and experiences of contemporary teachers is needed. I am ready to return to the classroom, but only for one year before I begin my PhD studies in Edmonton.

2003: Teaching media

I have been accepted into the Doctoral program in Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, but have not yet announced my imminent departure as senior ELA classroom teacher and department head to my principal. As a teaching load for the term he has assigned me two Grade 12 World literature courses, a Grade 11 Creative Writing class, and two classes of Grade 11 Media Studies. My decision to pursue a Doctorate has been made after much consideration because of the upheaval it will cause in my wife's teaching career, the energy and time it will take to relocate my young and growing family, but also because I greatly value what I am able to teach here as an ELA specialist.

I particularly value teaching the Media Studies course. It is a blend of the Humanities and Social Sciences – as much of my own formal education has been – that engages me as a teacher, and my students as learners in a mix of interpretive and deconstructionist approaches. There is supposed to be little focus on students' composition of media texts, but I encourage the representation of their knowledge through alternate forms in this course. Digital video cameras and online spaces such as web pages have recently afforded other useful platforms of expression alongside the oral presentations, storyboarding, and five-paragraph essays encouraged in the curriculum.

The media universe that McLuhan (1962) wrote about in works such as *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is manifested in my second floor classroom. We are connected to the world and extending ourselves through the cable connected television at the front of my classroom and through the broad-band wired desktop computer at the back of the classroom. In the midst of the flurry and busyness of prepping, teaching, and marking I am continually drawn back to wanting to understand more of what I am witnessing in this classroom. I also crave time to write. There is little time for either of these pursuits as I grab a video tape and ready myself for my 8:50 am Media Studies class. I have spent the last 10 minutes taping bits and pieces of television content – mainly commercials at this time of day, as I have surfed through the TV channels.

In this way I am capturing, for classroom use, the most recent examples of 'text' for my media studies class that will grab and hold their attention. I

repeatedly rely on ‘fair use’ policy of taping bits and pieces of television, cutting out magazine ads, or doing screen captures on the Web so that we can use these texts in a ‘critical’ manner. Saskatchewan’s Media Studies curriculum (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999, Introduction) requires me as a teacher to encourage my students to achieve this *critical reading* of such media texts through a deconstruction of text and transfer of ideas in their own lives:

> Curriculum Principles and Concepts
>
> Media Studies 20 is concerned with helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the mass media, the messages contained in the mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these media.
>
> The following principles form a foundation for teaching Media Studies 20.
>
> * Media literacy involves understanding mass media and how they affect us. Students should explore the values and tastes that are relevant to their own community and the impact of the mass media on their community.
>
> * A balanced view of each medium is important. The positive features of the mass media as well as the negative features should be examined.

I am using this video tape’s content as part of a motivational set to begin answering the question which I have written on the blackboard: “Does television provide a window on the world, or does it construct its own version of the world?” This is a particularly important question in the spring of 2003 as *reality television* has taken up much of the evening television content. The TV with cable

access in my classroom, along with the wired computer, and latest editions of newspapers and popular magazines adds relevance to what the students are learning, but it still provides me with pedagogical and textual control. This is a fine balance because what is relevant for these students changes quickly. It is hard to keep up. Stacked on the bottom of my classroom's TV cart are a VCR and a DVD player; they are layered or stratified in the way you might find them in an archaeological dig with the older technology at the bottom. I know that the contents of this stratification will change as different layers of new communications technologies are added just as they were in the school library of my youth. Here then is the convergence, or hybrid of media that McLuhan (1962, 1964) wrote about in the height of the electronic age just before I was born. It challenges and changes the way that I teach literacy, and the way that my students learn and communicate. These ideas and considerations need to be stilled for a moment as 23 students file in, tumble into their seats tired from early morning band, track practice, jobs outside of the home, or a long bus ride in from the family farm. As they get seated I hear from the back of the room, "So, what are we doing today Mr. N?" I smile and say, "Oh, this and that. We'll begin with this… you might find it interesting."

2006: Doctoral studies

I am hunched over, straining, looking at my laptop's screen positioned opposite the large seventh floor window of an office space that I affectionately call the 'broom-closet'. This is what this space would be used for if my fellow

Doctoral candidate David Slomp and I were not situated here – spending our days, and many late nights, here as nascent researchers and instructors near the end of our respective PhD residencies at the University of Alberta. I am looking once again at an online image of Alex Colville's *Horse and Train* – a work that has re-surfaced at several points throughout my life. I first became acquainted with Colville's painting as an adolescent while leafing through a *Canadian Centennial* art series book in my middle-years school library. I found this 'magic-realist' image of a 'dark horse against an armoured train' (this line comes from South African writer Roy Campbell whose poem inspired Colville's painting) alternately intriguing and disturbing. The dreamlike quality of the painting's scene is disrupted by a realization: the train technology that emerges from the horizon is headed full-steam for a collision with the older horse-powered technology, from which the viewer's perspective is based. The horse, though powerful and progressive in its own right, seems drawn to the oncoming train and is unable to move from the rail upon which the more powerful technology rides.

Many years after first seeing that image in a book, I happened upon the actual painting while visiting the National Art Gallery in Ottawa during my year of full-time Master's studies. While sitting in this 'broom-closet', looking at my computer's screen and the image, I decided to use its subjects as a metaphor in writing an article for *English Quarterly* (Nahachewsky, 2005). I wrote:

The last time I visited Ottawa I walked so much that my left foot blistered….

After viewing the main exhibit at the National Art Gallery, I absent-mindedly

> limped into a near-by room that promised a bench and some relief. Unlacing my hiking boots, I looked up to realize that I had unintentionally wandered into a retrospective of works by Colville…. To me, in a meeting of the aesthetic and the efferent, *Horse and train* began to ‘speak’ of the binary tensions between modernist and post-modernist (schooled) realities… that struggle to express and engage new definitions of textuality and literacy. (p. 22)

Using this painting’s imagery, through a ‘literary anthropology’ of sorts (Iser, 1993; Sumara, 2002), I framed this initial understanding of my own, and other ELA teachers’ experiences of the tensions between modernist institutionalized definitions of literacy and literacy practices in this transitional time. To me, in that painting on this screen, Colville’s unexpected scene illustrates the convergence of two literacy paradigms – modernist and postmodernist – *at the edge of the age of Reason*. These juxtaposed literacies are usually cognitively-based, highly positivistic in approach (modernist) or more fragmented and inter-textual in nature, drawing from a digitally coded ever-expanding multi-media universe (post-modernist). During my years as a senior language arts teacher I had encountered this binary between print-based teaching approaches, and students’ rapidly evolving fluid and interactive digital literacy practices. In the field now as a supervisor of student teachers, and as a PhD candidate immersed in research literature, I understand that today’s ELA teachers face unprecedented challenge

and change. They face challenges to the very nature of their subject discipline alongside rapid changes in the theoretical conception of literacy itself.

Being literate once meant an ability to read and write at an arbitrarily set level; but society now demands more sophisticated literacy abilities and practices. The traditional notion of literacy that informs many standardized tests and provincial English language arts curricula also contradicts contemporary adolescent students' literacy practices. C. Luke (2003) notes "although the fundamental principles of reading and writing have not changed, the process has shifted from the serial cognitive processing of linear print text to parallel processing of multi-modal text-image information sources" (p. 399). It is clear that language and literacy teachers are called upon daily to bridge these challenges and changes through the choices they make in the classroom.

These choices are made amid tensions created by outcomes based provincial curricula (in Alberta, Saskatchewan and beyond), constant cycles of high stakes testing, and shrinking professional development funds. Yet, in curricular documents such as *Western and Northern Canadian Protocol* (2000) contemporary teachers are expected to be proficient in the use and instruction of traditional books as well as a myriad of analogue and digital texts that may include static and moving images, sounds, music, and graphics (Hammett & Barrell, 2000). Changes in writing instruction must acknowledge that individuals can now create shifting identities and multi-authored performative pieces online that integrate visuals and reshape grammatical conventions (McClay, 2002).

I continue to wonder about the decisions that teachers are making in their classrooms in this digital age of binary code that is affording changing literacies. For the past decade language and literacy educators in Canada have attempted to navigate the contradictions between modernist-industrial model schooling and the meaning-making afforded students by explorations of mobile and interactive digital communication platforms such as the internet, cell phones, and social sites. At this point, it seems to me that contemporary teachers face a choice in their ELA classrooms – on or off, collide or pass, succeed or fail – as they engage curricula which struggle to express and engage emerging concepts of new literacies and their inherent pedagogical challenges. The viewer of *Horse and Train* also rides a rail of choices: do the horse and train collide or pass, thrive or struggle; the ultimate decision resides with us. As we experience in this viewing, perspective is everything. The horse and train of Colville's painting will remain static, confronting one another in that small space. Language and literacy teachers cannot remain static.

My research question

The daily experiences of teachers in contemporary classrooms are, likely, more complex than those that can be explained solely within a binary framework – whether it is through a Cartesian duality or a magic-realist painting. Although a number of important studies have been conducted recently into students' experiences in these transitional times, very few studies have examined classroom teachers' daily experiences. It is evident that educational theorists and practitioners

need deep insights into English language arts teachers' experiences as they continue to guide the next generation into post-secondary studies and the work world. With the help of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Doctoral Fellowship, I undertake a study of three selected English language arts teachers. The main research question that directs my empirical inquiry is: **What are the classroom experiences of three selected senior ELA educators teaching born-digital students?** Two sub-questions that arise from this main question, and which will serve to focus my investigation, are: (1) **How do these teachers' own conceptions of literacy affect their pedagogy?** and (2) **What stances of textual authority do these teachers have in their classrooms?** Findings from this study are intended to inform educational Discourse, including the discourses within the education of pre-service teachers, the professional development of practicing English language arts teachers, the development of literacy pedagogy in the field, and the continuing debate as to what it means to be literate in today's digitally-based information society.

Chapter Two

Understanding changing times

… learning is not just about the accumulation of information. It is also about the creation of meaning in a social context along unanticipated and sometimes uncontrollable pathways. By not actively embracing and participating in the construction of these paths, teachers run the risk of becoming 'rudderless'… unable to comprehend why things that have worked in the past have ceased to do so. (Selfe, 1999, p. 82)

Introduction

In this chapter I frame the importance of my study's main research question. Throughout my review of the research literature, I contextualize and make links between the broad socio-historical structuring of modernist-based literacy education and contemporary notions of multiple literacies and text as they relate to young people's communication practices. I conclude chapter two with a discussion of research into teachers' classroom practices in recent times.

This chapter, then, helps to establish a better relational understanding for the situated data and findings presented later in this dissertation. I establish these understandings because I hold a socio-cultural perspective to language arts education as a teacher, teacher educator, and researcher. I, as did Street (1995), acknowledge the role of print and other symbols as being central to literate

practice, but I also recognize that the learning and use of the symbols is mediated by and constituted in social systems and cultural practices. As a critical theorist, I believe that power, identity and agency play important roles in whose social and cultural practices are valued. The emergent digital age challenges many such relationships including privileged modernist notions of print-based literacy and literary practices. These challenges and changes hold direct implications for the pedagogical practices and textual stances of contemporary ELA teachers.

Section one – Modernity, literacy and ELA education

The term 'modernity' has a fixed reference in contemporary intellectual discourses as opposed to the term 'modern' which, derived from the Latin *modo*, simply means 'of today' or what is current. Historically, modernity has come to refer to the period that developed in Europe and North America during the last few centuries; emerging from the Enlightenment project, through the Age of Reason, to become fully evident in the last century. At the core of this conception of modernity are the 19th and 20th century world of: rationality, nation-states, mass literacy, mass media, mass culture, faith in science, large-scale industrial enterprise, individualism, enlightenment ideals and a public ideology in which liberal, progressive and humanitarian ideals are prominent. Edwards and Usher (2007) argue that:

> Education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity's 'grand narratives', the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised. The very

> rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on modernity's self-motivated, self-directing, rational subject. (p. 2)

Conceptions of modernity have relied upon, and continue to rely upon, individual reason as the foundation for the forward progression of Western society. This view of the individual, and particularistic knowledge supported a cognitive-based perspective of literacy that informed its definition throughout much of the 20th century. Literacy was defined as an individual's ability to read and write at a functional level in the dominant culture of the society in which one lived. An individual's inability to attain the skill to read and write made them functionally illiterate. This definition privileged written and print-based texts. With the advent of mass education and the accompanying rise of mass literacy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, literacy became increasingly subject to measurement, regulatory scrutiny, and governance in modernist institutions such as schools (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2006). The rise of each new mass communications medium throughout the 20th century – from the radio, to telephone, television, through to the computer – was often perceived by these institutions as a challenge to print-based literacy, and society as a whole. Birkerts (1994) captures the tone of a scholarly concern for the loss of print-based literacy and critical understanding of text in the late 20th century:

> …what emerged was this: that they [the students] were not, with a few exceptions, readers – never had been; that they had always occupied themselves with music, TV, and videos; that they had difficulty slowing

> down enough to concentrate on prose of any density; that they had problems with what they thought of as archaic diction, with allusions, with vocabulary that seemed 'pretentious'; that they were especially uncomfortable with indirect or interior passages, indeed with any deviations from straight plot; and that they were put off by ironic tone because it flaunted superiority and made them feel that they were missing something. (p. 19)

During this time, Birkerts, and other educational and textual theorists such as Sumara (2002), Bloom (1994), and Postman (1984) stressed the importance of privileging traditional print-based texts in classrooms based on a broad range of perspectives and understandings of contemporary literate texts and practices. Crossing modernist and postmodernist frameworks, these theorists wrote of their concerns for: the loss of common textual places for understanding oneself (Sumara, 2002); maintaining a canon of 'good works' (Bloom, 1994); negating the delusory effects of media (Postman, 1984); and the passing of an era of thoughtful reading (Birkerts, 1994). The functional definition of literacy and the focus on print based materials throughout the 20th century led to a formulation of secondary English language arts as a literary subject area. As explored in the next subsection, this modernist view of literacy as based in the study of literature had a direct impact on the education of generations of western Canadian school children, including those who would ultimately teach the present *born-digital* generation.

The study of literature as literacy education

Throughout modernity in the western world, it has been education's historical role to enlighten and emancipate. Following Arnold's (1869) Victorian-era call for a literature-based English culture to instill 'the best which has been thought and said' in students, ELA as a subject discipline in colonized western Canada defined its role within this Enlightenment project. English as a subject area became a vehicle on the early 20th century Canadian prairies to safeguard the language and preserve the dominant English culture (Leavis & Thompson, 1933). This was achieved, to a large degree, through the 'two Rs' of reading and writing; most importantly the *new critical* approach to studying canonical English literature. Walker, Ellefson, and Peters (2000) note:

> …the study of appropriate literary works was expected to develop character and refinement. In the early years of Alberta's (and Saskatchewan's) history, English included literary texts that emphasized loyalty to imperial values and the superiority of Anglo-Saxon language and culture. The literary agenda was blatantly colonial: to socialize the polyglot settlers of the new prairie province into the "proper" culture. (p. 59)

A canon of print-based British literature was granted primary status in ELA education throughout much of the 20th century, particularly through the new critical approach. That interpretive theory is grounded in the modernist belief that "great literature penetrates beyond the historically and culturally specific to a

realm of universal truth whose counterpart is an essentially unchanging human condition" (Johnston, 2003, p. 52). Here, as throughout modernity's age of print, text is held as something that can be seen on the page and something that can be studied objectively. The text is a finished object enclosed within the covers of a book with the reader as passive recipient of its truth. This objectified and authoritative approach to the study of literature "as a body of knowledge to be transmitted from teacher to students" (Johnston, 2003, p. 53) arguably reinforced ELA teachers' classroom role as "center, limit and guarantor of truth" (Callahan, 2002, p. 47) for the texts they chose.

Towards the end of the 20th century, and in tandem with the electronic age of a multi-channel world, the influence of new European literary theories including structuralism and post-structuralism encouraged the idea of meaning as self-referential rather than fixed to an external reality. The reader-response movement, including theorists such as Iser and Rosenblatt, started to inform the practices of Canadian curricular writers and classroom teachers. Iser's (1993) idea was that of a reciprocal relationship between reader and text. The text has 'authorial gaps' so that authority or meaning does not reside solely with the author or text, but rather it is produced through an active and creative process in which the reader draws on connections, or previous experiences of reading. Rosenblatt's (1970) framework for reader response was formulated from her critical reaction to the narrow focus of much literature instruction on literal recall or recitations of teacher-made meaning. She distinguished between two modes of transacting with

a text — the efferent and the aesthetic. When responding from the efferent stance readers are motivated by specific needs to acquire information. When readers are responding in the aesthetic stance, their own unique lived-through experience or engagement with a text is primary. Johnston (2003) writes:

> Reader-response critics such as Iser and Rosenblatt have provided the theoretical support for teachers to develop teaching strategies that are hospitable to individual ways of making sense of texts…. This perspective of literature may give teachers confidence to include new texts in the canon of literature they presently teach, and to encourage students actively to question and reflect on texts they read. (p. 58)

The shift in literary studies to a reader response framework that included an expanded selection of literature and student engagement through strategies such as literature circles (Daniels, 2002) and reader response journals, was encouraged in revised Provincial ELA curricula during the late 1990s and early 2000s in both Saskatchewan and Alberta. The following sub-section in this chapter examines this curricular re-visioning of ELA education in those two provinces.

Curricular response to newer literary frameworks

In the classroom, Canadian ELA teachers' day-to-day textual and pedagogical stances are guided, to a large degree, by ELA curricula developed in each province's Department of Education. The two western Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta each revised their ELA curricula towards the end of the 1990s and implemented them into Secondary ELA classrooms beginning in

1999 and 2003 respectively. This re-visioning was carried out, in part, as a response to expanding notions of text and an acknowledgement of a theoretical grounding in socio-cultural practices of literacy. These documents, still in use today, require teachers to help their students achieve a variety of learning outcomes organized around the traditional language arts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as well as additional and newly recognized language strands including viewing and representing.

The provincial-based curricular renewal in English language arts occurred contemporaneously across larger geographical groupings such as the western Canadian and Maritime provinces. Consortia such as the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP) developed to "paint with broad curriculum strokes over diverse geopolitical landscapes… and challenge seasoned teachers to re-conceptualize their practice" (Barrell, 2000, p. 37).

Despite Barrell's (2000) claim that both new and experienced ELA teachers would "perceive the (curriculum) documents as a paradigm shift" (p. 37), the provincial curricula of Alberta and Saskatchewan remained implicitly reliant on literature as core content, and students' response to literature as a pathway to language learning and literacy. This approach was supported at that time by ELA professional bodies such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) in their *Standards for English language arts*: "Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in

many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience" (IRA/NCTE, 1996, p. 25).

Even in a time of expanding notions of text and new communication practices, or perhaps because of these disorienting changes, ELA education and teachers remained heavily invested in literature as the subject area's content, just as they had for generations. "Traditionally, literature has enjoyed a special status in the subject English. In the nineteenth century, the study of appropriate literary works was expected to develop character and refinement" (Walker, Ellefson, & Peters, 2000, p. 59). This relationship to literature and literacy can be read in the rationale for Alberta's ELA curricula:

> There are two basic aims of senior high school English language arts…. An appreciation of literature and an ability to use language effectively enhance students' abilities to become responsible, contributing citizens and lifelong learners while experiencing success and fulfillment in life. (Government of Alberta, 2003, Introduction)

The literary/literacy relationship is also a primary rationale in the Saskatchewan ELA curriculum. It states: "The aim of the Language arts program, K to 12, is to graduate a literate person who is competent and confident in using language for both functional and aesthetic purposes" (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999, Aims and Goals). This strong relationship in subject ELA between literature and literacy can be understood to emerge from the late modernist literary traditions discussed above. Each of these province's revised curricula seemingly support,

but at the same time contradict emergent conceptions of literacy and expanded notions of text as ELA educators navigate through this nascent digital age (Nahachewsky & Slomp, 2005). It is evident that "reading and writing frequently occur in a range of literacy contexts outside school. However, only reading novels on a regular basis outside of school is shown to have a positive relationship to academic achievement as measured by school grades" (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008, p. 107). Findings from contemporary studies, as above, regarding students' literacies and their relationship to language learning in schools are troubling in a time of expanding notions of text and literacy. Such observations point to contradictory stances for curricular documents that also acknowledge the socio-cultural aspects of literacy, and that forward the role of critical literacies in students' engagement with expanded notions of text.

The following section in this chapter explores the socio-cultural and critical conceptions of literacy that have helped shift the definition of literacy to a consideration of 'literacies.' Further in the next section, two frameworks are examined that have been developed recently, and are being used at present to acknowledge and examine changes in literacies, namely the multiliteracies and new literacies frameworks. The experiences of classroom teachers, although acknowledged throughout the next section, will be considered more directly in the final section of this chapter's literature review.

Section two – Contemporary understanding of literacies

There is a temptation for every generation to believe that its particular historical period is momentous in one way or another, but there are strong reasons for believing that the period of the second half of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first has been, and will continue to be, truly dramatic for literacy. (Hannon, 2004, p. 24)

Social literacies

As discussed throughout the first section of chapter two, the modernist view of literacy continues to be a major voice within literacy Discourse – especially in educational settings. Since the mid-1980s, socio-cultural understandings of literacy have challenged those autonomous models of literacy. Street (1995) among others, such as Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Gee (1996), have drawn from an anthropological and cross-cultural framework, or socio-cultural view, to challenge this view and expand notions of what it means to be literate. In their work, these theorists argue that the traditional view of literacy as a personal cognitive ability that can be measured as discrete and de-contextualized skill sets is inadequate. The field of language and literacy studies has expanded then to include an understanding of literacy as "the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing…the rich cultural variation in these practices and conceptions leads us to rethink what we mean by them and to be wary of assuming a single literacy where we may simply be imposing assumptions derived from our own cultural practice onto other people's literacies" (Street, 1995, p. 2).

Barton and Hamilton (1998) have identified considerations of literacy as "primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people" (p. 3). Literacies, then, are bound up with social, institutional, and cultural relationships. Social cultural groups, or communities of practice such as ELA classrooms, rationalize the situated meanings and practices that people in those groups practice through their various literacy events (Gee, 1996). Language use through literacy events such as reading *The Crucible* or writing an email does not occur in an ideological vacuum. Understandings emerge through discursive contexts and relationships of power. Critical literacy, then, has emerged as a significant discourse within conceptions of socio-cultural theory.

Critical literacies

Critical literacies, by their very nature, challenge a monolithic definition. The lack of a coherent definition has caused consternation in educational circles, particularly when curricula explicitly require teachers to support "critical assessment", "critical understanding", and "critical readings" by students in their ELA classrooms (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999, Common Essential Learnings). This is further amplified in schooled spaces where practices of creating and acquiring knowledge should not be separated from the power that one exercises in negotiating learning (Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2002). As A.

Luke and Elkins (1998) note, literacy is as much about ideologies, identities and values as it is about codes and skills. A helpful definition of critical literacies, then, comes from the NCTE's (2009) 21st Century literacies:

> Although there are several versions of critical literacy, each underpinned by different theoretical perspectives, all of them involve an active, challenging approach to reading and textual practices. Critical literacy involves the analysis and critique of the relationships among texts, language, power, social groups and social practices. It shows us ways of looking at written, visual, spoken, multimedia and performance texts to question and challenge the attitudes, values and beliefs that lie beneath the surface. (Position Statement)

In the ELA subject discipline, critical literacy practices can include, but are not limited to a construction of understanding through 'intra' and 'intertextual' readings; comparative analysis of ideas and interpretation through readings/viewings of multiple textual sources; the transfer of ideas and understandings from one literacy situation to another; and understanding that texts are not neutral – they represent particular viewpoints. That which is not included within a text also becomes important to a critical reading of power relationships within the body and discourse of that text.

There are two influential frameworks that have emerged during the past two decades that engage the socio-cultural and critical perspectives discussed above. The multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009; New London Group,

1996) framework calls for a new pedagogy that recognizes a plurality of literacies, identity, and culture, while the new literacies (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) framework is an emergent field of cross-disciplinary research and theorizing regarding the impact of new communications technologies, such as the Internet, on evolving literacy and learning practices.

These frameworks are part of a broader shift within the social sciences, away from individual psychological and cognitive models, to focus on social and cultural aspects of language use, and on its constitutive role within social life (Maybin, 2000). Their approaches reflect the influence of poststructuralist ideas about the discursive construction of knowledge and subjectivity, and about its inter-discursivity. These include new ways of understanding and experiencing genre, identity, collaboration, authority, and sociality. As a consequence, "at an analytic level the researchers are moving away from the conceptualization of texts, contexts, individuals and communities as stable entities towards more processual notions of text-mediated practices, of the articulation of links between different contexts in producing meaning, and of the ongoing negotiation of individual and community identity across different activities and contexts" (Maybin, 2000, p. 198). These two frameworks are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Multiliteracies

In their 1996 *Harvard Educational Review* article – which was co-authored by 14 literacy theorists based in Australia, the United States, and Great Britain –

the New London Group recognized that cultural differences and rapidly shifting communications media called for “a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches” (p. 60). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) explain that the New London Group’s choice of the term “multiliteracies” arose from its description of two important arguments within the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order. The first argument engages with the multiplicity of communication channels and media, while the second addresses the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity that researchers such as Johnston (2003) have also noted. It is important here to realize that both the socially and personally multiliterate constituent characteristics which the New London Group identify, may also be considered in relation to teachers’ own changing roles and conceptions of literacy.

The multiliteracies pedagogy supplements traditional literacy pedagogy. The New London Group’s understanding of evolving multiliteracies calls for “a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (p. 64). The call for this multimodal means of dynamic representation, in addition to print-based approaches to teaching, was a response to the realities that the authors saw in their own research and communities that there was no canonical English that either could or should be taught anymore. “Whereas traditional literacy curriculum was taught to a singular standard (grammar, the literary canon, standard national forms

of language), the everyday experience of meaning making was increasingly one of negotiating discourse differences" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 166). As the multiple authors continued to develop their framework, they focused on the "potential to transform both the substance and pedagogy of literacy teaching" towards an "…open-ended and flexible functional grammar which assists language learners to describe language differences [cultural, subcultural, regional/national, technical, context-specific, and so on]" (p. 6). This framework also includes a critical impetus for language learners to be active designers – not only of texts but also of their own social futures. It forwards an understanding of "learners as agents in their own knowledge processes… persons… required to be users, players, creators and discerning consumers rather than spectators, delegates, audiences or quiescent consumers of an earlier modernity" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 172). A multiliteracies pedagogy, then, is understood as a framework that forwards particular conceptions – to replace static conceptions such as grammar and literary canon with dynamic conceptions of textual design through multiple modes (such as linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial) and meaning-making in social contexts. Multiliteracies' critical questioning of canonical literature, its social-constructivist view of literacy and learning, and its recognition of the pluralities of teachers and learners' experiences makes it a useful framework for this study that examines varying situated literate practices and textual engagements in three diverse classroom settings. Of particular importance is the framework's expanded notion of text and an accompanying

epistemological movement from textual critique to multi-modal textual design. This forwarding of particular conceptions varies from, but also complements, the other significant literacy framework – new literacies studies – in which I locate myself as a researcher.

New literacies

Drawing from Lankshear and Knobel (2006), C. Lewis (2007) states "new literacies aren't new unless they have both new 'technical stuff' and new 'ethos stuff'" (p. 230). The 'new technical' aspect recognizes that "more broadly conceived notions of literacy and literacy instruction are being defined by change in even more profound ways as new technologies require new literacies to effectively exploit their potentials" (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004, p. 1570). As Lankshear and Knobel (2006) write, "the significance of the new technical stuff has mainly to do with how it enables people to build and participate in literacy practices" that are different from conventional literacies (p. 7). Such technologies include the Internet and other digitally-based communication platforms that are discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter. The new literacies' ethos is the changed "…values, sensibilities, norms and procedures and so on from those that characterize conventional literacies" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 7). For Lankshear and Knobel, when both the new technical and new ethos stuff is present in a literacy event then one has a *paradigm case*, rather than *peripheral case* of new literacies. Such paradigm cases are important because, "… it is possible to use new technologies (digital

electronic technologies) to simply replicate longstanding literacy practices – as we see *ad infinitum* in contemporary classrooms" (p.7). These paradigm events include literacies that are more "participatory, collaborative, distributed and less expert-dominated than the published, individuated, and author-centric conventional literacies" (p. 9). Here one can understand new literacies to affect evolving relationships of teacher and learner.

New literacies studies "provide conceptual, theoretical, and methodological shape for an emerging field without unduly foreclosing on potentially valuable perspectives and epistemological approaches" (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008, p. xii). Such an approach allows for an inquiry into, and understanding of particular literacy practices through interdisciplinary lenses within a broad and rapidly changing personal or social communications context – from classroom to web page. As McClay (2007) notes, "new literacy environments allow relationships with unclear or no delineation of conventional boundaries, and many traditional literacy boundaries do not hold in traditional ways." Coiro *et al*. (2008) identify reference points within this relational perspective, and address critics of a defined new literacies field:

> Some have questioned the usefulness of a concept such as new literacies whose referents seem to have fleeting use-by dates…. For some the crucial factor has been the emergence of digital, post-typographic forms of inscribing language. For others, the point of reference is more the emergence of a particular defining technology such as the Internet. For

> others again, new literacies are to be more generally understood in relation to an historical conjuncture involving changes in culture, institutions, temperaments, and mind-sets, as well as in technologies.… (p. 15)

In this Discourse, context is brought to the fore as an ongoing process and practice. Kamberelis (2004) argues that the site of language and literacy classrooms can be a proliferating flow of text and activity that is continually reconstituted through tensions and transactions. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Kamberelis (2004) uses the *rhizome* as metaphor; its de-centered and non-hierarchical structure more aptly describing emergent new literacies' practices in contrast to 'arboreal' or linear, and deeply entrenched traditional notions of literacy. Classroom-based new literacies potentially include new textual processes and products demonstrated by both teachers and students through heterogeneous nodes of multimodal text (both print and non-print) that alternately involve production and consumption, rather than reproduction of existing forms and ideas. Alvermann (2002) adds that new literacies classrooms can be about "communicating across generations, creating shape-shifting portfolios, reinventing literacy teacher education, and using digital tools to foster critical inquiry" (p. viii).

Yet researchers, such as Leander (2004) write that "these new literacies and ways of knowing remain absent from most classrooms. Many education administrators, teachers, teacher educators, and academics seem largely unaware of them. Others actively oppose them" (p.16). Stagg-Peterson and McClay (2007)

report such a gap between classroom practice and the potential of new literacies approaches:

> In most teachers' classrooms, computers were used for retyping drafts, and often used at home, to create 'good copies' that students handed in for grades. Twelve teachers did not use computers at all for writing. It seems that teachers viewed computers as pernicious, rather than helpful in writing. They felt that students would rely on the spell check function and not strive to learn how to spell words. They felt that students would try to plagiarize others' writing if they did not have to hand in handwritten drafts to prove that the writing was their own. Teachers did not discuss technology's great potential to enable, rather than hinder, students' writing development. In cyberspace, peers can help each other with spelling problems and the borrowing of information is considered part of participating in the Wikis, chat groups, etc. that provide forums for writing with others around the world on the Internet. (p. 373)

In their 2007 editorial for *E-learning* which explored Canadian research conducted under the new literacies framework, Hammett, Mackey, and McClay (2007) reinforce that:

> … much of the research reported in this issue supports the conclusion… that mindsets associated with new technologies need to be explored and critiqued within pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

> Concentrated efforts to involve all in research of the potential of new literacies should be encouraged and enhanced. (p. 222)

C. Lewis (2007) echoes this observation and argues that the world of education has not shifted mindsets in line with those points of reference for new literacies in a digital age. C. Lewis (2007) writes "through professional development, teachers receive training in curricular uses of technology, but they do not learn about new mindsets, identities, and practices that come with new technologies, forms of communication, and economic flows" (p. 230). In Knobel and Lankshear's (2007) *New Literacies Sampler*, C. Lewis also notes that:

> many of us writing about 'new literacies' are, in fact, engaged in the making of a discipline that requires some knowledge-producing strategies similar to those taken up in the early days of writing research. We need to know what writers of new literacies do when they write – what they think about and how they negotiate the demands of new forms and processes of writing. (p. 229)

The role of new literacy studies helps to frame my study in that it affords a multi-disciplinary approach to examine the complex pedagogical experiences of contemporary ELA teachers. It is an expansive rather than delimiting discipline framework. Of equal importance to my study, the field of new literacies declares that texts and practices emerge in a rhizomal manner – being more distributed and less expert-dominated than teacher-directed conventional literacy practices and products. If evident in contemporary ELA classrooms such as those in my study,

new literacies practices afforded through evolving communication technologies may directly affect teachers' pedagogical experiences and textual stances. The next major section of this dissertation explores evolving understandings of our recent times, and its accompanying cultural and textual shifts; further contextualizing the classroom experiences of my study's three selected senior ELA teachers at the beginning of the 21st century.

Section three – Digital times

We are in an epoch of simultaneity: we are in an epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed (Foucault, 1981, p. 32).

To me it is more a question of how I want to position myself as history makes a swerve, not only ushering in new circumstances and alignments, but changing its own deep nature as well… (Birkerts, 1994, p. 294).

The invention and adoption of digital technologies by more than a billion people worldwide has occurred over the span of the past few decades (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Noted as having begun towards the end of the 20th century, the digital age involves an epochal change in communication technology. The driving technology behind this transformation has been binary-coded digital information in print, audio or visual format that can be created, saved, transmitted, or altered through Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 technologies and texts. Web 1.0 technologies are 'read only' platforms that were in wide development and use in the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. In schools these included desktop computers, encyclopedias on CD ROMs, and web pages whose content were authored and controlled by

specialists. During the mid-2000s, content and control of digital platforms became more interactive and socially driven. These communications and their read-write affordances (Richardson, 2009) were termed Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) and included externally alterable print, visual, and audio content such as that found on Wikipedia, Flickr, YouTube, BlogSpot and the like. As Palfrey and Gasser (2008) write, "No major aspect of modern life is untouched by the way many of us now use information technologies" (pp. 2-3). More recently, wireless hand-held devices such as smart phones and the iPod touch have afforded 'any time, anywhere' access to the Web. This has enhanced the mash up effect of Web 2.0 communications. If one has the proper handheld device (a smart phone, iPod touch, etc.) for use in an appropriate geographical area (usually heavily populated) one has access to a world of print, visual, and auditory information, as well as a worldwide audience for one's personal content. Burgos (2008) notes of the digital age that:

> [t]he evidence is everyware. The utopian pursuit of 'ubiquitous computing' in order to 'be digital' increases its influence over every business quarter, every retail season and reverberates in every ring tone, hyperlink, e-dress, automated message incoming and outgoing, deposit and withdrawal, pop-up and pop-down, download and upload, boot and reboot, start-up and shutdown, point and click. Data has been steered towards metadata with every touch and go. Data flecks like dust. (p. 123)

The diverse and proliferating array of personal communication technologies of recent times have afforded "associated changes in social and cultural ways of doing things, ways of being, ways of viewing the world, and so on" (Coiro et al., 2008, p. 7). Such changes have yet to be fully understood, because Western society is in the midst of these new ways of being and viewing the world.

Quite frequently, the early stages of important new developments, such as those being experienced at present through digital-based communications, can be subject to euphoric hype and fear. The present time period has accompanying tensions and opportunities which resemble other times when changes in communication technologies, such as the invention and institutionalization of the printing press, audio recording, and television (to name a few) restructured how individuals conceived of and constructed texts (McLuhan, 1964; Wahlstrom & Scrutton, 1997). Each technology of literacy, in conjunction with the cultural context in which it appeared, has changed conceptions of what it means to be literate, as well as literacy instruction. Hagood (2003) notes that this inter-play of traditional and new literacy practices is accompanied by issues of user, reader, producer, and consumer identity and subjectivity. These altered conceptions challenge teachers, and demand changes at the personal and societal levels; shifting values, changing institutions, and new structures of personality and temperament emerging in a global informational age. Willis (2003) argues that "schools are one of the principal sites for the dialectical playing out of these apparent disjunctions and contradictions" in changing times (p. 390). Bruce

(2002) believes that collectively, as a society and as individuals, one's hopes or one's fears about the impact of a new communications technology cause people to overestimate its short-term impacts, and reality always fails to meet those inflated expectations.

Prensky (2001) has presented a metaphor that represents such a dualism. This metaphor argues that a gap exists between digital natives and digital immigrants. Digital natives may be understood as those individuals born after 1990 into a world where digital technologies and communication are taken for granted. These individuals – including many of today's elementary to tertiary students – arguably understand and engage the word and their world differently than the previous generations who have been labeled as digital immigrants. Having been born before the advent of the digital age, digital immigrants are purportedly more challenged to adopt and adapt to the new and emergent practices and worldviews of the digital age. These individuals include many of today's K to 12 ELA teachers such as the teacher-participants in my study. As explored in the remainder of this chapter, such metaphors as Prensky's digital natives or Palfrey and Gasser's (2008) born-digital students – defined later in this chapter – strive to illustrate the complex and evolving relationship between ELA teachers, their students, and classroom experiences in recent times.

Expanding notions of text

For the first time since the development of moveable type in the late fifteenth century, the page and print have arguably lost their primacy in the way

that thoughts and experiences are communicated. The proliferation of electronic and digital technologies has gone far beyond providing new means for the communication, storage, and retrieval of information. The new digital media have gradually changed not only the way people perceive language and ideas but also the world and themselves. Beyond the literate nodes of reading and writing, there are now: (1) a multitude of new communication and representation verbs present in our everyday lives including cutting, pasting, ripping, burning, tagging, blogging, emailing, texting, twitting, mashing; (2) interactive platforms and formats beyond the page such as YouTube, Flickr, FaceBook, Wikipedia, fansites; and (3) literate descriptors other than 'reader' and 'writer' such as blogger, lead-user, texter, gamer, multi-tasker, and so forth. The changes to communication technologies, storage, retrieval and sharing of data (words, images, music) have impacted the forms and functions of writing on-screen and the texts and contexts in which digital literacy is located. Bolter (2001) writes that the present network culture, with its electronic/digital forms of communication gives viewers/readers the opportunity to "redefine cultural ideals inherited from printed genres and forms" (p. 208). This is troubling for those educators who have invested much of their understandings of the word and the world through the page. As Striphas (2009) suggests in *The Late Age of Print*:

> …we share a highly specific, normative vision of books and reading. This vision which has been propounded for decades by journalists, literary humanists, educators, and academic theorists, places printed books and

> solitary, immersive acts of reading center stage in the bibliographic mise-en-scene… (digital texts) appear to some as harbingers of loss—of knowledge, authority, history, artistry, and meaning. (p. 22)

Recent possibilities for text include easier combinations of semiotic systems and new communicative relationships, as well as the effects of more general features such as the ease and speed of communication and the largely unregulated nature of publication and audience. Kress (2003) has pointed out that the move from page to screen has resulted in a turn to the visual, and the development of multi-media technologies allow for new possibilities of combination in the creation of multi-modal texts. Authorship and authority become more elusive ideas as the space of the World Wide Web encourages un-vetted publication, bypassing the review and editing processes of established publishing venues. Texts and sites are formed and reformed across multiple authors/designers and over time.

Alongside the blurring of identifiable individual authorship, purpose is also less obvious as online texts often have multiple goals, layered and overlapping, overt and covert, in ways not typical of print. Stoicheff and Taylor (2004) write that:

> Literature depended upon a stable, simplified, largely forgotten page as a material carrier capable of fixing language at the level of the signifier. The electronic page… stack texts one on top of another or enfold various texts into one another. Constantly in a state of potential mutability, the

> electronic screen presents us with possible pages whose stability is determined now only by the reader. (pp. 19-20)

Barthes wrote of the death of the individual author in 1968. At present, theorists argue over the death of authority in previously authoritative books. In fact, researchers no longer have to use books to analyse and study other books or texts. That simple fact carries much significance; and trying to work as a scholar in such times can be troubling (Howsam, 2006).

Changes in the digital age have not only occurred on screen-based texts, they have also affected changes to the page. Bearne (2005) writes that, "not only are there new types of digital texts, however, but also a massive proliferation of book and magazine texts that use image, word and page design, and typography often echoing the dimensions of screen based technology" (p. 14). Mackey (2002), who has done extensive research into the multi-dimensional world of print and screen based texts, also reminds us that young people can enter multimodal textual representations through a variety of portals: print, television, video, computer game, movie, audio text and interactive connection. These multimodal and multimedia texts means that "not only do children bring wider experience of text to the classroom, but their immersion in multidimensional world means that they think differently too" (Bearne, 2005, p. 13).

The inherent inter-textual and intra-textual complexities of an expanded notion of 'text' in this digital age have been interpreted through the cultural studies lens. Striphas (2009) explains that cultural studies:

> …orients researchers to eschew formalism of all kinds as well as simple, causal explanations in favour of embracing the complexity, recalcitrance, and mutability of cultural life. What this means is that while cultural studies typically starts from specific objects, events, or practices, ultimately its concerns are contextual; more important than any given object, event, or practice is the network of relations within which it's embedded. Cultural studies explores how these networks are forged, maintained, and transformed, and how they, in turn, give rise to particular habits of thought, conduct, and expression. (p. 195)

Originating mainly from Birmingham University's *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* in 1964, cultural studies is now an internationally recognized discipline that has been characterized by a high level of eclecticism; moving from a theme of culture and class 'Ideology' in the 1970s, to 'Postcolonial theory' in the 1990s, and more recently to an overlap with media and gender studies. The very broad definition of the discipline, including its overlap with social sciences, media studies and a plurality of theorists such as Barthes and Foucault, have made it possible to examine a range of diverse topics not traditionally addressed in academia.

Cultural studies has come to the field of educational research recently through the work of theorists such as Giroux (1996) in his focus on youth cultures, Dimitriadis (2001) in his examination of 'Hip Hop' as text, pedagogy and lived practice, Burn (2009) in his study of multimodal texts such as video

games, and Hoechsmann and Low (2008) in their examination of contemporary youth's online writing and representation.

In their book *Reading Youth Writing: "New" literacies, Cultural studies and Education*, Hoechsmann and Low (2008) note "a number of theoretical and methodological convergences between new literacies studies and cultural studies" (p. 30) which make the cultural studies lens so valuable for investigating teachers' experiences in contemporary ELA classrooms. These convergences include rejection of high art/low art hierarchies, agency or production of literacy rather than obtaining it as a set of autonomous skills, broad notions of text and representation, and how literacy is used in specific contexts for specific purposes (pp. 31–33). Burn (2009) states that as a research-based interpretive lens for new literacy studies, cultural studies have "been an immensely invigorating development" (p.152). As researcher, I locate myself within this emergent end of the cultural studies continuum that encourages the study of expanded notions of text (literary, media, or digital) and textual practices as markers of cultural values and norms in educational contexts.

Two particularly useful interpretive lenses that may be situated within the cultural studies framework are Bakhtinian dialogism (1981) and McLuhan's (1988) tetrad. These lenses acknowledge the transient and evolving nature of communication events and communication technologies – and the resultant impact of these developments on individuals and society. The work of Bakhtin and McLuhan are consonant with the epistemological terrain covered by

multiliteracies theory and the field of new literacy studies that serve as frameworks for emergent understandings of literacy discussed previously in this chapter. As key thinkers, Bakhtin's and McLuhan's ideas, discussed below, help to broaden both multiliteracies theory and the field of new literacies allowing for a focus on both literacy practices and texts, as well as the implications that these practices and texts hold for the critical relationship of teacher/pedagogy and learner/epistemology in contemporary ELA classrooms.

Bakhtin worked on many topics in his half century of scholarship, including epistemology and education. Bakhtin explored the particularities, rather than the generalities, of everyday life for literary characters and real people. Such attention led him to understand how language and literacy are deeply embedded in both the consciousness and contexts of individuals within societal groups. His understanding of literacy events has particular application to students in schools:

In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each societal level has its own language; moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own particular accentual system that, in their turn vary depending on social level, academic institution [the language of the cadet, the high school student, the trade school student are all different languages] and other stratifying factors. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.290)

His notion of the chronotope, as clarified in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), is a literary unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the

temporal and spatial categories represented that has been appropriated for examining various educational spaces.

Bakhtin reminds us that all contexts are shaped fundamentally by the kind of time and space that operate within them. In chronotopic analysis, time and space are regarded 'not as transcendental but as forms of the most immediate reality'. Bakhtin's crucial point is that time and space vary in qualities; different social activities and representations of those activities presume different kinds of time and space…. Bakhtin gives the name chronotope (literally time space) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 367-368)

The chronotope can serve as an optic for reading texts as an X-ray of the various cultural forces or systems at work from which that text emerged. For example, Mahiri (2004) used the chronotope as an interpretive lens to understand the power relationships witnessed through the texts [communications and readings] in an online university course. Mahiri (2004) wrote that, "the concept of the chronotope is viable for reading classrooms as a kind of 'dynamic text' [a narrative of teaching and learning revealed and completed through interactions of 'characters' in the classroom community]" (p. 217). Johnston and Tupper (2009) used the chronotope to critically 'read' or examine the out-of-classroom spaces of an urban high school for negotiations of identity. They "considered the space of school both as observable space, with measurable and boundable aspects, and as a culturally coded space" (p. 11). In using Bakhtin's chronotope, Johnston and

Tupper were able to recognize the complex relationship of spatial practices "deeply embedded within lived experiences of curriculum" (p. 12). In both cases, educational contexts became "optics for reading the social spaces expressed therein in terms of how they replicate and/or illuminate some of the temporal/spatial categories and cultural/structural dimensions of the larger society" (Mahiri, 2004, p. 217).

Emerging along with the chronotope, from *The Dialogic Imagination*, is Bakhtins's (1981) notion of dialogism. In literary terms, a dialogic text is one that is in constant dialogue with other texts and thoughts. The present text is informed by previous texts (intertextuality), and these past texts are, in turn, altered by the present text. The dialogic text contrasts with a monologic or Truth-carrying text that closes any further dialogue. This conceptual lens is important to an examination and understanding of teachers' experiences in the complex contexts of ELA classrooms, particularly their pedagogy and textual stance. Within the classroom, teachers can be seen to exist in a dialectical relationship that is marked by a constant dialogue with 'others'. This dialogue can be inner and outer just as literacy events may be. During each moment of their day, teachers may be in continual dialogue with real and imagined others – the subject area curriculum, students in the ELA class, authors they have read, movies they are watching, and their past literate and teaching experiences. Dialogism is tension-filled because it involves an appropriation or intake and negotiation of meaning through others' utterances – thoughts given voice in speech, writing, or other representations.

The idea of a dialogic relationship for teaching is challenging because it means that the teacher is in a state of continual becoming – being in continual dialogue with others; there is no finality. Within the context or contact zone of a dialogic classroom, a teacher's pedagogy and textual stance – which may be considered utterances – are voiced in a constant state of becoming. The ELA classroom then can be understood as a zone of contact where teachers and students struggle with various kinds and degrees of authority that emerge through the heteroglossia of their utterances. The heteroglossia includes qualities that are common to all language use, whether in a novel or a classroom discussion, such as perspective and ideological positioning. In the selection of utterances that a teacher wants to appropriate, and the meaning he or she attributes to those utterances, the teacher then chooses the stance she wants to take pedagogically and textually in the classroom. The dialogic classroom contrasts with the monologic classroom in which teaching stance and pedagogy exist to extend the particular truth, correctness, or viewpoint of a (usually canonical) text by correcting others' utterances, thereby finalizing meaning.

Bakhtinian concepts, then, can be very useful in understanding the possible manifestation of new literacies where many new communication technologies, different textual genres, multiple voices, and student-led practices would co-exist in a polyphony of multiple contrasting and complementary voices for the construction of meaning. The new technical and new ethos stuff of new literacies, discussed in the previous section, would be manifest in ELA classrooms

that are – in Bakhtin's terms – dialogic, or in a continual process of becoming just as the students' literate practices therein would be continually in formation. This dialogism contrasts with monologic ELA classroom (con)texts where a teacher's textual stance and pedagogy would forward a corrective, authoritative, and definitive version of certain literacy acts and texts. Bakhtin's understanding of the relational aspect of literacy and learning in complex societal contexts such as contemporary ELA classrooms is complemented by McLuhan's (1988) consideration of the effects of evolving communication technologies.

Identified as a media guru in the 1960s, a media analyst in the 1980s, and a media ecologist after his death, McLuhan's ideas have gained renewed interest in the digital age. Of particular use in understanding new literacies practices which emerge from new communication technologies, McLuhan's (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988) tetrad organizes a technological artifact at a "resonating interval": an object that transcends time; and is affected by both its own attributes and the environment which surrounds it. McLuhan found that his model "applied to more than what is conventionally called media: it was applicable to the products of all human endeavour" (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p. ix). His is not a model based on causality, or technological determinism. Rather, the tetrad is arrived at through a process of asking questions, based on historical, social, and technological knowledge of the subject. These questions include: (1) What does any artifact enlarge or enhance? (2) What does it erode or obsolesce? (3) What does it retrieve that had been earlier obsolesced? and (4) What does it reverse or

flip into when pushed to the limits of its potential? In singular terms the tetrad is composed of the following: (1) Enhance; (2) Obsolesce; (3) Retrieve; (4) Reverse, with the medium at the centre. For example, first generation cell phones can be understood to enhance voice, obsolesce phone booths, retrieve village communication, and reverse privacy of the individual through continual access.

McLuhan developed the tetrad as a response to critics who had pointed to his earlier works, particularly *Understanding Media*, and declared that his work was not scientific. From his reading of Popper's *Objective Knowledge*, McLuhan concluded that investigations become scientific when they can be proven or disproven. He worked with his son Eric to arrive at the four questions discussed above. In particular, he wanted this model of inquiry to add rigour to examinations of the impact of new media technology and texts on individuals and society.

Created at the beginning of the development and distribution of personal computers, during a period that he described as leading to "a steady stream of electrons and city silicon" (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p.188), his model is a particularly useful interpretive tool for my study. The tetrad requires a critical analysis of a technology or text and its impact on individuals (teachers/students) and broader societal structures and practices (ELA education). McLuhan's model does not define what a text is; it can be applied to textual products as diverse as novels and web pages (he effectively used print and non-print textual representations throughout his own work). The tetrad also requires its user to

question ‘what is new’ in terms of process and product just as the new literacies framework requires one to consider what is new in terms of technology and ethos. Further, the tetrad is relational rather than declarative allowing for an understanding of new phenomenon while encouraging further inquiry. These critical, rigorous, and non-deterministic attributes of the tetrad clearly link to the characteristics of new literacy practices and multiliterate theories, discussed above, as they apply to this study.

Through such diverse yet complementary lenses as Bakhtinian dialogism and McLuhan’s tetrad, cultural studies serves as a valuable interpretive tool in relation to the emergent and quickly evolving textual landscape in our digitally-based times. The next major section in this chapter examines the role of the lead-users and producers of many of these texts – namely born-digital students.

Section four – Students in our digital-based age

Palfrey and Gasser (2008) employ the term ‘born-digital’, a term that I use throughout this dissertation, to describe individuals born after 1980. Why use such a term? Digital media – from desktop computers, to video games, to multi-purposed wireless smart phones – arguably are part of the present high school aged generation’s daily fabric of personal and social communication. Many of today’s young people are able to transform, and in turn they themselves are being transformed by what they can consume and produce through writing, reading, speaking, listening, viewing and representing on digital communication platforms. They inhabit a world of ubiquitous *twitch-speed* content in which they can

connect to peers, ideas, and information almost instantaneously, as well as tailor their own online spaces that promote a sense of freedom and individuality.

Much of today's youth, then, are engaged in an unprecedented experimentation with literacy, learning, and textual formats on an individual and societal level. As such, these changes present many complex challenges and opportunities for large institutions such as schools, and particular practitioners such as classroom teachers. This is due, in part, to the fact that for generations educational instruction has pivoted around control of the flow of print-based textual information to, and about, children and adolescents (Postman, 1994). "The printed page was supposed to preserve and promote a stable, authoritative, and yet vital literate culture, in which tradition and innovation were in balance and in which verbal representations were of a higher order than visual" (Bolter, 2001, p. 208). Until recently, English language arts curricula in western Canada were based on these same assumptions – privileging literature and its associated productive and consumptive practices from new criticism to reader response theory above all other forms of literacy learning.

The present digital age (Jenkins, 2006; Richardson, 2009) particularly complicates traditional concepts of language and literacy education that are embedded in modernist notions of schooling. Changing digital communication practices challenge traditional or modernist constructs of literacy as print-based, text as knowable artifact, and author/teacher as authority. These are privileged notions within the brick and mortar spaces of classrooms, but not the evolving

literate practices of the young people who inhabit those spaces. This is due, in part, to born-digital students' own fluid, de-territorialized meaning making afforded by explorations, and perhaps more importantly, a production of digital texts through a cascade of interactive screens. The multimodal digital texts on those screens circulate almost instantaneously and are cut and pasted, edited, revised, and juxtaposed by their creators and consumers in ways that cannot be as easily accomplished in print on the page.

> The sheer quantity of information conveyed by [the new media] far exceeds the quantity of information conveyed by school instruction and texts. This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid and cracked the very walls of the classroom so suddenly, we're confused, baffled… [m]any teachers naturally view the offerings of the new media as entertainment, rather than education. But this carries no conviction to the student. (McPherson, 2008, p. 1)

Much of the contemporary textual landscape, then, in which born-digital youth are developing "their literate habitus bubbles up and flows around popular and consumer culture and emergent electronic texts, often out-manoeuvering or subverting the supervisory gaze and control of adults" (Carrington, 2005, p. 13). Young people increasingly rely less on the "maps of modernism to construct and affirm their identities; instead, they are faced with the task of finding their way through a de-centered cultural landscape no longer caught in the grip of technology of print, and closed narrative structures" (Giroux, 1996, p. 67). This

convergence of old and new media is occurring in the spaces of wired technologies and the lives of connected youth (Jenkins, 2006). As Samuels (2008) writes:

> …the multiple ways in which young people are using new media and technologies; the combining of human and machine into a single circuit of interactivity often functions to exclude the traditional roles of social mediation and the public realm. For educators and public policy makers, this unexpected collusion of opposites represents one of the defining challenges for the 21st century... such innovative uses of new technologies threaten to undermine educational and social structures that are still grounded on the modern divide between the self and the other, the objective and the subjective, and the original and the copy. (p. 219)

While some see born-digital students as our best hope for the future, others worry that new media are part of a generational rift and a dangerous turn away from existing standards for knowledge, literacy and civic engagement (Ito, et al., 2008). Educators and educational theorists wonder what is being lost, and what is being gained for young people in this time of transition:

> Will the constructive component at the heart of reading begin to change and potentially atrophy as we shift to computer-presented text, in which massive amounts of information appear instantaneously… when seemingly complete visual information is given almost simultaneously, as it is in many digital presentations, is there either sufficient time or

> sufficient motivation to process the information more inferentially, analytically, and critically? (Wolf, 2007, p. 16)

The experiences of many students with new interactive communication technologies far exceed the scope, goals, and objectives of prescriptive language arts curricula in present-day educational hierarchies (Leander, 2003). In this school culture, information is best understood as a limited commodity. Curriculum coordinators and teachers select, define, delimit, shape and package the most important information for the moment (King & O'Brien, 2002). A study entitled *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (Media Awareness Network, 2005) states that today's teachers are struggling to engage their students in a meaningful form of literacy in the classroom. The report also reveals that parents are largely misinterpreting what their teen-aged children are doing with digital technologies, as young people themselves are engaging with new forms of literacy and textuality. Tapscott (2009) updates his seminal work Growing up digital, including a section on born-digital students, or the 'Net Generation', as learners:

> … consider the gap between how Net Geners think and how most teachers teach. Net Geners are not content to sit quietly and listen to a teacher lecture. Kids who have grown up digital expect to talk back, to have a conversation. They want a choice in their education, in terms of what they learn, when they learn it, where, and how. They want their education to be relevant to the real world, the one they live in. They want it to be

> interesting, even fun. Educators may still think the old fashioned lecture (think broadcast, transmission) is important, but the kids don't…. (p. 126)

Indeed, "…the alchemy between youth and digital media has been distinctive; it disrupts the existing set of power relations between adult authority and youth voice" (Ito, et al., 2008, p. ix).

Rushkoff (1999), a cultural theorist, purports "Kids are our test samples – our advance scouts. They are already the thing that we must become" (p. 13). Willis (2003) echoes this view:

> Youth are always among the first to experience problems and possibilities of the successive waves of technical and economic modernization…. [y]oung people respond in disorganized and chaotic ways, but to the best of their abilities and with relevance to the actual possibilities of their lives as they see, live, and embody them (p. 391).

By embracing a rapidly changing digital world, these young people are proving quite adept at breaking down century old distinctions between age groups, among disciplines, between high and low-brow media culture, and within print and digitalized types (Alvermann, 2002). Begoray (2001) believes that born-digital students' shift to multiliteracies and new literacies practices and texts contribute to a climate "for reconsidering traditional approaches and challenging the status quo in many language arts classrooms" (p. 213). The next section of this chapter considers how such changes have challenged ELA classroom teaching in recent times.

Section five – ELA teachers in a digital age

…we are different situated selves (Lankshear, 1997, p. 124).

A discipline in metamorphosis

Today's ELA teachers face unprecedented challenge and change. They face challenges to the very nature of their subject discipline (Barrell, 2000) alongside rapid changes in the theoretical conception of literacy itself. Bearne (2005) states that we are, indeed, living in demanding times. "Transformations in communications mean that the landscape of literacy seems altered out of all recognition. This has implications for teaching. Not only do we need to redefine what 'literacy' involves, but also to note new uses of the term text" (p. 13). As Richardson (2009) also realizes, "these changes create all sorts of challenges for educators, challenges to the educational system as a whole, and challenges to the traditional roles of teachers in the classroom… the educational system itself will be under pressure…. [m]ore important will be the response of classroom teachers" (p. 136).

Like many contemporary English language arts teachers, I did not grow up in the binary world of digital communication with its dual nature of on/off, 0 and 1 electronic impulses as born digital students have. Tobin (1998) relates that this fact can cause concern for the "relationship between young(er) people with evolving communications technologies and old(er) people reacting to them, trying to engage them, trying to control them, and worrying about them" (p. 111).

C. Luke (2003) notes that “although the fundamental principles of reading and writing have not changed, the process has shifted from the serial cognitive processing of linear print text to parallel processing of multi-modal text-image information sources” (p. 399). Indeed, the “one-medium user is the new illiterate” (Zingrone, 2001, p. 42). McClay (2007) writes that “the literacy world requires sophistication far surpassing the sophistication required to develop or delineate a poem’s metaphor or to trace the foreshadowing in a novel. These are still valuable analyses and a source of great literary pleasure, but they are hardly sufficient.” This leads to tensions where neither teacher nor their students are seen as authorities within the ELA subject discipline. As well, “teachers and schools are now very hard pressed to find space and time to think expansively about the interface of literacy, youth culture, multi-media, and identity” (Hull, 2003, p. 233).

Such continuing pressures often lead classroom teachers to voice resistance towards expanding notions of text, literacy, and the re-working of pedagogy that accompanies such a shift. In staff rooms and professional development conferences this resistance is openly declared: ‘They (the students) get enough of the media at home’; ‘I hate the Internet’; ‘Don’t we (ELA teachers) do enough already?’ Weeks’ (2003) experience reveals similar perspectives. “I continue to listen with amazement to people in our field who can simultaneously gloat about their inability to perform the simplest actions on the Internet or e-mail and yet harangue at length about the numerous gaps they perceive in the spelling,

penmanship or grammar of their classes" (p. 40). In addition, Buckingham (2003) believes that many educators distrust their students' exploration of online, pop culture, and interactive communication practices. "We [educators] are wary of sensuality, emotion, and irrationality, and we find it hard to deal with them when they inevitably arise. We are led by a political drive to fix and define meanings and pleasures that can be rationally evaluated and contested" (Buckingham, 2003, p. 111). Kelly (2000) argues that refusing to acknowledge ideological constraints and contradictions at the personal and professional level is not a reasonable educational alternative, even if it is a much practiced one. The spaces of contemporary language arts classrooms afford zones of contact (Bakhtin, 1981) to explore and arrive at better understandings of how this transition – the challenges and changes – to alternate texts and students' literacy practices is impacting the experiences of English language arts teachers.

The implied teacher

The experiences, particularly the textual and pedagogical stances, of those who are teaching senior level ELA to born-digital students remains largely unexamined. This is disquieting in our present time and complicates the already complex endeavour of teaching English language arts. From Iser's (1974) *implied reader* emerges the notion of the *implied teacher* of imagination (C. Lewis and Finders, 2002). For Iser (1974), the term implied reader incorporates both the "pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active

nature of this process – which will vary historically from one page to another – and not to a typology of possible readers" (p. xii). In C. Lewis and Finders' (2002) study of English language arts pre-service teachers, they found that "teaching identities were already inscribed materially, reiterated through the discourses of schooling and teacher education as well as in the disciplining of their own bodies… to create firm boundaries… between themselves and their students… to widen the gap they needed either to declare popular culture off limits or to force fit it into a traditional paradigm of English education" (p. 111). Such a paradigm, reflected upon earlier in this chapter, is grounded in modernist conceptions of authority based on single authorship, text as artifact, and literacy as a set of cognitive skills. This conception of the implied ELA teacher conflicts with notions of literacy, text, and authority as they are emerging in the present digital-based time.

Ferruci (1997) asks us to consider "how I am (continuously) constructed as a teacher or how that construction affects what and how I teach" (p. 183). Such considerations are invaluable in understanding the experience of contemporary ELA teachers. Many language arts teachers are uncertain of the power, or influence, of their pedagogy in relation to students' evolving literacy practices which are afforded by data-rich, digital, interactive communication and multimedia technologies. Arguably, many teachers' pedagogies are based on their own conceptions of literacy, and the "embodied relations" (Kelly, 2000, p. 79) they have with past and present schooled literacy/literary contexts that impact

these conceptions. These are important considerations as practices of creating and acquiring knowledge cannot be separated from the power that one exercises in negotiating learning (Foucault, 1972). “The energy and excitement that come from teaching English now are rooted in the same ‘core’ that I’ve always valued,” writes Kajder (2010), “ …but our work now is about a broader English curriculum, one leveraging the unique practices students bring to the classroom as … users of a variety of textual spaces” (p. 4). One’s comfort level with new literacy practices reflects how knowledge and power are intricately bound together with interests in teaching and learning.

Britzman (2003) too found that “teaching and learning have multiple and conflicting meanings that shift with our lived lives, with the theories produced and encountered, with the deep convictions and desires brought to and created in education, with the practices we negotiate, and with the identities we construct” (p. 32). This complicated construction speaks to the New London Group’s (1996) consideration of multiliterate identities within classroom contexts; and to how such identities are constructed and expressed simultaneously by students and teachers. This also speaks to Britzman’s (2003) understanding of the process of teaching as ‘becoming a teacher:’

> … learning to teach constitutes a time of biographical crisis as it simultaneously invokes one’s autobiography. That is, learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying de-contextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one’s past, present, and future are

> set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become. (p. 31)

One must consider, then, what ELA teachers are becoming in a time of new communication technologies and new literacies. The next section of this literature review considers both the recently researched and theoretical posited perspectives of ELA teachers in recent times, and the relationship between their personal and professional conceptions of literacy.

The examined and expected of ELA teaching

As discussed above, personal and public literacy ideologies play a crucial and integrated role in teachers' classroom textual stances and pedagogy. Contemporary ELA teachers' literate practices manifest themselves, and can intermingle, in diverse spaces such as the classroom, a page, or a screen. Intriguing observations or snapshots of ELA teachers' classroom experiences of teaching adolescents literacy have emerged from recent studies. An excerpt from my own Master's study (Nahachewsky, 2003) portrays a moment in one ELA teacher's day:

> After climbing a short flight of stairs, we entered the active environment of "the pod". This was a large, brightly lit room with the muted colors of computer hardware and office furniture highlighted by several plants that received sunlight from a single window at the room's far end. Around the pod's circumference ran a line of tables on which sat computers, monitors,

> video equipment, a couple of phones, printers, and scattered print material. The tables were separated into work stations with comfortable office chairs positioned at each. Situated in the middle of the room were support beams, filing cabinets, a couple of all-purpose tables, and a few stray chairs… Several secondary teachers, subject specialists, were busy 'conversing' across the room's relatively open space, on the phone, or on their computers. Ideas, laughter, and opinions flowed easily in a discourse among a few of the individuals while others, concentrating individually on texts and screens, worked silently at their spaces. This room served as Mr. Rosencrantz's and the other secondary subject teachers' 'cyberschool'. They worked here during the school day, when they were not in their regular classrooms, to create and maintain their ever-evolving online courses. (p. 52)

The mixture of the social and personal nature of teaching is evident in the description above. The multiliterate, multi-tasking nature of teaching today is evident in Richardson's (2009) book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and other powerful Web tools for the classroom*:

> English teacher Tom McHale sets down his cup of coffee and boots up the computer at his classroom desk… he logs in and opens up his personal Weblog on the school intranet…scans a compiled list of summaries that link to all the work his students submitted to their own Weblogs the night before…uploads an assignment on symbolism for his major American

> Literature class… and checks his audio library and sees that the MP3 interview that two of his students did with the principal has been downloaded to his player. He lifts it out of its cradle and puts it in his briefcase so he can play it on his car stereo during his drive home after school. (pp. 139–140)

Weblogs, or blogs as noted above are becoming a part of many ELA teachers' classroom textual practices – both in their composition and consumption. Blogs act as a space for teachers to make connections between the personal and professional aspects of their literate lives. As well, they serve as a bridge for the gap that many teachers believe exists between their own and their students' developing literacies (Merchant, 2007). Blogs also provide publicly accessible, yet first-person insights into ELA teachers' emergent practices. Such sources can be meaningful spaces for accessing contemporary teachers' emergent experiences as is seen in the following excerpt from *Why not blog?*

> Of course part of my affection for blogging is due to the support that the blogosphere has and continues to offer me. As well, I think it's just beautiful that the practice of blogging fits so well with the theories of two of my favorite language/learning philosophers/theorists: Dewey and Vygotsky. Not only do students have the opportunity to gain/enhance their technology literacy skills, but they get to write and respond in a social network. That is, they're not writing in isolation or for one reader only (i.e.

> teacher). And, for those who have never blogged before, they're learning by doing. (Donna, 2009, On teaching [literature] with blogging)

This notion of learning by doing is also reflected in Miller's (2007) inquiry into five teachers' use of digital video recorders in their middle years ELA classrooms. Miller found that when teachers used digital video recorders for class representation projects, these "embodied multimodal literacy tools…became agents of change" (p. 78). Many students in these classrooms became more active readers and composers for these projects. Teachers, in turn, gave up some of their authority: "teachers began to see themselves as members of a collaborative learning community" (p. 73). In their study of one teacher's "foray into new literacy practices" Tan and Guo (2009, p. 315) discuss the need for teachers to also work closely with their students as co-creators of a meta-language that would help in the 'reading' and 'composing' of multimodal texts such as digital video recordings and blogs mentioned above. Such recent studies point to the importance of an openness in attitude by ELA teachers – an adaptability to textual choice and engagement. This is clearly a challenge to long-held conceptions of textual and classroom authority. Challenges to teachers' textual and pedagogical authority were also examined by McClay and Weeks (2002) in their study of students' online writing. In Weeks' grade nine ELA class they found:

> … the teacher's stance matters. The teacher must be comfortable with ambiguity and apparent lapses in control, and he or she must be able to see deeper structure in the surface chaos. The teacher must respect the

> students as experienced players, bringing their own backgrounds and expertise to the ensemble. Just as a jazz musician must attend continually to the mood and direction of the ensemble, a teacher also must be willing to negotiate with students, sharing power to create something that everyone will own. As in jazz, the unexpected variation makes the music memorable. (pp. 18-19)

Even though there has been little empirical analysis focused particularly on teaching in contemporary language arts classrooms, many educational theorists have provided conjecture regarding what teachers should be doing – how literacy teachers might address the development of adolescents' literacies at a time when the impact of technological changes on these literacies is constant and pervasive (Hinchmann & Lalik, 2002). Unsworth (2001) wrote that the work of the English teacher clearly involves developing students' use of multiliteracies in the composition and comprehension of texts in computer-based and conventional formats. But it also involves developing students' meta-semiotic understanding and the associated meta-language to facilitate critical understanding of how meaning-making systems are deployed to make different kinds of meanings in texts and how these may be oriented to naturalize the hegemony of particular interests.

Lankshear, Snyder, and Green (2000) wrote specifically of "preparing students to work in non-linear environments; to learn how to skim; to work in a layered way; to evaluate critically; to read the visual; and to select valuable

resources from the web" (p. 19). They further declared that, "teachers need to ensure that education remains the main game and that technologies, new or old, remain faithfully in the service of the main game" (p. 118). Selfe (1999) emphasized that teachers need to remind themselves that learning is not just about the accumulation of information, that it is also about the creation of meaning in a social context along unanticipated and sometimes uncontrollable pathways. Selfe (1999) summarized the importance of the role of contemporary language and literacy teachers:

> Who would have predicted that English studies, composition, and language arts teachers at the beginning of the 21st century would be so desperately needed? And needed not only for our expertise with language and literacy studies but for the attention we pay…to the complex set of social, political, educational, and economic challenges associated with technology. (p. 4)

Arriving at my study

Teaching that explores the traditional cornerstones of literacy and language arts including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing is still seen as being relevant. However, the "new modes of representation and communication made possible by the new media introduce new dynamics for readers and writers, change conceptions of text and textuality" (Nixon, 2003, p. 410). In a time when teachers and students are concurrently learning how to use new media and online technologies, research needs to address

concerns of teachers' own emerging literacies. Mackey (2003) believes that educational researchers must therefore analyze not only students', but also teachers' literacy events while "simultaneously honouring the complexity of the larger background and exploring the social, pedagogical, and theoretical implications of the ongoing revolution in media and technologies" (p. 2).

As Buckingham (2003) states, "We [teachers] can no longer assume that our students will share similar experiences with one another, let alone that they might do so with us. Yet the differences in media experiences between teacher and students are not simply a matter of taste or of ritualistic claims and counter-claims" (p. 317). These tensions have more far-reaching implications for the pedagogical assumptions that inform our teaching; choices that influence text choice and literacy instruction. They speak of the need for self-reflection, understanding, and action regarding the processes of teachers' emerging literacy. There is a real need for reflection on teachers' conceptions of textuality and literacy as they exist "for specific social purposes inside and outside schooling and in the intermediary spaces and places between them" (Nixon, 2003, p. 409). As Kelly (2000) wrote, "to move beyond romantic notions of English is, often, to retreat from and to reconfigure once familiar and highly invested desires embedded in our personal and social histories" (p. 86). It is no wonder then that, as Merchant (2008) writes, "it is hard for us [ELA educators] to know which dispositions, values and practices will remain important and which new ones may be required" (p. 751).

This uncertainty is reflected on both the personal practitioner level, and in broader education systems of post-industrial economies that are "in a struggle between the valorization of traditional routines and the lure of radically different futures" (Merchant, 2008, p. 751). Lankshear (1997) has noted that such discontinuities of experience and perspective are opportunities for today's ELA educators. This historical transition of new literacies and emergent texts in relation to more traditional ones encourages educators "to ask questions about the role and purposes of education, and the relationship between education and global directions being pushed from familiar centers of hegemonic power" (p. 20). These questions allow for pedagogical and textual spaces to emerge for both teachers and students facilitating the creation, use, and representation of knowledge in ways that the teachers had not anticipated within the spaces of contemporary language and literacy classrooms.

Having been immersed in ELA education as a classroom teacher, teacher-educator, and researcher I believe that it is imperative to understand the rarely examined classroom experiences of ELA teachers in a digital age. The next chapter of my dissertation explains the qualitative case study methodology I employed to answer the research question that directed my empirical inquiry.

Chapter Three

Research methodology

Researching changing literacies

Educational theorists are making shifts to enable them to more deeply investigate evolving literacies. As reviewed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, changing notions of literacy have added many complications to the already complex endeavour of teaching English language arts in contemporary times. Importantly, changing notions of literacy have also complicated the literacy researcher's task. Although there is "…an inherent difficulty involved in reviewing dimensions of the new that are genuinely recent… these phenomena are so widespread and central to everyday literacy engagements that they cannot be ignored" (Coiro, et al., 2008, p. 409). Those researching in contemporary ELA classrooms – particularly when investigating questions in relation to new literacies – can draw from methods of inquiry and interpretive frameworks which are dynamic and flexible enough to help make sense of the complex practices and textual engagements present within the public and private situated moments of those spaces. In the *Handbook of Research on New Literacies* (2008) such diverse methods of inquiry discussed include case study, ethnography, phenomenology, large-scale surveys, mixed methods, discourse analysis, and a host of other

qualitative methodologies (Coiro, et al., p. 15). Multiple fields of interpretation such as sociology, cultural anthropology, media literacy, critical literacy and, as discussed in the previous chapter, cultural studies are employed as analytic lenses. The use of such diverse research strategies and multiple interpretive perspectives manifests C. Luke's (2003) argument that in these transitional times:

> The challenge for educational theorizing and research, then, is to devise a flexible conceptual and methodological mix based on an equally flexible – indeed provisional and transformational – epistemology with which to capture the dynamics of mobility and travel across media, modalities, information nodes, communities, link pathways, and networks that demand and generate new kinds of learning, (meta)cognitive routing, multi-semiotic literacy, identity construction and performance, community ethics, and sociality. (p. 402)

In this new literacies research discourse, newer 'virtual' contexts as well as brick and mortar environments need to be considered along with the individual phenomenon's ongoing processes and practices. "So, on one hand the importance of old-style… studies of real bodies in real time connected to new forms of immaterial but nonetheless real spatialities located within institutionalized educational contexts remains crucial" (Leander, 2003, p. 392). For teachers in contemporary ELA classrooms these spaces can include their personal conceptions of literacy and how these impact their very public pedagogies and textual choices. These conceptions are manifested through each teacher's

practices that in turn affect the physical and virtual spaces – from page to screen – of contemporary ELA classrooms. The following section explores the strengths of qualitative case study as method of inquiry, and reveals why I chose it for my examination of three teachers' classroom experiences in digital times.

Qualitative case study methodology

Case study methodology is a valuable approach for inquiring into the experiences of teachers within the evolving multimodal learning environment of contemporary ELA classrooms. Case studies offer a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2004) write, "qualitative research may be more descriptive or more explanatory, but it always aims to demonstrate the complexity, texture, and nuance involved in how individuals and groups experience themselves and their worlds" (p. 17). An understanding arrived at through qualitative research methodology effectively addresses the many complexities that emerge in new literacies environments.

Researchers using qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others. This is done because, as I believe and as Merriam (2001) notes, "there are multiple realities – the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring" (p. 17). Utilized throughout the social sciences, qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers

observe and talk to or people represented by their personal literacies and activities such as letters, emails, photographs, newspaper accounts, journals and so on (Creswell, 2003). Such research characteristics and approaches encourage an inquisitive rigour, rather than deterministic closure, in the pursuit of understanding the multifaceted realities of contemporary literacy classrooms and their many literacy events.

Importantly, for my research questions, qualitative inquiry can be used “to understand, interpret and explain complex and highly contextualized social phenomena such as classroom cultures, avid readers, or peer group development and maintenance” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2004, p. 17). Case study has been differentiated from other research designs by what has been called interpretation in context; by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon (p. 123). I also chose this design, as other educational researchers do, “because (we) researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation that is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic” (Merriam, 2001, p. 29).

Empirically, the case “is a specific, complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). But the case is not viewed in a clinical manner; removed from interaction with or influenced by other factors. Rather, qualitative case study methodology allows for the acknowledgement of flesh and blood cases with lived realities that are contextual. Case study inquiries therefore allow for unanticipated

events and circumstances that may occur within an educational environment, or within educators' professional and personal lives. Significantly, in relation to my research questions, qualitative case study methodology provides an in-depth study of the case[s] based on a diverse array of data collection materials. In holding empirical data up to pre-existing social frameworks such as cultural studies, the qualitative case study researcher can achieve as full an understanding of a phenomenon as possible (Merriam, 2001). It was my job as qualitative researcher to make informed and credible decisions regarding participant selection, ethics, data collection, representation, and the interpretation of the data.

What follows, throughout the next five sections of this chapter, is an identification and explanation of the particular methodological choices I made to most effectively answer my research questions that inquired into the experiences, particularly the conceptions of literacy, pedagogy and textual stance of three senior ELA teachers in a digital age.

Participant selection

… consider where to observe, when to observe, whom to observe and what to observe. Sampling in field research involves the selection of a research site, time, people and events. (Merriam, 2001, p. 32)

Case studies may focus on an individual, a group, or an entire community. For the purpose of this study, I examined the classroom experiences of three individual ELA teachers. I requested each of the three selected teachers to allow me to observe their ELA classroom teaching during four months over two terms.

During this time, I interviewed each of the teachers regarding their conceptions of literacy, and how these ideas affected their pedagogy. As well, I asked each teacher to engage in written responses to topical cues that emerged from my observations, and our interviews, conducted throughout the study. As is evident in the methodology described above, participation in this study involved a substantial investment of time, professional openness, and reflection. Therefore, I chose the three teacher-participants for each case study through purposeful sampling. Patton (1990) notes that "[t]he logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling" (p. 169). Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996) also identify purposeful sampling as "cases that are likely to be 'information rich' with respect to the purposes of the study" (p. 218). Merriam (2001) reiterates this definition of purposeful sampling as "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). 'Information rich' in these three cases meant that the teachers were practicing ELA classroom teachers. They were not selected in relation to any other criteria. After initial difficulties, described further in chapter four, in finding teacher-participants due to existing work/teaching loads, I chose the three participants through network sampling. Network sampling is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling. As Patton (1990) notes, this strategy involves identifying

participants or “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, that is, good examples for your study” (p. 173).

Each of the three teacher-participants I chose for my study was previously known to me, or recommended to me by academic colleagues or family members during the months and weeks leading up to my Doctoral research. The three teachers who participated in the study had no particular digital expertise. They were located in a range of school types and resource access points. The selected teachers, two women and one man, each worked as multi-grade high school teachers in different school divisions – one in a Catholic high school in rural Alberta, one in an urban Public high school in Alberta, and one in a Composite high school in rural Saskatchewan. The diversity in gender, geographical location, and school cultural context amongst the three cases reflects another conscious decision by myself as qualitative researcher. I was not striving to provide generalizable interpretations, but rather to gather multiple perspectives across-cases while understanding the particular experiences of each of these three teachers. The multi-site nature of this study also provided rich data regarding the influence of differing ELA curricular documents’ philosophy of literacy education on the three teachers’ understanding of literacy, and how this affected their pedagogy and textual stances.

Although not the main focus of this study, the students in each ELA classrooms that I observed were integral to their teachers’ pedagogical practices, textual stances and teaching experiences, and therefore to my study. The students’

classroom participation and work, including their assignments and discussions, were vital in contextualizing and understanding the three selected teachers' experiences. In addition, as the study progressed and I became familiar with the various classes, I chose two students from each class (one male and one female) whom I interviewed regarding their views on literacy and ELA instruction. Each of these student's interviews added important classroom-based perspectives and insights into the three teachers' experiences in digital times.

Ethical considerations

As a classroom-based educational research project, this study required the approval of the University of Alberta, and each of the three teacher-participants (refer to Appendix A). Approval to conduct the study was granted by the directors of education for each school division, by each of the particular schools' principals, as well as by the teacher-participants themselves. Also, before the study began, I forwarded letters (refer to Appendix A) to the participating students' parents/guardians to explain the nature of the research that would take place in the various classes – including the data gathering procedures to be used.

Each of the three selected teachers, along with the various classroom students and their parents/guardians (for students under 18 years of age), signed and returned participant release agreements and consent forms, which ensured that they were informed of ethical matters. These letters made the participants aware that their participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Students who were not willing to be

participants in the study remain unrepresented in the data and findings. The letters also stated that in the representation of the study and its findings I would use pseudonyms, when requested, to assure complete confidentiality. The data I collected throughout the study – including digital and hard copies of my field notes, tapes and transcriptions of teacher and student interviews, and the teachers' own reflective writings – will be saved in a locked cabinet in my university office for five years from the completion date of the study, after which they will be destroyed.

Data collection

Extremely rich, detailed, and in-depth information characterize the type of information gathered in a case study (Berg, 2006, p. 225).

The case study method focuses on holistic description and explanation (Merriam, 2001). Any and all methods of gathering data, from testing to interviewing, can be used in a case study, although certain techniques are more useful than others as a means of "investigating and understanding the identified phenomenon in a credible and trustworthy manner" (Merriam, 2001, p. 29). Methodological triangulation is commonly used in case study research. It is achieved through the use of multiple procedures for collecting and analyzing data, through redundancy in data collection, and through use of multiple perceptions to clarify meaning (Berg, 2006). My decisions about the usefulness of certain data collection techniques, including the necessity for triangulation, were based on my readings of researchers such as Berg (2006), Cresswell (2002), Gall, Borg & Gall

(1996), Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2004), and Merriam (2001). I adhered to methodological triangulation by collecting data through multiple methods and by comparing and contrasting multiple perspectives both within and across cases.

For the purpose of this study, then, my data collection methods included: (1) close observation of the classroom context, experiences and selected 'texts' including lesson plans, students' assignments, in-class discussions, course notes on the blackboard, films being studied, and so forth during four months of the school year which bridged two terms; (2) semi-structured face-to-face teacher-participant interviews; (3) semi-structured face-to-face student interviews; and (4) the collection of semi-structured teacher-participant reflective writings. Member checking of the interview data was carried out. That is, each teacher and student-participant interviewed had the opportunity to read and respond to the account of him or her through the interview and observational data. Member checking is invoked as a strategy for ensuring the communicative validity through triangulation of data for the case studies. The case study profile for each teacher draws upon this range of data in an attempt to present a complete picture, incorporating the range of perspectives of each teacher and his or her experiences of teaching ELA in a digital age.

I briefly introduce the three selected teachers here to further illustrate and explain the data collection, representations, and interpretations that I undertook for this study. The three teacher-participants' cases are presented with their own detailed description, within case, and cross-case analysis in the next chapter. The

three teachers – Kate, Michelle, and David - each had between 15 and 17 years of high school and/or middle years teaching experience, with varying years of Grade 11 and Grade 12 ELA teaching experience. At the time of my study, Kate was an ELA department head in a Catholic high school, while Michelle had recently piloted a new provincial ELA curriculum in an urban high school. David was a senior Phys-Ed and ELA teacher in his rural composite high school. None of the participants had contact with any of the other teachers throughout the study, yet each viewed their participation in the study similarly - as a process that would lead to a deeper personal and professional understanding of their situated ELA teaching processes and environments in digital times.

The teachers welcomed me into their classroom, providing valuable insights into their experiences through the collection of rich data. Upon completion of my study I had carried out 18 semi-structured face-to-face interviews amongst the three teachers and six selected students, 13 close observations (each lasting for two class times) of the three teachers' classroom environments during the four months of the study, and two sets of semi-structured teacher-reflective writings.

The teacher interviews

Each teacher participated in four semi-structured interviews lasting between one and a half, and two hours. The first interview occurred at the beginning of the research project, before the classroom observations began. This interview focused on the teachers' perceptions of themselves as literate

individuals, including how they defined literacy and their teaching context. The purpose of this interview was to begin to collect information regarding individual backgrounds, contexts and perspectives.

The second, third and final interviews were staggered throughout the study and occurred in tandem with classroom observations and student interviews. They were organized around two or three questions that emerged during my initial analysis of the first interviews and classroom observations. These questions were similar across cases; designed to help me to confirm or challenge my understanding of the relationship of the three teachers' conceptions of literacy and their teaching practices. As the study progressed, and the participants' comfort level increased, our interviews became conversational. We discussed broad themes such as: societal issues and their impact on teaching ELA; technology in the classroom; and students' changing learning styles. I used a digital audio recorder and an analogue tape recorder to record each interview. Both of the audio recorders were small enough to be unobtrusive, yet powerful enough so that our interview/discussions were accurately recorded. I transcribed each of the recorded interviews as the study progressed. When I had completed each teacher's transcriptions, I submitted them to the individual teacher-participants for review, comments, and final approval. In total there are 78 single-spaced transcribed pages of teacher interview data. Further data collection through on-site classroom observations is described in the next section of this chapter.

The classroom observations

The three teachers consented to my coming into their classrooms to observe their experiences teaching ELA. I made a total of five observations of two of Kate's Grade 11 ELA classes, four observations of two of Michelle's Grade 12 ELA classes, and four observations of David's one Grade 12 ELA class. Although the students were aware of my role as observer, I never became a participant in the classes. I designed an observational "protocol" (Creswell, 1998, p. 125) as a method of recording notes in the field. This observational protocol consisted of a dual-entry notebook that included both descriptive and reflective notes about the teacher's ELA classes – the observed experiences and my understandings. I noted both the experiences and understandings on-site in the classrooms during the observation time, and filled in more details right after I had left the classrooms – often in my car as I was parked before leaving each of the schools. The field notes also included a description of the physical setting with a particular focus on the textual and communication artifacts found within the classroom context. At the completion of the observation period, I had compiled 80 double-sided pages of descriptive and reflective data within three lined notebooks. These data were supplemented by my interviews of selected students from the observed classrooms.

The student interviews

As the classroom observations progressed, I also identified and gained permission from six students (as well as their respective teachers and

parent/guardians) to conduct semi-structured interviews with them. The students, one male and one female from each research site, were chosen for their demonstrated thoughtfulness and communication abilities as observed by me in class.

As mentioned above, the students were not the primary focus of my research questions, but their shared perspectives on changing definitions of literacy, the influence of new media and communication technologies in their home and schooled lives, as well as each teacher's pedagogical and textual stance in the classroom provided further important insights and counter-point to the teachers' interviews and reflective writings. Whether the teachers' claims, as presented through their interviews and reflective writings, did indeed play out for all students in the classroom lies beyond the scope of this study, but is worth consideration in designing subsequent studies. Although the teachers knew which students were interviewed, I did not share the student interview data with the teachers, thus addressing any ethical concerns regarding power-over relationships.

The students' participation, therefore, in no way altered or affected their academic or personal standing in the classes. As with the teachers' interviews, I audio recorded and transcribed each of the student's interviews. As well, I submitted these transcriptions to the students for their approval before using the interviews as data in my representations and findings. Upon completion of the study, I had 32 single-spaced word-processed pages of student interview data.

Teacher reflective writings

Between the completion of the multi-site classroom observations and the final on-site interview with each teacher, I submitted two writing prompts for each of the three teachers to respond to including: (1) How do you, as an ELA teacher, choose texts for classroom use? and (2) What is your view of teachers' authority in contemporary ELA classrooms? These prompts were chosen by me to further clarify and address key issues and trends that had emerged for each of the teachers throughout my study. The opportunity to respond in writing was also intended to provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect and compose their thoughts through a medium (the page or screen) that complemented, but did not mimic, the other data collection experiences. I believed that the space of the page/screen might open new angles of perception or understanding for David, Michelle, and Kate. The written reflection was not meant to be a summative statement by each of the three teachers, but rather one set of many sets of rich data collected throughout the study. I therefore placed no restrictions on the length or format for their writings, and mentioned that the prompts were merely reference points to encourage each individual to thoughtful writing. By the end date of the study, I had received two written responses each from Kate and Michelle, and one from David – 14 word-processed pages in total.

As seen throughout my above discussion of data collection techniques for this study, the interpretation of the data begins during the data collection. This initial interpretation affects the ongoing data that is selected and then in turn

interpreted. The progress of an interpretive inquiry may be visualized then as a series of loops in a spiral. Black (2005) explains that the "data is unfolding and uncovered in a forward and backward motion on the spiral. The forward portion of the arc involves pre-understanding and concerned engagement. The backward portion of the arc involves evaluation and seeing what was not seen before" (p.36). At a certain point, though, it is the job of the researcher to select which data to represent and then to interpret that data. The next section of this chapter discusses the careful considerations that must be given to the representation of data by qualitative researchers, and how I addressed these considerations.

Representing the data

The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else (Britzman, 2004, p. 44).

Britzman (2004) provides an important perspective on understanding the inherent difficulties and the importance of authority/authorial intention in representing and interpreting participant's data in qualitative educational research. The work of 'becoming' a researcher holds as many complications that are masked and misunderstood as does the complex work of teachers. Britzman warns that researchers "have the power to reinterpret and hence authorize the experiences and voices of others in ways that may clash or not resonate with the lived experiences they seek to explore" (p. 38). Further complicating the role of researcher as they work towards representation through written words is Bakhtin's

(1981) characterization of language as slippery, elusive, and bearing the capacity to assert another's intentions and meanings in opposition to the speaker's efforts.

Through my own "experiential continuum" (Britzman, 2004, p. 50) as researcher in this study I have come to realize these complications. Although I may strive to bridge the divide among research experience, representation and interpretation, there will always exist a separation/difference between participant and researcher. For Britzman, this is necessary: "the delicate work of interpretation depends upon difference… representation is made possible by the theoretical investments of the researcher" (p. 38). Here, the researcher's representational and interpretive voice expresses a sense of participation and connectedness with the participants striving to make sense of their own world, rather than taking ownership of that world.

In case studies then, detailed representation of particulars is needed for the "reader to assess the evidence upon which the researcher's analysis is based, but also so that the reader can vicariously experience the setting of the study" (Merriam, 2001, p. 238). Donmoyer (1990) offers two compelling rationales for conveying the vicarious experience of a case study to the reader. The first is the advantage of accessibility. "Case studies can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go" (p. 193). A second advantage is seeing through the researcher's eyes. By this, Donmoyer means that case studies may allow us to see something familiar but in a new and interesting way.

The representation of data from my research begins in chapter four with a

case by case, distinct description of each individual teacher's experiences teaching ELA. According to Creswell (1998), 'description' means simply stating the 'facts' about the case as recorded by the investigator (Creswell, 1998). The facts presented regarding each individual teacher's classroom experiences are contextualized by an in-case discussion of each teacher's conceptions of literacy, observations of their school culture, and descriptions of their classroom environment as gathered through the methodological triangulation described above.

The individual case-by-case representations of Kate, David, and Michelle and particular analyses of data that I present throughout the next chapter, are followed by cross-case analysis that integrates the particular research lenses under the cultural studies approach described in the following sub-section. This form of cross-case analysis applies to a collective case (Stake, 1996) when the researcher examines more than one case. It involves examining data across cases to discern themes that are common to all cases. The researcher then shares an analysis of the data for specific themes, aggregating information into large clusters of ideas and providing details that supported those emergent themes (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2004). The next, and final section of this chapter examines the content analysis and interpretive framework I employed to understand the experiences of three selected ELA teachers in a digital age.

Analysis and interpretation of the data

Hagood (2003) suggests that in order to move the field of literacy research forward, researchers need to examine the ways that old and new ideas merge and clash across contexts. The complexity of this interpretive work is also acknowledged by Mackey (2002) and Leander (2003). In her work, *Literacies Across the Media*, Mackey (2002) states that "any study of how people deal with texts of different kinds must necessarily be very complicated... Attending to as many of the complexities as possible" (p. 5). Leander (2003) argues that the challenge for contemporary literacy researchers is to "devise flexible and innovative analytic tools with which to track the fluidity and mobility of 'travel' across the semioscape of links, knowledge fields, web pages, chat rooms, e-mail routes, inter-subjective and intercultural relationships, and so on" (p. 392). Hoechsmann and Low (2008) suggest that we need a powerful tool or lens, interdisciplinary in nature and focused on the world(s) around us when engaging a scholarly question (p. 22).

Data analysis is the process by which the researcher systematically categorizes through data in replicable ways in order to arrive at usefully illuminating patterns. To make sense of the corpora of data discussed above, I used conceptual analysis as a concrete process to sift and sort the data content to arrive at the key foci within each case, and the three "themes" found across the three cases. In conceptual analysis, a term or terms such as 'text' and 'literacy' in the case of my study, are chosen for analysis. Also known as thematic analysis,

the job of the researcher is to focus on, or code for specific words and phrases from the data such as interview transcripts and reflective writings that are indicative of the research questions. The frequency of these terms within the texts, and their critical attributes – or those characteristics that were repeatedly evident in the data – were noted and then analysed.

I found that cultural studies, as discussed in chapter two, offer valuable cross-disciplinary interpretive lenses which help to make sense of the complex experiences of contemporary ELA teachers, and the multimodal classroom spaces – from page, to screen, to bricks and mortar – that they inhabit along with their students. I used cultural studies as an interpretive framework because it allowed space to embed more situated analytic tools from a variety of fields used explicitly and implicitly in contemporary ELA classrooms such as literary theory, media studies, and discourse analysis. For the purposes of my study, then, I used the two particular interpretive lenses discussed earlier. These included McLuhan's (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988) tetrad and Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism. McLuhan's tetrad helped me to understand the rationale for the three teachers' stances in relation to changing text and technology. The tetrad, which considers factors such as what is gained and obsolesced by a text, was particularly important as the three teachers worked continually to decide what texts and textual practices should be included in their classrooms. His lens provided a space for consideration and further inquiry into the three teachers' pedagogical and textual stances – it was not technologically deterministic. I used Bakhtinian dialogism, emerging from *The*

dialogic imagination (1981), as a lens to understand the three teachers' pedagogy and textual stances – applying their concepts throughout the three cases to specific communication acts such as classroom conversations, novels they study, or online journal responses. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism within the contact zone of the ELA classroom was helpful in understanding the dialogue that the three teachers encountered and were influenced by in the authoring of their classrooms. In this space, the three teachers and their students appropriated previous utterances in an intertextual manner to create new learning and possibly new literacies. Bakhtin's concepts allowed me to tease out the complexity of conceptions of literacy that the three teachers experienced in their classroom; that is the many dialogues the three teachers encountered within the classroom and themselves including the utterances and heteroglossia of the texts they used, the texts the students referred to/brought into the classroom, and the curricular-informed concepts of text and literacy. Bakhtin's ideas provide a nuanced and multi-layered lens for understanding these dialogues. The two particular analytic lenses discussed above – the tetrad and dialogism – provide a complementary interdisciplinary and contextual understanding of the teachers' experiences. Such a complex relationship amongst interpretive tools is needed to understand the complexities of the three ELA teachers' classroom experiences in recent times.

Chapter Four

Revealing the data

Teaching ELA is a complex endeavour that involves the identification and scaffolding of particular curricular-defined learning outcomes that address students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. In English language arts, arguably a 'contentless' subject discipline, teachers are asked to engage students through a variety of text types – including poems, novels, plays, essays, movies, magazine advertisements, and web pages to name just a few – that elicit aesthetic and efferent responses in those same readers/viewers/listeners. Besides encouraging a culture of thoughtful and critical consumption by its students, the ELA subject discipline demands that those same students produce a diverse manner of communications including writing, speaking, and representing for a variety of audiences and purposes. Complicating the already complex process of teaching ELA is the ever- expanding universe of text – both in form and content – and evolving notions of what it means to be literate in a rapidly changing and multi-modal world. Arguably, at no other time have teachers' textual stances (the choices they make regarding the selection of text types) or their pedagogy (how they support their learners' mastery of a wide variety of learning outcomes through the strategies and practices they bring to the learning contexts of brick and mortar, page, and screen) been more important.

Teaching language arts is a process of relationships – among the teacher, the curriculum, and the students. Added to these inter-relationships and clearly impacting their textual and pedagogical choices is the teacher's intra-relationship – who the teachers see themselves to be and who they want to be; their conceptions of literacy; and who they want their students to become as readers, writers, speakers, listeners, viewers, and representers. Sperling (2004) notes that research rooted in socio-cultural theories often "uncovers the contradictions by which individuals involved in the enterprises of schooling appear to be defined, motivated, and constrained" (p. 234). Such tensions became apparent for the three participants in this study as they engaged in teaching language and literacy in our digital age. The tensions were revealed through the rich data collected during classroom observations, face to face semi-structured interviews, and online writings conducted for these individual cases. Data revealing the experiences of the teachers are presented, through the following sections, in the order that they participated in the study. The selected students' perspectives are embedded in their corresponding teacher's sections and serve as additional reference points to the teacher's claims. A cross-case analysis of the three teachers' classroom experiences, organized thematically under the headings of disorientation, engagement, and co-authorship is presented at the end of this chapter. These thematic headings summarize key experiences that each of these teachers had in relation to how they engaged their students in literacy learning through text – or in other words, what the data revealed in relation to the study's key questions.

Through this thematic pastiche, we witness educational discourse and thought as always in a process of becoming; in the interactive, dialogic contexts of people, page and screen that give them shape and meaning (Bakhtin, 1981). I begin my first of three individual case studies with Kate.

Teacher-Participant: Kate

First meeting

Kate momentarily leaned against the side of her desk, which was piled with stacks of papers to be marked and two novel sets, in the midst of the crowded space of the teacher's workroom. She introduced me to a young colleague, S________ who had been teaching Grades 9 and 10 ELA at their high school for the past two years. The young teacher and I quickly established that we did not know anyone in common even though we had both lived in Saskatchewan for most of our lives. The three of us chuckled politely at the awkwardness of this little ritual – of trying to situate ourselves in relation to a previous relationship or experience; striving to make connections on which to build a new frame of reference and set of experiences when first encountering unfamiliar faces or spaces.

I had met Kate, for the first time, earlier on that November afternoon. Her energy and enthusiasm were immediately evident and contrasted sharply with the intermittent freezing drizzle that had cast a grey monotone to my hour-long drive to her high school. After she had greeted me at the front doors of the large and modern, yet equally monotone-coloured high school, we made our way to the

main office. She introduced me to her principal and I thanked him for allowing me to conduct research in their school. Although she had not stated it, this is what I expect Kate had wanted to happen; that I would thank the principal for access to the school, and this is what I gladly and sincerely expressed. I was truly appreciative of being allowed into the school and Kate's classroom to collect data through observation and interviews.

It had been difficult, after my PhD Candidacy exam and the passage of ethics by the University of Alberta's Ethics Board earlier that fall, to find willing participants for my study. Many of the teachers, recommended by principals or English department heads in the nine high schools located in three divisions that I had contacted through phone or by email, had expressed an interest in my study when I talked with them. Yet, each of these teachers declined my invitation to participate because they were too busy with their term work. During our first phone contact, Kate too mentioned that she was very busy, but that she also had a keen interest in my study. She said that it would be interesting and energizing for her to participate in the study. So, I was not too surprised that I had to work hard to keep up to Kate's pace as we walked from the school's main office on the ground level toward the school's open stairwell and its second floor where the workroom and her classroom were located.

Before heading up the stairs we passed an open, yet dimly lit, commons area where a small group of students were gathered, "Practicing for the school play…" Kate informed me as students' voices rang out, almost in unison, "Helloo

Mrs. P". We made a right turn at the top of the open stairs, went through a set of hallway doors and directly to her classroom where we stopped briefly. Kate quickly dipped in and out of her classroom to grab a timetable so that we could set up a series of observation dates and times. As we continued walking, she pointed out a large fish tank that sat embedded in the wall so that one could look into the Biology lab across from her English room; her pace slowing and manner relaxing as we entered the workroom where we, as mentioned above, met and chatted with her young colleague from Saskatchewan.

Kate moved from situated moment to situated moment understanding, as all ELA teachers are expected to, the role of audience and purpose in composing a communication. Her professional tone became personal when asking the junior teacher, "How are things?" S______ responded with an anecdote of a student who was particularly resistant to the poetry they were studying in Grade Ten that term. As the young teacher was leaving to return to her classroom, Kate reached out, placed a hand on her colleague's shoulder and said, "I have some materials that might help, and a couple of websites. Talk with me later."

As the one teacher left the workroom another entered. "Hi M_____" Kate called out, "this is James from the University of Alberta, he'll be doing Doctoral research here for awhile. M___ is the biology teacher who works in that wonderful lab across the hall." I recalled the room with the fish tank–trying to establish points of reference amidst the flurry of people and places I was encountering. The two teachers talked briefly, Kate assuming a very different

tenor than she had done with her younger subject area colleague; here is a different register (Halliday, 1978) I thought. As we exited the workroom to return to Kate's classroom, she quietly confided that M______ is "one of those Science teachers who thinks that we English teachers have it easy; that all we have to do is pick up a book and read it with our kids. What they don't know is that teaching ELA today is like conducting an experiment with too many variables." I noted this comment in my double entry journal as we continued with our first interview, knowing that I would return to that phrase. First, though, I wanted Kate to return in memory to her formative years so that I could better understand the context for her conceptions of literacy and textual choices that I was discovering in the present.

Kate's literacy context

Kate was an experienced teacher in her late 40s who was well respected as a professional in both her school and the broader community. At the time of my study she had 16 years teaching experience, and had become ELA subject area specialist and department head in the rural Alberta Catholic high school in which she taught. Along with her husband, she had raised two daughters who had now left home for University and travel abroad; a fact that Kate visibly relished as she declared a love for both literature and traveling. She had spent most of her formative years in the Maritimes. Her mother had been an elementary school teacher and her father was in the military.

Kate described her mother as a gentle person who was not easily riled by life or her students: “I never saw her mad. I had her as a substitute teacher in grade six to my mortification. One kid started up on her and she sat down and asked him, ‘Now dear what is the matter?’ and she had him eating out of her hand.” Both Kate’s mother and father were active readers in the home; her mother, being interested in current events, was a voracious newspaper reader, while her father was interested in history. He read biographies about figures such as Churchill and historical non-fiction about the wars. He was not a novel reader. This disinterest in reading fiction coloured much of Kate’s childhood. “I did not read a lot. I remember *Forever Amber* around the age of 15 and then I probably did not read much until well after high school; until I went to University 10 years later, pregnant with my second child and scared to death.”

Kate did not recall having any one particular role model during her own early school years that influenced her perspective as a language arts educator at the time of this study: “over time a model has built. I don’t remember any really passionate teachers. I remember fun teachers who would get into the discipline. Mr. ___ in Grade seven taught grammar for a whole year and I didn’t get bored. But I never really questioned things at that time; I do now.” One of her most influential educational experiences was returning to University as an adult in her late twenties. “I had to stop the car three times to be sick on the way to the University, but I knew that first night that I was there to stay.” She recalled her

Education degree work as a difficult yet exhilarating time, particularly her elective English courses:

> … a creative writing course and host of reading. I started reading theory and stories and it was wonderful. There was nothing they gave me that I didn't like. And when you have little kids you run on adrenaline and get used to staying up all night. I had one nursing and one sitting on my lap and I had to study psychology so I read it aloud like a children's book – 'Today we're going to hear the story of Richard Skinner'. I was definitely multi-tasking.

Her ability to multi-task as a young mother and University undergraduate was clearly still very much part of her abilities as an ELA classroom teacher in digital times, as will be demonstrated in the data that follows. Connections to Kate's present day conceptions of literacy, particularly her love of reading, writing, and energetic approach to teaching emerged throughout these contextualizing conversations during our first and subsequent semi-structured interviews. Sheehy (2004) notes that from a socio-cultural perspective, an individual's engagement in literacy can be viewed as participation in networks of relations in which cultural values are formed and expressed. This holds for one's so-called formative experiences and familial relations. But it holds equally true, as evident in the data presented in this chapter's next subsections, for the relationships that ELA teachers form with their students, texts, and the communities they inhabit.

The surrounding community

Kate had waited until her two daughters were old enough to enter elementary school before finding work as a teacher. She had begun her career and remained at the same high school right through to the time of this study. Her school was situated on the edge of a small town that was quickly becoming a bedroom community to a large urban centre during the latest economic boom and exponential population growth in Alberta. The location of her school meant that other local rural schools 'fed' their middle-years students into Kate's Catholic high school, making the student population of the two Grade 11 ELA classes that I observed relatively homogeneous in their socio-economic, political, and religious make-up.

This close, and rather closed, community feeling affected Kate's conceptions of herself as an ELA teacher, impacting her pedagogical and textual choices: "what you do or don't do, everybody notices and knows. Kids come in with a pre-conceived notion of who you are as a teacher, what your reputation is. So 'reputation, reputation, reputation Iago…' it is everything to me and thus I've got to tread those platforms very carefully." She believed, though, that the local and school community afforded her opportunities as an ELA practitioner she would not have had elsewhere:

> They've allowed me to do things that other communities wouldn't allow; perhaps study some texts that would be more controversial philosophically than in a more conservative school. I've been given pretty good rein here

> but with high expectations – I've always beaten provincial exam averages and it's expected…most of the time that means that the kids can communicate well and fairly. They can deal with a complex task because they've been prepared for it adequately. But I think in preparation for it you don't teach to the exam, you give them as many experiences as you can. You teach them that you do have a voice and a right to that voice but it has to be a respectful voice and a critical voice. Kids need to be able to discern different elements, their power and purpose, and meaning.

Both Teri and Kris, the two students whom I selected to interview in Kate's Grade 11 ELA class, believed that she was an important influence in their language and literacy learning. Teri, a young woman who had a frustrating year in ELA previous to her term in Kate's class remarked that she would remember Kate as a teacher, "because of the variety of things we did this year. For example, we'll be doing Shakespeare next term and get to act it out…. I enjoy her class because you get to express yourself in so many other ways than just essay, essay, essay. Yeah there's still a lot of essay writing but there's a lot of other activities like discussions and finding other people's points of view, and reading and viewing lots of things."

Kris, a young man who enjoyed the Beatles and created music on his computer at home also appreciated Kate's classes for the variety of textual forms they read and viewed. These included reading canonical novels such as *Lord of the Flies*, web-pages on Greek mythology, poetry, and contemporary young adult

literature. The class was also viewing *The Elephant Man* as part of their term work. Kris appreciated the opportunity to engage in a variety of text types to both construct and express his understanding. Kate, he said, had them focus on "creative projects rather than worksheets." This included discussions in class, creative writing, critical analysis papers, independent novel studies, letter writing, and visually-oriented texts such as short video pieces and posters. Kris stated that, "[w]e go down to the lab with all the iMacs and go on the photo shop program to make big posters on there. And sometimes people make stuff out of scraps from the garage, and draw, and cut out magazines they brought and added to the posters."

Teri and Kris both acknowledged the diversity of textual engagements and types that Kate supported in their classroom. Yet, that textual diversity was not immediately apparent when I began my study as both Grade 11 classes were completing a unit on a novel that many of their parents had read when they were in Grade 11. The following sub-section examines, through my on-site observational notes and subsequent interview, Kate's experiences teaching a canonical text in digital times.

Lord of the Flies

I'm seated at the back of Kate's class. I've met these students before briefly, to introduce myself, chat about my research, and distribute student participant/parent consent forms. The 23 students in this non-semestered Grade 11 ELA class spend just over an hour a day with Kate. With it being November,

their relationship and routines are well established. She is collecting their word-processed writing assignments from a previous class-time.

Kate states, “You know the drill, come on up.” Students shuffle and jostle, congregating at the front of the classroom to place their papers on Kate’s desk that sits by a corner window in their classroom. One female student sings quietly, “Tale as old as time… song as old as rhyme” from her upcoming performance in the school play *Beauty and the Beast*. Two male students, back in their separate seats now, poke at each other verbally as they had been doing physically just a moment before when handing in their assignments:

Student one - “B______ touched me…”

Student two - “Because you owe me $15.”

Student one - “Don’t begin your sentence with ‘and’.”

Student two – “B_____ just made the stupidest face in the world!”

Kate, with all of the students’ assignments collected, laughs and begins: “Okay. The kinds of conversations we have about *Lord of the Flies* may emerge from the same text that has been studied for years, but the kinds of conversations that we will continue to have are changed. And – by the way you can begin a sentence with ‘and’ – I bet your parents didn’t do photo-shop representations along with their character sketches.”

On a subsequent visit, and interview, I ask Kate about this exchange; how things have changed during her 16 years of teaching, many of which have

included a Unit on *Lord of the Flies*. She initially responds from a personal perspective:

> When I first started out, I stayed on the surface talking about the plot making sure that students knew what was happening in the book. But for many years after it became the allegorical level of representation – what happens in our world and familiar experiences of the human condition. But now the layer that has been added is much more philosophical. I find the conversations with students becoming heavier; the idea of the mythical and archetypal…. It helps us to figure out who we are as people.

I inquire further, in that same interview, if there is anything else in particular that had changed during those years beyond her own intellectual maturity. Had something shifted the way that she taught the text? Kate responded:

> I believe there is. Given the revised POS (Alberta Program of Studies) there is a great deal of lateral roles for the teacher – you can do multi-genre thematic studies that will allow the kids to experience things on different levels of Gardiner's intelligences – levels of physical, mental, spiritual stimuli. The ability to read film as text, to read companion pieces of literature, to read classic literature and then contemporize it with parallel pieces that come out of current viewing, reading, social dynamics such as *Survivor* or *The Simpsons* which I have in the class…. Not to say that was never was done before – but in saying that you're studying a text

> and focusing on just that text is a very different thing from trying to be aware of the multiplicity of global and historical influences.

During that first classroom observation, Kate's work to help students contextualize *Lord of the Flies* and its content is evident: "Even with all of the changes we are experiencing in today's society, there are certain things that move across millennia. Who can tell me what an archetype is?" She waits, and then prompts, "We need to start a conversation and use your understanding." A student mumbles, "I don't know." Kate picks up on this, "Well, tell me what you do know." The student waits a moment and then responds, "Kids need their parents, an authority, or things fall apart?" This is more of a question than a statement on his part. Another student offers: "The shadow, or fear the beast." "Okay, now what represents the archetype of the beast in this book?" asks Kate. The same student responds, "The pig's head", while another states, "The snake or Beelzebub." The class is interrupted by an intercom announcement about the following week's performance of the school play.

Kate begins again, summarizing the novel's plot to the point that they have left off reading together in class, using terms such as 'allegory', 'ignominy', and '*In medias res*' fluently to support and monitor her students' literary learning throughout her review. Then she begins reading aloud. Several students migrate quietly to spaces beyond their seats: some sit on cushions; two boys sit leaning against the front wall; three girls share a blanket nearby, while other students remain in their chairs which line two rows of tables formed into a semi-circle. All

of the students have books in their hands, reading silently while Kate reads aloud to them assuming different voices, interjecting intermittently with questions and comments: "Noteworthy symbolism here… it's the beast incarnate… beautiful writing here – 'the night accomplished' – think about that in your own writing." She reads to the class for almost a half hour and asks the students to continue on their own after, stating: "It's an ellipsis… fill in the rest; figure it out for yourself."

Kate's textual selection

During our second interview, which I discussed in the previous subsection, I probed a bit more directly about her textual stance during this study of a core canonical novel:

> *James* – So what is influencing that process of selection and your pedagogy? Is it the immediacy and broadening universe of texts?
>
> *Kate* – Wanting to present important ideas through multiple lenses so that it's an enrichment. You want the students to come away with the sense 'oh I understand that'. It's not just something that they had to learn for a test, but rather that it is a new layer in their life…. So for the writing they passed in last class I took a different approach, exploring in teams of three people, a companion piece for each chapter…. Included in the mix is not just the novel but poetry, art work, excerpts from other novels, short stories and then when they're doing their culminating assignment it will include multimedia such as film study, web pages, more art, music – so

that it is enhanced by this multiplicity of influences. Gone is the idea that you read something, do some questions, and write a test. There has to be enrichment that goes with it. You're building up the picture and then the reveal hopefully will include a bit of an epiphany 'I did it'. But it's pretty intensive when you've done that and the selection process is long and there is easily the possibility that the students will get bored of it.

James – How do you do your selection process? What influences you as an ELA teacher besides the idea of keeping the kids alert?

Kate – Well, to match with the curriculum there are recommended texts. I will draw from the base of materials I have used before, and to be quite honest the resources that we have in the school. You can choose any poem you want – you can type that out. But you can't just have another novel every year. There is a conscious progression in the recommended novels to much more ambiguous concepts as the kids get older, and more complex pieces of literature such as *Macbeth* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Those cores aren't going to go away, but it's the way that you flesh it out around those texts.

James – So let's talk a bit about that fleshing out of the core text for a bit. What role do media texts play for you as an ELA teacher?

Kate – I think as companion pieces popular culture works fine; as reference points – the kids understand that. I'm doing *Hamlet* with the Grade twelves and this is the first performance of Ophelia's mind

> dissolving and as the kids said at the end, “Nobody out crazies Ophelia” and that is Matt Groening, right? So they know it and there is no harm in that. I’m going to be doing A *street car named desire*. Rather than letting them know about it or showing it as an addendum at the end, I begin the play by showing them that clip from the *Simpsons*, not because it does the story but then because you can contextualize and you can say ‘based on this perhaps parallel, perhaps parody, perhaps slightly relevant little text, what do you now know about Blanche Dubois as Stella. Let’s get your pre-thoughts out there’. You know you can use the media in different ways and I don’t think there is anything wrong with that. But I don’t think you can take away from the absolute genuine article. It is so much more profound. You can’t teach *Hamlet* unless you teach *Hamlet*. A paraphrase, or a selected readings from does not cover the breadth of it. Hamlet scales mountains, not toboggan hills.

In these transitional times, Kate grounded her teaching and supported her students’ learning through a broadly contextualized reading of core texts. This process of contextualization was structured around an appropriation (Bakhtin, 1981) that drew heavily from her inter-textual and lived experiences, as well as those of her students. This appropriation was not an absorption and conformity to a dominant discourse, but rather the ‘theft’ of language that is reinterpreted and used to further discourse. Her textual references spanned the Western tradition, but also drew from Eastern philosophical texts and recent pop culture texts. She

had read and traveled extensively. These experiences gave her a broad set of discourses, or perspectives on the community she lived in and the recently revised Alberta ELA Program of Studies that she worked with. In her first online journal entry, she wrote about the newer pieces recommended in the curriculum, such as young adult literature and film, and expressed an initial reticence about using these pieces.

> Until it is inside of me I can't share it because that wouldn't be fair to them (her students) – to see the motifs and find the quotations and know when it happened because that's just fundamental plot stuff and that's your job… you don't want to be a power-monger but you have a duty to lead and a leader doesn't waffle. That doesn't mean that I can't feel ambiguity with literature but as a leader in the classroom I have to have direction and the more global that direction is, the better it is for both me and the students.

Kate possessed a purposeful and authoritative stance with literature. Literature served an explicit purpose in her classroom as a platform for her students to understand themselves and their own literacy in a changing world. She was very much influenced by, and engaged in a cultural studies approach with the literature she chose – although the revised Alberta POS never explicitly called for this analytical approach. Kate stated that her preferred textual choice was books in print, "simply because it gives you digestion time. You can pause and ponder; recreate, engage and interface with your text through marginalia, through deep

thinking, through intuition. You're not under pressure to think and regurgitate. But I think that all processes are valid and as long as there is a textual mix a literate person will equally, willingly engage in and potentially improve from the encounter they have with other people."

New learners and new literacies

But Kate also believed that given the recent changes to conceptions of literacy, expanding notions of text, and the inclusion of multiliteracies such as representation and viewing in Alberta's Program of Studies, there was a great deal of lateral movement for teachers in their textual and pedagogical choices. This was particularly evident in the textual engagements I observed her supporting in classes later in the study. The study of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* involved Kate and her students using texts such as the film version of the play in class, screen captures, and online research of web sites including the Arthur Miller Home Page, and references to other films such as *Fat Man and Little Boy*. Throughout all of my classroom observations, Kate engaged the students in multi-textual viewings, readings, and conversations – utterances that she believed important to her students' new literacies. She used digital texts such as movies on DVD, photo-shop representations, information from the Internet on 'myth' and 'archetype', as well as canonical texts to allow for an inter-textual exploration of theme. Her textual and pedagogical choices engaged a plurality of identity and student-centered learning. She understood this need for a plurality of textual engagements because, as we have also seen through the literature review, students

and textual engagements are changing in digital times. Dimitriadis (2001) notes that " text are no longer – if they ever were – embedded in stable social systems that draw participants into coherent and predictable modes of reception" (p. 35). These transitional times were represented for Kate in the recently revised Alberta ELA curriculum, but more directly through her own classroom experiences:

> These kids are used to thinking in ways that we never were. We were taught in rote fashion, in demand fashion…so while they are maybe not as methodical or as organized as we would have been, they can multi-task and see a variety of influences coming into a main concept. Their paradigms are different. Rather than seeing things linearly on paper they open up their computer and like a hyper text there is another window that opens up and inside that and so on; you know it is Robert Frost's poem 'way leads on to way' knowing you will never come back so you lose a thread from here but you gain another thread from there. And that's the way their brain must be hardwired – mine is not hard wired that way.

Kate's experiences as an ELA teacher in digital times changed how she taught. She believed that, "[t]he best thing you can do with kids is give them a 'somewhat' idea and let them make it better than you ever dreamt it possible. This is a big difference. I think that we do have greater discourse and I think that there is a need because you cannot hold students any longer. Their need to be challenged is greater." Kate was very much a 'ripper and burner', 'cutter and paster' of multiple texts. She did this not to build a single authoritative "Truth" for

her students in the classroom, but rather to socially construct constellations of truth through an appropriation (Bahktin, 1981) of the myriad textual representations that orbited main canonical works.

These works of literature, by genre rather than specific title, are still valued in the curriculum and by Kate. She also facilitated the 'textualization of self' (Callahan, 2002) that is valued by students through many media – from digital representations to classroom conversations. This teaching approach meant that Kate expected her students to be actively involved in the construction of understanding. In her class students wrote, represented, and talked as part of their process of learning. "You cannot have them just do the supersonic power point presentation with lights flashing and disco going – the ABBA version of *Lord of the Flies* – you've got to have them do something challenging and to encourage them…then they can grow from there and stop seeing literature as a series of plot line questions. I don't think that we as teachers can give plot line questions any more and get away with it."

The two Grade 11 students, Teri and Kris, each talked of this active construction of understanding in their separate interviews. These constructed understanding were achieved through traditional and non-traditional texts and assignments:

> *James* – Can you recall an assignment or project that was really good; that excited or grabbed your attention this term?

Teri – I think the project we just did for *Lord of the Flies* because, although we wrote essays, it wasn't just a bunch of essays…. I like the projects we did in class. I enjoyed that because it was a group thing and you got to find out other people's opinions.

James – Have you had to do things other than personal or critical essays?

Teri – Yes, for a movie which I cannot recall the title, she gave us the choice to write an essay or make paper dolls. So we had the decision whether to be creative through the dolls or essay. If you did the dolls you also had to write a hallmark card. You also had to compare that person to someone in our world, what their power was, who were their enemies.

In his interview, Kris shared the following observation about the kinds of texts and work students were expected to engage in Kate's classroom:

> We kind of decide things as a class. It's not laid back but it's neat that you let people down if you don't do your stuff. Everyone kind of needs to pull their own weight… and the discussions are really good. She's really open to everything and so is everyone else. Usually a lot of people take part in them and they can go on. She just lets us go for awhile even if we go on tangents… we have creative projects rather than the worksheets that we had for last year's semestered class, and I like the projects and creative writing a lot more. We do a lot of that.

Kate had grown to believe that there was a "reciprocity" in this approach that was particularly afforded by the variety of textual genres her students could consume and produce; that would keep their attention in contemporary times: "it is engaging them to the point to where they want to investigate, where they want to know. You've got to keep their interest. The more students become interested in it the more I become interested in teaching it." This interactive approach and reciprocal relationship amongst teacher, students and expanding notions of text was evident throughout my on-site observations of Kate's classroom.

The classroom as text

During my observations of her two Grade 11 ELA classes, I found it useful to think of Kate's classroom – its textual content and observed teacher/student interactions – as a text or chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981) that could be read critically. Kate believed that, "what's around the classroom is just a shaping of how we think and who they are. They [students] will always teach me something new – bring you to a phrase or portion of a phrase you hadn't noticed before that reveals insight." So in this critical reading, classroom as text becomes more than an artifact or product, it is also an emergent and dynamic process.

Building an understanding of the pedagogical and textual processes in ELA classrooms as text has also been employed previously (DiFabio, 1989) in relation to reading or interpreting teachers' practices "using terms… more typical of literary study than empirical research" (p. iii). The metaphor of classroom as text also allows for an understanding of how that classroom is 'authored' through

a composition of textual choices and associated practices by teachers and students. Here the classroom becomes a chronotope text with measureable aspects that can be read, but also a space that is actively authored. I believe that an examination of such practices in relation to the modes of inquiry, methods, and culture of the subject area discipline itself is most useful.

Utilizing the metaphor of classroom as a text and teacher as author further provides a familiar reference point for understanding concepts within the broader subject discipline. It serves to bridge understandings of situated literacy practices in rapidly changing times. Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism (1981) within the contact zone of the classroom was a useful interpretive lens through which to understand impact of the multitude of voices and perspectives – from students, curriculum, and various genres page – that Kate engaged in an ongoing dialogue. These particular texts and literacy events were appropriated within the broader context of Kate's textual classroom. Bakhtin's ideas also served to frame a better understanding of the complexity of Kate's role as author/authority of that classroom (con)text through her pedagogical and textual choices. Kate paid close attention to supporting her students' literacy development. They worked to construct understanding and literacies within the textual space of their classroom. This was evident in the open-ended classroom conversations they held, the student-generated work that was on the walls, and Kate's willingness to stretch her own comfort with canonical works through pop culture and web-based references that spoke more to the students' literate engagements outside of class-

time than her own. Her focus on her students' competence with purposeful literary language, making and grasping meaning through a variety of texts, and developing their awareness of the constructed and evolving nature of these literate practices, helped to transform the students into co-authors of the classroom space and their own ELA learning that moves to spaces beyond the text of the classroom. In this manner the students' new literacies, just like the classroom itself, remains unfinished.

The complexities of co-authoring an ELA classroom

Kate's willingness to engage in an open and emergent dialogue with her students through multiple literacies, such as talk and representation alongside traditional print formats, was clearly evident with both of her Grade 11 classes. This willingness emerged as one of her qualities as an ELA teacher in rapidly changing times. Her desire to co-author the text of her classroom alongside her students also was evident. "I sometimes cannot follow the dynamics the way it goes – I think that's not the way I was going but okay I'll live with it. I don't know but I might be becoming perhaps a bit better at trying to house that conversation in a central stream but it's all just hit and miss. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't." Kate's sense of her self as teacher in digital times was above all else emergent in relation to the challenges and changes of teaching ELA. Ferruci (1997) writes of being continuously constructed as a teacher; situated, within the classroom in rather complex, often contradictory, and certainly shifting ways" (p. 181). For Kate, teaching ELA in digital times was, as

mentioned earlier, "like conducting an experiment with too many variables." She had also compared the learning and teaching process during the first class I observed to an ellipsis – where certain texts, pedagogies, and a sense of authority had to be relinquished, or omitted, to complete the construction or sense (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2005) of self by both her and her students. These analogies directly reflected her notions of literate individuals, and her consideration of ELA teacher as co-author, rather than authority in the classroom.

> I think what I author in this classroom is a platform or way to be more than the specific text itself. I publish a lot of things, I talk to them [her students], I write to them, I write with them. But am I the author of this classroom? Absolutely not. We are co-authors – I hope so anyway…. Even this morning, they finished Macbeth and asked me what to do and I said this is what I envisioned but shock me and amaze me. I've never had a project back where I didn't learn from them. If I'm not learning from the kids then I'm not growing.

Just as her pedagogy and textual choice was relational to her emergent understanding of what it means to be literate in digital times, she hoped that her teaching "allows the kids to have an interrelationship that helps us to grow." Both of the students I interviewed from Kate's class agreed, as seen earlier, with her stated goal. This relational co-authorship of learning and literacy in the ELA classroom has had a lasting impact on both Kate and her students. "I have a lot of contact with students who have graduated from here and are now in University

and they ask me questions, phone me up and ask 'have you read this book?' It's a dynamic relationship and personal," much in the same manner that Kate's own pedagogy and textual stances were throughout the study. She was impacted throughout her classroom teaching by the polyphony of voices she encountered; and these discourses were on-going, what Bakhtin (1986) termed as an unfinalizability. But this open and emergent stance did lead to complications on a regular basis, as is demonstrated in the following excerpt from a latter interview/observation that I had coded as "A difficult day":

> *James* – So how has your week been?
>
> *Kate* – Absolutely hectic. I was here all weekend. It mostly had to do with the play so I feel that I'm not up to snuff for classes today, and I don't always have the best energy on Mondays anyway….

We are interrupted by a knock at the door – Kate talks quietly at the door for several minutes with a female student regarding her late assignment and unexcused absence. Kate sitting down to resume our interview is interrupted again by a teacher who comes into the classroom unannounced with a concern about the cast list and the play-list that was on a flash-drive Kate had made to be printed for that evening's performance. Kate finds the flash-drive on her own desk and hands it to the other teacher who departs as quickly as she had arrived. Kate returns to her seat beside me with a noticeable sigh.

> *James* – Yes, the complications of teaching in digital times is partly what I'm here to understand. Tell me more about your day.

Kate – It is things; competing forces: the kids needing to go out for the play when I need them here for an ELA conversation. The kids needing, up until recently, time for CTS (computing) projects, some of which you see around the room – and now you have to teach them the technology when you don't know it yourself. The students needing to be able to access power point in your classroom or wanting to do exams on the computer and how do you deal with that? There're just so many details. Like the companion pieces that I needed this morning – my email file wouldn't house them, but then I opened my email to do attendance after the class had started and the file had made its way through the system and it is there and I couldn't print it and I started this process yesterday morning. So technology is wonderful but it is also terrible…. The fact that I spend all weekend here and come to school at six in the morning seems irrelevant. What more do you need, where does it all come from? And yet the perception of it is simplicity. Remember the Science teacher who said all we do is read books?

These complications with new literacies and technologies amidst the already complex role of being an ELA teacher did not threaten Kate's textual stance, nor her pedagogical response to changing times and learners. Kate worked daily to locate herself within the polyphony of teaching ELA in new times, just as I had worked as researcher to locate myself amid the flurry of new people and places when I began my on site observations. She demonstrated the tensions and

rewards of this work throughout her classroom teaching, in her interviews, and poignantly in the final entry from her online journal for this study:

> Teaching ELA is the simple and the complex.
>
> An English teacher has TONS of high-voltage authority in her modern ELA classroom. She has beautiful stories and poetry and electronic images from which to draw inspiration. Those same text and their stories can yet sustain the imagination of youth, despite what critics say to the contrary. Further, if a teacher really loves these literatures and truly loves the students (complete with carbuncles and cynical, abrasive parents) then she does have multiple literacies and powers: the power of the abiding human need to LEARN (you know...curiosity), the power of a great story (that never goes out of fashion) and the power of quality conversations through many modes which can – and DO – engage young minds who, like all their predecessors just want to have a voice. Oh sure, there will be bad days. But, wasn't that what the literature taught us anyway?: bad days will be juxtaposed against the holy days of moments that change our lives. *Doubt that the stars are fire*; *Doubt that the sun doth move; Doubt truth to be a liar; But never doubt I love (Hamlet).*

Kate's love of teaching ELA is evident throughout the rich data I collected from her participation in my study. These complex experiences reveal how her own emergent conceptions of literacy affected her pedagogical and textual stances – becoming a co-author of the ELA classroom and multiliteracies along with her

students. Such a singular response may seem normative in a time of transition. It is important to gain further close understandings of another ELA teacher's experiences in our evolving digital age. From Kate's case study I move now, in the following section, to a discussion of the second teacher-participant in my study, David.

Teacher-Participant: David

It was well into the high school basketball season when I began my data collection through on-site classroom observations and face-to-face interviews to understand David's experiences as a senior ELA teacher in a digital age. This is an important fact to note because during the time that I conducted my study, he was teaching one Grade 12 ELA class of 32 students and several middle years and high school Phys Ed classes in his small rural high school in west central Saskatchewan. David was in his late 30s with 17 years of teaching experience. As well as being a coach and active referee for basketball and volleyball, David was married to a local elementary teacher, father of their two young children, and he was involved in a men's recreational hockey league. I therefore greatly appreciated David's willingness to participate in my study. He had immediately agreed to become a participant in my study when I called him with the invitation even though he was obviously very busy with work and family responsibilities. I also appreciated that our time together during the study allowed me to reconnect with an old family friend whom I had not seen in over a decade as our lives and teaching careers took us to different locales.

David's literacy context

During his formative years, living in the same small prairie town that I grew up in, David had always been involved in a number of sports. He was in Grade 11 or 12 when he decided he wanted to be a teacher:

> I knew I'd be a Phys Ed teacher and a coach, but I wasn't sure what else I was going to teach. So I decided when I had to pick a major in University that I would choose math because I had strong marks, but then found out it wasn't for me so I switched over to English. That was a very positive move. A lot of credit goes to my high school English teacher. She had a lot of energy and allowed us to choose our own poetry of the day – in music and song reviews. She allowed us to talk about what was important to us.

David did not consider himself to be a traditional reader, or long-fiction reader, when he was growing up although he read magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, comic books and a variety of nonfiction including newspaper, encyclopedia and magazine articles. He was what Jobe and Dayton-Sakari (2002) termed an "information kid"; fascinated with facts and often actively engaged in learning on a variety of levels (p. 8). David had also been an avid movie viewer, television watcher and video game player during the earliest stages of the gaming industry on platforms such as Telstar 'pong', Atari and then Nintendo. Throughout his childhood, and into his teens he traveled widely with his parents. His mom was a nurse's aid in the local hospital, and his dad managed an automotive and

electronics shop (thus David's early access to cutting edge electronics and video games) as well as being the fire chief for the town.

David recalled being able to attend sporting events, concerts, and plays on these many trips to larger centers. Mackey (2005) writes that "Although we talk about and teach separate interpretive activities – reading, viewing, listening, and so on – people actually live in whole cultures and bring insights from one medium into their approach into another" (p. 50). As is evident throughout the data presented in this section of chapter four, David referenced or drew upon all of his early textual experiences in his ELA course through his textual stance and pedagogy. These textual experiences held implications for his classroom pedagogy and his students' literacies. As Mackey (2005) notes: "At present, adults and children often work from very different backgrounds, making use of quite diverse interpretive toolkits, because they have been exposed to such different kinds of texts. It is important for those adults who wish to understand reading and other forms of narrative interpretation to ponder what, to them, may effectively be alien frames of understanding" (p. 52).

David's born-digital students

Both of the two students whom I interviewed from David's Grade 12 ELA class, Mandy and Tony, noted a strong difference between their in-school and out-of-school literacy practices during our separate interviews. Mandy, a young woman who worked two jobs outside of her Grade 12 courses, attended a digital

film school in Alberta during the past two summers and had recently been accepted into nursing at university.

> *James* – Have you used computers much in the past year in English?
>
> *Mandy* – Um, not this year. In the last two years we did essays and could do it on anything we wanted so I picked stuff I didn't know about. I did research on women in Iraq and sexual education in schools.
>
> *James* – Do you use computers for email and IM?
>
> *Mandy* – Yes because it's faster and cheaper.
>
> *James* – How about in school?
>
> *Mandy* – Not really. Usually the email doesn't open up in the school, it shuts down because of 'Net Nanny' or it's just slow.

During our interview she discussed accessing her computer at home to chat with friends through instant messaging that she had met during her summer film camps. She kept a journal of quotations from poetry and novels that she had read, and subscribed to and critically analyzed magazine ads for trends - creating collages for her bedroom at home.

Tony, a young man who worked as a butcher's assistant outside of school hours and planned to continue working there after Grade 12, said that online communication at home was an important, almost nightly, occurrence for him:

> *James* – Let's chat about what importance computers, email, chat rooms has for you.

Tony – Quite a bit. Basically the only way I talk to friends is through email or through MSN every night. It's a pretty big part of my life. These are friends from the area and then a couple of others from Newfoundland who used to live around here and then moved.

James – How about other forms of text?

Tony – Newspapers aren't too important. I watch quite a few movies when I have time and read a few magazines – I keep up with a couple of those like the two Jehovah's Witness magazines and Nintendo power. I usually rent movies/dvds although last weekend I went out to two shows which doesn't happen too often.

Tony particularly enjoyed 'dissecting' the *Star Wars* trilogy and its 'extras' such as insights into special effects and how the story was developed by George Lucas. He believed that these activities helped him as a creative writer in school.

These two students of David's were actively seeking out and engaging with texts in ways that were not being addressed in their school. Hagood, Stevens, and Reinking (2002) note that adolescents' literacy is multimodal. As with Tony and Mandy's out of school textual practices, rather than receiving information and ideas from static texts, they actively create meaning "dynamically across diverse media" (p. 75). The gap that exists between their home and school textual practices relates to David's sense of authority as an educator and his own understanding of emergent literacies and texts in transitional times.

David's textual stance

It was noteworthy, given David's early adoption and use of electronic games and enjoyment of a variety of media, when he declared during our first interview that much of what he perceived students to be doing outside of school through Instant Messaging, emailing, and so forth was not particularly important for their literacy. Rather, he considered it " a pastime for them". As the study progressed, this viewpoint clearly impacted his textual stance and pedagogy in his ELA teaching, and reflected Hagood, Stevens, and Reinking's (2002) claim that "one's comfort level with literacies reflects how knowledge and power are intricately bound together with interests in teaching and learning" (p. 77). David stated:

> I know why I'm a good teacher but I also know my weaknesses, and one of them is that technologically speaking I'm not with it. That's part of it and so I haven't been utilizing computers or the Internet in class as maybe I should. I perceive this need in the field of education as the world of communication is evolving. I think of my dad when he sold his business and was retained to manage it. The company who purchased it immediately computerized and I remember my aging father being so afraid of computers. I kind of feel that way as well. I could do it in the class when I find time but there isn't any time, or time enough to hone my own skills.

In addition to his own discomfort with changing communication technologies, David strongly believed that his students' learning and literacy were becoming "more superficial than deep" through their use of digital based texts and communications. "A lot of kids now just get things done rather than love to learn the process of how to do things. There's still the odd student who really loves to write and think deeply, but many just do what's asked and not much more. It's difficult in this age of instant messaging and instant information to challenge them as a teacher to find a focus, or to dig a little deeper."

For David, this lack of depth was reflected in, and compounded by the recently revised Saskatchewan ELA curriculum:

> The other day we had a retired French teacher subbing and she said '[f]luff, there's nothing but fluff these days' it's all 'how do you feel about this?' and 'what is your reaction to this?' , 'what does this make you think of?' – those types of assignments as opposed to more traditional comprehension and absolute learning of language and to some extent I think she's right. I used to think that the ELA curriculum was literature driven, now they've gone away from that more so to give kids many options, lots of resources and they go looking to other sources. I don't know if that's bad because I like exposing my students to a variety of types of writing, and lots of it, but the bad side of that is how much time you are expected to devote to the other strands such as representation.

During the initial two classroom observations, David's teaching was very focused on an authoritative exploration of literature. While discussing his teaching, after a lesson that involved a reading and analysis of several poems described later in this section, David noted "I'm still very much literature driven. I like to get a lot of literature in them [the students] or to them. Then we look at ways of evaluating it; the merits of what makes it 'good literature'." This approach mirrored the stance and pedagogy that we had experienced through the majority of ELA teachers in our hometown's high school. It reflected a new critical stance to literary instruction rather than a new literacies approach to language education.

There was another rationale for his approach. As our conversations continued, he mentioned understanding his role as being a language coach – helping his students to make authentic connections through the critical consumption of literary texts such as poetry, plays and novels to their own lives. "I'm very much into just that – connecting the literature to their lives, my life, and making it real." He also thought it very important to find ways to help kids develop skills to communicate effectively by spending time on "the rules" of their writing and speaking. DiPardo (2003) notes that "… at least since the Dartmouth conference of 1966, observers have noted an internal divide between teachers who see English as something one *does,* and those who see it as a body of information one can come to *know* – great books, literary criticism, rhetorical forms, and so on" (p. 146). In a time of rapidly expanding digital-based texts, and highly touted affordance of these texts for student-centered, or socially constructivist

approaches to literacy and learning, David had located himself squarely within a framework of 'knowing text', with the teacher at the center of that knowledge. This relationship between teacher, students, and text was reflected in the organization of his classroom and teaching as demonstrated in the following sub-section, which consists of an excerpt from my double-entry journal recorded during my first on-site classroom visit.

A tale of two classrooms: Term one classroom

David has taken up his self-described position "center stage" in his class of 32 Grade 12 ELA students. They are in their desks organized in a semi-circle four or five deep facing him and the blackboard. The classroom itself is an octagonal shape being part of the new addition to the community's middle years/high school. I sit at the back of the room, at David's desk on which rests his desktop computer, two photos of his wife – one as a young child and the other as a University student, a small plaque with the inscription "I am St. Ulcer – Guardian Angel of coaches", and a couple of photocopied articles. On a nearby shelf are literature textbooks, a Shakespeare anthology from his undergraduate days at University, grammar handbooks, two sports trophies and the board game *Balderdash*. There is no student work on the walls.

David chats with his students, before the morning bell, about attending last night's performance of the school play. He mentions with a chuckle that his six year old son now has a crush on the female lead of the play. He then reads that morning's announcements that include details about a basketball game, a students

against drunk driving meeting, the school's intramural curling league, and an SRC meeting.

At the bell he asks the students to get out their "blue bible" – a McGraw Hill grammar and usage text. The class spends several minutes going through a handout from a previous ELA class that reviews the rules for outlining and referencing in essay writing. They then switch back and forth between the handout and examples from the textbook as David continues to go through the pages and topics as if reading from a rule book, "now improving use of vocabulary, modifiers, and writing parallel structure." It is just over a month from the end of term. The students are working on literary essays for a writing contest and readying themselves for their Grade 12 Provincial Departmental exams – two literacy events that traditionally play a large role in this small community's school life.

David breaks away from reading the photocopied handout page to solicit students' response – writing on the blackboard as class-time continues:

> Nobody's going to give you heck for thinking more. We can brainstorm again but don't scam me by writing your essay draft and then going back to do an outline. Begin filling in your outline – can you find quotes to support this. Now you could use these and be fine or do more on your own to explore aspects like the author's writing style, character delineation….

Many students begin filling in their handouts as a few others stare at their pages. David remains at the board, " being the good spoon-feeder that I am", writing

down page numbers and then accompanying quotes from Canadian author Morley Callaghan's *More Joy in Heaven* – the short story they are basing today's lesson on. As David writes, several students ask questions:

"Are we doing a Venn diagram?"

"When do we come up with a title?"

"Can we use your title?"

David turns to respond with a chuckle, "Live on the edge a little – come up with your own." One student calls out "My title is MJ and Evan" which is followed by some student laughter. David calls out "Keep it down, and work on your own" as he puts down the chalk and begins to circulate through the rows to help students individually at their desks. This seat-work continues until the bell at the end of this 50 minute period. I stop taking observational notes and glance at the articles I noticed on his desk earlier in the period, they are entitled *Ten Myths of Reading Instruction* and *Learning from what doesn't work.* As David finishes circulating through the class he stops by my side at his desk, and I ask him about the articles. "Some reading from my vice-principal," he replies.

David strives to make connections to the students' lives through humorous comments and asides about their in-school and out-of-school activities. This is part of his pedagogy and is informed by who he is and where he lives – in a small community. He has taught these students' older siblings, and may very well teach their children if they and he remain in this community. This last point is likely because he and his wife are discussing buying or building a new home, and fixing

up their cabin which is located in the parkland district just north of their town. He had employed instructional methods that he was familiar with from his own high school days and his present role as a coach. There was an absence of multimodality in the texts he engaged with his students. During my next visit and interview I ask David about his textual choices:

> *James* – Do you ever find yourself grouping companion texts to a main literary text like the short story you covered last day?
>
> *David* – Yup, definitely. I like to find similar lines from the new stories or film and relate them to the other genres in class. Through comparing, those students see commonalities and differences, in theme, structure, etc.
>
> *James* – You had mentioned during our first interview that your high school teacher allowed you to make choices text as a student – to explore songs, videos, and such beyond the course textbook. Do you as teacher try to do this in your own class?
>
> *David* – Yes, but it's a continual challenge. I'm also constantly looking – particularly for the shorter genres, poetry, essays and short story – trying to amass a list with synopses and giving them a choice. I've been successful with helping the boys in particular. It comes down to understanding their interests and being a male I think that may be easier.
>
> *James* – Okay. Of your contemporaries, who influences you as a teacher?

David – The other ELA teacher on staff here and I are on the same wavelength. We don't have an official department or departmental meetings but we often discuss the teaching of English, where we're at, and what has worked and what could work better with the kids. I've enjoyed everyone I've worked with over the past 16 years. I think the best part of our public schooling system is that the kids, all of whom learn differently, are taught by different specialists and stylists. You focus on what works well for you and recognize what's not going to be your style.

This interview came the night before my second on-site visit to David's ELA classroom. It was early January and very close to the end of term. There was a lowered energy level in the classroom compared to the first observation. Several of the students had a seasonal flu; David's lesson was punctuated by students coughing. As well, the students were nearing their Grade 12 ELA departmental exams. David's response to this pressure was to try and increase the room's energy with a quick question and answer approach:

David - "So, back to poetry. We've been discussing identity, today we'll do more about imagery." David reads from the poem *My mother's face* as students read silently from a package of poetry handouts he had given out at the beginning of class. "Who do you think wrote this poem?"

Female student 1 – "Her daughter."

David – what is being described

Male student 1– "Their relationship?"

David – "OK, what's being referred to in the last line 'I understand at last'"

Female student 2 – "What it's like to be the mom."

David – "Think of the writer's craft. What is the most important phrase or word in that line?"

Female student 2 – "At last…?"

David – "Yes, 'at last I can understand'. What other poem that we've read does this remind you of?" Various students respond with poem titles. "Everyone agreed? Let's turn to that one…." David reads *Canning tomatoes*. "Do you recognize these things in your own lives, in your relationship with your parents?"

Male Student 2 – "Not really."

Female Student 3 – "Yes."

David – "As a parent I'm noticing these things more in my own kids (shares a personal anecdote and laughs) – So, I'm becoming my Dad. Here's another poem." David reads *A key*. "What story does this poem tell? What is the key a symbol of?" Several students are coughing. David's computer remains unused on the back desk. David gives another anecdote from home. "Moms have the key to all of us, how to open us up and make us tick."

David spends the remainder of the class time reading through a number of poems with the students – including 'Parlour game' and 'Berry picking'- and guiding

their responses to those poems. In this guided response he works to make connections to the students with questions such as: "When we're young where do we learn about love – TV, magazine ads, etc." He alludes to these texts but doesn't provide direct examples.

There is much transmission here. He assumes a very authoritative voice. The students' responses are limited. Today, he is living the curriculum (Aoki, 1993) as its Latin root word *currere* suggests. Again he mentions film and documentaries but has no time in the *race of curriculum* to bring in these texts and create spaces of connection and understanding. The students' responses are all oral, stacatto-like and remain on the surface of things until the end of the period approaches. As they finish their final poem during class-time David asks:

> "What is the effect of the ending?"
>
> No response
>
> "Roxanne?"
>
> *Female student 1* – "It wraps the poem up with a parallel feeling, like we've been here before".

The pedagogy and textual stance, an authoritative stance in his text selection and a transmissive teaching style, mirror the first class observation. David works to capture his students' attention, and engage them through the page and many anecdotes. The students remained, largely, unresponsive.

Isolation and disorientation

David's reluctance to engage emergent multimodal textual platforms and new communication technologies in his classroom, as is evident in the first two observations, may have been due to the somewhat isolated nature of his teaching position in a small rural Saskatchewan town, and its lack of readily available professional support structures for such implementation. The physical and technological materials were available though. David's school had high-speed Internet connections in the classrooms, TV/DVD combinations on carts, and a library/resource centre with traditional-print and digital texts.

This was the only ELA class that David taught. Most of his instructional and extra-curricular hours were spent in the school gym as a coach or referee. As is evident through the data, he was able to access some English subject-area support from the one other ELA teacher in the high school, and his administration provided copies of professional articles they thought important to new trends in ELA teaching.

> *James* – Theory relates that we're sort of at a transition stage. Teachers older than us are more afraid whereas teachers younger find computer use and digital communication normal. Let's broaden the definition of technology now and talk about film, radio, TV, magazines – I see a lot of textual material in your class on your shelves, what do you like to bring to the kids?

> *David* - I'm comfortable with film. I'm not comfortable with the fact that our school Division hasn't taken the steps to secure my use of film in the classroom. Hopefully with amalgamation that becomes so – I hear in other divisions that they're buying the viewing rights. I enjoy talking about good film. As a theme-type of thinker I like movies that have surprise endings that aren't obvious until we as a class 're-read' it and see that the foreshadowing was brilliant. I love those types of things and find that I can have excellent discussions with kids on that level and I think that is a very effective way to stay with them. I am comfortable with using the newspaper but we don't always have enough resources. A local pharmacist donates a week's worth of the *Star Phoenix* each year so I've kept and used those over the years and its particular forms of communication. And I save the same week's *Leader Post* and we can compare newsworthiness and perspectives in Regina, Saskatoon, and Edmonton.
>
> *James* – Do you do the same with TV news?
>
> *David* – Unofficially, yes.

As an ELA teacher David was engaged in what McLuhan (1988) called a 'resonating time' with newer communications technologies. This is a time of transition in which the introduction of technologies and accompanying ideas extend and sometimes disorient those impacted by the new technology. During this time questions emerge such as: (1) What does the technological/textual artifact enlarge or enhance? and, (2) What does it erode or obsolesce? David was

continually questioning what he should hold on to, and what he should let go of in relation to changes he saw in his students' literate lives outside of school, what the curriculum challenged him to do, and how he was oriented through his own literacy experiences and conceptions.

His observation that many of his students' out of school literacy practices were only past-times may prove to be contextually correct – over time – especially as the importance of communication platforms such as Twitter, MySpace, and email rise and fall within students' personal and social literacies. Leander (2003) echoes the considerations in McLuhan's tetrad by recognizing, "as teachers and researchers, we are currently confronted with the need to observe and learn from our students while making critical decisions about the kinds of old and new literacies that could make schooling meaningful to their life trajectories beyond it" (p. 393).

A tale of two classrooms: Term two classroom

When I return to David's school for my final two observations during the next month both he and the 32 Grade 12 students are the same, but their classroom has been transformed. Their physical space is reorganized – the desks have been re-arranged into five pods. There is a TV/DVD combo at the front of the classroom. I have scheduled an observation at the end of one day, and the beginning of the next. I am expecting the same approach and engagement that I had observed on the previous month's visit during this late winter's afternoon

class. Instead, there is a constant chatter as the students come through the classroom door. As the students take seats of their choosing, David says:

> Take a look on the desks – there's a sheet that will help guide you to write a character sketch individually, but we'll begin by working together. From our viewing and discussion of *The Emperor's Club*, choose a character that you want to represent. There are five characters and, today, five groups of six.

In *The Emperor's Club*, a film that David had used in his English classes for two years previous to this study, a high school Classics teacher at a private boys' school learns about his own character flaws after years of teaching his students that: "A man's character is his fate." He teaches the importance of an examined life through Greek and Roman philosophy, but bends the rules during an academic competition to the benefit of a student he favours. Years later, the teacher is reunited with his students where he learns of his impact, for better or worse, on their lives. For much of the week leading up to this lesson, David and his class have been studying this film. Tony talks about their viewing experience during our interview:

> *Tony* – We watched the movie through once, straight through, stopping only a few times to talk about it, and then we watched it again with the director's cut on and stopped every five minutes and talked for a while. It took a lot to get through it but you learned a lot about the movie,

and then we also looked at deleted scenes and a little blurb about directing, about behind the scenes.

James – Does that transfer to anything else you're doing in school?

Tony – Yeah, we write essays on the quotes from the movie and have a few to go.

James – Do you learn about the creative or writing process itself?

Tony – Yeah. They talked quite a bit about the writing; about how involved the person who wrote the original short story that the movie was based on was, and about the casting for the movie.

James – Do you think you would have a deeper understanding of the story through a book or movie?

Tony – I think I understood it pretty good through the movie. I can't really compare to the book because I haven't read it, but I got quite a bit out of the movie.

The students working in groups during this afternoon class appear to be comfortable and focused at their pods. There is constructive talk evident in these groupings around the characters and plot in the film. Some students are jotting down notes as others speak. David begins circulating through the classroom to the various groups. He asks them to consider, clarify, and support their discussion points. Towards the end of class he asks the students, "Are we close? This is day one of two. Choose your presenters for tomorrow."

It was his acknowledgement of his own sense of the possibilities of this movie on DVD as text, and the needs/interests of his students that encouraged David to include this digital-based text. Although, as he expressed in his earlier interviews, David considered himself somewhat limited in his use of alternative digital texts, he used the DVD versions of the movie in his course, as core text, in a manner that explored the pedagogical affordances of that medium. David engaged his students, as was evident in the classroom observation noted above as well as the next day's on-site observation, in an aesthetic and efferent viewing experience; soliciting responses to the movies through personal and critical writing, conversation, role-play, and visual representation. As Tony had mentioned, David utilized the 'director's comments' and 'deleted scenes' to help students construct critical understandings of the film's narrative. He then encouraged students to inter-textually extend and transfer these critical understandings of creative and meta-cognitive processes to other print literature, the students' own creative writing processes, and their constructions of self.

In our third interview, later that evening, David shared a story from a previous professional development opportunity where he could access perspectives and strategies beyond those in his immediate environment. "I've really enjoyed the accreditation seminars, their openness and sharing because as teachers we're all plagiarists and thieves; borrowing, stealing, and manipulating materials from all sources and other teachers…." As became evident during the final two classroom observations, David had begun to transfer this evolving sense

of himself as a teacher who constructs openly, through sharing with others to his understanding of how his students learn in an equally emergent and evolving digital age.

The film *The Emperor's Club* also became a textual touchstone for a literary anthropology (Iser, 1993; Sumara, 2002) of David's emergent understandings of the importance his role as an ELA teacher in a digital age. This movie became a space for David to interpret his teaching experiences during our final two face-to-face interviews. Considerations of this text "focused practices in mindfulness in order to develop perceptive and interpretive abilities" (Sumara, 2002, p. xviii). For David as teacher and myself as researcher, it was within this literary commonplace that we had opportunities to review "past, present, and imagined interpretations of ourselves, of others, and to contexts of experience" (p. 28). He loaned me a copy of the movie to view between my last on-site observations and our final interview. In return, I gave him an anthology of Saskatchewan poetry. During our final interview, David expressed seeing himself and his relationship to his students reflected in the movie's main character:

> In many ways I feel as if I'm a life teacher rather than a subject teacher through this literature. I love using *The Emperor's Club*, the text serves us so well; it fits in with *Death of a Salesman* – what takes the day, hard work and integrity or is it more important to be well liked? So I draw many parallels and similarities between these… that's where I like Mr. Hundert – in the end he made a difference in the kids' lives…. That is

> what I want, I want to build good people. If kids use emoticons in our classroom writing, or the comma isn't necessarily in the right place – then so be it. But it would be nice to have them do it correctly too.

When David became engaged by the text that he was teaching, in this case, *The Emperor's Club*, he was able to engage his students on a different experiential and constructivist level. This mirrors the reciprocal relationship that Kate had with using an expanding selection of texts to engage her students' interests. On reviewing his childhood literacy context and the study's further interview data, David's connections to visual and film texts becomes clear. When considering the DVD version of the movie that includes director's comments and extra scenes, the pedagogical and learning potentialities that digital texts can afford becomes evident. David's connection between the two emerged from an opening of textual stance that can be challenging in our transitional times. Further considerations of such challenges and associated disorientations will be re-visited in this chapter's cross case analysis after revealing the individual case study data, through the following section, from the third teacher-participant in my study, Michelle.

Teacher-Participant: Michelle

Teaching in tangents

My double entry journal notes from my first on-site observation of Michelle's Grade 12 ELA classroom read as follows:

> The students in Michelle's 8:40 am class are restless in their seats before the first period bell. She's writing on the whiteboard: (1) quiet reading; (2)

journals due tomorrow; (3) today *Death of a Salesman* – thematic connections. One of the students checks her cell phone for a text message while leafing through her copy of the Play. Another student slips his iPod buds into his ears but responds to Michelle's oral instructions: "After quiet reading, in the next few minutes come up with an individual theme statement that represents the understanding you've arrived at." On a television monitor mounted from the ceiling in one of the classroom's corners, school messages scroll across the screen: "noon-time chess… weiner Wednesday… leadership announcements… open stage improv… Millenium Excellence Awards…compressed schedule…bus passes… trip to Russia…." A student pulls a fitted toque over his close-cropped hair and multiple piercings; a girl with low riding jeans and highlights raises her hand. Michelle stops leafing through papers, listens, moves closer and answers: "Become the expert on that aspect of the play" and then louder to the whole class of 33 Grade 12 students, "O.K. group up, work with someone you haven't in a while. You'll have to share with the rest of the class your overarching sense of his character, a conflict and the theme you wrote. Remember to give key quotes as support. You have 20 minutes."

She turns to write this on the whiteboard as the students begin to sort themselves out through their actions, interactions, processes and products.

On the interpretive side of my double entry journal I've noted a reference from a recent reading of King and O'Brien (2002) who write that:

> The demands of the media-sphere culture are now well known. Consumers adapt with increasing efficiency to a variety of (often) simultaneous and/or juxtaposed information sources. Thus, they are immersed in a world of images, sound bites, texts and icons, as well as countless other signs that flash, pulse, and fade in and out. Efficient consumers sample these simultaneous data streams for the most significant signs at a given point in time and media space. Within the culture of schools information is best understood as a limited commodity; curriculum coordinators and teachers select, define, delimit, shape and package the most important information for the moment. (p.40)

King and O'Brien's argument is important for interpreting my observational notes; to understand Michelle's classroom experiences as someone who selected texts and shaped understanding for her students, but who – as represented through the data presented in this section – also worked hard not to delimit her students' developing literacies and learning.

Michelle's literacy context

At the time of the study, Michelle was in her late 30s and was an ELA specialist with 17 years of teaching experience. She had piloted the recently revised Alberta ELA POS (Government of Alberta, 2003) in her urban public school division. As she stated in our first interview, "I was looking for something new to explore as I had the feeling that I had 'been there and done that' with the old curriculum already." She ended up working three years with the piloting

committee through Alberta learning. This committee consisted of people throughout the province who had a draft of the document with the general outcomes. These various classroom teachers worked through the draft document; implementing it into their classrooms through existing resources at that time. Michelle assumed a positive tone when discussing the process and the changes to the recently revised curriculum. “I didn’t find it a struggle at all because I felt ‘finally’, this will fit the students’ world.” She further held that this revised curriculum acknowledged that:

> … students had more life experiences coming in to the classroom. They were willing to challenge what was happening. They weren’t as complacent in accepting what the ‘expert’ had to say. As much as people like to say that teenagers nowadays are stupid and don’t have the classical literature background, they are so more worldly smart than we ever were and they are willing to challenge it and to see what they see in it, and to support that through many different texts and perspectives – from things on the page, to the internet, to their own experiences.

Michelle’s own literacy experiences included growing up in a family with two sisters, a dad who worked in the Corrections system, and a mom who was an Elementary teacher. Michelle described herself as a “voracious reader” who literally, from Grade three onwards, read everything including the backs of cereal boxes, *Archie* comics, *MAD* comics, *Judy Blume, The Chronicles of Narnia, The Hobbit*, and so forth to the present day. She stated, “reading’s valuable to me”

although she regretted that the only thing she did not have time to read was professional literature because "you just get so caught up in doing what you're supposed to be doing that you don't often have the time to reflect on what you could be doing." She also commented on her experiences as a student:

> The last time the ELA curriculum changed was in 1982. I didn't see a lot of merit in that curriculum as a student because I wasn't good at it – I enjoyed the reading but not the reflective writing and such. And I remember doing horribly bad in the diploma exam and thinking 'well at least that's the end of that'. But that also set the tone for if I were to ever teach I would never teach that way. So coming back to that school as a teacher, where I subbed for a number of years as well as being a middle years teacher where it was a great preparation in the idea that it's not all about analysis it's personal connection – what does this literature mean to you, how can I reflect on it in my own life. So middle years teaching was very much seeing that personal connection, not necessarily the literary merit of something or a hyper-critical analysis. That's where I started.

Michelle worked in a .85 position. This allowed her the time and flexibility she needed to raise her two school aged children. She stated that she valued her time with her son who was eleven, and her seven year old daughter. Michelle spoke about her children's literacies: "My son and I have read through the whole *Harry Potter* series, and the last one has a great scene at the beginning with the choir singing 'toil toil burn and bubble…' from *Macbeth* which we made an immediate

connection to, though I don't always verbalize the connections I make with my family because it would drive them nuts. But there's always something bouncing around in there."

Michelle's textual interactions with her children moved from the page to the screen. "It gets exhausting. It's amazingly exhilarating but also exhausting. You know they're full of questions and there's never a question that we haven't answered in some way shape or form." She was well versed in TV programs, ads, and video games such as *Neo Pets, Zelda*, and *Fable*. Michelle explained the narrative structure and character development for *Fable:* "you develop characters…every choice you make for your character affects him to become an evil horrible man, a hero, or a magician. So every choice you make within the context of the surroundings affects your strength, your emotions, your morals, your ethics and in this way you can better understand who you as a real person, not only an avatar."

Textual stance

The textual variety that developed during her own childhood, and continued into her adult life as a mom with her own children, was also evident in her work as a senior ELA teacher. Other teachers openly acknowledged her engagement of a wide array of texts. During conversations in the 'pit', or the Humanities work room in their high school, ELA and Social Studies teachers asked: "Michelle, do you know of anything that's new online about Macbeth?… Michelle can I borrow this article?... Michelle, tell me about *Grand theft auto*...."

Her classrooms were, as witnessed throughout the data in this section, consistently horizontal in their textual relationships. That is, the teacher often became a learner alongside her students, as opposed to an authority. Michelle worked to co-construct emergent personal and critical literacies.

Jason and Sasha, the two Grade 12 students who I interviewed from Michelle's class, discussed the nature of this horizontal relationship and expanded notion of text. Jason was a male student who bussed into school each day. During our interview, which ran 20 minutes past the scheduled 45 minutes, Jason stated "Mrs. F. chooses good stuff for English, stuff – books, movies, websites, conversations – that points you towards something. That's the whole point of education, to point you towards something that you wouldn't think of yourself." Jason also noted that the various texts Michelle chose, and how she pointed students in a direction without determining where they would end up, meant that they were better critical thinkers than in other classes. "So that's where the most emphasis is – going beyond just enjoying the story, or movie, or website to understanding an underlying message they're (author, director, host) trying to get across."

The second of Michelle's students I interviewed was Sasha. She came from a professional household. Her mom was completing her MA in Nursing, her dad worked in the Aero-tech industry. She had recently been accepted as a direct entry student into Education at the University of Alberta. Sasha appreciated Michelle's open manner in her teaching. This openness related to Michelle's

treatment of her students' ideas as well as engagement through multiple textual formats:

> *James* – What does she bring into this class that you like?
>
> *Sasha* – In her class we do poetry, current events, the media and we talk about our life; we talk about the future and everything in her class. And it's not just 'Do this, this is what you have to do for the curriculum'. One thing that I absolutely love about her class is that tolerance is expected, there is no room for ignorance or arrogance…. Whenever anything like that comes up in Mrs. F's class it's pretty much discussed why someone expressed it that way and then we're done. There's not a lot of negative debate, but rather discussion.
>
> *James* – With all of the different texts you use or read in class, how does Mrs. F get you to think – on a deep level or superficially?
>
> *Sasha* – Well. I remember when we did *Macbeth* in Grade 11 with Mrs. F. – we spent a whole class on half a page of *Macbeth*, discussing, talking about other things we read and watched, and I'm thinking 'Why are we doing all of this'? Then after, when we wrote our critical essay, it was like 'Oh, I know this. I know how to support this'.

Here, the classroom teacher and her students achieved various understandings and critical abilities in relation to a broad palette of texts, and conversations that formed and informed the dialogue within the contact zone (Bakhtin, 1981) of their ELA classroom. These conversations emerge in relation to the various personal

and professional literacy discourses that Michelle engages in as a teacher. Michelle stated that, “I try, with shifts to different texts and literature in culture, to use that with the students. They need that here (at school) too… I often work through two or three texts together – a visual, a print based, something multimedia or a newspaper – something different that all deal with the same theme, and then I ask them to go out and find that message or find those connections in what they’re comfortable with; demonstrate how it fits all of those others and bring it back.” Deep critical understandings were built amongst a horizontality of texts, or an intertextuality. These intertextual appropriations (Bakhtin, 1981) amongst the content of various texts and student/teacher discourse were only one aspect of the critical literacy practices evident in this class. Michelle also created spaces within the contact zone of her classroom for multiple forms of student generated textual composition, or utterances, alongside the broadening horizon of textual consumption.

Michelle’s ELA class was the only one of the study’s three sites in which I observed student produced digital films as a form of ELA composition. One of the student-produced films I watched exhibited a clear sense of filmic codes and conventions through the construction of a decidedly postmodern, fast-paced narrative. This eight-minute film, in which both Jason and Sasha along with six other students appeared, presented a message that education is better than violence as a tool to change the way that the world is. This message was communicated through an appropriation of visual and thematic elements from pop

culture, advertising, and literary texts. In particular, the students paid homage to their teacher Mrs. F (Michelle) in the film as someone who encouraged them to "love, laugh and learn." This critical discourse was built through a variety of inter-textual references including: a slapstick chase scene that ended with a *Lord of the Flies* visual reference of a mannequin's head on a stake to demonstrate the horrors of armed conflict; a *Brave New World* reference to the year 432 AF (After Mrs. F instead of After Ford); and a cut away (Monty Python influence) close-up to a 'Jessica Simpson' influenced character saying that she was "now a nuclear physicist because of Mrs. F". Through this comedic yet critically informed representation, Mrs. F's pedagogical style was represented as symbolizing the positive and transformative possibilities of "new ideas and sensibilities" over violence.

Dimitriadis (2001), drawing from Bakhtin, describes this relationship built upon textual appropriation and teacher/student discourse as "a proliferating flow of text and activity that is continually reconstituted through tensions and transactions between the lines of flight and the lines of articulation that make it up" (p. 189). Michelle, although expressing that she did not know what to hold on to and what to let go of, just as David did, worked differently with the daily tensions and transactions of a rapidly expanding multi-media and digital universe. She struck an open stance in the classroom, having a theoretical grounding in both the possibilities and complications of broadening notions of literacy and text, especially as they were defined in the Alberta ELA POS. She demonstrated these

understandings in both our interviews and her classroom teaching, as is seen in the following data:

> *James* – You had mentioned during our first interview that it 'was about time' that the curriculum changed. Can you explain your reasoning behind that comment?
>
> *Michelle* - I had probably ignored the previous curriculum because I didn't think that it matched the experiences of the kids, what they go through – because it was 20 years old – and these kids were now in a society with multi-media, computers, and they always had rapid-paced TV programming.... They had been brought up with an awareness of big social problems and had always been very visual. They were not particularly interested in Nathaniel Hawthorne and Alice Munro. It just wasn't their grammar and those plot-line levels or fill in the blanks were no longer valid in understanding the literature, or conceptualizing it in their own life.
>
> *James* – Is there anything else that you saw in society or educational culture that allowed for the change in the ELA curriculum?
>
> *Michelle* – I think that there was the realization that having strict guidelines – previously it was that you had to do six short stories, a novel, you must do five non-fiction pieces –was too rigid and mandated. That put a whole lot of stress, I think, on the people who cared. It did on me because I thought that I would rather do a few pieces well and really take a look at it, but if I were ever to be held accountable for it I couldn't say yes

I followed that curriculum word for word because I didn't. I've always been very much about 'make the choices that are best for you' and we know time and time again that students are more engaged in literature that makes sense to them and that they can see a connection to.

Challenges

The daily challenges of addressing new literacies and learning in the spaces of Michelle's classroom were also evident alongside the affordances of her multi-textual and multiliterate approach. During my third classroom observation, the smooth and fluid transition amongst textual mediums came to a disruptive halt as the LCD projector did not 'read' the DVD version of *Big Fish* – a recommended film for Alberta's Grade 12 ELA POS in Alberta – that the class was going to study. Michelle attempted to fix the problem herself. When her attempt did not work, she turned to her students for help. After two of her students tried unsuccessfully to remedy the situation, Michelle had a third student go to get another teacher to come in and fix the problem. Just over ten minutes of class time had passed during that technological glitch where, once again, Michelle openly turned to others for technical support and to the students for a conversation:

Michelle – Any suggestions here? Okay, I noticed in class yesterday and in your journals some confusion, amongst the linear and non-linear aspects of the plots. Is the story in this film realism or hyper-realism?

Female student one – Realism.

Female student two – I'm confused. Is his character real?

A third female student slips iPod earbuds into her ears.

Michelle –These involve flashbacks. Are you getting this? [looking at the third female].

Male student one – He's like Willy Loman.

As a class, they had finished studying *Death of a Salesman* the week before. Character charts, on poster paper, line the back wall of the classroom.

Michelle – Tell me more.

Another male student puts his head down on his desk.

Male student one – He's normal and insecure. He's making things, himself, seem more important; telling tall tales from when he was younger.

Michelle – Yeah, we could run into him, or Willy Loman at WalMart. The play was realistic in its portrayal of our own lives. Here the movie uses, as I mentioned, flashbacks and allusions to build this sense of the fantastical – he's dying and reconciling himself to his life just as his son is reconciling to a dying father.

A teacher who arrived with a student to help with the technical glitch, leaves and then returns with a different remote control and gets the LCD projector working.

Michelle – That's all it was? Great. Our thanks.

Teacher 2 – No problem.

They begin the film, picking up with last days' viewing. As the film continues Michelle interjects, and explains terms such as 'mis-en scene' and discusses the development of the main character "who likes to tell stories."

The following week, during our fourth interview I ask Michelle about the complications of teaching in a digital age:

> *James* – Logistically thinking of many shifts in text, are you able to manage that through the various media that are available? Is that making your life more complicated?
>
> *Michelle* – (laughs) As you saw the other day in class, yeah, because when you're asked to do that much, as much as it is exciting, choosing from the variety of texts that are available to you there's still photocopying, setting up the equipment, space is at a premium here but so is equipment. So not having stuff, let's say in the computer lab, available when you would like it or need it because it's booked by everybody else who is trying to meet their outcomes as well, particularly the technology outcomes. So, yeah it does complicate things, but I often work through two or three texts together – a visual, a print based, something multimedia or a newspaper – something different that all deal with the same theme. And then I ask the students to go out and find that message or find those connections in what they're comfortable with, demonstrate how it fits all of those others, and bring it back… I ask them, more often than not, to

make those connections on their own because I can't, there's not enough hours in the day.

James – Besides a lack of time is there another aspect that would cause you to not make those connections through multiple texts?

Michelle – Just access to resources, because there's such a glut of stuff out there. When I was young there was the encyclopedia, and now I was trying to look at the *Edmonton Journal* online for a current event that was mentioned, so I went onto the Net and the school's 'net nanny' cut me off saying I couldn't go there. And then there's booking the computer lab, making sure we have AV equipment, and yet we're fortunate here because we each have a monitor and VCR in our classroom. So access to working and workable technology – that makes these changes easier.

Michelle also talked about problems that her colleagues had encountered with student plagiarism because of the Internet. According to Michelle, one female teacher had a situation where her students were doing work together and were copying from the Internet and each other. "This work sheet came in word for word. There were phone calls home, and zeros, confrontations with the students." Michelle mentioned that in the past she had encountered student plagiarism from the Internet and students copying from each other but stated: "I just write on it (the student work) 'looks like you shared your brain with so and so on this day, so you share the half the mark as well'. The kids realize that I recognized it; it's not

an accepted practice." I asked Michelle, further in this same interview, about particular differences to her students' literacies and learning in digital times:

> *James* – So there are differences in the ubiquitous texts of students' lives. Do you see them reading differently, thinking differently because of these technologies and texts? In class do you see a difference in the processes for how they arrive at understanding?
>
> *Michelle* – Yes, because things happen so quickly in their lives they're not as deep and as thoughtful. They have difficulty with vocabulary. I ask them how many read the local paper or the national paper, how many watch movies, and how many text message. They are all occupied with jobs, relationships, socializing. They get things done quick and dirty. TV shows that happen quickly like reality TV, they can download MP3s and do things quickly, they can 'keyword' and get thousands of pages to come up on the net. They won't stop to think that it's the 995th that they actually need to look at. They're accustomed to just seeing it. It's presented there for them in a headline, in a newscast scroll or highlight and then they figure that they know it all. They don't look to the deeper things and ask those critical questions about why and how.
>
> *James* – So as opposed to a depth in understanding there's a horizontality?
>
> *Michelle* – Yes, a wide array; huge across but not so much depth.

James – In the POS they talk about the importance of critical thinking, so how do you as a teacher break through the horizontality to the depth?

Michelle – Well again that's why it doesn't matter if they study six short stories or films, if they get two or three and are able to read them and read them well… read one a second time, imagine that, and then talk about it with a group, reflect on it personally, recreate it in a different scene, make a connection to another link. They've done three or four things with one text which creates that critical analysis as opposed to 'let's do six texts, here's my pre-generated questions that I think are important, you come up with the right answer and then I'll evaluate whether or not you got the valid answer' I don't see a lot of merit in that.

Opportunities

Regardless of the discomfort that Michelle felt, or the complications that arose in her teaching in digital times, throughout the data she demonstrated a willingness or ethos to 'have a go' at various texts and textual forms. These provide pedagogical opportunities for her, and learning connections for her students. During my on-site visits, we would usually begin in the Humanities workroom where she would organize herself. Here she would navigate and negotiate amongst a broad variety of communications tools at her desk space in the 'pit' – from cell phone to email, popular culture magazine to online professional journal before attempting the same in her classroom which included

whiteboards, TV with cable, computer with Internet, audio and visual DVD/CD player, as well as the other personal technologies that her students brought into the classroom for their personal/marginal use. Michelle's ability and conscious decision to provide the tools for discovery, and point towards a pathway for her students emerges from her stance on textual engagement and interpretation:

> I believe that the biggest fights happen when kids say 'no, you're wrong' during a discussion. Well who am I to say. Most of the recommended authors are dead by now, and so it's too late to ask them what their writing is about. And if you do if you reflect it's about the wholeness of it; the context. For example, when the kids read 'The Lottery' they were appalled by it. But when you can pull in instances where something similar happens today – who is the sacrifice, and there's a bully ring going on – there's an afterword by Shirley Jackson where she says it is fictional, there was no actual town like that, but consider it in relation. And kids can consider that they are right in their interpretation. There is validity to their thoughts and experiences, and they can be the experts if they are thoughtful and insightful about it. It gives them empowerment… for the most part it's that exploration that's the exciting part – the coming to terms with it.

This exploratory, rather than transmitted, approach to engaging and interpreting text – how ideas, emotions and attitudes are experienced by the viewer/ reader/ listener – in a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1970) with the text – may be described as "rhizomal" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). As introduced in

chapter two, for Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the rhizome is an oppositional alternative to what they call arborescent or arboreal ways of thinking. Arborescent forms and structures may be imagined metaphorically as trees – linear, hierarchical, sedentary, striated, vertical, stiff, and with deep and permanent roots. Trees are structures with branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser structures. Kamberelis (2004) notes that in their "various social and cultural instantiations, arborescent models of thinking, acting, and being amount to restrictive economies of dominance and oppression" (p.64). Using the rhizome as metaphor as an alternative theoretical model, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) identify a nonlinear, nonhierarchical way of being and acting.

Such a metaphor helps to illustrate Michelle's textual stance and pedagogy in digital times; her desire to reach all of the students in her class in a "balanced and democratic way." Michelle viewed herself as a teacher who digressed a lot, or taught in tangents. It was these digressions that I observed during my on-site visits, through textual, conversational and representational forays, that brought the ELA senior course's concepts and themes into focus. In this way Michelle created a space in the classroom; a space for unanticipated texts, ideas, and literate practices to emerge – all of which appeared vital to engaging her adolescent students.

Through her use of multiple text types (I observed students bringing in, or suggesting the use of television clips, songs on iPods, pictures from cell phones to name a few) which these Grade 12 students were allowed to bring and encouraged

to share in her class, possibilities for co-authorship of understanding were also afforded in Michelle's class. In her online journal response to my second prompt she responded:

> Teachers, and students in turn, are empowered by openness and trust in the abilities and strengths of each teacher and/or student. No longer is understanding/memorization of the literature the end result, but the broadening of the definition of text/context, the idea of meta-cognition and choices within the creation/study all support the idea that the text(literature) is merely to be the vehicle to teaching 'students' and the reaching of the outcomes as outlined in the curriculum. Additionally, the idea that there is ONE [*sic*] right answer from the point of view of the teacher, as the expert, is being challenged – as it should be – and the students have some accountability, choice and responsibility toward an understanding, not just a knowledge base. It is in this way both the students and teachers are powerful within the classroom.

In the contact zone (Bakhtin, 1981) of Michelle's classroom, textual choices and teaching practices were dialogic. The dialogue she engaged in herself, and that she modeled for her students, encouraged a continual becoming. The utterances she chose, or allowed others to make, impacted her open textual and pedagogical stance that in turn impacted those previous utterances. This openness in textual stance was expressed through technologies that were not present in the other two sites I observed. Although disorienting at times through the complications they

posed, students' use of iPods and digital video cameras were extensions of themselves and their literacies. In the dialogic space of Michelle's classroom students were more openly able to arrive at understandings of what certain technologies and texts, whether it be novels, television, or digital video-recordings, extended or obsolesced (McLuhan, 1988).

Engagement with students and colleagues

The co-authorship of the classroom that included Michelle's encouragement of experiential, inquiry-based learning along with a flexible textual stance – could be understood to remove some of the disorientating pressures from Michelle's teaching experiences. Engaging students on various levels – through a multiplicity of texts and compositional forms from dialogue, to poster, to digital video – provided spaces for the development of Michelle's and the students' literacy and learning in digital times. When I asked Michelle where she came up with her teaching ideas, she replied that she had a great deal of print-based materials that I had observed in the humanities work room, as well as internet searches, discussions with other teaching staff, student teachers, and professional development opportunities. But she reiterated, in our final interview, that: "one of the greatest resources for ideas are the students themselves, they are constantly challenging me, suggesting activities/revisions, texts to study and so on…."

> They keep me young because we talk about instant messaging and things that they are comfortable with and familiar with, and we try to connect

> that to something like *The Shawshank Redemption* which was set in 1949. Kids have no idea about the time. So we talk about wanting to leave something behind, some legacy, and how do you do that. Well you hang on to your emails, your text messaging, that reminds you of that person. That's why he (main character) carved his name into the header – something that they're familiar with to something more abstract, and then back to a short story that they read or a TV show, or a conversation they had out in the hallway.

Within these competing and complementary spaces, and perhaps because of her willingness to share textual authority in the classroom, Michele had a sense of proportion and wellbeing as an ELA teacher in the digital age as she mentioned in that last interview:

> I just really found my place in the English classroom, not so much from the position – I don't see myself as the expert – I'm grammatically incorrect throughout my conversations in class, I get up in front of the whiteboard and I question my spelling – which allows me, I don't see this as a weakness but as an acknowledgement that it allows the students to understand that they're growing with me. I am the facilitator in the class, not the expert and they're welcome to bring in different areas and ideas as long as it is well supported…. I wish I had a 'slow down' control on my brain but it doesn't work. So that sense of business people who talk about multi-tasking – I kill myself laughing because they have nothing on

> teachers. I try, with the shifts in different texts and literature, and the students need to do that too. Their lives are like that very much as well – but I digress...

Michelle did not feel isolated as a teacher, or that she had to "do it all." She felt a part of an active community of learners and professionals who facilitated the co-authoring of her classroom, and teaching experiences in a digital age. Recalling our first meeting, after some time in the 'pit' or Humanities work room, she mentioned that just as she readily gave support to others, it also came to her by way of networking with other teachers in the same area, professional activities such as marking diploma exams, committee work, professional reading and "just plain talking." The challenges of being a teacher who is continually becoming through dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981) was troubling at times. In her second online journal entry, Michelle wrote anecdotally about her mixed feelings regarding teaching ELA in rapidly changing times:

> I went to a leadership conference recently and the speaker said, 'Some people are sunflower people with sunflower jobs – you drop a seed and almost immediately you see the flower and say oh look at me and what a great job I did. But teachers are acorn people. You tend the seed. It has to be planted deep, watered, nurtured, cared for – and you know what? You may not even see a sprout before they leave high school. And I really liked that metaphor because I particularly struggle with that.

In these rapidly changing times, Michelle had to remind herself of the value of her work as an ELA teacher – that it is sometimes, but not always evident in the students' growth as a composer or consumer of texts; in the processes and products that they engaged – whether it be classroom conversations, small group work, in response journals, digital videos, essays, posters or poetry.

The impact of each of these three teachers on their students' changing literacy and learning becomes more evident as one compares the data represented in the previous three sections of this chapter across those same cases. Through that thematic analysis, the impact of rapidly changing communication technologies and situated literacies on each of these teacher's classroom experiences becomes evident.

Cross case analysis

Literacy is no longer a static construct from the standpoint of its defining technology – the printed page – for the past 500 years. Transitioning from the Age of Reason, 'to be literate' has now come to mean "a rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose, and communicate information" (Coiro, *et. al*., 2008, p. 5). Readers/viewers of interactive websites and social media must do more than reconstruct a narrative that exists in a predetermined order: they must engage in a multimodal construction and reconstitution; "both determining sequence and filling perceived gaps in meaning (Dobson, 2007, p. 182). Theorists struggle to find appropriate terminology – from appropriating Barthes' (1974) lisible and scriptive texts, to

coining the term hypertext – in defining such challenges and changes to literacy practices. Similarly, institutions like contemporary schools struggle to find meaningful responses to changing times as young people move fluidly and fluently from communicative platform to platform; from page to multiple screens. In the following cross-case analysis, I integrate the McLuhan's (1988) and Bakhtin's (1981) conceptual lenses under the cultural studies approach discussed in chapter three and used throughout chapter four, to further examine and discern themes that are common to Kate's, David's, and Michelle's classroom teaching experiences. These common themes include: (1) a **disorientation** experienced by each of the classroom teachers as they navigated expanding notions of text and literacy in their subject area; (2) a **reciprocal relationship** with students' changing literacies and ways learning; and (3) a **co-authorship** of the ELA classroom context by the teachers and their students.

Disorientation

A disequilibrium

McLuhan (1994) argued that all new texts and technologies, which are extensions of a previous self, cause a disorientation in one's traditional stance and practice. This disorientation, "…demands new ratios or new equilibriums…. [o]nly gradually does he [*sic*] regain normal sensitivity" (pp. 44-45). During the time of my study Kate, David, and Michelle were each experiencing their own disequilibrium – a challenge to the traditional textual and pedagogical equilibrium of the ELA classroom where canonical novels existed as the core text to be read

and responded to, and the teacher was the main authority in relation to the critical reading of that text. This destabilization of traditional approaches to language and literacy learning and teaching, grounded in their personal and professional lives respectively, complicated each of the three teachers' classroom textual stances and conceptions of literacy. They wondered, in Michelle's and David's terms, at what to hold onto and what to let go of; what is gained and what is lost for teachers and students in this time of ever-expanding textual production and consumption. In McLuhan's (1988) concept of the tetrad, the teachers were considering what was being enhanced, obsolesced, retrieved and reversed in their classrooms. Merchant (2008) writes that it is difficult for ELA educators to know which dispositions, values and practices will remain important and which new ones may be required in both the personal practitioner level, and in broader education systems (p.751). Through this study's data, it is evident that the three teachers live this challenge daily through their classroom experiences. Indeed, their ELA teaching was at times, as Kate had mentioned, like conducting an experiment with too many variables. David saw these variables as emerging from the temporally and physically transient nature of the texts and technologies of students' out-of-school communication practices.

The broadening horizon of texts

The disorientation for these three teachers related directly to the broadening horizon of text type, content, and multimodal compositional possibilities. This expansion was afforded, most often, by the digital technologies

that the students engaged outside of the classroom. But changes were also occurring within the spaces of their brick and mortar classrooms. As presented throughout the individual case studies, these students were emailing, instant messaging, creating digital videos, mashing and composing songs on *Garage Band*, playing video games, creating multi-modal posters, viewing director's cuts of movies on DVD, accessing multiple online electronic and paper-based news sources, responding to mass media texts in online spaces, and the like. When emergent practices and texts were introduced into the traditional literate spaces of the classroom, the three teachers experienced further complications such as technological breakdowns in hardware and software, and pedagogical concerns over student plagiarism. There was also a strong epistemologically-based concern for the loss of students' critical thinking skills due to a perceived superficial quality and overabundant quantity in pop culture and new media texts that may be used in the ELA classroom.

Such significant changes to the students' literate practices, inside and outside of schooled spaces, were magnified for these teachers by recently revised provincial curricula. As discussed in chapters one and two, the senior ELA curricula in both Saskatchewan and Alberta were revised and implemented in 1998 and 2003 respectively. Each of these curricula has maintained a modernist outcomes-based approach to language and literacy teaching while forwarding newly recognized but poorly defined language arts such as representation and viewing. While acknowledging the broadening horizon of textual choice, and the

influence of new forms of students' social constructivist literacy practices, these curricular documents did little to bridge, in concrete terms, the teachers' everyday pedagogical practices between print-based and emergent forms.

These teachers' need to orient themselves within the rapidly changing textual and pedagogical contexts between book and screen created professional tensions. All three teachers expressed that they were not doing enough to keep up to their students' changing literacies – including digitally expanded textual formats and their compositional possibilities. As witnessed throughout the study's classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, the three teacher participants continued to rely on novels as core texts to maintain an equilibrium for their literate selves, and their curricular defined teaching role within the classrooms. They did this for a sense of epistemological purposefulness in their classrooms, particularly in relation to revised provincial ELA curricula and a shifting sense of textual authority. As Kate mentions in her second interview:

> I really do have an appreciation for the expanded idea of literacy in the curriculum. I do very much believe in the visual mediums as well as the textual and auditory paradigms. All do offer equal and valid methods of communication between people… Yet I wrestle with the idea that I want to choose everything. So which book is the best? They're all the best. Which method of teaching is the best? They're all worthy because there are going to be different students who have different experiences and different ways of learning.

Understanding the teachers' stances

Such expanding notions of text – expanded in the manner in which the texts may be consumed and composed – impacted the three teachers' classroom pedagogy as well as their textual selection. Their disorientation led the teachers to continue privileging novels, but it also opened them to new stances. This included their use of Web 1.0 platforms such as author websites by Kate, online articles by Michelle, and DVD movies by all three teachers. Recalling the questions of McLuhan's (1988) tetrad, we may better understand this textual stance; each of the three teachers' responses to disorientation as they tried to simultaneously identify, comprehend and respond to rapid changes in literacy process and product. "The tetrads are verbal structures and poetic science in one…. [e]ach tetrad gives the etymology of its subject, as an uttering or outering of the body physical or mental, and provides its anatomy in fourfold-exegetical manner" (McLuhan, 1988, p. 224). Such an interpretive lens is valuable in understanding the three teachers' experiences when they are challenged on a daily basis with emergent digital-based communication practices and textual processes.

As discussed in chapter two, the tetrad requires a viewer/reader to consider what is: (1) enhanced; (2) obsolesced; (3) retrieved; and (4) reversed with the text/medium at the centre. Using McLuhan's tetrad, we can understand the teachers' choice and enthusiastic use of a particular textual artifact – for example, David, Kate and Michelle's common use of movies on DVDs as core and supplemental texts – in what McLuhan termed a resonating time of the

technology. For each of the three teachers, movies on DVD: (1) enhanced canonical novels; (2) obsolesced author as sole literary authority; (3) retrieved reader response and literary interpretation; and (4) reversed the threat of an atomized learning and learner context. In this way, each of the teachers retained a focal but supplementary text for exploring ideas and themes.

Michelle used *Big Fish* to make connections to, but also extend her students' understanding of *Death of a Salesman*. She adeptly supported her students' understanding of filmic codes and conventions, to the point that they were willing to compose and represent their own learning through digital videos. David effectively employed the 'extra features' of *The Emperor's Club* DVD to enhance, not only his students' viewing of that particular text, but also their consideration of compositional choices in their own writing. Kate showed clips of *Lord of the Flies* and *Death of a Salesman* to 'flesh out' her students' aesthetic and efferent reading experience of the same novel and play respectively. She also engaged them in a viewing of *The Elephant Man,* further developing literary allusions and thematic elements with her students.

Through this 'read only' (Richardson, 2009) digital text, each of the teachers maintained their students' focus, extended their literate understanding through multiple aesthetic and efferent readings/viewings of the DVDs, and maintained their own role as purposeful text selector. The DVDs not only spoke to each of the teachers as experienced educators, but also to who they were, and what they experienced in terms of viewing and representation in their own youth.

That is, these texts extended their literacy contexts but not past the breaking point. Such a textual stance parallels Gee's (2003) claim that good video games operate at the outer and growing edge of a player's competence, remaining challenging, but do-able. The Web 1.0 texts that the teachers used, particularly those noted above, stretched each of the teachers' stances to varying degrees, but not beyond the point that their pedagogy would collapse. Michelle commented on the more traditional literature that still dominates in many ELA classrooms; maintaining that the most effective teachers are those who find a way to engage in new approaches by building on previous understandings. David, while more reluctant to open his classroom to many digital innovations, was still willing to use movies on DVD and their 'special features' to address literary concepts and connect to what he believed to be more permanent texts in his students' lives than Web based communication and social media.

Engaging students' new literacies

As McLuhan (1988) posited, the hybrid or meeting of two or more media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born (p. 55). The prospect then, in a classroom that acknowledges expanding notions of text and the emergent co-construction of understanding in ELA classrooms, is not only for momentary disorientation but also for "transformation into a complex and depth-structured person (one may say teacher and student) aware of their interdependence" (p. 50). Lankshear (1999) notes that such discontinuities of perspective are occurring in the classroom where there is a convergence of new

texts and emergent literacies in relation to more traditional ones. Each literacy encompasses different sign systems which, when taken up by learners, allows them to participate more fully in the world.

These educators were expanding their pedagogical and textual options, and realized that understanding differs according to contexts: both more traditional and less traditional ones. The more flexible both teachers and students became, the more they were able to participate in each other's literate worlds meaningfully. This occurred most noticeably in David's move to a socially constructed understanding of *The Emperor's Club* along with his students, as opposed to the highly transmissive and disengaged lecture style he had employed in his poetry class, or the rule-book approach to essay writing he used in his short story unit. The flexibility in textual stance was also evident in Michelle's classroom where she allowed open use of iPods, cell phones, and digital video cameras during and for schoolwork alongside traditional print-based texts. Such responses were part of each of these ELA teachers' recognition of students' changing literacies and learning in digital-based times.

A reciprocal relationship

On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279).

The zone of contact

Throughout this study, there was much evidence of Kate's, Michelle's – and in the later stages – David's recognition of their students' changing literacies and learning in our nascent digital age. There was also rich data revealing that each of these three teachers were, in turn, changing their students' literacies and learning within and beyond the boundaries of their classrooms. The contact zones (Bakhtin, 1981) of these three contemporary ELA classrooms were sites where diverse voices – those of the teacher, their students, selected literary and popular culture writers/directors, and curricular – interacted. Bakhtin (1981) argued that when such diverse voices interact, there is a struggle by each individual in the zone of contact to assimilate two distinct categories of discourse: (1) authoritative and (2) internally persuasive. Authoritative discourse is defined as:

> …so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given in lofty sphere, not those of familiar contact. (p. 342)

Within the contact zone of Kate, Michelle, and David's classroom, each of them struggled, as we have seen in the previous section, with assimilating a rather disorienting array of voices. Some of these included "kinds and degrees of authority" (p. 342) that were present during the study, but would not have been present in their classrooms at the beginning of their ELA teaching careers. These included the multi-vocal and multimodal texts of the Web, instant-messaging,

pop-culture texts and students' own authoritative understanding of these texts and their surrounding discourses. According to Bakhtin (1981) such "alien discourses enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness just as they struggle with one another in the surrounding social reality" (p. 348). The lived complexity of the multitude of discourses that these teachers experienced and managed on a daily basis contradicts the simplistic binary frameworks forwarded by technological determinists (utopians and dystopians), or theorists such as Prensky (2001). The heteroglossia that each of the ELA teachers encountered through a variety of dialogic utterances encouraged a "plurality of consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 189) that became evident in the classroom observations, interviews and online journals. This changed consciousness related to how the teachers were thinking about their students' thinking, and impacted the teachers' textual selection and the use of those varied texts to engage students.

Shifting pedagogies

Through this study's data, there was a noticeable shift in each teacher's understandings of how to engage their students' literacies and learning. This shift in the three teachers' pedagogies and textual choices was emergent, just as the students' own literacies were emergent. None of the three teachers had found 'the key' pedagogical approach. Rather, each teacher was engaging students through a flow of situated texts in multiple literacy events. Texts, whether page-based or digital, print or multimodal, became starting points for experiential and co-constructed learning processes. The teachers worked to focus their students'

attention; as both Michelle and Kate expressed, "engaging them to the point to where they want to investigate, where they want to know." This inquiry-based approach contrasted with the more traditional ELA teaching model of literary text as artifact, or product, whose content should be mastered that David exhibited during the beginning of the study. Notably, his approach also shifted as the study progressed.

The three teachers' recognition of a change in their students' engagement with texts became evident in situated moments across all of the cases. This recognition resonates in Michelle's desire to engage her "students' new grammar," Kate's declaration that "way leads onto way," and David's question to his students during the second term observation of his class, "are we close?" This query is significant. His question points to a marked change in his pedagogical practice, afforded by an opening of textual stance throughout the lessons where his class viewed and responded to *The Emperor's Club*. The shift was seemingly simple but clearly evident as a change in learning from texts (transmission) to learning with the text (transaction). Here he acknowledged the shared and constructed nature of his students' learning and literacy through a changing textual horizon that included the intra-textual support of the DVD's extra features. During these lessons, David supported students' alternate response formats to the movie, which they had viewed in its entirety before re-viewing for an exploration of literary elements such as character development and motivation. These response formats involved roleplay, small group work, oral and written

presentations which contrasted greatly with his insistence that the students "work on your own" during the first term classes. In this way, David's voice became one amongst many others within the construction of his students' understanding, and their representation of that understanding in a dialogic rather than monologic classroom.

Changes in textual stance

In this way, the texts that these teachers chose, or allowed the students to bring into the context of the classroom – formally and informally – became spaces for an intertextual dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981). Kate, Michelle, and David realized that their students' engagements with text were changing in digital-based times. Densely layered literary works such as novels were complemented, and at times replaced, by a cascade of screen-based texts through the TV and computer. Each of the three teachers privileged full movies alongside novels. Other texts, from website screen captures, to online articles, to clips from *The Simpsons* added a polyphony (Bakhtin, 1981) or multitude of voices and perspectives within the classroom and directly impacted the students' literate experiences. Each of the three teachers expressed and demonstrated an attempt to engage the students through this multiplicity of reading, viewing, and listening experiences. Michelle spoke of classroom shifts to different texts and literature; working through two or three texts together – a visual, a print based, something multimedia. She would then encourage her students to go beyond the classroom to find other texts and make connections with those. This intertextual relationship, and growing reliance

on what the students could bring to the classroom was evident in my observations of Michelle's thematic-based study of *Death of a Salesman* and *Big Fish.* Shared experience, ideas, and feelings, as well as new insights and perspectives were formed through the dialogism of her classroom (Bakhtin, 1981). Such textual dialogism occurred in the other two classrooms as well, influencing the teachers' traditional textual stances and shifting their pedagogies. The dialogues that these teachers engaged in the classroom did involve struggle and contradiction. Through their appropriation of their students' utterances – the conversations, writings, representations, and out-of-school texts that they brought to the classrooms – the teachers inserted "a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 189). Kate understood the need for this movement in her teaching, and reflected it in her broad textual stance:

> I sometimes think in terms of constellations of text, or with the myth being a large planet with other secondary texts from television, to the Internet, to readings from Joseph Campbell orbiting around that main text. They each form a relationship to the larger text. And the students come to rely on those pop culture, and shorter texts to support their learning, and I rely on the mix to help keep the students' attention through larger works.

Kate had grown to believe that there was reciprocal relationship in such a constructivist approach that was particularly afforded by the variety of textual genres her students could consume and produce in this digital-based age. All three

teachers expressed that 'the more students become interested in learning the more I become interested in teaching'. The interactive, experiential approach and reciprocal relationship amongst teacher, students and expanding notions of text also transferred beyond the contact zone of their classrooms, impacting students' emergent literacies.

Affecting students' literacies and learning

Young people in this digital generation expect a participatory culture (Livingstone, 2008; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Through the personal and social spaces of digitally afforded new literacies and learning, each of the three ELA teachers saw their classroom roles being expanded, sometimes to the breaking point. Each teacher thought it important to help the students to understand their world through the word, and increasingly through multimodal images and sounds. The teachers expressed that they were trying to provide their students with learning experiences, rather than finite pieces of knowledge, through the texts they engaged. It was the teachers' role to encourage their students to develop a voice through the texts the students composed, and connections they made to their lives beyond the page, screen, or classroom. This encouragement took a variety of forms – from David's very authoritative and transmissive approach evident at the beginning of the study, to Michelle's tangential and constructivist classroom conversations. Each teacher worked differently for a common purpose of having the students critically understand their own lives and the world around them through the variety of texts and multiliteracies they engaged. As Kate mentioned,

"kids need to be able to discern different elements, their power and purpose, and meaning."

Such connections within and beyond the spaces of the classroom are evident particularly in the data from the students' responses to their film studies on DVD. Kate's Grade 11 student Kris talked of wanting to "think quietly for myself" during an outing to watch the Academy award-winning film *Syriana*. "I wouldn't have been able to understand the character's choices, or get the film without our conversations over *The Elephant Man."* David's Grade 12 ELA student Tony shared his critical impacted viewing experience: "[w]ell, after studying the movie we just did, spending two or three weeks I'll probably look at movies a lot differently especially when I get the DVDs with the extras on them. I'll look a lot more about how things were made and done, as opposed to just watching it and forgetting about it; and also looking at how the story affects me as a person – that kind of thing." Jason, Michelle's Grade 12 student shared a similar perspective*:*

> …in English class you learn about themes and connections such as that. So in English I make connections that I would say most normal people hanging out watching a movie wouldn't make. Mrs. F's English gives you a deeper level of understanding – you go 'oh', and I love that moment, it's kind of cool when you watch a movie. When you go 'oh okay I understand that' ; what the director is doing with that, the symbolism and stuff.

In these instances, the teachers provided a critical counterpoint and modeled critically literate practices that each of these students valued in their own literacies beyond the classroom. What becomes obvious is that the transference of this critical practice from classroom to other spaces was achieved through a genre, film, that is more visual than print-based; a text that each of these born-digital students valued. Through the personal and social spaces of digitally afforded new literacies, Livingstone (2008) has found that what engages young people "is primarily the peer-to-peer opportunities…in which they provide for each other the responsiveness, criticism, humour, feedback, openness, and networking that so often is absent from content designed for children by adults" (p. 116). In their classrooms, the three teachers understood that it was important to start with the text and move from there. The teachers modeled that movement through a thoughtful discourse of intertextuality and critical questioning along with their students. This participatory and experiential approach led me to a consideration of the third thematic aspect in this study's cross case analysis – the teachers acting as co-author of the ELA classroom with their students.

Co-authoring the ELA classroom

The classroom as text

Instead of asking, as Fish (1980) did: "Is there a text in this class?" one could very well now ask "Whose text is this class?" As discussed earlier in Kate's case study, I began to find it useful to think of each the teacher's classrooms as a text that could be examined as Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the chronotope. Street

and Lefstein (2007) note that "… literary theorists and educationalists have tended to look at literacy in terms of the texts that are produced and consumed by literate individuals" (p.45). The metaphor of classroom as text is helpful in providing critical insights into the compositional processes of particular classroom spaces – of relationships of teacher and learner involved in the composition of that literate place. Understanding how these compositional processes occurred, and how they relate to broader social structures from which they emerge (Bakhtin, 1981) is significant in a time of expanding notions of text and literate practices for individuals and groups. Such a metaphor led to a further understanding of each of these teachers' shifting authorial stances in their text selection and pedagogical practice.

The classroom (con)texts

Kate's focus on student-centered learning was clearly reflected in her organization and engagement of the learning contexts (Vacca, Vacca and Begoray, 2005) in that room; from the small spaces of page and screen, to the larger brick and mortar places. It was a busy and colour-filled space full of student work generated on computer. These digital texts were intermingled amongst a movie poster for Gibson's 1992 film version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* a couch for reading in one corner that had a rainbow designed streamer flowing above along the ceiling to the opposite side of the room, a cabinet full of costumes nestled along a side wall with Kate's desk and computer along the other wall which was lined with windows. Student seating was organized in a semi-circle

with daily work and other resources located in the middle of the semi-circle on a round table. This arrangement allowed for student movement – both physical and intellectual – within the class as Kate could orchestrate student-led pair discussions, and small group presentations that occurred during the class times that I observed.

Kate understood that the way she composed the classroom impacted her students' literacy and learning: "…the students who haven't come to abstract thinking or come with enough confidence, enough sense of voice or personal passion, that doesn't mean they can't get there. And in seeing other people's work, it encourages them. So I make it available to them." Examining across cases, it was evident throughout that throughout the study Michelle also worked to acknowledge her students' voices and perspectives as co-authors in their ELA classroom. She believed, through recent changes in the Alberta Program of Studies, that there was a historically unique opportunity to engage in a horizontal relationship between teacher and students, and students and text. That is, no one person or text held authority, or positioned themselves as having a final correct answer, over any other. In addition, Michelle integrated evolving multimodal formats – both formally and informally – into the space of their classroom.

As a text, the design of her classroom exhibited different modes of communication along with the linguistic – visual, acoustic and spatial – that encouraged a multiliterate engagement (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). A reading/viewing of their class demonstrated elements such as

a video screen with scrolling school announcements, a TV/DVD cart, student-composed digital poster representations on the walls, iPods and smart phones placed beside copies of plays and novels on the classroom tables which were organized in a semi-circle. In this reading we can understand how Michelle and her students were accessing available design in their appreciation and understanding of written, visual, and acoustic texts. Michelle made a conscious decision to co-author the space of her classroom with her students to facilitate access to multiple literate processes and texts. She expressed that there was 'too much stuff' to ever get around to using, and that the students provided her with many of her best language learning activities and sources.

In contrast, David's classroom was strikingly sparse in its initial configuration. During my first term observations, students' seats were arranged in rows facing 'center stage' where David would, most often, lecture about the literature they were studying. The walls of the classroom were mainly bare. This reflected not only the 'busyness' of his teaching outside of the classroom – remember his role as a Phys Ed teacher – but also his instructional approach: the walls appeared as *tabula rasa*, or blank slates. This is the manner in which he approached his students at the beginning of the study – as blank slates that needed to be 'spoon fed' their knowledge. Here the printed page was privileged as place to be decoded and encoded according to standards found in authoritative texts such as the McGraw Hill 'blue bible'. David remained very much as sole author/ity in the interpretation and compositional response to the page – drawing

most often from his own experiences and perspectives to illustrate points. This was a text without multimodality. There was a clear absence of the visual to supplement the many pages – in anthologies, grammar textbook, photo-copied handouts – that were distributed to the students. Any mention of TV commercials, programs and the like were not supported with direct examples such as clips, trailers, or excerpts. An opportunity to express through multimodalities, and engage the students' visually or acoustically was lost. As well, there was little connection or acknowledgement to compositional or reading spaces, an intertextuality, beyond the boundaries of the page or text of the brick and mortar classroom. David's computer remained unused on his desk. In the text of this classroom the operational aspect of literacy, including competence with the tools, procedures, and techniques, was privileged through skill and drill.

It was therefore equally striking when I entered his classroom in the second term. Here it was evident that the composition of their classroom paid closer attention to the cultural and critical dimensions of the students' emerging literacies. From the moment that they crossed the room's threshold to choose seats now situated in small groups, to the final bell when they handed in drawn sketches, pre-draft outlines, and paragraphs that represented their work for the period, David involved his students in a range of language situations while helping them to build a competent understanding. David posted the work and had the students relate to it the next day in their further composition of roleplays and oral presentations, representing various aspects of key characters in the movie *The*

Emperor's Club. He encouraged them to draw from the director's comments in their interpretation of their character's motivation as well as including important quotations and actions from the film. They were able to view the film as needed with a TV/DVD present on a cart at the front of the room. The students' voices were, literally, present within the text of the classroom in a meaningful way that they had not been during earlier observations. This was an actively co-authored space as both Kate's and Michelle's classrooms had been throughout much of the study. It is, arguably, this co-authoring or sharing of authority in the ELA classroom that holds much promise for teachers and students in the complex and often disorienting times of our digital age.

Sharing authority in ELA learning

The three teacher participants' trend towards co-authoring their ELA classrooms emerged from their experiences, and as a response to the ever-expanding array of textual platforms, genres, and forms of writing/representation which their students engaged in – both inside and outside of the spaces of their three classrooms. "Adolescents are increasingly finding their own reasons to become literate, especially when learning a literate practice allows them to collaborate with and participate within a group that values their knowledge/ contribution" (Kajder, 2010, p.10). Through this co-authored response the teachers afforded the development of their students' competence with the tools, procedures, and techniques involved in a language situation such as being able to read and write in a range of contexts in an appropriate and adequate manner.

Through the co-authoring of the classroom, while recognizing text as an utterance for 'appropriation' (Bakhtin, 1981) or a 'tissue of quotations' (Barthes, 1977), rather than a truth-bearing artifact, teachers are released from the modernist notion of single authorship and teacher as sole authority in the context of the classroom. This speaks further to Barthes' (1977) notion of the 'death of the author' – a decentralizing of authoritative 'truth' in the construction and engagement of texts:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning [the 'message' of the Author-God] but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture… the only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (p.146)

The notion of single authority had informed much of Kate, David, and Michelle's own literacy contexts through the pedagogical choices and textual engagements they encountered as high school students, and then employed as ELA teachers. Although meaningful in particular contexts of composition and learning, the modernist notion of single authorship/authority may need to be relinquished when considering the wide array of writing and representational possibilities for teachers and students in this digital-informed age. What becomes evident through the cross-case analysis of data in this study is that neither teachers nor students can rest on any previously privileged sense of literacy and learning, and that much can be accomplished through the co-authoring of literate selves. In the next and

final chapter of this dissertation, I share findings from the data presented above, present the implications of these findings for language and literacy education, and suggest what further research is needed in emergent digital times.

Chapter Five

Findings, educational implications, and future research emerging from this study

We need to invite everyone to the conversation in order to both define and study the construct of new literacies, while establishing broad parameters so that people can connect their work to something specific (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008, p.13).

Findings

This qualitative inquiry, conducted between the fall of 2005 and spring of 2006, examined the ELA classroom experiences of three teacher participants in rapidly changing digital times. In particular, I inquired into the relationship between the teachers' conceptions of literacy and how this impacted their pedagogy and their textual stances within their classrooms. The questions that guided my research included:

(1) What are the classroom experiences of three selected senior ELA educators teaching born-digital students?

(2) How do these teachers' own conceptions of literacy affect their pedagogy?

(3) What stances of textual authority do these teachers have in their classrooms?

Rich data were gathered in each case through the methodological triangulation of on-site classroom observation, face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the teacher-participants and selected students from their classrooms, and the teachers' online reflective writings in response to two prompts. The research questions that I asked remain important in understanding ELA teachers' classroom-based pedagogical and textual practices in the present time that continues to witness "changes in how we read and write, and where we learn to do either" (Kajder, 2010, p.3). In the years between my data collection for my study and the writing of this dissertation, English language arts classroom teaching has continued to evolve. Frameworks for understanding the complexities of teacher and learner interactions and relationships in our digital-based times also need to evolve. As Leander writes, "now we are ready to move onto an even more difficult concept: How do we think about the everyday?" (2008, p. 33).

The findings from this study emerge directly from the everyday classroom experiences of three ELA teachers. Framed within new literacies studies, my study's data and findings add empirical evidence and understandings for a consistently under-represented frame of reference in that emergent field – the secondary ELA classroom where teachers are required to navigate language learning relationships amongst their students, subject area curricula, continually shifting communications practices, and their own conceptions of literacy. In the following sections of this dissertation's final chapter, I discuss my study's main

findings that address the research questions mentioned above. These major findings, by section headings, include:

(1) 'Way leads onto way' – the systemic complications and classroom opportunities the teacher-participants experienced in realizing students' new literacies;

(2) 'Tangents' – the emergence of horizontally-oriented critical literacy practices through dialogic-based rhizomatic teaching and textual practices in the classrooms; and

(3) 'Ellipsis' – the need to relinquish teachers' traditional pedagogical and textual authority in ELA classrooms.

Way leads onto way: Realizing students' new literacies

You know it's Robert Frost's 'way leads onto way', knowing you will never come back so you lose a thread from here, but you gain another thread from there. (Kate)

There is clear evidence throughout this study that the classroom teachers understood their students' literacies and ways of learning were changing due to developments in new communication technologies. As lead users, most often outside of the walls of ELA classrooms, these students were shifting their teachers' sense of what a text can be and how those texts could be engaged – both in their consumption and composition. The content of these digitally-based texts shifted from being broadcast to interactive, from static to dynamic, and from print-based to multimodal. The associated activities around these texts also

changed. In their everyday lives, nouns became verbs creating neologisms. Google became 'to google'; WebLog became 'blogging'; and text became 'texting'. Here, young people were the primary active agents – engaging in a tissue of quotations; writing and reading continually in ways that were not expected or experienced by them, or their ELA classroom teachers, only a few years earlier.

Young people are creating new literacies although their language may be unrecognizable at times [e.g. "BOOMS" 'bored out of my skull' and "PIR" 'parents in room']. The once personal in idea, process, and representation becomes very public. This is evident in the immediacy of their writing and their stretching of standards in spelling, grammar, and perhaps aesthetic taste on page and screen. Yet, as seen throughout this study's data, born-digital students' personal and evolving textual grammar consistently rubs against the deeply entrenched grammar of ELA education. These authoritative pedagogical and textual stances are forwarded by modernist outcomes-based curricula, storage rooms stacked with novel sets, essay-based high stakes examinations, and over-worked teachers such as David who are wary of the seemingly fleeting nature of the 'new technical' and 'new ethos' stuff of new literacies. The printed page, particularly canonical novels at the secondary level, provide a firm thematic footing and knowable content for ELA teachers, including all three of the teachers in this study, to maintain an equilibrium while texts and learners shift around them.

Amidst all of the changes to text and communication practices in this digital age, what remained constant in these three teachers' experiences was their desire to compose classrooms that were relevant to their students' lives; to engage students with texts, and in critical textual practices that could transform their lives. For each participant in the study it was most important, as Michelle noted, to teach their students "about the world through texts, not merely coming to an authoritative understanding of a particular text as artifact or intellectual unit." The prospect in such a classroom that acknowledges expanding notions of text and the emergent of understanding in ELA is not only one of momentary disorientation, but also transformation.

Complicating the possibility of transformation in the three teachers' daily classroom literacy practices were the provincial curricula, though recently revised, that remained modernist 'curriculum-as-plan' rather than 'lived curriculum.' Aoki (1993) explains the frustrations of such curricular frameworks for teachers trying to engage students' lived curricula, including new literacies. "The curriculum-as-plan is the work of curriculum planners… it is imbued with the planners' orientations to the world, which inevitably include their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood" (p. 260). Aoki's conception of an alternative curricular approach, the 'lived curriculum', provides spaces for teachers to connect with, or realize students' new literacies within the classroom on a daily basis. The lived curriculum is a curriculum of multiplicities that emerges from a teacher's daily

practice and alertness. Bakhtin would consider the lived curriculum to be dialogic rather than monologic.

The various students in this study arrived daily to the three ELA classroom sites with newly lived language and literacy experiences beyond those walls – composing mash-ups of music, creating message threads, editing movies, contributing to fansites – paralleling Aoki's notion that there are as "many lived curricula… as there are self (*sic*) and students" (p.261). For these three teachers' students, as suggested for other born-digital students, a complex blend of new and old media were "central to the experience of the everyday cultures of their childhood and adolescence, and are fundamental to the formation of young people's cultural identities. These media(ted) texts constitute children's first curriculum, often their initial entries into texts and textuality" (Luke, 2003, p. 401).

Kate, David, and Michelle each worked to navigate the ideological complications posed by their subject area curricula. They also had to negotiate the boundaries within the institutions they worked towards realizing their students' new literacies. Michelle's school was the only one that allowed students to bring in cell phones and iPods. Yet she had trouble booking time in the computer lab. Kate ran into the same problem with booking computer time for her students, as well as encountering technical malfunctions when she did use computers, particularly the one in her own classroom. Although David's school was wired with high-speed internet, the administration had installed a 'Net nanny'; an

expenditure that could have been spent on licenses for movies or other media that David expressed an interest in using in his ELA class.

Such curricular and institutional thresholds of modernist industrial-model high schools are troubling to students who want to engage in collaborative de-territorialized meaning making through their new literacies. As the data demonstrates, these same boundaries and thresholds have perhaps an even greater impact on the classroom teachers who want to realize new literacies. Students are able to move fluidly from subject area classroom to classroom, just as they move fluently between the virtual and real worlds if afforded the possibility. It was the classroom teachers who lived uncomfortably on the threshold between the traditional and the new from day to day; feeling that their students were not understanding texts deeply enough, that they could not maintain their students' attention, or that there was never enough time to do everything asked for in the curriculum.

The three classroom ELA teachers in this study needed support to make the transition between 'realizing' or being aware of their students' new literacies, and 'realizing' those same literacies by helping their students to give form to new textual practices and products in the classroom. Throughout the study, the data revealed the tensions – from disengaged classes, to technological breakdowns, to personal exhaustion – that these three teachers experienced while living this liminality. From the Latin word *limen*, meaning a threshold, the liminal state is characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity

dissolves to some extent bringing about, as is evident for the study's three teachers, a sense of disorientation.

These three teachers' pedagogies were based in conceptions of literacy and the "embodied relations" (Kelly, 2000, p.79) they had with past and present schooled literacy/literary contexts that impacted these conceptions. Kelly (2000) wrote that an English language arts teacher is "positioned within a complex, contradictory, and conflicted trajectory. Pulled in various directions, such a teacher must begin to negotiate and to reconcile the expectations of curriculum, the profession, the teacher education program, and any personal hopes and dreams of what English teaching is, could, or should be." Using the lens of Bakhtinian dialogism (1981), the dialogic teacher can be understood as continually becoming through a constant dialogue of self and other. Throughout this study, we saw the 'other' voiced as written and spoken utterances emerging from provincial curricula, the technologies and textual references the students' brought to the ELA classrooms, and the literacy (con)texts the teachers worked in themselves. The data further reveals that another influential voice for these dialogic teachers was that of professional support for their subject area development.

Michelle, as someone who piloted the revised Alberta senior Program of Studies, had received the most support. During three years of implementation seminars and de-briefings, she had her voice heard and had listened to others' perspectives. She also continued with her professional development beyond that phase. David was geographically more isolated having only one other ELA

colleague on staff and limited resources for buying new resources, or traveling to attend professional development opportunities. At the time of the study, his connections to online support beyond his geographic isolation – such as teacher composed blogs or podcasts – was also limited by his own ethos, or reluctance to connect with the world digitally. He did, however, benefit from an accreditation seminar where he began to realize the shared and intertextual possibilities of language learning. Kate's own disorientation and transformation occurred daily and directly through interactions, as department head, with colleagues who challenged her sense of new literacies while establishing their own.

In her interviews, Kate had stated that teaching English was about the simple and the complex, but above all else it was about giving the students a voice. As the study's data reveals, it was often the three teachers' students who offered ways for realizing new literacies. This was evident through the students' openness to expanded notions of text and an enthusiasm for composing the textual content and understandings in the space of the ELA classroom when afforded the opportunity by their teacher. Such opportunities emerged through a variety of situated moments during the study – from Jason and Sasha who asked Michelle if they could create a digital video in her class, to Tony who made connections between the processes David's class viewed and discussed from the 'extras section' in *The Emperor's Club* DVD and his own writing, to Teri and Kris who created a reciprocal enthusiasm for new literacies and learning with Kate by

engaging in a cascade of popular culture and scholarly screen-based texts – much as way leads onto way.

Tangents: The horizontal aspect of critical literacies

… but I digress. (Michelle)

“In attempting to depict a world that has infinite possibilities, genres make selections from those possibilities, and thereby set out a model of the world” (Mahiri, 2004, p. 217). Throughout this study, the three teacher-participants demonstrated broadening textual stances in their genre selection for their students to engage with, and compose in the ELA classroom. During my on-site observations, such genres included: traditional print-based novels, poetry, short stories, drama, contemporary biography, young adult literature, and graphic novels. Non-fiction articles, editorials, literary synopses, and movie reviews were cut and pasted from the Web. Narratives were also viewed on DVDs, as were extra features that included directors’ comments, and ‘behind-the-scenes’ making of the movies. Excerpts from the mass media, particularly the genres of reality TV, satirical cartoons, and popular songs (from hip hop to country) were referred to consistently by both the teachers and students, but only occasionally brought into the classroom, by either the classroom teachers or students, as clips for viewing or listening in Michelle and Kate’s classes and later in David’s class. At no point during the study did I observe the students working at computers in any of these three classes, although evidence of this work was displayed, at varying times and in differing amounts, within the three ELA classrooms. These

compositions took the form of screen captures of online images and web sites, multimodal collages, and character sketches emerging from the narratives engaged through print and video.

The three teachers assumed a stance that acknowledged and afforded an intertextual approach to critical literacy education. Their decisions as to what texts to choose and how to use them depended upon which texts were privileged in their personal and professional literacies, curricular guidelines, and the input of their students. As is evident throughout the individual case studies and cross case analysis, each of the three teachers worked to engage the students in an understanding of the world and themselves through a cascade of print-based word, and multimodal screen-based texts. Yet, each of the teachers became concerned that the wide array of textual choices available to students inside and outside of their classes hindered those students' abilities to focus on one core text, and engage meaningfully in a critical engagement of the word and world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Each of the teachers believed that the students were prone to merely skimming the surface of a page or screen. This was due, in part, to the three teachers' perceptions that the students could not get the same steadily-paced, concentrated, or reflective experience from textual formats such as movies and multiple web pages as could be achieved through the space of a novel.

Troubling the three teacher's pedagogical shifts and broadening textual stances, noted in the cross-case analysis, were their perceptions of the loss of a 'deep' reading, or critically-informed understanding of texts by their students in

this nascent digital age. This concept of a 'deep' understanding was a way of knowing that had been privileged in each of their own ELA/literary educations – from their primary to tertiary schooling – and had occurred most often in the form of an extended novel study. These perspectives were an important voice within the heteroglossia of the three ELA teachers' contemporary dialogic classrooms. All of the teachers and their students struggled, at times, with various kinds and degrees of authority that emerged through the heteroglossia of their utterances. As discussed in chapter two, utterances (Bakhtin, 1981) are thoughts voiced through speaking, writing, or representation. The appropriation of utterances in dialogic classrooms does not imply conformity to the dominant discourse in the contextual community; rather, appropriation assumes a relation of consumption and re-interpretation of utterances used to further the dialogue of self and other, as well as the discourse of the community. Appropriation, for Bakhtin, is an integral component of dialogue. Mahiri (2004) notes that "in order to engage in dialogue, one must be able to apprehend, internalize, and recreate the utterances of others [which is the same "intertextual" activity that Kristeva argues occurs in the context of reading]" (p. 217).

Such a dialogic intertextuality is itself important to understanding further critical literacy approaches, complementary to 'deep' readings, in recent times. Critical literacy can be understood to involve the active analysis and critique of the relationships within and amongst texts; questioning and challenging explicit and implicit attitudes, values, and beliefs. Such biases are present within the very

textual selections, as well as the descriptions of their students' reading processes that these teachers made. A belief in the loss of a deep or vertical engagement may be related to their over-privileging of a particular critical literacy approach engendered by the density of novels. As Mackey (2003) notes, "just as we need to take a broad view of the complex context in which texts are supplied to their users, similarly, it is essential to take account of changing practices among these users of texts…readers – perhaps especially young readers – can show us what forms of attention texts are now teaching" (p. 404). When literacy and learning are "no longer geographically tied to a desk, the school library, the book, or the teacher who demands 'all eyes up front'" (C. Luke, 2003), such an acknowledgment is needed.

Throughout the data, a rhizomal or horizontal orientation is evident in the students' new literacies practices that each of the three teachers struggled, at times, to recognize and support. As discussed in chapter four, for Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the rhizome is an alternative to what they call arboreal ways of thinking which they claim have defined Western epistemologies at least since the Enlightenment. Arboreal forms and structures, such as static print based texts, may be viewed metaphorically as trees – linear, hierarchical, sedentary, with deep and permanent roots. They are structures with branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser structures. In contrast to arboreal forms of critical thinking, rhizomal forms are nonlinear. "The "rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or

central automaton" (p. 21). Rhizomes are ever-growing horizontal networks of connections among heterogneous nodes of discursive and material forces (p. 21).

Rhizomal critical literacies, then, can be understood as a valid form of critical reading, listening, and viewing through an ever-growing horizontal network of connections among heterogneous nodes of text. This rhizomal approach parallels C. Luke's (2003) consideration of 'lateral thinking' inherent in new literacies:

> That is to say, instead of learning and thinking "vertically"— deductively or inductively—within the root structures of disciplinary boxes, connectivity and hypertext environments demand horizontal or lateral cognitive mobility across disciplines, genres, modalities and, indeed, cultural zones. (p. 401)

Making meaning through multiple modalities – print, visual, oral – and genres including literary and popular, means that the students must draw upon a developing meta-knowledge of traditional and newly blended genres or representational conventions, cultural, and symbolic codes. The nodal texts house an accompanying variety of content and ideas in relation to each other. Such cross-referential and broadly horizontal, yet critical, reading adds a significant voice to new literacies Discourse. During their interviews, the students voiced an appreciation for the opportunity to engage texts beyond or alongside traditional novelistic texts; beyond and alongside the five paragraph essay. This opportunity was co-authored by the teachers and students. As Kate expressed, thematic

studies have been done for years in the ELA classroom, but here the difference was that such pedagogies and textual stances were necessary on a constant and integral basis to engage born-digital learners, rather than as a separate unit of study. These rhizomal practices, and the critical literacies they afford, existed in Michelle's class through conversations about reality TV episodes as well as their computer-based multimodal representations of Willy Loman. Here the teacher could act as either facilitator or counter-point to their students' readings depending upon his or her stance.

As the three teachers worked to develop dispositions, knowledge, and skills needed in 21st century ELA classrooms, it helped that they could distinguish how dialogues are entered from multiple 'subject' positions and social spaces, and how some of these may be in conflict with others. The three teachers were necessary contributors of tension within the dialogic classrooms. Their privileging of the page and narrative as devices for understanding the word and world was one tension-producing aspect of this ongoing dialogue. Going against the grain, and helping students to ask critical questions is particularly important role for teachers in the fast-paced, multi-genre, and rhizomal textuality that born-digital students can live in schooled and out-of-school spaces. The questions or frictions that teachers bring to students' textual engagements is important for the students' development as critical thinkers on a deep or horizontal levels, especially when students can "go anywhere and find anyone that is important to them" (Lankshear and Knobel, 2007, p. 7) in their wired world.

Dialogic perspectives were alternately opened and closed by the three teachers and their students. This dialogue occurred rhizomally during conversation, drafting, and skimming through a multitude of pages/screens – described by the teachers as pedagogical 'digressions' and 'tangents' – in each of the three classrooms. Differing ideas, contrasting perspectives, and unfinalizable understandings emerged from this surface-skimming of multiple texts and experiences – a heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). The students grew in their understanding across genres and modes, building further literary knowledge but also their own critical literacies in being able to read and compose an expanding horizon of text in the classroom, at home on the Web, or in a local movie theatre. Through such a rhizomal or horizontal array of texts and text types, literacy and learning became a process engaged by many in a cascade of contact zones (Bakhtin, 1981) rather than within one cognitively deterministic individual or canonical text type. A balanced textual stance and a willingness to remain open to unplanned moments of co-constructed understanding by the teachers was crucial to their students' developing critical literacies in an ever-expanding textual horizon. In this chapter's next section, the third and final major finding from this study is presented.

Ellipsis: The need to relinquish authority in the classroom

…what do we hold onto and what do we let go of? (David)

In her final online journal entry, Kate wrote: "Like Lear, until I face(d) my (pedagogical) storm I remain (was) so very weak and pitifully blind; that

doesn't (didn't) so much 'happen' as it is perpetually happening – the verb tenses are thwarting my intentions…." Happening is an important word here – it is a verb that leads to an understanding that these teachers were in the midst of an action or process. Throughout the study, it was evident that the teacher-participants were aware that their pedagogical and textual choices held direct implications for their students' emergent language and literacy learning processes. The dialogic relationship between the choices the teachers made and the perceived effect these choices would have on their students' literacies was complicated by the key consideration that each of the teachers had regarding what texts and textual practices they should maintain or relinquish within the space of the ELA classroom. Discussed earlier in this dissertation, McLuhan (1988) considered such questions to emerge in the resonating time of a new technology or text. As the user(s) of the new technology/text extend their senses through that artifact, they consider alternately personal and broad implications, such as what is being lost or gained through that text/technology. The teachers wondered at what texts to engage, and how to engage them, on a daily basis.

Britzman (2003) believes that "teaching and learning have multiple and conflicting meanings that shift with our lived lives, with the theories produced and encountered, with the deep convictions and desires brought to and created in education, with the practices we negotiate, and with the identities we construct" (p.32). Learning to teach in recent digital-informed times entails a process of

becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become. Kajder (2010) writes:

> New literacies, new technologies, new ways of reading and writing…. In real ways these are invitations to rethink and re-imagine our work as English teachers, as readers, as writers and as individuals who have our own literacy identities. (p. 10)

Yet, as Stoicheff and Taylor (2004) argue, and as was evident in all three ELA classrooms in this study, the print-based page is "one of the most fundamental intellectual constructs in the Western tradition" (p. 7). Johnston (2003) believes that many ELA teachers and students are "encountering text with a vast array of unexamined theoretical presuppositions and expectations…. They find it hard to believe that when they enter a classroom they are drenched in largely unconscious cultural and epistemological assumptions" (p. 51). Street and Lefstein (2007) further believe that ELA educators "… cannot avoid the implications of the deeper conceptual frameworks that underpin our approach and our practice….[u]nderstanding and defining literacy lies at the heart of 'doing' literacy" (p. 47). All three of teacher-participants engaged in conscientization (Freiere, 1970) – a cycle of reflection and action – within their classroom practice. These three teachers consistently demonstrated, during our interviews, in their online writings, and in the sequence of my classroom visits, an ability to reflect upon their practice and act in relation to that reflection. Tensions emerged in this reflective process, in part, from the complex situatedness of their practices.

Each teacher was located within a particular community and school culture during a time of major societal and communications changes influenced by digital-based technologies and texts. Such shifts in communications practices and culture have, arguably, not happened for generations. Such tensions and rapid shifts were part of the reasoning behind these three teachers' textual stances and pedagogies that maintained a privileging of traditional print-based text over all other forms. Yet, the manner in which each of these teachers engaged the selected core texts differed. This was evident in the differences between David's transmissive approach to traditional print-based texts, and the co-constructivist pedagogy he chose for the movie unit where students' understandings could also be represented beyond the essay. Kate noted that although her class was doing a character sketch for their unit on *Lord of the Flies,* as may have been done by previous generations of students, those earlier generations did not use photo-shop in their representations. Here, one can recognize dialogic teachers (Bakhtin, 1981) and multiliterate ELA classrooms (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009), but these were peripheral cases rather than paradigm cases of new literacies classrooms (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

As discussed in chapter two, paradigm cases would include new literacies that were more participatory, collaborative, distributed and less expert-dominated than the published, individuated, and author-centric conventional literacies (p. 9). Although Michelle privileged novels and narrative in her senior ELA class, she also had the new technical stuff (recall the video monitor with the scrolling

school announcements, the students who would slip iPod earbuds into their ears, cell phones sitting beside novels, and the student group who used digital video recorders to compose representations rich in intertextual and multi-genre references) and new ethos stuff of a paradigm class. She encouraged tangential pedagogy and open textual stances – a co-authoring of the ever-changing (con)text of the ELA classroom. Here one can understand how new literacies do affect evolving relationships of teacher and learner.

Besides the embedded digital technologies in her class, what was also 'visible' was Michelle's relinquishing of classroom authority. Michelle spoke of her teaching as providing a choice; of text as a starting point. She became invigorated by her students' creativity when she relinquished, not the goals, but the form of the multimodal responses her students could create. Clearly, single authorial/authoritative stances in the ELA classroom, including mandated selection of textual formats and responses, can be relinquished in digital times.

The teachers that opened up their classroom to a co-authorship – in textual choice and composition – with their students in this study experienced a reciprocal relationship. Here was a daily negotiation by the teachers of their authority – what they wanted to include or exclude in terms of the texts they/their students chose and the pedagogy they employed. Kate likened this to an ellipsis. Grammatically, an ellipsis represents the omission of a word or words necessary for complete construction but understood in context, and the sign (...) that something has been left out of a quotation. As a narrative device, an ellipsis is the

omission of a portion of the sequence of events, allowing the reader to fill in the narrative gaps. For Michelle, leaving gaps for her students to choose how they would represent their constructed understanding in relation to core texts amidst a broadening horizon of peripheral text was empowering for both her as a teacher and her students. By relinquishing her authoritative stance in those situated moments, in re-visioning herself as teacher/learner, such spaces offered the opportunity to further a sense of literate self within the world; a possibility valued by all three teachers and their students in ELA classrooms at the edge of R/reason.

Situated at the edge of modernist notions of textual and pedagogical authority, the term *reason* has been, I believe, integral to contextualizing an understanding of Kate's, David's, and Michelle's experiences, and the findings from this study. I have used the term reason at various times throughout this dissertation as a "verb with the meaning to think, understand, and form judgments logically and as a noun meaning a cause, explanation, or justification for an action or event" (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2005, p.1467). In addition, the term reason has been used as a proper noun. As a historical period, the Age of *Reason* denotes a cultural and intellectual period in Western civilization spanning the previous three centuries when investment in the rule of *reason* has greatly influenced modernist notions of literacy and schooling. As is evident throughout the data, the three ELA classroom teachers' experiences, including their textual stances and pedagogical choices, were located in the midst of a time of cultural change brought about by digital-based communications technologies that is

historically significant. Just as the three teachers had opportunities to co-author the space of their ELA classrooms, they also had the opportunity, reasons, and reasoning to revision their role and subject area in transitional times. Such re-visioning of ELA teachers and teaching holds important implications for language and literacy education.

2010: Educational implications

It is the nature of teaching and researching in the emergent field of new literacies that changes occur rapidly. As Stagg-Peterson and McClay (2007) note, "establishing new literacies practices in classrooms is an especially complex task, as new forms and genres of writing abound, and writers and audiences are developing *de facto* conventions for these new genres even as they evolve" (p. 368). Coiro *et al*. (2008) acknowledge that "changes to literacy happen so quickly that some elements of this change will appear, and go unreported..." (p. xii).

Since the completion of this study during the spring of 2006, there have been many shifts in digital-based communication practices. There has been a significant movement to Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) platforms – particularly to social networking sites and multimodal representational practices. Forms and pacing of online text-based communications, including text messaging and Twitter, have evolved. Personal wireless handheld devices, with their multitude of communications functions, have afforded the evolution of such communications practices in an 'any time, anywhere' manner. As Ito *et al*. (2008) note, "digital

media are part of the taken-for-granted social and cultural fabric of learning, play, and social communication… and are part of broad-based changes to how we engage in knowledge production, communication, and creative expression (p. viii).

During the time of my study, Kate expressed that she was composed of many divergent moments; that teaching ELA amid the binary flow of digital technologies and texts was like conducting an experiment with too many variables. Such a realization remains significant, along with the findings from this study for ELA teachers in continually transitioning times. The findings from this study – including systemic complications to realizing students' new literacies, horizontally-oriented critical literacies, and the need to relinquish individual textual stances and pedagogical authority in the classroom – have direct implications for changing the conceptions of literacy learning and teaching in a variety of educational Discourses. These include Discourses within the education of pre-service teachers, the professional development of English language arts teachers, the development of literacy pedagogy in the field, and the composition of ELA curricula.

To sustain literacy educators and maintain the relevance of ELA as a subject area, teachers need to examine their own literacies and what they privilege. As we have seen in Kate's, David's, and Michelle's experiences, it is unfeasible when frontline educators are busy in the action of teaching, learning, and supporting new literacies for them to be able to appropriately study and

monitor the actual progress of emergent practices, and intended interventions such as the use of Web 2.0 texts and technologies. It is evident, then, that teachers need support in understanding their personal and professional literacies through structures that are more responsive to their changing roles and needs. Such support may be afforded to ELA pre-service and classroom teachers on demand, through web-based dialogic resources such as teacher-composed blogs and podcasts, as well as through the formation of critically informed research relationships with subject area scholars. As this study's findings reveal, such personal and professional dialogic support, as Michelle received, is crucial in realizing born-digital students' new literacies.

Realization of these new literacies also requires a re-visioning of post-secondary teacher education programs. Print-based literacies and the industrial model of schooling built around book culture are no longer wholly adequate in light of expanding notions of text and literacy. Yet, secondary ELA teachers are commonly required to take a significant number of academic courses at the university level in their subject specialization in order to teach at the secondary school level. The divide between the literate experiences teachers encounter in the classroom and these courses is complicating their pedagogy and textual stances. Although these courses may be important for future literary scholars, teacher education programs should be questioning whether these courses are of value to ELA teachers. Such programs should consider the de-privileging of canonical text-based content courses often required for entry into secondary ELA subject

area specialist streams. Kress (1997) argues that such classes must move from critique to design, beyond a negative deconstruction to more positive construction. This re-orientation has significant implications for the constitution of schoolteachers' professional ways of knowing and practicing ELA – to think not just about how teachers and students are being transformed by changing communication technologies and practices, but rather through a metaliteracy to consider how they can be transformative.

Further, curricular-based complications that emerged in relation to the three teachers’ changing textual stances and pedagogies should be addressed through renewable curricula that are both (a) co-authored by teachers, students and other literacy stakeholders beyond educational policy-makers, and (b) encourage a co-authorship, by teachers and students, of their new literacies and learning in the ELA classroom. Extant curricula-as-planned need to be re-visioned by provincial governments and educational policy makers as dialogical. These curricula need to acknowledge the unfinalizability (Bakhtin, 1981) of teachers’ and students’ literate selves. The Government of Saskatchewan attempted such a dialogic space through the ‘Evergreen’ curriculum that included online message-boards and hyper-links to digital texts, in 1999. The ethos behind this interactive and malleable text was abandoned as its message board filled with teachers’ requests for ‘canned’ grammar units and novel studies, and divisional administrators turned to expensive, top-down initiatives such as “First Steps” as programmatic responses to what they believed to be an amorphous and subjective

curriculum. Now, as the born-digital generation enters into classrooms as ELA teachers, it may be time to renew the ethos and approach of a dialogic 'Evergreening' curriculum so that teachers may be supported in crossing the threshold towards co-authoring and realizing new literacies alongside their students. As was evident throughout this study, teachers and students can learn much from co-authoring the classroom, yet much has to be learned about new literacies and new ways of learning in this digital age.

Emerging from this study: Future research

Extensive and intensive research has been conducted in educational circles that have added significantly to the emerging field of new literacies studies in the past few years. Concerted efforts such as the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation grant-making initiative on digital media and learning have added ongoing insights into born-digital youth's identity formation and textual innovations by researchers including Ito (2008) and MacPherson (2008). Other large-scale studies, such as Stagg-Peterson and McClay's (2007), have been conducted regarding the classroom compositional practices and pedagogy of middle years students and teachers. Dobson and Warwick, as part of the international and interdisciplinary INKE (Implementing New Knowledge Environments) collaborative research project headed by Siemens (2009), have been examining the area of user/reader experiences with a wide range of digital and non-digital textual artifacts. Smaller-scale individual studies, such as those carried out by Rowsell and Burke (2009), have examined the situated digital

reading practices of middle school literacy learners, while Miller (2007) has conducted longitudinal inquiries into the effects of digital video recording in middle and secondary urban school settings.

Findings that are emerging from these recent studies continue to point to, and illuminate the complex relationships between teachers, learners, and expanding notions of text and digital-based textual practices. These studies are also further illustrating the changing nature of classroom-based textual ecologies. These ecologies will likely shift ever more dramatically from page to screen as a broad array of handheld wireless technologies become available and affordable. As the textual ecology of secondary ELA classrooms change, and as multimodal personal screens replace pages, it is important to have an understanding of the impact of this shift to students' literacy and learning. Barton (1994) and later Barton and Hamilton (2000) used an ecological metaphor to explain how these contemporary complex literacies are a set of historically situated practices associated with particular social systems, language and learning, and their related technologies. Their call for an ecological perspective on literacy as rooted in its contexts; and of the complex social relationship of texts and consumers/creators has been adapted by educators and theorists such as: Ito *et al*. (2008) in their MacArthur foundation-funded longitudinal study of students in digital times; Mackey (2002) in her study of children crossing media boundaries; Pantaleo's work with children and contemporary multimodal picture books (2009); and D. Lewis (2001). D. Lewis wrote that in a digital age, page and screen, just as the

"word and image, organism and environment, mutually shape each other" (2001, p. 48). An ecological lens for understanding emergent literacy emphasizes the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments, their interrelatedness and their reciprocity (Pantaleo, 2009). Mackey (2002) notes that "the concept of ecology is a shelter for verbs; it represents an idea whose very force is in dynamism" (p. 181). I believe that conceptual dynamism is crucial for those, such as myself, who are interested in a further empirical-based understanding of changing textual contexts and engagements in schools.

Conclusion

Situated literacy moments happen quickly and continuously, while significant change to literacy instruction seems to occur slowly within the ELA classroom. But change is needed. Shifts in teachers' textual stance and pedagogy are needed to address the many complexities of teaching ELA in recent times. These complexities emerge from a subject area curriculum that struggles to adequately bridge traditional conceptions of text and literacy to new literacies. Complexities also emerge as teachers struggle to find meaningful texts and textual practices to engage their students while seeking equilibrium amongst print-based and digital-based multiliteracies. As was evident in my study's findings, such struggles can create a sense of disorientation, but also tangible pedagogical and textual possibilities for ELA teachers.

Through a broadening of their textual stance and a movement towards co-authoring the (con)texts of the classroom, the three selected teacher-participants in

this study were able to engage, in a critical manner, their students' literacies. In turn, the students influenced their teachers' conceptions of what it means to be literate, and what texts are meaningful to language learning. It was through such a reciprocal teacher/learner relationship that situated moments became part of an ongoing dialogue in the co-construction of word and literate world that was valued by these teachers and their students.

This research is also meant to be dialogic. Through these situated case studies, my findings are meant to add perspective and understandings from rarely examined educational spaces – secondary ELA classrooms – to ongoing dialogues in pre-service teacher education, teacher professional development, and the emergent field of new literacies studies. As part of these dialogues, such findings are also meant to engender new conversations and research questions into the experiences of a generation of born-digital ELA teachers, and further, how changing textual ecologies are affecting the critical literacy practices of students in contemporary ELA classrooms. Such classroom-based empirical inquiries are vital to ongoing literacy education, for as has been evident throughout my dissertation, new literacies and learning are as complex as each student and teacher who crosses the threshold of those classrooms.

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Appendix A

Dear (teacher's name):

I invite you to participate in a research project which will run between the months of November 2005 to April 2006. The purpose of this research is to explore the nature of your experiences as a teacher of adolescents during a time of challenge and change within the English language arts discipline informed by expanding notions of literacy in our digitally-based information society. Data from this study will be used in the completion of my doctoral dissertation and may contribute to my university teaching and to articles, books and/or presentations for teachers, teacher educators, and curricular specialists.

The component of my research that I am inviting you to participate in involves an in-depth exploration of the nature of teaching in a contemporary ELA classroom. This research consists of three components: (a) classroom observations (b) close reading of online/print anecdotal journals written by each teacher during the time frame of this study - expressly for this study, (c) interviews with each teacher and possibly, as the need arises during the study, with three of her/his students.

Your agreement to participate in this study would involve the following:
Classroom observations**:** I will observe one or two senior ELA classroom (Grades 10 to 12) of your choice during five ELA periods chosen by you. The purpose of these observations is for me to develop an understanding of the classroom context, to place literacy products and practices in relation to theory, to later facilitate interviews, and to enrich all of the data through personal observations. I intend for my observation to be minimally intrusive. During my time in the classroom I will be engaged in taking field notes, both observational and analytical, regarding the literacy pedagogy and practices as well as the textual products and processes in the classroom. I will not directly participate in classroom activities. Data collection will not involve any visual or audio taping of classroom activities. **Time commitment: minimal** (select classes/periods for me to observe, preliminary discussion to ensure a smooth observation period enables us to establish boundaries and to discuss/negotiate mutual expectations).

Reflective journals: This journal may take an electronic format such as email or be print-based, depending on individual teacher's preference. They are intended to be spaces in which each teacher can reflect critically on her/his definitions of literacy and how those understandings affect their classroom practices. These practices may include textual choices and processes. I will examine these journals to determine specific issues regarding the individual teacher's experiences. Tentative conclusions will be discussed during interviews. **Time commitment is dependent upon each individual teacher's writing habits and content choices; entries may be numerous and involve deep reflective detail and description, or they may be few and involve anecdotal re-tellings of particularly poignant teaching events or moments.**

Interviews: The purpose of the interviews is for me to clarify my understandings of your experiences as an ELA teacher. **Time commitment: 3 to 4 hours over the course of the study.** (Times can be negotiated to best suit each teacher.) I hope to conduct three interviews, although the need may arise for an additional interview. The first interview will focus on background information and will probe your beliefs about literacy practices

and pedagogy. The second interview will explore your teaching practices and experiences using my classroom observations and your reflective journal entries as a starting point for discussion. The third and any further interview will broader and deepen my understanding of your particular experiences as an ELA teacher in a time of challenging and changing literacies.

In addition to interviewing you, I possibly would also like to interview two of your students. The purpose of these interviews is for me to clarify my understanding of their literacy practices and products in your classroom, as well as their opinions and understandings of the course. Time commitment for your students would be approximately an hour each. Student participants for these interviews will be selected by me at some point as the need arises during the study. Interviews will be scheduled after students provide letters of consent.

If you agree to participate in this study, my commitments to you include the following:
At any time, you or any of your students retain the right to withdraw from this study whether temporarily or permanently. Should you choose to opt out or withdraw at any time I will stop conducting research in your class. Any data collected to that point will be destroyed and will not be used for the purpose of this study. You may also choose to withdraw your consent for the use of any data after its collection. To withdraw, you need only to inform either the researcher or his supervisors, Dr. Ingrid Johnston or Dr. Jill McClay, of your intent. Should you wish to withdraw, you must do so prior to the completion of the final document. Once the research document has been finalized and granted approval by the University of Alberta, you can no longer withdraw from the study.

If any of your students choose not to participate in this study, I will not take field notes regarding any of that student's interactions or comments. Students who agree to participate in this study will also retain the right to opt out of the study at any time before the final document has been approved by the University of Alberta. Any data directly relating to that student will be removed from the research database.
I will protect the identities and confidentiality of all those involved in this study. Pseudonyms will be used for both individuals and the schools in which they either teach or study. Any identifying information will not be used in this report.

Please contact me (jln4@ualberta.ca or 468-3334) or my advisors, Dr. Ingrid Johnston (ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca or 492-3751) and Dr. Jill McCLay (jill.mcclay@ualberta.ca or 492- 0968) with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

James Nahachewsky

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Dear Student,

My name is James Nahachewsky, I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a research project that I am conducting in your English language arts (ELA) classroom. The purpose of my research is to explore three selected teachers' experiences while teaching English language arts in today's digitally-based society.

Your teacher has permitted me to use his/her classroom as a site in which to collect information for my study. I will collect information using the following methods: observations/note-taking and interviews. If you agree to participate, you will permit me to take notes about your oral and written activities and work in class. The purpose of these notes is to record information regarding literacy practices and products in your ELA class.

I may also need to interview up to three students in your class. You may choose to, or not choose to, participate in this part of the study. The interview will last approximately one half hour. Its purpose is to clarify my understandings of your written and oral activities and work in the class, and your opinions on the English language arts course. These interviews will be audio-recorded by me. The audio-recordings will be transcribed into writing by me as well. Transcriptions will be returned to you for you to review. Once you have reviewed the transcripts, given your approval or suggested changes, and returned them to me, I will analyze them for further understanding.

If you agree to take part in this study, your responses and information will be kept completely confidential. A pseudonym for each participant will be used throughout. Your name, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any papers or presentations in which this information is reported.

If you decide not to participate in this study that decision will not affect your English grades in any way. If you chose not to participate, no notes will be taken regarding your interactions in class. As well, if you do decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without a consequence of any sort. If you chose to withdraw from the study, no information you have provided will be used in any reporting of the data.

I hope that you will agree to take part in this study. Your opinions and experiences in class are important. Information you provide will assist future teachers and researchers in understanding the nature of teaching ELA in contemporary times.

If you agree, would you and your parent/guardian please sign and return the attached sheet to your English teacher as soon as possible.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact me by email at jln4@ualberta.ca or by phone at 468-3334. You may also contact my faculty supervisors: Dr. Ingrid Johnston (ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca or 492-3751) and Dr. Jill McClay (jill.mcclay@ualberta.ca. or 492-0968)

Sincerely,

James Nahachewsky

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is James Nahachewsky, I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. I have approval from the classroom teacher, school administration and Division's superintendent to conduct research in this English language arts (ELA) classroom regarding the teacher's experiences while teaching ELA in today's digitally-based society. I am writing to ask your permission to conduct this research which involves your son's/daughter's/ward's participation as a member of this class.

If you and your son/daughter/ward agree to their participation in this study, he/she will be permit me to take notes regarding his/her oral and written activities and work in this class. The purpose of these notes is to collect information regarding the literacy practices and products in contemporary ELA classrooms. I will be observing their class six to ten times during the term.

In addition to observing the class, I plan to interview three students from the class. If your child/ward chooses to participate in this element of the study, he/she will agree to participate in about an hour long interview with me. The purpose of the interview is for me to clarify my understanding of his/her literacy practices and products in this ELA classroom.

If your child/ward agrees to take part in this study, information provided by him/her will be kept completely confidential. Also, pseudonyms will be used in the reporting of the study.

If your child/ward decides not to participate in this study that decision will not affect his/her English grades, or standing in the class in any way, and I will not take any notes of your child's/ward's interactions in the class. As well, if your child/ward does decide to participate in this study, he/she is free to withdraw from this study at any time without consequence of any sort. If he/she chooses to withdraw, no information he/she has provided will be used in the study.

I hope that you and your son/daughter/ward will agree to have them take part in this study. Students' experiences and opinions are important. Information that your son/daughter/ward may provide will assist future teachers and researchers in understanding the nature of teaching English language arts in challenging and changing times.

If you agree, would both you and your child/ward please sign and return the attached sheet to their English teacher as soon as possible. My classroom observations will not begin, and your son/daughter/ward will not become involved in this research until your signed consent forms are returned.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact me by email at jln4@ualberta.ca or by phone at 468-3334. You may also contact my faculty supervisors: Dr. Ingrid Johnston (ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca or 492-3751) and Dr. Jill McClay (jill.mcclay@ualberta.ca or 492-0968).

Sincerely,

James Nahachewsky

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Sample Consent Form

I, ____, the parent/guardian of ____________________________________ consent to the participation of my son/daughter/ward in research concerning the nature of teaching English language arts in contemporary times. (Please circle the sentence(s) that correspond to the type of consent you wish to grant. You may agree to both the observation and the interview, or to the observation only)

* I agree to permit my son/daughter/ward to participate in the classroom observation component of this study.
* I agree to permit my son/daughter/ward to participate in the interview component of this research.

I realize that he/she may refuse to answer any questions and that he/she may withdraw from the research at any time. I also realize that his/her name will never be used and that the research will have no impact on class marks.

____

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date ____

Student section

I, ______________________________________, agree to participate in the research about the nature of teaching ELA in contemporary times. (Please circle the sentence(s) which the correspond to the type of consent you wish to grant. You may agree to both the observation and the interview, or to the observation only)

* I agree to participate in the classroom observation component of this study.

* I agree to participate in the interview component of this research.

I realize that I may refuse to answer any particular question asked by the researcher and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I also realize that my name will never be used in this study and that this research will have no impact on my class marks.

____

Signature of student

Date ____

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Appendix B

Interview protocol – Teacher participants

First Interview: semi-structured (face-to-face)

Broad Questions:

1) What are some of the challenges that affect you as an ELA teacher?

2) What are some of the changes that you have witnessed/experienced during your time as an ELA teacher?

The following probe questions may be used in light of the teacher's response to the initial 'grand tour' question:

1) How has "being literate" changed since you were a child?

2) How do you think your present definition/understanding of literacy affects your classroom practice?

Second Interview

Broad Questions:

1**)** Tell me about your best moment as a teacher in this class to date.

2) Tell me about your most frustrating moment in this class to date.

Some, or all of the following probe questions may be asked in light of the teacher's responses to the initial broad questions:

1) In your opinion, who knows more about digital-based literacy practices – you or your students? Why is this important? Does this affect your authority?

2) Do you use things like email, dvds, digital cameras outside of school?

3) What, in your opinion, are some of the interesting possibilities afforded by digital technologies?

4) What, in your opinion or experience, are some of the obstacles to using new technologies in the classroom?

Final Interview

Broad Questions:

1) Tell me about the best experience that you have had in this class.

2) Tell me about the most frustrating experience that you have had so far in this class.

Probe questions which may be used in light of the student's response to the initial broad questions:

1) What are some of the influences on your teaching practice?

2) What carries the most weight in your daily tasks (POS, assessment, culture of department/school, students)?

3) How much time do you spend outside of school hours on your work (reading, viewing, listening, writing, prepping…)?

4) What sort of practices/experiences outside of school affect your textual choice in the classroom?

5) Do think that your students' out-of school literacy practices enhance or interfere with what they do in your classroom? Explain.

6) Do you feel that you, as a teacher, or your students have an impact on the development of the ELA curriculum?

7) What do you think is important for pre-service teachers to know about teaching ELA in contemporary times?

Interview protocol – student participants

(1) What do you watch, listen to, read in your spare time?

(2) Does what you do in this ELA class (reading, writing, viewing, listening, etc.) affect what you do in your daily life (in relation to reading, writing, viewing, etc.)?

(3) When you do your homework, what kind of space do you work in? Do you multi-task (eg. go online, read, have tv or music on)?

(4) Do you think that your literacy practices outside of school are more important than what you do in this class? Why or why not?

(5) Who do you think knows more, or is better at communicating and using digital technologies such as cell phones, computers, dvds, etc. – you or your teacher?

(6) Does this affect your teacher's authority in the classroom?

(7) What kinds of literacy practices and products do you think you will be doing/using in five years from now?

(8) What do you think is the most important thing for new ELA teachers to know?