University of Alberta

Straddling the Cultural Divide: Second Generation South Asian Canadian Secondary Students Negotiate Cultural Identity Through Contemporary Postcolonial Fiction

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate the purpose of this research to my three daughters. You are the reason I began and most importantly, finished this project. Without your passion for reading, this research would have lost purpose a short time after it began. I hope that one day you will be able to read my words and understand the deep passion I have for making the world a better place for you. This mentally exhausting journey was equally exhilarating. I have raised the bar high for you three and expect you to raise it higher for yourselves. When I started this journey, I had no idea the places it would take me.

I would also like to I dedicate this work to my parents. I am who I am because of your values and hard work. Your resiliency and courage to come to a new country, to take risks and face hardships was all for your children. Mom, your decision to pursue your dream of becoming an administrator against all odds taught me that nothing in life is too hard but only a challenge. Dad, your passion for teaching and dedication for constant learning taught me to push through and better myself. At the times I needed gentle nudging, you were both there to guide me to finish.

To my sisters, you gave me the emotional strength that only comes with the knowledge of what it means to have competing urgencies as mothers: work and family. Your presence in my life is a blessing and a curse; you continue to believe in my abilities to achieve my wildest dreams and you both kept me accountable for those achievements.

And finally, I dedicate this work to my husband. The respect for my intellect and belief in my capability to pursue this behemoth task me is the light in my soul. I completed this research only because of your unwavering support. You took me for dinner one evening in early October shortly after beginning the program and I was ready to give you a well-prepared speech about how I had made a mistake beginning this program; it was too difficult to do with young children.

You explained to me quite simply, that quitting was not an option.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of second-generation South Asian Canadian students in secondary English classrooms as they encounter the contemporary postcolonial text and film entitled *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003; Nair, 2007) and discuss cultural identity through reader response. The three main questions this study addresses are: What does it mean to re-think how we teach English language arts through a postcolonial lens? In what ways do cultural identities affect how and what we read/view? How does text selection affect a students' sense of cultural identity?

Framed by ongoing debates regarding the continued dependence on the Western literary canon in contemporary secondary classrooms (Johnston & Mangat 2012; Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2004), this study is timely because for the first time in Canadian history, South Asians are now the country's largest visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2010).

This study is framed by transactional theory, postcolonial literary theories, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of identity. Pertinent literature on postcolonial literary theory and critical multiculturalism reveals that the connection between literature and the students' cultural world needs to be further explored (Bannerji, 2000; Spivak 1999). The seminal works of Bhabha (1994), Said (1990) and Spivak (1999) have yet to be fully applied in educational contexts, thus constituting a gap in curriculum theory limiting the current scope of theorizing around the impact of cultural identity on reading and viewing experiences (Shariff, 2008).

I used a case-study approach with seven South Asian Canadian students in an English 20 IB and an English 30 class from a large urban Western Canadian high school. Using qualitative data analysis (Campbell, McNamara & Gilroy, 2004) the data suggest the value of using contemporary postcolonial texts in a high school English language arts

classroom for helping South Asian students to address and make sense of issues pertaining to the complex nature of their bicultural identities.

This research addresses the need for a more critical understanding of Bhabha's (1994) liminal notion of identity. My study extends his ideas in order to better understand the struggles of young people in their evolving cultural and national identities, and the implications of these struggles for literacy activities and text selection in English language arts classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to begin by thanking my academic advisor, Dr. Ingrid Johnston for giving me the confidence to believe that above all else, my research interests were important and worth pursuing. You pushed me to challenge myself, put my thinking and writing out there, publish, present and teach. I am humbled by your grace and the ability you have to offer your intellectual ideas and knowledge in a way that allowed me to absorb and learn my own insights. Thank you for providing me with so many opportunities to challenge myself, better myself and teach me anything and everything you could. My thinking, beliefs and perspectives on education, equity and diversity are all directly influenced by the experience of working with you.

Dr. Marg Iveson, thank you for all the coffees, lunches and baked goods we enjoyed during lunch breaks, pep talks and 'just because' meetings. Your wise and gentle encouragement was not only comforting, but also good for my soul. When I missed my mom the most, a coffee with you was all I needed to remember why I was pursuing this crazy dream. The mentoring you provided while teaching together made me a better teacher. The stories you shared provided me with vision and foresight and to begin to make sense of my own identity as an academic.

After working with Dr. jagodzinski, I had the confidence to feel like I had a good command of some very dense theoretical concepts. Meeting you and discussing ideas with you made me excited to try on new theories and find my way through Zizek and Lacan. You helped me to see what I had to read next to challenge my existing beliefs and to pose important –albeit hard- but important questions that still have me thinking as I pen these last few words. The depth of your intellect is truly amazing, I feel grateful to have worked with you as I finalized my research agenda in your course after your encouragement to pursue the pilot study, which so heavily influenced my thinking.

To Dr. T. Carson and Dr. D. Smith, my research base and interests were developed in your courses. I deeply respect and admire your teaching, knowledge and beliefs. Your constant encouragement and support for my work has carried

me through to the end. At the times I felt like I could not finish, I picked up my course work and read through your comments, notes and ideas and was immediately re-invigorated with new thinking and ideas.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Dear Reader,

I am addressing you as a person—not just as a reader, but as a person who happens to be reading this text. You picked up this manuscript for a reason. There is a story of how you got here. Perhaps you are reading this because you have to. Maybe someone suggested this reading for you. Maybe you are thumbing through it because you need ideas for your own research.

Whatever the reason, you are here with me. My intention for the tone I take in writing this manuscript is to feel as though I am talking *to* you, like a conversation, over coffee, in a noisy cafe. I feel this style is important to honour as it mimics the environment in which important conversations take place about complicated, ineffable stuff that we call "life" and "culture" and everything in between. My participants and I were able to discuss and decipher some amazing ideas about school, about being young in Canada, and I gained some deep insights with this approach. This approach takes the formality away from complicated conversations—it allows one to reach the person on the other end of the message in a deep and personal way.

You are reading my story with a story of your own to tell. You have stories behind you, waiting for you, stories you may never finish.

In broaching the subject of the impact of schooling on cultural identities I begin with myself as positioned subject. G. S. Dei (1999), among many others, has stressed the importance of understanding the production and reproduction of knowledge and social meanings from diverse and variant vantage points. Anti-racism educators, activists, and students engage and negotiate on social issues with a set of ideological and political assumptions about the nature and functioning of society. These assumptions also serve as our lens through which we view and interpret the world we live in. Our knowledge is positional, relational, contextual, and dynamic. Our personal journeys and stories reflect how we see the world and how we structure and engage in communicative practices (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Our political and cultural assumptions also interfere and influence how we each structure our pedagogical ideas about our ideal educational visions.

You are reading my story *through* your own story. The lens through which you read and make meaning is coloured by your own background knowledge and experiences, by your race, your culture, your religious affiliation(s) or non-affiliations. The fact that I brought this to your attention makes a difference in how you read the rest of my story. And let's face it, we all judge—it's a part of life. You will judge and compare and rate my story against your own or that of a student in your class or that of your neighbour or of your "visible minority"[1] friend. It's a part of human nature and it's an important part of how we operate in the world. Maybe you'll nod your head in agreement, you might cry, perhaps you'll laugh. I hope you will identify with

[1] I hesitate to use the term visible minority as it emphasizes difference, however, hyphenated cultural and political identities infuse multicultural discourse and a problem of naming arises. Officially, since the inception of official multiculturalism, the term denotes a constructed identity based on skin colour and refers to the non-white people living in Canada.

some aspects of my experience and those of my participants.

This is my intention for this manuscript; to take you along the perimeter of the landscape in my story—you can walk along the edge of the perimeter if you like or you can peek over and allow yourself a glimpse into a world you may be unfamiliar with. I'd like you to think of reading this manuscript as an attempt to gain insight into the lives of some of my students who allowed me the chance to see myself as others see me. Indeed, this (un)familiarity with myself made me feel strange. Unsettled.

Indeed the writing of this manuscript was also unsettling. Between naps, soccer practices, teaching classes, volunteering . . . as I sat at my computer in snippets and long stretches, I began to see connections between how we make sense of things. Unsettling information comes to us at different points in our lives; stop lights, on the morning run, cooking dinner, coffee with a friend. It is at these moments when questions came to me—questions that interrogate and challenge my own thinking. Questions you will see in footnotes along the perimeter of this manuscript. Only when we gain this view of ourselves—unsettled—can we move towards understanding.

This unsettling encounter with the other is what I invite you to attend.

I have one wish for you: by turning each page of this manuscript, you will begin to examine the possibilities for opening up spaces to think about your own stories and perhaps, the stories of your students which can be used as a starting point to thinking about education through a postcolonial lens. I also hope that today begins an attempt to deconstruct the notion of cultural identities in order to explore the role of "race," colour, culture, and situational factors in cultural identity development for the complicated youth of today.

> **certain awkward truths.** For instance, although he can understand his mother tongue, speak it fluently, he cannot read or write with even modest proficiency. On trips to India, his American-accented English is a source of endless amusement to his relatives, and when he and Sonia speak to each other, aunts and uncles and cousins always shake their heads in disbelief. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 118)

Stories can tell us many things about ourselves—what we are interested in and how we move through the world . . . and everyone has a story. Autobiography and my own cultural and educational experiences have played key roles in defining this research and my teaching. My research explores the role of culturally-infused literary and film texts in the life experiences of second-generation[2] South Asian[3] Canadian youth. The study of English literature requires an exploration of meaning that is inextricably personal and unique to each individual and creates a powerful relationship between the reader or viewer and the text s/he engages with. Reader response theories of reading suggest that a dialogue develops between the reader and the text in which meaning is made (Iser 1974, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978, 1983). The consideration for the teaching of English language arts is the understanding that the meaning of texts (written or visual) for individuals is highly complex and completely contextual, dependent on life experience. Life experiences are y based on race, culture, and language and each individual brings these experiences to intersect with the ideas offered by the text. Race, culture, and language, I argue, are often negated or all together dismissed in the selection, reading, and interpretation of texts by educators, carving out a huge margin of the population of students in today's classrooms.

You are perhaps wondering "why Brown kids"? Of all the pan-ethnic/multicultural/visible-minority groups (whatever you want to call these labels) "why Brown kids"? For the first time in Canadian history, South Asians

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[2] See the section entitled "Second Generation South Asian Canadians" to understand why I focus on the second-generation and what exactly is meant by the term 'second-generation'.

[3] "South Asian" refers to people who have a historical and cultural connection to the South Asian subcontinent; India, Pakistan, Republic of Myanmar [formerly Burma] Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and those who migrated from the South Asian subcontinent to East Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, the Caribbean and Fiji (Buchigani, Indra, & Srivastiva, 1985; Handa, 2003; Henry 2006).

have become Canada's largest visible minority group, making up 28% of the nation's visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2010). Consequently, I argue that South Asian cultural identities and the interplay of a Eurocentric and colonially infused, patriarchal school system are critical issues for Canadian English educators to consider (Shariff, 2008).

> Now let me tell you why.
>
> I grew up in a predominantly white, upper class city in central Alberta. Though born and raised in Canada, my national identity was constantly subject to incessant scrutiny, doubt and racial insults. My family was one of the very few visible minorities who had settled here in August of 1965. At school, I led two very different lives: I was 'Canadian' at school and at home I was a "good Muslim girl." There was no way I felt comfortable 'just being myself' at school. All I wanted was to fit in with the other girls. I was well aware that I was never quite brown enough and never quite white enough; I was 'Othered' in my own community. Everyday I walked the tightrope of cultural identity. (Shariff, 2002, p. 28)

The memories and experiences that I carry with me from my years growing up in a monochromatic city have shaped my experiences as a student, as a teacher, and now as a researcher. Secondary school was especially difficult for me. It was not because I was a poor student. Like many non-White kids, my "identity" was constantly questioned, a funny thing for a young adult to have to worry about. I wasn't Brown enough and I was never White enough. Everywhere I go people STILL ask me, sheepishly—"you look so *exotic* . . . what *are* your parents? Where are you from . . . like really from . . . like originally. . . . Oh really? You don't even look Brown!"

This research is an attempt to deconstruct cultural identities to explore the role of the unconscious and situational factors in cultural identity development and how these unconscious factors affect our reading, viewing, and reader response experiences in the age of changing and becoming. Hermeneutic, phenomenological, psychological, and narrative studies of reading (Britzman, 1994; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Hunsberger, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1983; Sumara,

2003; Van Manen, 1994) describe reading as a recursive process of meaning making where experiences from life inform experiences with text which further impact life experiences and together become a part of a reader's evolving identity. I will discuss how I arrived at the research questions through a series of inquiry-based experiences with a pilot study that explored the role of literary and film texts in the experiences of four adult second-generation South Asian Canadians. I begin this research with an investigation into how, where, who, and why I am because these questions frame what I believe about education and how I came to be here writing the story of my research journey thus far.

CHAPTER 1: Insight

I'll start with a sheepish confession: as a child, I didn't "love" to read. Even as an adult, I don't read for pleasure that often either. It seems strange to think that an English educator does not *love* reading. I *like* to read when I can—but I don't love to read. I do love reading to my children and all three of them love reading. So, where did my "unlove" for reading come from? As I reflected on the stories of my experiences as a young student and on becoming a teacher, I often encountered students that reminded me of myself, which enabled my mind to go to the places where I could consider the importance of the *why* of my stories. What did I discover? I realized that it's important to think about my students as "people" and not "pupils" and why I should feel compelled to think more seriously about the *why* of *their* stories. How did these students come to be sitting in my classroom in front of me. What goes on before they get to my classroom and after they leave my classroom ? Which hat are they wearing today? What part of their *self* is being shorn away each time they come to school? As I began to think about how my *selves* as a Canadian-born South Asian were (re)produced through the social interactions, cultural, familial, and educational experiences of my past within the particular context in which I found myself struggling, I continued to ask myself "why don't I **love** reading"? How can I help students like myself reconnect to literature and get more out of their English language arts experience?

My research interest is intimately intertwined with my experience as a second-generation South Asian Canadian female—which is a unique experience in itself because there is little Canadian research that attempts to articulate this experience. Now one may argue that this may serve as a limitation to my research orientation or even to my interpretations and findings; but in the section entitled "Methodology," I argue that the topic of my research is intimately wedded to my own experiences as a second generation South Asian Canadian. The section entitled "The Significance of Canada's Shifting Identities" also

explains why the label "second-generation" is important for educators to consider.

I really did not enjoy secondary English language arts. Much of what we read were texts from the school's "vault" of canonized texts which had no resonance with my life, with my history, with my cultural values; there was no opportunity to include my own experiences in relation to what I was reading as they simply did not match. I felt like a fraud most of the time; I had to fake answers and pad my arguments with empty reasoning void of feeling, passion, or personal connection—all the qualities teachers look for in a good reader response piece, everything I never felt. I always struggled to articulate the "right" answer. I couldn't "lose myself" in any of the texts we read, always an outsider to class discussions. I was a very strong student, I received exemplary grades, but I always felt detached from the act of reading. Now an adult, watching my daughters become entranced as they devour each page of the books they read, I wish I could have discovered the pleasures of losing oneself in a text much earlier in life.

My first teaching assignment was in a very monochromatic city. As an English language arts educator, I felt constant pressure to "teach what everyone else in the department was teaching." So I did . . . for the first few years of my career. I couldn't escape the anxiety around wanting to suggest to my colleagues that "perhaps we should introduce more contemporary texts from a *wider* variety of genres?" I did not want to alienate or lose the few visible minority students I had in my English classes. I wanted my students to lose themselves in what we read and passionately enjoy responding to texts. I seemed to be the only one who thought that teaching the texts *I* studied 15 years ago seemed to be a little narrow in scope. I then began to wonder if maybe I had chosen the wrong profession. Why did I seem to question everything about what was being taught in our department; why was it such a big deal to me? In retrospect, I realize that my first few years of teaching also consisted of being a full time grad student in an M. Ed. program. Graduate studies forces you to question and re-examine your

own philosophies, deeply entrenched beliefs, and teaching practices. Essentially, it forced me to go to places in my memory of my own experiences as a student. My experiences in my first round of graduate studies are what influenced my first few years as a young teacher, my first encounters with students as a *real teacher*—students whose first and last names I remember to this day. This first round of graduate studies is also what created a need to question a lot of things that were happening around me in the schools I was teaching in.

Shortly after completing graduate studies in Ontario, I moved to Alberta and decided to take a break from teaching. I was frustrated. I took a break for about 2 years but quickly returned to the profession after being offered a position to teach in a junior high. I enjoyed the challenge of the a new grade and thought I could maybe put to use some of the social justice, equity-oriented, and anti-racist pedagogy I had studied so intently in my masters degree. However, it was very early into my assignment that I felt my orientation to education was "too out there" for the Alberta context. It only took a year before the aggravation set in again and I decided I needed to return to graduate studies to try to gain some much needed clarity.

As I began the second year of doctoral studies, I was trying hard to narrow the scope of my research. As I was reading the paper one morning, I came across the most recent results of the 2006 Canadian Census published in *The Globe and Mail* (Jiminez, 2007) which indicated minority immigrants are slower to integrate into Canadian society than their White, European counterparts, and felt less Canadian. According to this landmark report, multiculturalism doesn't work as well for non-Whites. The study was based on an analysis of 2002 Statistics Canada data and found that the children of visible-minority immigrants exhibited a more profound sense of exclusion than their parents. Furthermore, visible-minority newcomers, and their offspring, were less likely to identify as Canadians, trust their fellow citizens, and vote than White immigrants from Europe. The findings also suggested that Canada's official policy on interethnic relations was not working as well for newer immigrants or

for their children, who hail largely from China, South Asia, and the Caribbean. Canada's identity as a multicultural nation was changing very rapidly in ways that were indicative of a Canada that would look very different over the next decade.


GREATER TORONTO EDITION – WEATHER: CLOUDY WITH LIGHT RAIN, HIGH 8. MAP AND DETAILS, S5 S&P/TSX COMPOSITE 12,519.86 ▲ 62.35

Beautiful home

Bold decision

Bizarre return

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ■ FOUNDED 1844 ■ GLOBEANDMAIL.COM ■ FRIDAY, JANUARY 12, 2007

Visible-minority immigrants and their children identify less and less with the country, report says

How Canadian are you?

Abdul Razzaq Qureshi of Halifax

Joan Chang of Vancouver

Bush takes fire for Iraq 'blunder'

Six countries, 18 days, $12,764 and still no report

Speaking two tongues helps lick dementia, study finds

The I-can't-believe-I-ever-got-by-without-it device.

TELUS

Figure 1: The Globe and Mail, 12/01/07

These statements were made in reference to the large scale Ethnic Diversity survey which included several indicators of social cohesion such as a sense of belonging in Canada, trust in others, self-identification as Canadians, acquisition of citizenship, life satisfaction, volunteering, and voting patterns. The authors of the large scale study (Reitz & Bannerjee, 2008) conducted out of the University of Toronto suggested that visible minority children of immigrants still perceived high levels of racial discrimination and had a greater sense of alienation in Canadian society. I wondered if these changes had an impact on the way Canadian educators approached the Canadian curriculum. I thought about how I felt about my experiences as a student. The Alberta English language arts curriculum has traditionally excluded the experiences of people like me, second

generation South Asians Canadians. I didn't want the focus of my research to be to find a better way or a "cure" (Taubman, 2000, p. 20) for teaching English language arts. If I made the assumption that the ELA curriculum was something that needed to be fixed, the very hope for something better, perhaps unattainable, would keep me from being mindful of the reasons why this topic was important. Thinking about my position in relation to the English language arts curriculum along with my history of not loving reading I share my experiences as a "student-turned-teacher-turned-graduate-student-turned-teacher educator" with you as I believe that it will help to point out a clearer path to question how contemporary postcolonial[4] texts can help address the gap between how a text influences and redefines possibilities for how we conceive and teach literacies for students in today's classrooms. Although the choices of texts are more varied now than when I was a student, many teachers still have had little preparation for working in culturally diverse classrooms and little exposure to existing critiques of multicultural education. In two studies conducted by Ingrid Johnston and Jyoti Mangat with experienced and beginning English language arts teachers who expressed an interest in broadening their text selections, the researchers found that most of these good intentions quickly evaporated in the classroom:

> Participants in both studies spoke of a desire for curricular and pedagogical change that appeared to be confounded by the structural realities of life in schools. These constraints included minimal resource budgets, the force of literary tradition and a lack of experience with teaching culturally distant, unfamiliar texts. (Johnston & Mangat, 2012, p. 50)

In my own experience as a teacher and a teacher educator, many of my colleagues and my pre-service students still believe that including a

[4] Postcolonial literatures include countries in Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka. Literature from the USA can also be considered as postcolonial, but because of its current position as a world power and its past neo-colonizing role, its postcolonial nature has not been commonly acknowledged, but its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for postcolonial literatures everywhere.

"multicultural text" here and there is enough to "cover" the multicultural "stuff." They also seem to want "The Teacher's Guide to Implementing Multicultural Content" and don't feel confident enough to embark on creating their own classroom resources. According to many theorists including Bannerji (2000), Razack (2001, 2002, 2004), and Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001), teachers, through their choice of literary texts and manners in which they respond to students in classroom discussions, may inadvertently make students feel they are invisible and insignificant and that their differences are irrelevant.

Research Questions: Finely Tuned

Presented with the unique opportunity to re-define myself in my late 20s during my second round of graduate school, the *newly-coined* category of "South Asian Canadian" offered some much needed space in which I could ruminate and participate in the work of defining myself as a part of a large and diverse community—a community that I was not a part of growing up and thus served as the impetus for my Masters' and now doctoral research. Through my doctoral work with South Asian Canadian high school students I discovered that there is a very conscious narrative to be told by children of the second (and subsequent) generation(s) of South Asian Canadians about the re-creation and renewal of cultural traditions and the meaning of identity to these youth through the use of contemporary postcolonial literature and film. I argue that postcolonial literature and films can be crucial vehicles of cultural fusion, renewal, and transmission and also seem to be misunderstood forms of cultural expression in which today's youth actively participate.

I selected the text and film entitled *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003; Nair, 2008) to use as a focal point for discussion in my research project. I will tell you more about the details and particulars of the project in the next few pages but I thought it would be salient to share some of the conversations I had with my research participants in which some critical questions emerged, most importantly, questions raised by the students very early on in the project. I have chosen to

share these questions in the introduction of this manuscript because I think it will help you to understand the issues that are pertinent to the students and how they negotiate the tightrope they walk everyday between their home lives and school lives. I thought it would be useful to share an interesting comment raised by one of my participants, Kamani, as we discussed what she would like to ask her teachers if she ever had the chance:

> *Did you ever wonder how did I got here? Did you assume I was born here? Do you think I immigrated here? If I did immigrate here, did you assume I did so because I was "fleeing" from a "war-torn" country or did you think I came by choice? Even if I was were born here, how do you think I experience life in the classroom as opposed to the White kid sitting across from me, or even my Chinese friend who constantly gets mistaken for a Japanese girl, or even the Brown girl in my physics class whose parents are originally from the Caribbean (but have been Canadian citizens for the past 20 years!), but she's never been to the Caribbean and did you know she actually resents being called African-American because she was BORN IN CANADA and she has NO ROOTS from Africa!!! And she's not Black! Because her skin is brown…!* (Kamani)

These statements made by Kamani at the very outset of the research forced me to examine the possibilities for the potential of our own personal stories and the stories of our students to be used as a starting point for an investigation into a critical examination of second (and subsequent) generation(s) of South Asian Canadian identities. When I first embarked on this study, I sought to answer the following questions: What are the experiences of Canadian-born, second generation students in secondary English language arts classrooms? How does our cultural identity affect how we read/view, what we read/view, and what sense we make of what we read/view? However, as I worked through my data, my questions changed and became pedagogical questions evoked by my students in response to the text and the film:

What does it mean to re-think how we teach English language arts through a postcolonial lens?

What are the experiences of Canadian-born, second generation students in Canadian secondary English language arts classrooms?

How do our cultural identities affect how we read/view, what we read/view, and what sense we make of what we read/view?

How does a teacher's choice of literary text affect her/his students' sense of cultural identity?

I thought about how my experience as a student-turned-teacher-turned-graduate-student-turned-teacher educator has brought me full circle to investigate the reasons why I didn't love reading and why it was important to me to help educators to find more equitable and socially-just approaches and methods to teach English language arts. The object of my anxiety (my unlove for reading) seemed to also be the root of my desire to become an English teacher but there were so many gaps in trying to articulate my experience. Once I read *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) it was like the clouds parted and I gained clarity. Everything—my experiences, my feelings, the questions, the uncertainty about my research agenda—came into focus and became sharper as I turned each page.

> Though substitute teachers at school always pause, looking apologetic when they arrive at his name on the roster, forcing Gogol to call out, before even being summoned, "That's me," teachers in the school system know not to give it a second thought. (Lahiri, 2003, pp. 66–67)

Research Orientation

As found in the writings of the Frankfurt School, the term *praxis* has meant, roughly, a transformative mode of perception-in-action

> an effort to reconstellate sense data, propelling us towards a reinsertion of our identities and practices that are reciprocally determined in such indefinite networks as above, in the flows and unformed intensities beneath systems of articulation in the social field, with a view not to recover any essence or discover any truth, but to open up the fastness in which thought takes refuge, provoking by that same parting novel, non-humanist stirrings. (Roy, 2003, p. 1)

The images and rhythms of our stories are rooted in our experience as cultural beings. My research orientation and methodology are rooted in qualitative inquiry and are firmly rooted in praxis. According to Robert K. Yin (2003), "the first and most important condition for differentiating among the various research strategies is to identify the type of research question being asked" (p. 7). Because many of my research questions are how and why questions, a qualitative case study was the preferred approach in examining contemporary events when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. Denzin and Lincoln (in Merriam, 2002) explain, "Qualitative research does not belong to a single discipline. Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own" (p. 6). My research process was inductive; I gathered my data to build concepts, hypotheses, and theories rather than attempting to deductively derive postulates or hypotheses to be tested.

I believe that my research orientation and questions are most suitably matched with a postmodern perspective. In contrast to the "modern" world where reality is predictable, where research is scientific, and where there are assumed to be universal norms for truth and morality, "the postmodern world is one of uncertainty, fragmentation diversity and plurality" (Merriam, 2002, p. 10). There, multiple interpretations and "truths," and all generalizations, hierarchies, typologies, and binaries are contested, problematized, or challenged. Postmodern research thus challenges the form and categories of traditional qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). A postmodern research report does not follow the

traditional research report format; it has its own rhythm and structure. Nor does it follow a traditional mode of data analysis.

Within qualitative research, I have selected case study as the most appropriate approach for my research questions. Robert E. Stake (2000) defines the case study as less of a methodological choice than a "choice of what to be studied" (p. 435). The "what" is an integrated and bounded system with its emphasis on the object(s) rather than the process; "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995b, p. xi). By concentrating upon a single phenomenon or entity, the case study approach seeks to describe the phenomenon in depth. The case has a finite quality about it either in terms of time, space (location), and components comprising the case (number of participants). The case study shares many of the attributes of other forms of qualitative research: the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive.

Stake (1995b) discusses the various types of case study, including the intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study. He defines the intrinsic case study as an instance where "we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we have a need to learn about that particular case. We have an intrinsic interest in the case" (p. 3). An instrumental case study starts with a research question, a puzzlement, and a feeling that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case. This type of case study is used to understand something else; understanding is instrumental to accomplishing something other than understanding this particular inquiry.

A collective case study is used when several cases, similar in nature, are studied. Each case study is instrumental to learning more about the research question, but there will be important coordination between individual studies. The reason for the distinction among these three kinds of case studies, Stake

(2000) notes, is "not because it will be useful to sort case studies into these three categories (often we cannot decide) but because the methods we will use will be different, depending on intrinsic and instrumental interests" (p. 4). The more the intrinsic interest in the case, the more the researcher will have to restrain his/her curiosities and special interests; therefore the more he/she will try to discern and pursue issues to the case. According to Stake (2000), readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case through the researcher's narrative description. The colourful description in a case study can create an image and what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations. It is the reader not the researcher who determines what can apply to his or her context (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2009) explains how this knowledge transfer works:

> Case researchers like others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationship—and fail to pass along others. They know that the reader too, will add and subtract, invent and shape—reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it . . . more likely to be personally useful. (p. 51)

A case study approach allowed me to understand the complex social phenomena, such as South Asian Canadian adolescent experiences with identity, and still retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events that happened in the classroom and in conversation. I engaged in direct observation of classroom discussions and activities and I interviewed persons involved in the events, and the case study approach enabled me to deal with a full variety of evidence (Yin, 2003). My data consisted of quotes from class discussions, field notes, student journals, open-ended and partially-directed participant interviews, student assignments, and electronic communication (MSN conversations, emails), all of which I will discuss in greater detail throughout the sections of this manuscript.

In light of the dynamic and changing settings of my research, my inquiry questions were constantly revised and re-worked. These investigative questions were not fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomena, which were

assumed to be in positivist, quantitative research (Merriam, 2002). The participants were in constant interaction with their world, and engaged in socially constructing meaning, and thus qualitative research sought to capture the multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that were constantly in flux and changed over time. The nature of my research did not seek to find the answers to the questions mentioned above. These research questions were a road map and set of guidelines intended to keep me on course. As Patton (1985) explains, qualitative research

> is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily but to understand the nature of the setting—what it means for the participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what their world looks like in that particular setting . . . the analysis strives for depth of understanding. (as cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 5)

Methodology

I selected particular methodologies and approaches within qualitative research that were best suited to create an authentic and limitless environment in which my participants were able to express themselves freely. This style served as a starting point of my research and again, is crucial to how my reader interprets this manuscript. As a member of the South Asian Canadian community, I am unable to separate myself from this relationship. As I see it, the role of subjective experience as it pertains to identity is influential in how we come to know things about the world around us. Peshkin makes the case that one's subjectivities "can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their unique qualities joined to the data they have collected" (as cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 5). I am well aware that the human instrument as researcher

has shortcomings and biases that will have an impact on my study. Instead of eliminating these subjectivities, I have tried to identify them throughout this paper as well as in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of my research findings. My experiences as a South Asian Canadian female educator have prompted my interest in researching South Asian Canadian English language arts students. I am fully aware that my gender, culture, race, social class, and life history operate as a lens through which I see the world, and that these subjectivities will influence how others may perceive my research interests. My research interests operate primarily in relation to my culture, which I would define as the predominant signifier. I consider my race, gender, history, and social class (all of which are highly contextual) as being secondary signifiers in this research, therefore placing me in a space where my subjectivity can give meaning to the research.

Why Narrative? Making Meaning of Experience

This journey has taken a shape of its own as a way of understanding human experience. My study is focused on the stories of South Asian Canadian high school students who were at a very interesting and crucial stage of identity development in their lives. Because students of this age live their lives through stories, tell stories, and invest in each other's stories, I felt the need to keep their stories in context to the research and the conversations (see the section entitled "Data Interpretation" for my choices as to why I chose to represent the participants' comments as excerpts as opposed to dedicating a chapter to each participant). Because my own story influenced my research interests I felt that narrative inquiry was a natural fit with this research. In their text, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) address narrative inquiry as a collaboration between teacher and researcher over time in many social milieu. All narrative inquiry occurs in the midst of living; it is the living, telling, re-telling, re-living, and retelling of stories and experiences that make up people's lives. It is highly social and highly

individual at the same time. In essence, it is stories lived and told. For Connelly and Clandinin, the key to narrative inquiry is the process of transitioning from field texts to research texts. Whereas the field text contains the stories, a research text involves analysis and interpretation and a researcher must consider the way narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 121); they suggest "we need to continually ask questions about the way narrative inquiry illuminates the social and theoretical contexts in which we position our inquiries" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 124). Narrative inquiry is a relatively new way of thinking about changing phenomena and changing nature of the inquiry into identity. As cited in Connelly and Clandinin (2000) Denzin and Lincoln call the present time of inquiry "the fifth moment" (p. 11). I came to see that if I stayed married to my research questions rather than allowing them to guide me, I would run the risk of losing the essence of my participants' stories and experience. I needed to proceed in a way that allowed the stories to be told as they were lived. Change—change in the world, change in the inquiry, change in the inquirer, change in the point of view, change in the outcomes—is what comes with reflection, and this change is the key term to learning (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Narrative inquiry helped me to learn about the world in which these students lived by listening to them tell their stories. *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) became the vehicle to discuss hard-to-articulate "things" that went on in their lives. I was the participant observer—sometimes more the observer, sometimes more a participant—in their conversations. Mary Catherine Bateson's (1994) *Peripheral Visions* illustrates how texts, in disciplines such as anthropology, can be illustrative of inquiry and their contribution to knowledge of phenomena in this field is dynamic and fluid. Bateson offers an anthropological lens,

> Always, for learning to occur, the inquirer in this ambiguous, shifting, participant observation role is meeting difference; allowing difference to

challenge assumptions, values, and beliefs, improvising and adapting to the difference; and thereby learning as the narrative anthropologist. (p. 9)

And thus, my final analysis of the stories my participants shared with me will, in turn, be shared with you. What you make of the stories and my analysis will shape how you think of their experiences with the chosen texts and what they gained, what they lost, and how they felt. Certainty is not the goal; as Bateson (1994) states, "rejecting the rhetoric of merely, the rhetoric that treats us as trivial whatever is recognized as a product of interacting human minds" and to "accept ambiguity and allow for learning along the way" (p. 235).

The potential for individuals to create and recreate identities for a varied audience is immeasurable. In my experience, my students were no longer simply writing for a specific audience and the frequency and volume with which my students composes seemed far greater online than I had previously imagined. If identity is a matter of matching our performance of self to the appropriate cultural context, then we cannot ignore how young people are negotiating such moments daily through their reading and writing online. I was curious to see the potential for this research to look at questions that respond to how to validate students' literacy engagements, cultural practices, and experiences on and off line. Engaging in students' online experiences and activities allowed me access to a space in which they spoke, wrote, and discussed issues pertaining to the research more freely.

Keepin' It Real: The Importance of Multiliteracy and Diversity in Education

The term multiliteracy was coined by the New London Group (1996) to explain the connections between the changing social environment facing students and teachers and a new approach to literacy pedagogy. The term also highlights two related aspects of the increasing complexity of texts: (a) the proliferation of multimodal ways of making meaning where the written word is increasingly part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns; (b) the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity characterized by local diversity and global

connectedness. According to Cazden et al. (1996), increasingly, we encounter knowledge in multiple forms—in print, in images, in video, in combinations of forms in digital contexts—and are asked to represent our knowledge in an equally complex manner. The authors argue that the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches. Multiliteracies circumvent the limitations of traditional approaches by emphasizing how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is vital to the pragmatics of the working, civic, and private lives of students. The New London Group maintains that the use of multiliteracy approaches to pedagogy enables students to achieve the authors' twin goals for literacy learning: creating access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment. Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant "teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language" (The New London Group, 2000, p. 11). When multiliteracy is applied to equity, diversity, and multicultural educational contexts, we see the parallels of how "literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project—restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (The New London Group, 2000, p. 63).

The multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches, including using more contemporary texts which appeal to a more diverse group of students. Currently, online technologies allow young people to manipulate and play with their identities. Social networking sites such as MSN, Facebook, and Twitter, just to name a few, allow individuals to create online personas that are very different or similar to the ways they present themselves face-to-face in classroom and more intimate settings, such as interview and conversation. These social networking

sites allow users to create personal pages that display photographs, lists of favourite movies and books, music, pop culture images, and other information. Students are in some ways anonymous identities and in many other ways, very much public identities. The identities students perform on these sites may be very different and very similar at the same time. The creation of a particular identity in writing is as old as literacy itself; writers have been creating identities on the page for hundreds of years! The distinction with online interaction is the ease in which the writing can be distributed to an audience of readers and that such an audience may very well write back. Many young people today feel more comfortable behind the screen than they do face-to-face.

In the following chapter you will get a taste of the context of my study; you will get to know the field, the students, and the environment in which we met. The demographics of the students in the different sections of English language arts are particularly interesting. You will also get a glimpse into my own anxieties of introducing myself to the students and how I felt during the initial meetings with the classes.

CHAPTER 2: The Field

> But I think I can still ask… am I a Canadian writer?... In a Canada, where he still has to spell out his first name? Where he finds himself sputtering out in frustration, I am no more ethnic than you are; I am not a professional multiculturalist, a specimen demonstrating this country's political or social reality, justifying its place on some UN list of wonderful places just behind Switzerland and ahead of Belgium? and where he has to assert, I am not an immigrant writer, my writing is not immigrant… These are the frustrations of looking for a place to belong. (Vassanji, 2006, p. 7)

This chapter discusses the landscape of this study, the students I met, and the environments in which we worked and talked together. Unlike other studies on the second generation which focused only on Asian Indians (Bacon, 1999; Rudrappa, 2002), this study includes respondents whose families immigrated from India and Pakistan, thus creating a broader South Asian sample. The students in this study included a second generation sample of males and females ranging in age from 16 to 18 years of age, all of whom were high school students in English 20-IB (International Baccalaureate) or English 30-1 (the academic stream). There were 33 20-IB (Grade 11) students and 26 30-1 (Grade 12) students who participated in my research survey. The original sample size was 15 and included individuals from various religious communities. Due to the specific cultural group I was interested in working with, I ended up working closely with 7 students from both grades. I used in-depth interviews, conversations, MSN conversations, and assignments to construct meaning from my participants' experiences as they revealed aspects of their life narratives. In the course of trying to understand the assimilation experiences of second generation South Asians, I found that the data revealed how the ethnic and/or cultural self-identification of the respondents affected their attitudes towards their work and their feelings towards texts studied in class. The designation or label of a "South Asian Canadian" and the varying definitions of this designation based on context were equally perplexing to me and to the students.

My First Day

The teacher had informed both sections (20-IBs and 30s) that a researcher was coming to work in their classroom for the second semester. The 20-IBs were assigned *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri as part of their World Literature requirement and the 30s were given a choice by their teacher to choose between *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros and *The Namesake*. If I recall correctly, all the South Asian students in the 30 section picked *The Namesake* but not all the South Asian students decided to participate. There could be a variety of reasons for this, most notably however, many of them may not have wanted to associate themselves with anything exotic, ethnic, or considered to be different than the mainstream. Interestingly, not all readers respond positively to the characters they are reading about. Early research (Galda, 1982) discovered that readers rejected the actions of characters when those actions did not correspond to their own lived experience. Enciso (1994) connected this type of response to cultural practice when she documented how some readers might resist or reject a text that does not reflect their cultural expectations. The suburban high school students in Encisco's (1998) study adopted a stance of resistance to multi-cultural literature given their reluctance to explore issues of racism and White privilege within their suburban culture (Beach, 1997). It is highly possible that the South Asian students who decided not to participate in my study did not feel comfortable with being associated to any of the themes represented in the text or may not have felt a connection with the characters of the text.

These responses also take the form of resisting the social norms readers perceive operating in a text or classroom. Students may resist invited stances and dominate discourses in ways that lead them to create their own versions of texts (Lewis, 1997). They may affirm or reject an author or teacher's stance. For example, in responding to multicultural literature, students may adopt a stance of resistance to the assumption that a book such as *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) is being used didactically to discuss race issues.

When I arrived, I had to introduce myself to both sections of the teacher's English language arts students. I was completely unprepared for the anxiety that welled up inside . . . I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, a wave of nervous energy surged through my stomach, and I felt surprisingly insecure all of a sudden. How could I actually tell these students, in essence, that I am only picking Brown kids?

The proverbial "beating around the bush" began . . . I introduced myself as a parent, a teacher, and finally, a researcher. I explained how I was interested in their thoughts, feelings, questions, and comments about what it was like to be a South Asian student in a Canadian classroom. I explained that I wanted to be a participant in their discussions and how I hoped to gain their respect and trust . . . silence . . . followed by more silence. They could see right through me. I noticed a few of them glance down at their desk to the copy of *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) and I knew what they were thinking . . . get to the point, lady. I had to get to the point and explain to an entire class of Caucasian, Asian, European, and South Asian kids that I was only picking South Asian students to work with. Being obviously South Asian myself, I immediately wondered what they were thinking about this . . . maybe the students were thinking, "Of course she's picking Brown kids, how predictable!" So I said it. My words were, "I am interested in the life experiences of Canadian-born, second generation South Asian students. I am also interested in seeing if your cultural identities affect how you read/view, what you read/view, and what sense you make of what you read/view? Does a teacher's choice of literary text affect her/his students?" To my surprise, it was not that big of a deal.

A few White students asked, "Why only South Asian students?" I replied that because of the scope and focus of my study (and ethical limitations) I have to select a specific sample for my research. I proceeded to explain how the survey worked and asked all the students to fill out the survey anonymously and to the best of their ability. After collecting the survey, I sorted through and disaggregated the data for students born in South Asian countries who came to

Canada when they were young, or had parents of South-Asian descent (See Appendix B for survey questions).

Over 60% of the Grade 11 students were not born in Canada, indicating they are second-generation Canadians (21% of the students came from China, mostly in their teenage years and some came to Canada in the early formative years). Approximately 15% of the students in my Grade 11 sample were born in South Asia and moved here when they were very young. I worked with this group of second-generation South Asian Canadian students for my project. Over 80% of the Grade 11 IB students' parents were immigrants to Canada and just over 60% of the students spoke English as their first language at home. However, almost all of the students' parents (just over 90%) spoke a language other than English as their first language. More than half of the Grade 11 IB students spoke a language other than English in the home and 90% of students stated that the first language of their mothers and fathers was not English. Seventy percent of the Grade 12 students were born in Canada and only 24% were born abroad. Most of the Grade 12 students were first generation Canadians, indicating that 48% of their mothers and 36% of their fathers were immigrants to Canada. Of these numbers, 5 students were of South Asian decent and born abroad. Most of these students spoke English at home and almost half of these students' mothers and fathers spoke English as their first language at home.

In reviewing my data, a few emerging themes have surfaced and recur often. A particularly interesting point of discussion was the participants' responses to the question, "Do you think that being 'Canadian' means something different for people who were born here than it does for people who have immigrated to Canada?" Interestingly, 80% of the Grade 11 IB students and over 90% of the Grade 12 students stated that being Canadian does mean something different for people who have immigrated to Canada. My participants helped me to think about the questions, "What is distinct or common among South Asian second generation Canadians and other second generation Canadians?" and "What constitutes a

particularly South Asian Canadian identity?" I will discuss more on these questions in the section that follows.

Data Gathering

The demographic of the school is interesting and pertinent to the nature of my research. The high school is located in a diverse area of a large Western Canadian city. A good majority of students attending the school are "visible minority" and include a mixture of second and subsequent generation Canadians as well as a great number of recent immigrants and international students. There is a full range of academic programming as the school is a district site for the full high school French Immersion program and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program (see Appendix A for more information on the IB program). In addition, the school offers a broad spectrum of Career and Technology Studies (CTS) and fine arts courses, along with programming for International students. Students also have the opportunity to study a second language of French, German, Japanese, or Spanish. Students can expand their athletic abilities through participation in the school's various teams and athletic tournaments. The school is also a nationally recognized site for the Leadership Alive program. Committed to the development of all youth as global citizens of good character who serve others selflessly with dignity, respect, and integrity, the school supports many student service opportunities that encourage volunteering in the community. It also hosts an annual "Culture Fest" that celebrates the school's rich cultural diversity. Also unique to the school is the transition program which welcomes new Grade 10 students and makes them feel comfortable throughout their first year of high school. Built on the belief that students can help students succeed, students act as mentors who guide new students in their discovery of what it takes to be successful in high school.

At the time, the high school had a population of approximately 2,300 students from a variety of cultural backgrounds (and over 116 different languages spoken) including a fairly large South Asian population. I worked in the classroom

of one English language arts teacher with her 20-1 International Baccalaureate (IB) students and her English 30-1 students. Phase one of my research was conducted in December 2008, following my literature and ethics review, and consisted of preliminary introductions to all the students to explain the significance of my study as well as the curricular objectives of the study. The student survey (see Appendix B) served as preliminary data collection to invite students to provide information about their cultural heritage, their reading, viewing, and on-line literary experiences, and their interest in participating in the study. The teacher also introduced and assigned the reading of the novel *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) in its entirety before the start of second semester, which began in February 2009. Subsequent emails, questionnaires, and interviews (over the phone, on-line, and in person) were conducted, as well as classroom observations, discussions, and photos in the second phase.

Phase two was more interactive with the students as I selected a sample of second generation South Asian Canadian students based primarily on their ethnicity as second generation South Asians, and on the basis of willingness indicated in the survey to participate in conversations about their responses to the contemporary postcolonial text and film *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003). Participant observations and discussions about the text and film ensued as the students participated in an independent close study of the text through literary circles, where they explored the text and film in small groups (see Appendix C). I also engaged in audio-recorded conversations with my participants during and after class time in the library about their responses to the text. Students also engaged in written assignments and online MSN posts and responses, which were used to elicit data about the students' personal responses to the film and text. Online conversations about the text and film were designed to generate as much contextual and comprehensive data within the confines of the semester. Data were collected and recorded by digital recorder then transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed for relevant themes related to Canadian identity, culture, responses to postcolonial texts, and implications for school literary curriculum practices.

Phase three consisted of some initial analysis of situated student practice, learning, student comments, attitudes, values, and beliefs. I examined the potential for multimodal texts such as on-line conversations, films, emails, and race-based comedy as potential spaces for authoring and exploring cultural and social identities. The key to my analysis was to attempt to make sense of my data from the participants' perspective; and therefore my data collection was triangulated with participant observations, interviews, focus groups, and MSN conversations as well as a comparison against my pilot study. As I worked with the transcripts, I returned to the text and film, revisiting them to search for more connections and interpretations from which to draw my analysis. My interviews and questions were only used as "a provisional outline of a limited number of questions from which it could be helpful to draw if the conversations with interview participants do not extend to the issues the researcher thinks it necessary to include" (Ely, Vinz, Anzul, & Downing, 1997, p. 237). Most interviews began with a conversation about the chapter being discussed for that lesson which led to a close reading of passages and then to discussions of their own cultural experiences, small idiosyncratic qualities of family life, significant memories of school and culture intersecting, so on and so forth. My goal was to not direct the conversation; rather, I wanted to allow the students to relate to the text and film and see whether, if given the chance to incorporate aspects of self and culture, reading this text allowed for a broader, deeper, and more in-depth understanding of the material being read and how they made sense of their own cultural identities through the material in the context of Canadian schooling and society. In this relating of experience, this study is intimately narrative research using "retrospective meaning making—the shaping or offering of past experiences" (Chase, 2005, p. 656) in order to describe the conditions for retelling the story of their experiences growing up as second generation South Asian Canadian students.

In these conversations, I asked my participants to share whatever they were comfortable with. In order to build rapport, gain trust, and maintain credibility so that I could relate to what they were telling me, I shared my own experiences with

the text and film, how I related to it, and what I experienced as a result of reading it through a second gen South Asian lens. Though my voice in these conversations is transient in the audio interviews and not present in the following chapters, I was there as a participant rather than an interviewer, and because this manuscript is the story of *my* making meaning of *their* experiences, it is my words speaking for them. However, I must impress that I was more interested in what these young people had to say and so my voice fades into the background. As the narrator, my story remained flexible, variable, and was shaped in part by the interaction with my audience "a joint production of narrator and listener whether the narrative arises in naturally occurring talk, an interview or a fieldwork setting" (Chase, 2005, p. 657). This text was not intended to be representative of fundamental belief statements, but rather, a representation of the different ways of interpreting the concepts, statements, beliefs, thoughts, values, and everyday occurrences my participants articulated and shared with me. I tried to let their understandings direct the research conversations. Throughout my analysis, I was cognizant of the fact that research conversations should be about exploring an idea together.

Data Interpretation

When I began to work with the transcripts, I chose to interweave their comments throughout the text as opposed to dedicating single chapters to each participant. My focus was not on each participant but the collective impact of their comments and the impact of their words. I did not interview any of my participants on his/her own; it was always in a group setting. Yes, there are limitations to this method; however, I found the manner in which the interviews unfolded followed very much a cultural norm—the conversations were very social and communal. As I worked with various concepts and beliefs that were expressed in connection to the text and film, particular experiences in school with other texts and content, it became clear that certain themes from the student responses emerged naturally from the data. I grouped and explored my student participant comments and responses according to themes and linked them with ideas from a

number of theoretical viewpoints. I felt it was necessary to give consideration to research and theory in order to develop and deepen my understanding and interpretation of how the cultural experiences of my student participants affected the reading and interpretation with text, and to understand whether the text intersected with their cultural identities. I began to understand and see that their thoughts and attitudes towards their lives at home and at school, their interpretations of events and happenings in the text and film, juxtaposed with their own life stories at the time, were all a part of the construction of their identities—cultural and educational—during that point of their lives that they shared with me. The chapters in this manuscript are an attempt to reconstruct a sense of this small portion of their cultural identities and how they saw themselves in the world at the time. These identities shifted, changed, and became more and more fluid and hybrid as the days passed. My hope is that the students gained a sense of themselves through the text and film, and that they understood some of the hard to articulate aspects of identity and what shapes their identity.

I treated their conversations as a group discussion, extracting some excerpts and passages I found pertinent and salient to consider and that offered opportunities to develop my interpretations and themes. I often returned to each transcript to further consider and develop interpretations and themes. I explored the ideas and issues raised by my conversations with the students in my research through the theoretical lenses I found that may have been a good fit, along with my own cultural experiences with learning, teaching, and the teaching of learning. The goal of this analysis was to tease out the broader implications of the possible connections among cultural identities, reading, viewing, and reader response. The results are not about the participants' interpretations of the text itself; rather, the most meaningful information came from how this story and film (and the potential for other contemporary postcolonial texts and films) may have impacted particular lives. I also chose to share some anonymous comments from the survey made by some of my White students (as indicated by their demographic information on the survey) as I thought it would be helpful to juxtapose the differing views about

"what it means to be Canadian" from both "insider" (White) and "outsider" (non-White) perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Obtaining informed consent from a research subject takes on greater ethical considerations when the participants are young students. A relationship of trust is implied as the researcher is under a great moral obligation not to violate any trust between researcher and participant. Students must fully understand and be comfortable with the possible uses of thoughts and ideas they express in the classroom, interviews, conversations, and their writing. This issue was discussed at great lengths with my students. Although the students wanted their own names used, all are pseudonyms (males: Kamran, Sahil, and females: Kritika, Anjali, Kamani, Kavita, and Sanam). All examples of student writing, comments, and remarks are used with their written permission. To further ensure anonymity, I asked the transcriber to sign a confidentiality agreement as well.

I arranged the chapters to illustrate a range of possible openings into the experiences of my participants. This research is based on the voices and stories of the adolescent participants who shared their thoughts and beliefs about school, culture, reading, books, parents, friends, being Brown, the relationships they had with "other Brown kids" . . . all this is married with theory and then is further intersected by my own interpretations of these conversations. Their voices will appear as chunks of text representing much of what was said during our conversations. I understand that this representation can only be a partial telling, nuanced both by context and by my presence as a South Asian Canadian teacher, researcher, and adult.

Limitations

Before recruiting the students, I was approached by the teacher who was eager to support a fellow researcher. I met with the teacher on two separate occasions to discuss her beliefs, methods, teaching practices, and experiences in

general with South Asian Canadian students and with this text. I must note that before approaching me, she was aware of the text I wanted to work with and she didn't particularly like the text as a literary piece, but she was still interested in the potential the text had for her students to explore the topic of cultural identity. I do understand the limitations of only meeting with one teacher and two groups of students, but I feel for the scope of this topic, it was an appropriate match. Prior to beginning the data collection, I visited both the Grade 11 and 12 classrooms to observe how students worked together, participated in group discussions, and how they responded to text. I took notes on my observations and referred to them as a way to get to know the setting. As my interpretations and theoretical understandings developed, I came to see that the considerations for the classroom that were required for this study were the ones that arose from the students' own experiences. I used my survey to gain an understanding of students' attitudes about school, reading, "Canadian culture," and their sense of "belonging," and we also had group discussions to explore their backgrounds and experiences with texts, attitudes towards topics discussed in English language arts, topics that were left out of English language arts, and topics they wished could be discussed in English language arts. I used the students' past and current cultural experiences at home and at school as a primary basis for understanding how they perceived reading and choice of texts by teachers. The understanding and intentions of the teacher are woven with reader response research, offering strategies and examples of ways to craft student engagement and text selection as an ongoing work in progress.

CHAPTER 3: What *Style* of Canadian Are You?

> "I may have wandered into this wilderness—and returned, what else but bewildered if they were honest, or with simplistic or outdated notions if they were naive; this is hardly surprising—the country is changing around us even as we speak, stirring up a host of conflicting ideas and interests, and to look for an essence, a core, a central notion within that whirlwind is surely an illusion. To define this country or its literature seems like putting a finger on Zeno's arrow: no sooner do you think you have done it than it has moved on." (Vassanji, 2006, p. 6)

I would like to be clear about certain terms that I use throughout this manuscript. I think it's important to do this because I may use a term that could have a completely different meaning for you than I intend when using it. In the chapter that follows, I will discuss the terms I will be using throughout this text as a way to help orient you to the lens through which I am reading, discussing, analyzing, and interpreting this research.

In *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*, Richard J. F. Day (2002) examines and comments on the concepts (signified) and words (signifiers) related to Canadian diversity, public education, and identity:

> I will be obliged to use certain terms that would be better left behind. Among these I would include all terms that ascribe group membership to an individual based on some means of differentiation from other groups…I could not have stated it any clearer: the words 'race', 'non-white', 'visible minority', have gained so much notoriety that it is almost impossible to *not* refer to them for a couple of reasons. Primarily, the English language and specifically for Canadian readers, is likely only to have little difficulty in coping with 'race' as these days 'everyone knows' it (race) is a construct. (p. 12)

I also think terms like "woman of colour" and visible minority completely emphasize difference and are really only relevant to Western discourses and

contexts. Regardless, whatever terms we use, we can't escape the rhetoric we can only refuse it. As Himani Bannerji (2000) so eloquently states,

> I use this term as a political signifier, not an ontological one, to point out the hegemonic cause of our woes, namely, racism. In this matter where we come from, our national cultures, are less significant than the fact that whoever is not "white" will fall within the purview of racialization and discrimination. For this purpose, I prefer to use the term "non-white" since the conventional terms "women of colour", "immigrants" etc. do not always do the job at hand. (p. 174)

Essentially, one can't escape the rhetoric of language, but only refuse it and name it where possible in order to destabilize the inherent power and dominance ascribed to certain terms.

A second point of clarification that must be made is how I use the terms "White" and "Brown." My participants asked me, in a round about way, as a researcher and a teacher, and a *supposed knower* of these things, why it is that people use the terms "Black," "Brown," "Chinese," "Asian," "South Asian," etc., (they listed about 15 or more) but the term "White" is rarely used. I asked them, "like, 'used where/how'?" I was a bit unsure of what they meant. Samir clarified,

> *It's common knowledge that when teachers are referring to a kid, like when they are describing them to another person/teacher/kid/whatever, they automatically use their skin colour as a way to describe them. Not that this is wrong, but if they were talking about a White kid, a name would suffice. Why is this the case? It's because that's the way things are. It happens with everyone, not just teachers. We don't have to talk about White people that way because we just don't. So why is that ok?* (asking me).

I have to admit, even *I* struggled with that question. We discussed this for a while and that is when we got into a discussion about how they felt about the word "Brown." There is more about this discussion in chapter 8, but I felt that it was important to address the use of the word here as it will be used freely

throughout the chapter. It was at this point that my participants schooled me on what "being Brown" meant. . . . Let me explain.

Apparently, according to my participants, it is common knowledge amongst their age group and generation that there are different categories of Brown (South Asian). There are Brown Fobs which means "really 'Brown'" which also means very "ethnic" which means one may have an accent, dress in a "traditional" manner or speak one's language in public. "Brown-er" means one can be Brown but there are varying degrees of "Brown-ness. 'Brown-ness is situational and therefore highly contextual depending on who's around (e.g., "I'm not Brown" means "I'm not *that* ethnic . . . I may be visibly Brown but not really"). "Whitewashed" is when a Brown person has been heavily influenced by White people and therefore acts more White than Brown which means he/she has adopted a more westernized manner of dressing, speaking, or acting. Other terms include: Oreo, Coconut, ABCD (American born confused Desi—even though they are Canadian, Desi means a Brown person). "In-between Brownness" means you're just the right degree of Brown. Not too White and not too Brown. "Toronto Brown" denotes a different type of Brown altogether and is completely based on demographics. "Toronto Brown People" are a lot more confident in their Brown-ness. The students in my study felt they were "just right". As Kavita noted, "We're hybrid Brownies! LOL!" (LOL: laugh out loud).

In his article, "Regarding Race: The Necessary Browning of our Curriculum and Pedagogy Public Project", Gaztambide-Fernández (2006), explains how scholars of colour are rarely mentioned "as part of the intellectual geneaology that spurred our traditions of curriculum work" (p. 61).

> While those of us who do not identify (and are not identified) as white can simply not avoid a direct engagement with processes of racialization whenever we "speak," our "white" colleagues rarely have to consider what it means to be white and how they are implicated in the racialization of the field. This way of engaging requires that we make personal commitments to creative ways of being in solidarity with one another toward the

personal, political, and intellectual "Browning" of our field. (p. 63)

Gaztambide-Fernández argues that skin colour remains a powerful marker of "otherness" and that visible minorities are racialized as non-White. "White folks" are also people of colour and have a place in a racial order and this racialization shapes the ways they go about their work (p. 63). So now that you, too, are schooled on what Brown means (and don't feel bad, I am Brown and this was news to me!) it will be easy for you to understand when my participants make references to anything Brown in their comments.

In line with race being a social construct, the concept of Whiteness has also been socially constructed. Instead of thinking about racism as something conceived that is external to the non-visible minority, race and Whiteness are seen as a system that shapes the daily experiences of everyone, especially our sense of self. Ruth Frankenburg (1993) explains,

> Whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming "whiteness" displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of dominance….To look at the social construction of whiteness, then, is to look head-on at a site of dominance. (And it may be more difficult for white people to say, 'whiteness has nothing to do with me – I'm not white' than to say 'Race has nothing to do with me – I'm not racist.'). To speak of whiteness is … to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism. It is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people – that, rather, racism shapes white people's lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life. (p. 6)

What is at work here is the acknowledgement that race and racism are not for the "other" person, those people who are different or for someone who is outside our frame of reference. The need to outline the term and speak of Whiteness further specifies what is at stake when discussing the issues of race and culture as they

relate to cultural identity and school. By naming Whiteness, I am displacing it from its unnamed, unmarked status that is itself an effect of its dominance.

Another problematic term that I used in this study is "culture."[5] While recognizing that the term culture is a contested term with numerous definitions and interpretations, for the purposes of my research, I am loosely defining it as customs, values, beliefs, habits, and attitudes. The challenge confronting modern, culturally diverse societies is therefore understood as arising from value conflicts (Collalillo, 1978). Typically, South Asian adolescents are said to be torn or caught between the values of a traditional South Asian culture and a modern/Western Canadian culture. "This discourse is prevalent in both mainstream representations of the South Asian community and in the discussions of South Asian researchers, analysts, service providers and community members" (Handa, 2003, p. 7). I seek to problematize this notion of "culture clash" in Chapter 9 entitled "Culture Clash or Cultural Omission."

I will also make use of the term "hybridity" throughout this manuscript and I should point out how I will be using it. I will be playing off the current meaning of hybridity within postcolonial theory which refers to a *semiotic process* through which new *poles of identification* are constructed (Day, 2002). Homi Bhabha also suggests that the "wider significance of the postmodern condition" lies in the "awareness that the epistemological limits" of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant and dissident histories and voices—women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities (2005, pp. 4–5). It is the in-between spaces of *fixed* identities—symbolic identities which are socially ascribed and designated by the dominant culture, cultural institutions like schools, and dominant Western notions embedded in most print, media, and pop culture—which remain open to the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. I want to make clear that my use of the term hybrid identities to entertain the notion as a way

[5] I elaborate later on in this chapter, my reasons for adopting the commonsensical notion of the term *culture*, which is situated within a larger conversation about race and ethnicity.

of possibly overcoming European colonialism, in no way suggests that this term acts as a solution to the problem of a "fixed notion" of a Canadian identity through the recognition or acceptance of postmodern fragmentation. As Bhabha (2005) notes, "the social articulation of difference . . . is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (p. 2). Nation states have and always will be able to authorize hybrid identities by "nominating them as pure and then using the resulting category as a means of mass articulation with an administered population" (Day, 2000, p. 15). I contend that it is better to be seductively integrated (Day, 2002) than coercively assimilated.

Among the waves of immigration into Canada, a large number of immigrants from non-European countries arrived in Canada in the 1970s. As a result, in Canadian public discourse about diversity, race, and ethnicity, visible minority and immigrants are often conflated and as a result, they are presumed to refer to the same group of people (Khayatt, 1994; Yon, 2000). Factors such as social class, educational professional background, religious or political beliefs, and personal experiences are not considered. In fact, South Asians are amongst the most heterogeneous groupings in terms of all of the aforementioned factors. Second generation youth are constantly questioned about "where they are from." If they answer "I'm Canadian," their claims are contested by further questions of where they are *really* from. Mahtani (2002) suggests that multi-racial women in Canada, for example, respond to their ascribed identifications by taking on hyphenated labels referring to their Canadian-ness as well as other ethnic identities. However, interestingly enough, Mahtani notes that White people rarely do this.

There are also questions of what constitutes an ethnic group? What connotes being Canadian? How does the term *dominant culture* appear in everyday language and what are the implications of this? The notion of ethnic group continues to be debated. Following Weber's identification of factors that define ethnicities (as cited in Driedger, 2003) (that is, race, culture, tribe, nation,

and religion), various scholars have added to this list or selected some factors as more significant than others because of strong associations with a shared socio-economic or socio-cultural background, leading to a sense of belonging and/or political stratification in society. Others such as Dreidger and Halli (2000) and Henry (2006) state that minorities are forced into ethnic subcultures as a result of dominant majority groups' gate-keeping of access to power and privilege[6].

What is Canadian Identity, Really?

Throughout my life, I have been asked by teachers, friends, and later on by colleagues, "Are you Canadian?" "Where are you *really* from?" "You don't *look* Canadian." I often wondered about what it really meant to be Canadian. I am very cognizant of the fact that by raising questions around the notion of Canadian identity I may have entered into an abyss of never-ending questions and circular statements. However I am in no way trying to define it, but rather, trying to disturb the notion that it is an un-problematic term. I discovered that simplistic and outdated notions about multiculturalism still exist among this group of young adults, which reveal many honest truths about how my student participants see themselves and the others around them. Some second generation South Asian students felt that being born elsewhere meant less of a connection to a Canadian identity and that being born in Canada gives you an automatic connection to this identity—a "carte blanche" so to speak for free access to certain privileges. However, my South Asian participants still felt that visible minority youth (in general) simply would not be able to enjoy the *privileges* or *full access* often associated with the title of Canadian.

Some White students who completed the survey commented that a number of immigrants felt that being called a Canadian was a threat to the immigrant's culture of origin because they have to adjust to a "foreign lifestyle." One said,

People who have immigrated to Canada feel that they are not truly

[6] A good point to be raised here would be where do "religion" and "atheism" fit in? I had not quite worked through this topic with my participants as we did not get into the topic of religion for the simple reason of the scope of my research topic.

Canadian; they were born elsewhere. The people who have immigrated to Canada have been raised elsewhere so they will feel the customs of Canada will be different than their home ones and feel sort of isolated from them.

For people who were born in Canada, they would feel more connected to this country. But for people who immigrated, they had spent their life in a totally different environment and it might take awhile to get used to the concept of—Canadian. I feel the country you were born in (home country) would be the country one has the strongest connection to. (Kamran)

An interesting theme became evident after reading the survey responses of all the students and from conversing with a number of my student research participants that a binary relationship exists between being from "somewhere else" (not from Canada)and ideas about being Canadian. The notion of Canadian identity, as my participants understood it, was not synonymous with immigrant; you can't *really* be a Canadian if you come from another country (immigrant). You are either an immigrant or a Canadian or an immigrant Canadian (i.e., South Asian Canadian). Even if you have received your Canadian Citizenship, you are still not *really* a "true" Canadian. For example, one Canadian student (White) said "*People who immigrate to Canada see Canada as a new opportunity or way of life, as opposed to people who are born here (me for example) just see it as a place to live."* A question that kept recurring in my mind as we had more conversations and that the students were also asking (in so many words) was who owns the gaze to name a "true" Canadian? Who wields this authority?

I found it interesting that while most students were very forward-thinking and believed in the grand narratives of Canadian multiculturalism, they still had interesting comments—often contradictory—about what they believed to be Canadian. One of the survey questions asked, "What does Canadian identity mean to you?" and surprisingly, almost none of the ENG 30 students (who consisted of a

mix of visible minority and White students) was able to answer this question clearly. Even more interesting was the fact that almost all of the ENG 20 IB students had very sophisticated responses to the same question. When I examined all of the responses the consensus among the 20 IBs (which mostly consisted of visible minorities) was that Canadian identity was, "a unique construct and separate from anything 'ethnic' or 'cultural.' " Yet, many of these students also indicated that Canada was synonymous with multiculturalism. A 20 IB student noted,

> *Canada is multicultural, so it's hard to define what a Canadian identity is. To me, Canada is multicultural. So the Canadian identity is your identity, fused with the identity of your culture. This could be like East meets West; some western influences and others mixed together.* (Anjali)

It was also apparent that many students believed that Canadian identity was a collection of Canadian values mixed with patriotism, habits, and attitudes considered to be exclusively Canadian. One student went as far as to remark, "*Canadian identity to me is a Caucasian identity. I have no history here."* It seems as though many visible minority students felt that Canadian identity was laced with Western values, attitudes, and beliefs that seemed to encompass individualism and some degree of assimilation. There were also those students who believed that hybridity, which is quite a sophisticated construct, was a blending of their own cultural identity along with western ideas to create a unique identity of their own. The essence of hybridity as captured in Anjali's quote also involves a conscious choice of including certain elements of each culture in creating equilibrium among values, culture, and beliefs. Sanam noted, "*Canadian identity includes aspects of my South Asian culture along with aspects of Canadian {western} culture that have shaped my life*."

Once I understood what this group of students thought and understood to be certain universal truths about being Canadian I wanted to know if my South Asian sample of participants felt connected to a Canadian identity. (I was able to tell

which survey responses were those of South Asian students based on the demographic information provided on each survey.) Of my South Asian sample of ENG 20IB and ENG30 students, to my surprise, most students said they indeed felt connected to a Canadian identity (67% said yes, 18% said somewhat, and 15% said no). However, the comments that qualified their responses supported my assertion at the beginning of this chapter that their understanding of Canadian identity and South Asian identity was that these ideas are polarized and sometimes in conflict. The connection to a Canadian identity or feelings of belonging was indicated to be fleeting and highly dependent on context, peer group, familial connections to the heritage culture, and the degree to which their parents were flexible when cultural values were non-congruent with western values. Sanam states, "*Sometimes, but I feel I'm kind of in between my own culture's identity and Canadian identity. Like stuck in the middle."* Sanam also shared an interesting response that revealed her ideas about being Canadian being associated with the term White or caucasian).

> *I am connected to a Canadian identity, because Canada is a nation of nations, but I would consider myself as a part of the group of East Indian second generation Canadians living in the country right now. I do not identify with Caucasian Canadians, as I still hold many of the values of my parents. The people that I best get along with are people of South-Asian descent.* (Sanam)

Some White students who responded to the survey also indicated their belief that an immigrant usually "flees" his/her home country in search of refuge in Canada in the next two statements.

> *Yes, for someone who immigrated to Canada, being Canadian could mean starting a whole new life and forgetting about his/her past. Someone who was born Canadian doesn't show as much enthusiasm and maybe not show any pride.*

> *Since people born in Canada likely have a stronger sense of Canadian tradition than immigrants, then there likely is a difference in meaning.*

Immigrants may also view Canada differently, perhaps like a sanctuary, than people view it that was born here.

This assumption seems interesting because it speaks to the grand narrative of multiculturalism and immigration that most Canadians (White and non-White) view as the role of immigrants and immigration to Canada. The popular belief behind Canadian multiculturalism is that Canada is a "safe haven" of sorts—a colonial ideal that still lingers today behind most rhetoric surrounding immigration policies where the "host country" provided a "safe haven" or refuge to the poor immigrant—a myth that is full of contradictions and falsehoods. These assumptions are reflective of what many people—not just students—feel about anyone who doesn't *look* Canadian. M. G. Vassanji's (2006) essay, "Am I a Canadian Writer?" eloquently describes this assumption,

> Traditionally, a new Canadian or American was someone who left the shores of Europe, and later China and Japan, set foot on the new soil, kissed the earth, and adopted the new land; forgot the old. At least, let's assume this for the time being (forgetting the special privilege of coming from Western Europe and Britain, with which there was a cultural continuity and constant contact). The succeeding generations were adapted, spoke the language and idiom, played baseball or hockey or football, had integrated. That is the traditional model of immigration; it still makes a lot of people very comfortable. It makes the sociologists of immigration feel like mathematicians. (There is a QED-ness to this picture of immigration.) (p. 8)

For *White* students who responded to the survey, being connected to a national identity was a binary—one or the other—there is no hybridity or interconnectedness between being a Canadian and an immigrant; there is no hyphen so to speak, no "Canadian-immigrant." For my *South Asian* participants, being connected to a national identity was only something fluid and shifting; something similar to occupying a hybrid position between Canadian and South Asian. However, for both, Canadian was not synonymous with anything ethnic.

What is at work here is the idea that if one comes from elsewhere, reconciliation must be made between "what was once" and "what is now." Being Canadian is not synonymous with coming from elsewhere and once you get here there is a perception that the immigrant is constantly longing for "home."

> *Someone who was born here might feel like Canadian is their own identity, while an immigrant will probably always feel more connected with their home country, even though they are now Canadian.*

> *For an immigrant, to be Canadian citizen means to live in Canada and work in Canada. However, their love will be for their home country.*

These statements allowed me to formulate some thinking around the notion of what actually constitutes a Canadian identity and a stereotype. Does a Canadian identity actually exist? What or whose qualities is this identity based on? What or who is the measuring stick against which we compare ourselves? Who is included or excluded from this category? How is one framed? According to my participants, I was over-thinking it. It did not matter. Let me explain . . .

The issue of "introducing myself as . . . South Asian Canadian/Canadian South Asian/Brown?" was a very pertinent topic for this research and for my participants, but not for the reasons I thought were to be important. To help me tease out a broader understanding in which to frame this discussion (which I point out to my reader, was more confusing to me but extremely simple for my participants), I refer you to a similar question posed to a second generation South Asian Canadian writer, Shyam Selvadurai, which helped me to make sense of this. In response to the question, "What kind of a writer do you consider yourself to be? Are you a Canadian writer or a Sri Lankan Writer?" Selvadurai, comments,

> [M]y creativity comes not from "Sri Lankan" or "Canadian" but precisely from the space between, that marvelous open space represented by the hyphen, in which the two parts of my identity jostle and rub up against each other like tectonic plates, pushing upwards the eruption that is my

> work. It is from this space the novels come. From a double-visioness, a biculturalism. (2004, p. 2)

If I am questioning the significance or usefulness of the notion of a Canadian identity, then I must ask, what makes one's experience as a South Asian Canadian uniquely "South Asian-Canadian" or "Canadian-South Asian"? Which signifier goes first?[7] My participants laughed and informed me that quite simply, it depends on where they find themselves dwelling, before or after the hyphen or in the space between as represented by the hyphen. Was it *that* simple to them?! To help explain this notion, I refer to Selvadurai (2004) as he suggests, that for the majority of South Asian Canadians, a dual identity is a burden forced on us by the fact that our bodies—more specifically our skin—do not represent the nation-state we are in, thus compelling us to constantly wear our difference on our sleeve and carry it around wherever we go. As one of my student participants notes,

> *Being Canadian does mean something different whether you are born here or whether you come here when you are young because we have another identity that mixes with being Canadian. You can tell the difference between Canadian-born people {White} and others who are Canadian but immigrated here. Regardless, if you are born here and you look different, it doesn't matter where you came from or when you came. You will always "look" different and "looking different" {coloured} is not synonymous with being Canadian.* (Sahil)

As a second generation South Asian Canadian researcher myself, when I enter my home office, close the door behind me, and sit at my computer, I find that this very slippery notion of biculturalism is the very source of my creativity and the impetus for my work. My thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and values and the slant as a researcher that give my work the unique quality all researchers seek, have been shaped by my life in Canada as well as the past lives of my parents and the gifts they brought with them from "back home." However, my back home is in Canada and the mix of my cultures, which often occurs in this in-between space or

[7] Maybe it turns on asignifications? Or the assemblage that continuously changes?

the hard-to articulate-experience my student participants face. They question whose gaze are they under? Who came to create this gaze and how does this gaze affect their sense of belonging? It is this experience I seek to make sense of and articulate in my research. Though born and raised in Canada, the national identity of multigenerational South Asian Canadians is subject to incessant scrutiny and doubt. To corroborate this, I refer to Angela Aujla's (2000) study of South Asian Canadian females. She states,

> They are othered by a dominant culture which categorizes them as "visible minorities," "ethnics," immigrants, and foreigners—categories considered incommensurable with being a "real" Canadian, despite the promises of multiculturalism. Never quite Canadian enough, never quite white enough, these women remain "others" in their own land. Not only are they excluded from national belonging, they are haunted by a discourse which has historically constructed non white women as a threat to the nation-state. Contemporary constructions of South Asian Canadian women are situated in a larger racist, sexist, and colonial discourse which cannot be buried under cries of "unity in diversity." (p. 41)

Aujla's research, *Others in Their Own Land* (2000), examines how the gendered racialization of multigenerational South Asian Canadian women excludes them from national belonging and pressures them to assimilate. She states that the literary production of these women reflects the deep repercussions of this exclusion, and provides a location where issues of identity, otherness, and racism may be articulated and resisted. She examines poetry and personal narratives by multigenerational South Asian Canadian women as points of intervention into these issues. She argues that racist and colonial discourses of the past continue to influence dominant discourses and perceptions of South Asian Canadian women today.

To further Aujla's (2000) argument I contend that despite diversity in the multi-generations of South Asian Canadians, there are similarities across experiences. The accepted forms of racism, feelings of being "other" and not

belonging, colonialism, sexism, and living in a diasporic culture all contribute to a collective "ethnic identity" of being other. My participants summed it up as "it's a Brown thing." They all get it. They know how to play the game, work the system, and sit still and let their schooling experiences wash over them. As long as they are getting the marks their parents approve of, they have learned not to ask too many questions. They knew when to "turn down the Brown" and when they could be "Brown." I must admit their comfort with playing this game was a bit unsettling as I thought of my own daughters. Why should they have to omit certain aspects of their selves in order to play the game? Why could they not enjoy the same pleasures from class discussions, reading, responding to the literature that they enjoy? Why is the colour of their skin still an invisible ceiling that keeps them stuck in labeled categories?

Although this idea was unsettling to me, my participants were quite comfortable with the idea of shifting back and forth and in between. The confidence they exuded allowed me to step past my own discomfort to see how they truly live with cultural hybridity as a part of their daily lives. My next chapter takes up the significance of Canada's shifting identities and how the idea of a Canadian identity was really not that important to my participants.

CHAPTER 4: The Significance of Canada's Shifting Identities

One day I learnt
a secret art,
Invisible-Ness, it was called.
I think it worked
as even now you look
but never see me…
Only my eyes will remain to watch and to haunt,
and to turn your dreams
to chaos. (Sartre, 1973, pp. 16–17)

This section will include some background information on the idea of what constitutes a particularly South Asian Canadian identity and the formation of these identities, an explanation of the label "second generation South Asian," as well a recounting of some similarities in life experiences growing up in Canada. Then it will recount the responses of students who were asked about their own sense of ethnic and/or cultural identity and how they described themselves to others. These accounts will reveal the processes of adopting, rejecting, or hybridizing the South Asian label and will describe the ways in which identity is organized and understood by the individuals themselves.

There have been recent changes to Canada's population, and the significance of my selected participant group—the second generation of South Asian Canadians makes a strong case for some necessary undivided attention from the persons in charge of the Alberta language arts curriculum.

Second Generation South Asian Canadians

Canada is in the process of another major shift to its ever-changing multicultural identity. The issue of exploring the experiences of the second (and subsequent) generation(s) of South Asian Canadians is crucial. Based on the 2010 Statistics Canada census data that was recently released, over 5 million Canadians (16%) report being visible minorities, an increase of 27% since 2001—

an immigration surge unprecedented in a quarter-of-a century (a growth rate five times more than the rest of the population). Canada's dependence on foreign labour is also attracting many new immigrants who come to Canada to begin a new life. The children of this more recent group of immigrants have already constituted a large group of second (and subsequent) generation youth who seem to be negotiating even more critical issues pertaining to race, culture, school, and identity.

It is important to consider the differences between the first generation struggles alongside those of the second generation in order to understand identity in postmodern times. The first generation's story was about adaptation and learning, acculturating, and also discovering new things about themselves. The term *second generation* shifts away from the determining criterion of nativity and allows the immigrant generation to be considered first generation South Asian American/Canadian/British rather than erasing this history from the trajectory of the group in the new country. This term also highlights the fact that there is a visible and growing population of more recent South Asian lineage that does not have the same migration history as South Asian descendants pre-1965. This earlier group consisted of highly educated, skilled professionals who, in a relatively short time, acquired middle to upper-middle class status. The term second generation also encompasses new immigrants who have children in the chosen country, which spans a huge group of people ranging in age from newborns to their mid 40s.

First generation immigrants, often unaware of the harsh contrasts between Eastern and Western culture, discover in the midst of raising their children that there are often conflicting messages sent to their children in hopes they will fit in, while at the same time stay true to their own cultural ideals. A focus on second generation is crucial to understanding how South Asians and other new immigrant communities will be inserted into the economic and social fabric of a Canadian "national identity." The paths followed by individuals in the second generation who are on the threshold of adulthood—often characterized as being a cultural

formation associated with occupational/career decisions, the creation of some sort of family unit or independent household, and political/civic participation—will clearly have an impact on the future of the larger ethnic community (Maira, 2002). As Alejandro Portes (1997) observes,

> The case for second generation as a "strategic site" is based on two features. First, the long-term effects of immigration for the host society depend less on the fate of first generation immigrants than on their descendants. Patterns of adaptation of the first generation set the stage for what is to come, but issues such as the continuing dominance of English, the growth of a welfare dependent population, the resilience of culturally distinct enclaves, and the decline or growth of ethnic intermarriages will be decided among its children or grandchildren. (p. 814)

The process of migration has important implications for a redefinition of what it means to be Canadian and in turn has equally significant implications for what it means to be South Asian. The changing racial and ethnic composition within Canada's borders has led to much angst and controversy over the definition of *Canadian*. In a discussion of Canadian and South Asian discourses of cultural protectionism, Amita Handa (2003) suggests,

> Second generation youth in Canada are particularly troubling to these discourses because their presence points to the ruptures and contradictions between "modern" and "traditional." Young South Asians struggle to fashion an identity that speaks to their experience of being South Asian in Canada. In doing so, they often unsettle and resist certain mainstream definitions of both *South Asian* and *Canadian*. (p. 5)

Thus, this notion seems to recall the question of any familial rethinking on the part of youth as they pull away from their parents.

The children of the post-1965 wave of immigrants are less visible in the media, not to mention academic literature. Now that this group of second generation Canadians has moved into adulthood and created their own social, personal, professional, and familial spaces, their ethnic and national identity

development have not been adequately researched and this is particularly true of the *second* generation of South Asian Canadians. This issue is timely and significant in light of new research that questions the efficacy of official multiculturalism for the children of visible minority Canadians who exhibit a more profound sense of exclusion than their parents (Jimenez, 2007). According to Rifaat Salam (2005),

> The first cohort of second generation South Asians to reach adulthood is sometimes called the "children of 1965" since their parents were permitted to enter the United States under the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1965, which opened the gates to immigrants from parts of the world which had been previously excluded. This first wave of immigrants consisted mainly of professionals, with higher levels of educational attainment than successive waves of immigrants from South Asia. (p. 5)

As Jedwab (2008) points out, the identification of one's ethnicity as Canadian or otherwise is not necessarily a measure of the level of attachment to Canada. However, it does raise the question of whether they would ever have the same sense of entitlement, responsibility, collective identity, and solidarity with co-nationals that Harty and Murphy (2005) refer to as indicators of full citizenship.

By 2030, if the current trends continue, Canada's population growth will stem solely from immigration (Grant, 2007). This shift has profound consequences for Canada's educational, cultural, and economic future. It is crucial that educators pay more attention to the issue of cultural identity among second-generation Canadian students. Especially within the changing demographic of Canadian culture, South Asians have become a visible and integral part of Canada. Brooks (2008) points out that racialized second-generation groups will become increasingly significant as their numbers become proportionately larger in the Canadian population. She states, "The process of identity ascription by mainstream society marks the body of the Canadians of

colour as 'other,' and this not only serves to exclude the second generation, but also reminds them of their perpetual difference" (p. 77).

Second generation youth are more likely to identify their experiences of discrimination as racism. According to the Statistics Canada (2010) over 36% of visible minorities feel they have experienced discrimination and unfair treatment; nearly 50% of Blacks reported discrimination or unfair treatment, 46% of Aboriginal people living off-reserve reported being a victim of racism or discrimination, and 33% of South Asian and Asian Canadians reported discrimination or unfair treatment.

Congruently, Ali (2008) states second generation youth who go to ethnically diverse schools strongly believe in the ideal of Canadian multiculturalism because their socio-cultural and environments, varied skin colours, accents, religions, and countries of origin represent a multicultural Canada to them. It is only when these youth experience life outside their local spaces and consider how racialized and ethnicized immigrants are affected by the limits of Canadian multiculturalism that these youth are much more likely to expect that Canada will treat them according to the tenets of Canadian multiculturalism. According to Ali, these youth are much more likely to become disappointed when they discover that their race, ethnicity, and indeed their associations with multicultural schools and neighbourhoods can limit what they can or cannot achieve in a context where power and privilege are still controlled by the White immigrants who arrived in Canada many generations ago. An extremely heterogeneous group, Kobayashi (2008) points out they are overwhelmingly from racialized minorities and there is growing evidence that racism is a serious issue for them, particularly when they enter into the labour force. According to Ali (2008), "because these young people believe so strongly in the ideology of Canadian multiculturalism and their right to what it promises, they are likely to be deeply disappointed when they realize they are still outsiders in Canada" (p. 104).

In the same vein, Razack (1998) points out the existence of "the culturization of racism" which, in effect, invites minorities to keep their culture but enjoy no greater access to power and resources. "If we live in a tolerant and pluralistic society in which the fiction of equality within ethnic diversity is maintained, then we need not accept responsibility for racism" (Razack, 1998, p. 60). Amongst the second generation, there are patterns of strong adherence to ethnocultural identifications but also efforts to reinterpret their ethnic and social locations and their visions of Canada as a multicultural society. Growing up, second generation South Asian children are immersed in the language, food, and religion of their parents' homelands as part of what Joanna Lessinger (1995) describes as a bulwark against the "corrupting" influence of American society. What is taught at home is often reiterated and reinforced through religious activities outside the home. In Kurien's (1998) study, children participate in prayer groups and religious instruction through informal family networks, as well as more formal activities through temples. In a striking compromise to American society, Aminah Mohammad-Arif (2000) describes "Sunday schools" that South Asian Muslim children attend at their local mosque, where they learn religion and the basics of reading Arabic. Salaam (2005) concurs that the children of South Asian immigrants have been raised in an environment in which it is acceptable, and in many cases desirable, to be socialized into their ethnic culture while growing up in the United States. However,

> they cannot (and in most cases do not) feel themselves to be Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi in the same ways as their parents. However intensive their immersion in ethnic culture, their socialization experiences have taken place within the American social context. The life experiences of these second generation immigrants is rooted not just in their parental teachings and ethnic community but also within their local communities and educational institutions and the opportunities and constraints that they present. (Salam, 2005, p. 12)

Often, many people outside the field of immigration or diasporic studies

have a different interpretation of the terms first and second generation. The South Asian label has become a common way to describe, refer to, and categorize immigrants and their children from the South Asian subcontinent. Organizations of all types, especially second-generation organizations, define themselves as South Asian, choosing the panethnic label over East Indian or other labels that refer to the national origins of their members. In the post-Obama afterglow of a Canadian panethnic landscape, the South Asian designation has also become a racialized category or a quick referent to describe people from a particular region of the world, especially as it distinguishes this group from Asian Canadians from East or Southeast Asia. There is no question that this term or label South Asian has surfaced in academic and media accounts. The aim of my research was to understand the individual accounts of my high school student participants and their experiences with ethnic and/or cultural identity; however, it is even more important to understand these individual accounts post-September 11th. It quickly became apparent to me that there are a variety of factors which influenced how this unique group of students who participated in my research, viewed themselves against the backdrop of their very multi-ethnic high school. There are those who may argue that in Canada, there is no "post September 11th" drama or aftermath. For example, in their text, *Teaching Against Islamophobia* (2010), Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg discuss how in Western traditions of teaching about, writing about, researching, or representing Islam, Europeans have consistently positioned themselves superiorly and have exoticized Muslims as irrational, fantastic, and despotic others. They argue that this type of portrayal is more about Western anxieties, fears, and self-doubts than it is about Islam. They state,

> As educators, we are concerned about these representations in light of events of the early 21st century. After September 11, 2001, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the ways images of Islam have been embedded in the Western and especially the American consciousness become extremely important to everyday life. With these concerns in mind, we attempt to re-

> write within current curricula to contextualize and construct a liberatory framework to teach against Islamophobia. (p. 3)

It seems as though the authors argue that much of how society sees South Asians, Muslims in particular, is directly affected by the gaze that shapes representation held by pop culture.

Post-9/11 curriculum discourse is a necessary and vital topic for educators to consider. It must be noted here that the term "Islamophobia" is limiting as it seems to define the experiences of discrimination, dehumanization, and misrepresentations of Muslims, those of Muslim heritage, and the systemic miseducation of Islam itself (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010). However, the authors of *Teaching Against Islamophobia* use this term to isolate instances which have been applied to Islamic peoples *or those who appear to be Muslim*. Naturally, not all Muslims are Arabs and not all Arabs are Muslims, but according to the authors, the 21st century is an Islamophobically constructed era as many of today's Canadian youth seem to be stereotyped as belonging to Muslim heritage by association, by colour, or by any other cultural marker even remotely related to Muslims. South Asian identities and organizing around it has taken on greater legitimacy as the second generation unites to resist ethnic stereotypes and fight discrimination based on stereotypes and misinformation.

In fact, the youth I interviewed even viewed using racial stereotypes and misinformation through comedy as powerful forces in the demystification of their cultural identities. The narratives told by my second-generation participants point to a subliminal and coercive emergence of different kinds of South Asian identities revealing a wide variety of attitudes and understandings of the South Asian label from total embrace to ambivalence to slight denial, depending on how the individuals located themselves within peer and family groups. A common thread as indicated by my data pointed to an adoption of simultaneous and multiple identities (as described by other scholars) in order for my research participants to navigate the daily routine of their lives. Most times, they were completely unaware and at other times they were strategic and systematic about

which hat to wear depending on environment, context, and company.

I discovered from my participants (and in reference to my own upbringing) in addition to organized and informal religious activities, most South Asian Canadian families are also involved in some type of ethnic organization and extended informal family friendship groups that provided children with opportunities to socialize with other second generation co-ethnics. According to Salam (2005), the goal of these socialization efforts is two-fold: one is to teach children about their native culture (the essentials of their religion and their own family values) and the other is to deepen and reinforce family bonds in ways that South Asians feel contrast with the closeness and obedience they see lacking in American families. (Such is also the case with Canadian families.) In this vein, it seems as though there is also a stereotyping of American/Canadian families as preserving difference from the eastern ways of thinking about family, religion, and cultural values. At home, South Asian Canadians are free to practice their own religions, speak their own languages, cook their own Indian foods, and, crucially, acculturate their families in what is considered to be the Indian or South Asian way. While outside the home, children must conform and figure out the gender ideology and expectations of contemporary Canadian society and then return home to a different set of norms and expectations. The crucial and essential problem for South Asian Canadian parents is the contentious issues of deciding on which aspects of Canadian (i.e., Western) culture to assimilate and which aspects to avoid, which are often the main source of familial conflict; to have it both ways.

Pettys and Balgopal (1998) note the conflicts faced by Asian Indian youth include the shifting of one's South Asian identity and the accompanying guilt over abandoning the cultural and time-honored ways of one's culture and ancestors. There is also a concern over appearing materialistic or as having sold out to Western culture as well as a deep-seeded fear of becoming more Western which often causes family disruption or the risk of losing one's "inner soul," which—inherited from a rich South Asian heritage—is a soul carved out by

discipline, duty, and devotion (Salam, 2005). This too can be interpreted as a fundamental terrorism. Finding the balance between being "too ethnic" in terms of the mainstream or being seen as "too Western" by their family and co-ethnics is often described as the main concern of parents and some youth.

> As Karen Isaksen Leonard (1997) notes:
>
> [T]he youngsters, even if born in Pakistan or Sri Lanka, can position themselves within the history and culture of the United States and engage in the construction of pan-ethnic groups, building new conceptions of ethnic and national identities in the United States. (p. 28)

This is also true for the South Asian Canadians in my study who often needed to negotiate between two identities and faced tension between sameness and difference. This negotiation is two-fold, writes Handa (2003). First,

> identity is negotiated in relation to "white" as the normative reference point, which means not being too different from the white norm. Second, identity is negotiation in relation to "brown" as the point of reference, in that there is a desire not to be perceived as stereotypical South Asians. (p. 70)

Multiculturalism: A State Initiated Enterprise

> Canadian multiculturalism appears as neither a generous gift of liberal democracy, nor a divisive practice threatening to destroy the enjoyment of Canadianness for all. Rather, it is a reproduction of an ethnocultural economy which takes as its raw material the 'objective contents' of Canadian diversity and hopes to produce out of it a simulacrum of Canadian unity. The reality of Canadian diversity is symbiotically dependent upon this fantasy of unity—without it, a diversity simply could not exist and certainly could not be a problem. The rhetoric of multiculturalism says that Canada is attempting to become, not a nation-state, but a self-consciously multinational state, in which all nations can

> seek their enjoyment in possession of a national Thing. (Zizek, 1992, p. 165)

Canadian official multiculturalism developed through the 1970s and '80s, and became, in the 1990s, a major part of Canadian political discourse and electoral organization (Bannerji, 2000). Pierre Trudeau introduced multiculturalism in 1971 as a way to encourage newcomers to keep their cultures while adapting to the country's norms. The purpose of Trudeau's call for a multiculturalism policy was to recognize the existence of cultural groups living in Canada and to provide state assistance to them to "overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society" (as cited in Ali 2008, p. 93). Almost 40 years later, Fleras and Elliot (2002) suggest that this concept has been used as a multi-dimensional strategic endeavour: to promote diversity as an ideology, to justify government programs for minorities, to describe the existence of many different ethnic groups in one geographic space, and to articulate and protect the rights of minority groups within a nation state. It is obvious that Canada's landscape circa 2011 is a pan-ethnicity at its very finest. However, how Canadian society responds to this reality is a matter of contentious and controversial debate. Those who support multiculturalism claim that a healthy society is based upon diverse, healthy ethnocultural groups providing security and support to its citizens. The opposing argument asserts that it divides citizens by overemphasizing differences, draws attention away from structural inequities and injustices, and that too much multiculturalism diminishes trust in social capital and in effect leads to the dissolution of social bonds (Bannerji, 2000; Bissoondath, 1994; Henry, 2006). Regardless of birthplace, age, or demographic, in Canada the concept of multiculturalism is almost always associated with racialized immigrants or visible minorities. Scholars such as Anthias (1999) and Dyck and Mclaren (2002) state that dominant public discourses impose ethnic identities and ethnicities and races on non-consenting people, such as the second generation, and therefore severely limit their own options for self-identifications.

Now, in the 21st century, we see another major shift in the multicultural paradigm of Canada. Will Canada be a truly pluralist country? If the population of immigrants continues to soar,then the category of second and perhaps subsequent generations will also continue to climb, hence populating Canadian classrooms with a large number of visible minorities. From an educational standpoint an interesting question that begs to be asked is how the cultural identity experiences of second generation South Asian Canadians impact current classroom and institutional approaches to literacy? Are Canadian English language arts curricula changing to meet the needs of the diversity of learners?

Educators have to recognize that the complexion of Canada is changing rather fast (Ghosh, 2011). Canadian curricula, and more specifically teaching strategies and approaches, are still extremely Eurocentric in focus and have been based on the inequalities of a class and patriarchal Eurocentric society (Johnston & Mangat, 2012). Historically, the canon of literature that still exists in most schools emerges from the beliefs of critics such as Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot that certain literary texts have intrinsic artistic worth and should be read and studied without reference to history or time. Reinforced by the work of the critic F. R. Leavis, English Literature became the centre of the education syllabus, enshrining the qualities of an essential "Englishness." A parallel movement in the United States entitled New Criticism similarly celebrated the concept of Literature as "a select(ive) and valuable aesthetic and moral resource to replenish those living in the spiritual desert of mass civilisation" (Widdowson, 1999, p. 60). This literary canon, embedded in selected British and American texts, has remained as the staple of literature taught in North American schools (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2004). At the core of this study, my intention is to question what the possibilities are that accompany the inclusion of a postcolonial literature curriculum? Can these texts address the lived experiences of second generation South Asian Canadian students in secondary English classrooms and help them negotiate the complexities of identity in such a tumultuous time?

Historical and formational peculiarities of the Canadian curriculum will emerge as I discuss issues surrounding the lived experiences of second-generation South Asian Canadian students and how these experiences might inform educators' selection and teaching of literary texts in contemporary Canadian English language arts classrooms. It is my hope that this discussion will also be of interest to many second generation Canadians from many different cultures. Several of the struggles with identity outlined in this dissertation are also very relevant to a variety of cultures other than mainstream dominant culture.

The "Mantra" of Multiculturalism?

The following section offers empirical data and a partial explanation of how Canadian students, more specifically second generation South Asian Canadian students, may feel about the Canadian school system—most specifically Alberta's English language arts program. I argue that the second generation youth in this ethnically diverse school live in ethnically diverse communities and therefore strongly believe in various narratives supporting a belief in the ideology of Canadian multiculturalism. They do so because of the varied skin colours, languages, accents, religious affiliations, and countries of origin in these countries, which are all congruent for them with an image of a multicultural Canada. Their parents' narratives of hard work and perseverance in Canada are met with security, equity, access to free health care and education, making them grateful to be born here. However, as much as they believe in the grand narratives of Canadian multiculturalism, they also feel very strongly about what needs to change about how teachers are choosing to teach the current language arts curriculum. They also have very strong opinions about what is being included in this teaching and what is being left out. Within the confines of their micro-environments (home, communities, places of worship) they do not experience racialization. According to one participant,

> *If you were born here, or if you immigrated, you're still part of the multicultural country. If you live in Canada you are Canadian because it*

is just the same laws and rights that are followed and respected. As most people, whether born here or having immigrated here, usually accept differences and commonalities between themselves, no matter how big or small, and still believe they all are Canadian. (Karan)

It is only when I asked questions pertaining to life in the classroom that my participants' expressed contradiction, conflict, realizations, and disillusionment with what is supposed to be and what is. To support the claims of my students, I came across a similar study conducted by Mehrunnissa Ahmad Ali (2008) who describes this group of second generation Canadians as:

> confident, ambitious, consumer-oriented and globally connected people who strongly identify with their parents' ethnic origins, but do not share their pre-migration or immigration experiences, they are unlikely to be simply grateful for the opportunity to live in Canada. Instead, they are much more likely to expect that in Canada they will be treated according to the tenets of multiculturalism. (Ali, 2008, p. 91)

I discovered this is also indeed true of my student participants, who were disappointed when they discovered in their school environment that on a daily basis, their race and ethnicity acted as limits to what they could and could not express and share about their home lives in "a context where power and privilege are still controlled by White immigrants who arrived in Canada many generations ago" (Ali, 2008, p. 91). Kavita notes,

> *I don't think there is enough diversity even though there have been many changes recently. The curriculum is quite old and some old concepts still dominate the teaching . . . Most of the texts that we studied come from a North American or European author. There's not a lot of* {diversity}. *There could be more. Some high schools are predominantly White so I guess that's why . . . but ours is so multicultural… You would think teachers would figure it out. We're being left out.*

It seems as though race was also an important factor for my participants, as Kamani remarks:

Usually, the teachers are usually a different race {from us} *and a lot more of the books that we study are written by either American or North American authors in "White" societies or the main characters are "White" and portray a different view on things.*

What I found interesting about these statements was the impression that these students were making; they felt that only visible minority teachers would include a representative amount of diverse materials in the first statement and that "American or North American authors" couldn't be of diverse ethnicities. Or, for that matter, that American or North American authors don't write about diverse characters or settings. For example, one of the survey questions I asked was, "In your previous courses, have you ever had the chance to read a novel/text that involved/depicted characters, setting, themes of a multicultural/ethnically diverse nature? Did you enjoy reading this type of novel text? Why or why not?" Almost 70% of the 20 IB students said yes, they did have the chance to read a diverse novel or text which shows a direct reflection of the impact of the World Literature component of their International Baccalaureate program (Just a note, most students in the International Baccalaureate program in this school are first or second generation Canadians and are mostly visible minorities). Most of the students who responded stated they enjoyed reading this type of text. Some responses include:

Made me feel connected to my roots

Enjoyed reading about new settings, perspectives, points of view, insights of other cultures

Opened my eyes

I felt I could relax to these types of texts

I felt connected to the situation

Gives us the truth about other cultures and shows that many beliefs we have about other people's cultures are just negative stereotypes.

When answering the question, "If you have not had the chance to read a novel/text that involved/depicted characters, settings, themes of a

multicultural/ethnically diverse nature, did you ever wonder why you did not have the opportunity to do so? Please explain your answer." Many students expressed that they didn't even think it was an option to question what texts the teacher selected:

> *No, I never wondered why. I just assumed that possibly it wasn't part of the curriculum*
>
> *No, I never actually thought about why I never have, it just never occurred to me.*
>
> *No not really, I just trusted the teacher decision to pick other texts.*
>
> *I would have liked the opportunity to discover more about other cultures.*
>
> *No, it never occurred to me that reading books based on multicultural people could be interesting.*
>
> *I never even considered that there is a whole new realm of literature out there.*

One particularly interesting response from Kamran was,

> *No I have not because coming from a—White elementary, junior high has White-washed me so I don't wonder why we haven't.*

Upon further discussion with this student later on in the study, he revealed to me that he was somewhat resentful of his experiences in the elementary school and indicated that once arriving in larger schools, the population was more diverse. His formative experiences in an elementary school were quite influential in the way he perceived the world. His words,

> *I have lost some of my cultural South Asian identity. I have somewhat acculturated to western society, but not fully.* (Kamran)

In fact, many students felt that elementary and junior school were significantly more difficult experiences for them than junior high or high school simply because the population of their schools was less diverse and, of equal importance, the content was less flexible. One student described her experience of moving to Canada early in her adolescence as being "a horrible junior high experience":

Initially, I hated Canada. In grade 9, I'd just moved from India (but I had studied previously in an American school for 3 years) but the people here seemed mean. I studied hard but I was in a regular curriculum. The White kids in class sometimes bullied me and cheated off me in exams (but I could never do anything about it). I think I couldn't blend in with the differences I saw. But in high school—it was very different. I kind of liked it. There were people whom I didn't like—but most people in high school were great. I think it's because there were more people who looked like me…

In my previous courses the texts we read seemed to be more focused on English literature, like classics. I did wonder why we didn't read something more diverse but at the moment the study of those English classics seemed more important. I think that teachers choose to assign novels of a monoculture because they feel that it is easier for the students to follow and understand the literature. I also think that sometimes, teachers do not assign multicultural novels because it may not reflect their values (what they prefer).

I know it is off-topic but I personally think [*the*] *history course is pretty —White. It's all about European history, and not diverse at all. Ironically, people who learn European history in IB history are mostly non-European races*[8]. (Kavita)

When I asked the students if they would have enjoyed reading a novel/text that involved or depicted characters, setting, and themes of a diverse nature in English language arts courses, many of the 20-IB students indicated that the World Literature courses offer many texts of diverse nature. Some of the White students responded that it opened up their world-view, they were able to experience different cultures and lifestyles, and it helped them to recognize parts of the world they normally would not have had the opportunity to come into

[8] I question here in their backgrounds does the term White appear in this form since this can be equally viewed as a racial slur? Something to investigate in further research…

contact with. A few students even remarked,

> *I had read enough books with a western or European setting & culture and it is more interesting to be more exposed to books from other cultures. In fact, I find them* {books with diverse content} *more interesting and I like the discussions we have in class because everyone can contribute in a different way because our class is so diverse. A lot of people could use the knowledge to be less ignorant.* (Sanam)

> *I'm sick and tired about learning about Canada—its cold winter, wild life and aboriginal and European conflicts. This topic is drawn out for so many years.* (Anjali)

In response to the same question, the South Asian students indicated that they were able to relate more to the content of texts like *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) in a deeper way. There was a wide consensus among the students that when common values, religion, and culture were included in the content of the text, they felt a very strong connection towards the text. Kamani said, "*We were so taken by this book. The connections are very personal for all of us*." Sanam also shared this comment with me one afternoon while discussing how reading a text like *The Namesake* made her feel more "at home" in the classroom.

> *I can relate better. When we only read novels that are mainly English/western, everyone seems to have certain ideas. Appreciation of other cultures is very important, and so is understanding them to a certain degree. Because novels that were originally English or written in a western perspective sometimes convey ideas I don't always like. Like the play . . . (I don't remember what it is—something with Oliver as the main character that we read in LA class in Grade 9). My teacher once said—the boy Oliver has very blonde hair and is very pale. That's always how it is. White is good—black is bad . . . I wonder what they do in cultures where people are dark. I mean you couldn't imagine an East Indian having blonde hair? That really offended me and now that I look*

back on it, maybe it even lowered my self-esteem a little at the time…
(April, 2009)

When I asked her if she would like to see more texts and films like *The Namesake* in English language arts classrooms, she said,

> *I would, and I am quite excited to take part in this research project by reading* The Namesake*. I actually own the book, and was given it as a—gift from my sister after a year in which I had had many a fight with my parents. My sister said that I could learn something from it. And after reading it, I felt a very strong connection to the happenings in the novel, though I can't effectively explain it.*

Through my research, I discovered that South Asian students *are* thinking about their cultural identity and have interesting views on how they perceive the English language arts curriculum and how media, culture, and literacy have an impact on how they view themselves inserted into Canadian society. They are concerned with how their answers measure up to their peers and whether their cultural identities are limiting factors to their responses to text. As you will soon find out in the next few chapters, my students felt exceptionally connected to the text itself, as an entity. They knew the pages on which to find the "*weird Brown things only Brown people know about*." It was these weird Brown things that my students enjoyed seeing in print, enjoyed discussing out loud, in the open, in class discussions. They felt a sense of ownership over conversations, passages, and discussions—all of which they found useful as evidence for point, proof, and discussion exercises; essay writing; oral presentations; etc. Before getting too far ahead of myself, I think it is important to share some information with you about the changing nature of Canada's demographics. Even by the time this study has been reviewed, edited, and defended Canada will have undergone even more transition and change, making her even more diverse and challenging to study.

CHAPTER 5: Conceptual Framework

We know plain prose cheats. (Spivak, as cited in Grosz, 1984)

Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

Framed by transactional theory, postcolonial literary theories, and a post-structural lens, this study hopes to open up possibilities for the place of postcolonial text and theory in the classroom. Post-structuralist thought examines the notion of difference in all its facets and discovers that Ferdinand de Saussure had left in tact certain (metaphysical) presuppositions about subjectivity and language (e.g., privileging speech over writing)—vestiges of the historicist framework with which Saussure himself was dissatisfied. Post-structuralist thought examines writing as the paradoxical source of subjectivity and culture, whereas once it was thought to be secondary; most importantly, it is an investigation as to how this was so. Post-structuralist thought[9] involves a radical questioning of otherness and subject-object relation, as indicated by Georges Bataille and Emmanuel Levinas.

Post-structuralist thought operates according to certain assumptions. The concept of 'self' is singular and separate from all else. The notion of a fixed and coherent identity is considered to be a fictional construct; instead, an individual compromises tensions between conflicting categories (e.g. gender, race, class, etc.) Given these assumptions, in order to properly experience and study a text, a reader must understand how the work is related to his/her own sense of self (which is fluid and dynamic and constantly in a state of flux). This awareness of self plays a crucial role in one's own interpretation of meaning. While the various scholars that are associated with post-structuralist thought have different views on the notion of the 'self" (or the subject), Lacan's account of the subject includes a psychoanalytic dimension, while Derrida stresses the effects of power on the self.

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[9] While most scholars who are generally associated with post-structuralism generally do not label themselves as 'post-structuralists', three of the most prominent post-structuralists were first counted among the so-called "Gang of Four" of structuralism par excellence: Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault. The works of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva are also considered to be prominent examples of post-structuralism. Some scholars associated with structuralism, such as Roland Barthes, also became noteworthy in post-structuralism.

The author's intended meaning of a text is secondary to the meaning that is made by the reader. A post-structuralist analysis of text rejects any ideas that a literary text has a single purpose or meaning; rather, each reader brings a different experience, culture, purpose and meaning to any given text. To take this notion outside of reader response, when any given subject perceives a sign, the meaning of this sign (the signified) is constructed by an individual from a signifier. In Deleuze's work, inspired by Nietzche, the "tree" of the "subject-object" relation is compared to the "rhisome" of horizontal thought, thought always in movement (Lechte, 1994). The fundamental difference between post-structural thought and psychoanalytic discourse is the notion and emphasis of the Real (See section entitled "Lacan's Ontology").

There are always critics and limitations to any theory, and one of the major limitations of post-structuralist thought is that some interpretations of texts may conflict with others. It is particularly important to analyze how the meanings of a text shifts according to variables involving the identity of the reader (class, race, sexual identity, etc.). Another major criticism of post-structuralist thought is the reliance on linguistics, signifiers and signifieds and thus creates a danger in representation. (See the section entitled "The Canadian Gaze").

Through a psychoanalytic orientation[10] to identity, this research attempts to deconstruct cultural identities to explore the role of the unconscious and situational factors in cultural identity development, with particular attention to the role of the Real. My goal is to discuss the limits of representation and difference by presenting a psychoanalytic discussion of non-representational and non-relational ways of thinking that are not caught by the representational ego.

[10] Influenced by structural linguists, Lacan was the first to recognize and formulate that language has the capacity to say something other than what it says. Language speaks *through* human beings as much as they speak it. The role of the Other is fundamental in the articulation of human desire. Because it is founded on the loss of the object (ex: the mother) desire does not confirm the subject in its identity but puts it into question: desire highlights a division in the subject.

Transactional Theory and Postcolonial Theories: Possibilities for the Second Generation

When transactional theory first gained ascendancy in literary circles, it was a corrective to the long-term entrenched "objectivism" that sought the one true meaning of a text. Most of today's literacy educators accept the major tenets of transactional theory and do not believe that a text has but one true meaning and that anyone seeking it can be totally objective. However, the other extreme—textual indeterminacy, where a text has infinite meanings and that meaning resides solely in the reader, is also not a credible or accurate way to interpret text and response. There exists a compromise between extremes; one that acknowledges that readers bring something to their reading of a text and in addition, the text, for its part, influences how it is read. Transactional theory stresses the importance of the reader's role in interpreting texts. Rejecting the idea that there is a single, fixed meaning inherent in every literary work, this theory holds that the individual *creates* his or her own meaning through a "transaction" with the text based on personal associations. Because all readers bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge to their reading, each interpretation is subjective and unique.

It can be argued that the beginning of reader-response theory can be traced back to Louise Rosenblatt's influential 1938 text, *Literature as Exploration*. Rosenblatt's ideas were a reaction to the formalist theories of the New Critics who promoted "close readings" of literature, a practice that advocated rigid scholarly detachment in the study of texts and rejected all forms of personal interpretation by the reader. According to Rosenblatt, the New Critics treated the text as an autonomous entity that could be objectively analyzed using clear-cut technical criteria. Rosenblatt believed instead that the reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader and a particular text at a particular time under particular circumstances.

Another influential transactional theorist, Wolfgang Iser (1974), also posits that a reader plays a central role in the form of engagement within the reading process. In an exploration of the social norms and challenges to these norms offered by a work of fiction, a reader is offered the opportunity to live vicariously through the text. He/she encounters his/her own reality and lives out experiences beyond his/her frame of reference as offered by the text. Iser (1974) argues that literary meaning is not some hidden object or substance that can be extracted from a text; rather it is the text that activates a reader/viewer to produce meaning so that literature is an event, something that happens when he/she reads. Likewise, Umberto Eco (1979) describes the "two way" process of reading whereby the reader, bringing his/her own experience to the text, not only receives a meaning, but also becomes an active contributor to that meaning.

At each reading or viewing moment we generate expectations about the kinds of things that might happen ahead in the text. We anticipate and modify our interpretations of what we have read in light of what we are reading or viewing now. The reader/viewer's activity is not independent of either textual or cultural constraints but rather guided by the text and influenced by personal experience, cultural history, his/her present representation, and the reading conventions s/he has internalized (Rosenblatt, 1995). Similarly, contemporary postcolonial texts create spaces in which a reader/viewer can explore the meanings of their own cultural nuances and experiences alongside the curriculum expectations.

Transactional theory in the classroom can have a profound impact on how students view texts and how they see their role as readers. There is no single, authoritative voice, teacher, or critic to give students a single, standard interpretation of a text. Instead, students learn to construct their own meaning by connecting the textual material to issues in their lives and describing what they experience as they read. As a result, transactional theorists would argue that there is no one "correct" interpretation. The diverse responses of individual readers are key to discovering the variety of possible meanings a poem, story, essay, or other

text can evoke.[11] Students in reader-response classrooms become active learners because their personal responses are valued. Students begin to see themselves as having both the authority and the responsibility to make judgments about what they read. The responses of fellow students also play a pivotal role, moving students beyond their initial individual reactions to take into account a multiplicity of ideas and interpretations, thus broadening their perspective. Transactional theory has tremendous potential for the field of identity studies which, in turn, is informed by postcolonial theory. In a general sense, as a literary or critical theory, postcolonial theory examines the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the last few centuries. The field also deals with the impact of colonization on postcolonial history, economy, science, culture, the cultural productions of colonized societies, and feminism (Henry & Tator, 2006). As Stephen Slemon (2003) has argued, postcolonial theory offers "a sustained challenge to the dominant in contemporary distributions of valuation and power" (321). Postcolonial studies have much to offer Canadian educators. The multicultural nature of Canadian society makes this discourse especially useful because of the discourse's emphasis on identity and the processes of changing identity.

Although there has been much more critique about the way identities are dealt with in social and educational discourses (e.g., Hall, 2003), there seem to be only a few scholars who address the influence of marginalized identities in educational organizations. It is my aim to draw upon postcolonial ideas put forward by scholars such as Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (2005), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) together with transactional theory and Lacanian discourses of identity to explore how students articulate and talk about their unique experiences of being South Asian Canadian teenagers in secondary schools.

[11] There is the question of psychoanalytic truth that will be developed further in my dissertation.

It can be argued that Edward Said's seminal book, *Orientalism* (1978), is one of the foundational works in the field of postcolonial studies. Said's evaluation and critique of the set of beliefs known as Orientalism form an important background for postcolonial studies. His work highlights the inaccuracies of a wide variety of Western assumptions as it questions various paradigms of thought which are accepted on individual, academic, and political levels. Said's main thesis was that the Western image of the East was heavily biased by colonialist attitudes, racism, and more than two centuries of political exploitation (Said, 1990). Said argues that Orientalism can be found in current Western depictions of "Arab" cultures. The depictions of "the Arab" as irrational, menacing, untrustworthy, anti-Western, dishonest, and—perhaps most importantly—prototypical, are ideas evolved from Orientalist scholarship. These notions are trusted as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by the Occident (Said, 1990). Said believed that the modern history of literary study is bound up with the development of cultural nationalism, whose aim is first to distinguish the national canon, then to maintain it in a place reserved for eminence, authority, and aesthetic autonomy. In an essay entitled "Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations," (1990) Said discusses how, even where discussions concerning culture in general seemed to rise above national differences in deference to a universal sphere, it is very apparent that hierarchies (as between European and non-European cultures) and ethnic preferences are held to.

> I do want to be understood as saying that a focus on identity need imply neither the ontologically given eternally determined stability of that identity, nor its uniqueness, its utterly irreducible character, its privileged status as something total and complete in and of itself. I would much prefer to interpret a novel as the selection of one mode of writing among many others, and the activity of writing as one social mode among several, and the category of literature as something created, made to serve various worldly aims. Thus the focus that corresponds with the destablising and

> investigative attitudes I have mentioned in connection with active opposition to states and borders is to look at the way a work, for instance, begins as a work, begins from a political, social and cultural situation, begins to do certain things and not others. (p. 1)

Said (1990) suggests that the basic premise of what literary scholars do is provided by the residue of nationalism with its various derivative authorities, in alliance with professionalism, which divides material into fields, sub-divisions, specialties, accreditations, and the like. He elaborates,

> Most students and teachers of non-European literatures today must take account of the politics of what they study right at the outset; one cannot postpone discussions of slavery, colonialism, racism, in any serious investigations of modern Indian, African, Latin American, Caribbean and Commonwealth literature. Nor, strictly speaking, is it intellectually responsible to discuss any of these literatures without specific references to their embattled circumstances either in post-colonial societies or as subjects taught in metropolitan centres where, for example, the study of what are marginalized and/or subjugated literatures is confined to secondary spots on the curricular agenda. (1990, p. 1)

Said believes that the notion of literature as hybrid and burdened with supposedly superfluous elements is the essential idea adequate for the revolutionary realities that face us today, "in which the contests of the secular world so provocatively inform the texts we both read and write" (1990, p. 1). If configurations like world literature are to have any meaning at all, it is, therefore, because,

> by their existence and actuality…they first testify to the contests and continuing struggles by virtue of which they have emerged not only as texts but as experiences; and second, because they interact ferociously not only with the whole nationalist basis for the composition and study of literature, but also with the lofty independence. (1990, p. 1).

As influential as Said's (1990) work is, Ibn Warraq's book entitled *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007), offers a valuable and logical critique of Said's notion of "Orientalism." Warraq argues that Said's case against the West is seriously flawed, accusing Said of not only willfully misinterpreting the work of many scholars, but also of systematically misrepresenting Western civilisation as a whole. He demonstrates examples dating all the way back to the Greek's Western civilization. He argues that Greek Western civilization has always had a strand in its very makeup that has accepted non-Westerners with open arms and has ever been open to foreign ideas. Warraq also critiques Said's inadequate methodology, incoherent arguments, and a faulty historical understanding. Nevertheless, the impact of Said's ideas has been a pervasive rethinking of Western perceptions of Eastern cultures, plus a tendency to view all scholarship in Oriental Studies as tainted by considerations of power and prejudice.

Said is followed by one of today's most expressive postcolonial scholars, Homi Bhabha (2005). Bhabha uses a psychoanalytic perspective on identity and borrowed the term "hybrid" to describe persons who are in a liminal state, negotiating between two cultures, and whose culture and behaviour is neither one nor the other. Such can be said of the second generation of South Asian Canadians who walk the tightrope of culture. They are Othered by a dominant culture which categorizes them as visible minorities, ethnics, immigrants, or foreigners. These categories are considered to be incommensurable with being a real Canadian, despite the promises of multiculturalism.[12] As Bhabha states, "The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (2005, p. 64). Second generation South Asian Canadians are never quite Asian enough nor are they

[12] In *Tarrying with the Negative* (1993) Slavoj Žižek discusses the question "What is dominant culture if not a mythical idealization?" I do not attempt to identify what a 'real' Canadian is in this paper, although I do attempt to discuss the 'inexpressible' notions of citizenship and cultural identities. Žižek's notion of the negation of citizenship is more useful here than the search for national identity against a hegemonic idealization, and will be further discussed in my dissertation.

quite White enough; they exist in a liminal space. Identity building is a process of self-reflection (Bhabha, 2005) and images of self therefore are always constructed in reflection of others.

In *The Location of Culture* (2005), Bhabha discusses the vanishing point of two familiar traditions in the discourse of identity studies: the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of human nature and the anthropological view of difference of human identity as located in the division of Nature/Culture. According to Bhabha (2005),

> In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image—missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype—is confronted with its difference, its Other. This is neither the glassy essence of Nature, to use Richard Rorty's image, nor the leaden voice of 'ideological interpellation', as Louis Althusser suggests. (p. 66)

By disrupting the stability of the ego expressed in the equivalence between image and identity of the ego, the "secret art of invisibleness" of which the poet speaks, fundamentally changes the terms of recognition of the person. In the process of identification, the familiar space of the Other in the process of identification develops "a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject" (Bhabha, 2005, p. 67). As a psychoanalytic postcolonial theorist, Bhabha makes reference to the Self and Other as a shifting of frame of identity from the field of vision to the space of writing which interrogates the third dimension that gives profundity to the representation of Self and Other. Bhabha argues for the importance of *depth* in the representation of a unified image of the self as "it is borne out by the most decisive and influential formulation on personal identity in the English empiricist tradition" (p. 69). Bhabha strives to define the space of the inscription or writing of identity beyond the visual depths of the symbolic sign. To propagate self-image is to go beyond representation as the analogical consciousness of resemblance. Bhabha (2005) writes,

> Each time the encounter with identity occurs at the point at which something exceeds the frame of the image, it eludes the eye, evacuates the self as site of identity and autonomy and—most important—leaves a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance. We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, and culture and politics. (p. 71)

The image of identity and identity itself are either familiar mirrors, or frames of selfhood that speak from deep within Western culture and are inscribed in the sign of resemblance. The perspective that Bhabha brings to the postcolonial and psychoanalytic inquiry represents a departure from the traditional study of literature, one in which literary canons are defined by nationality with only an occasional acknowledgement that artistic influences may seep beyond borders. Bhabha's view of the literary universe is one in which borders are extremely porous and national identities may be exceedingly ambiguous. This view reflects a world in which the media, the Internet, and globalization have created a greater degree of cultural contact than ever before. As Benjamin Graves (1998) notes,

> Homi Bhabha has encouraged a rigorous rethinking of nationalism, representation, and resistance that above all stresses the "ambivalence" or "hybridity" that characterizes the site of colonial contestation—a "liminal" space in which cultural differences articulate and, as Bhabha argues, actually produce imagined "constructions" of cultural and national identity. (¶3)

In a 1995 interview with W. J. T. Mitchell[13], Bhabha stated that Edward Said is the writer who has most influenced his thought, yet his thinking has also been influcenced by Derridean deconstuction and Lacanian psychoanalysis

[13] W. J. T. Mitchell is the Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago.

(Graves, 1998). His interests in Lacanian psychoanalysis have led him to oppose the binary model of colonial relations. Bhabha (2005) hypothesizes the Western production and implementation of certain binary oppositions which include center/margin, civilized/savage, and enlightened/ignorant. Bhabha challenges these notions by destabilizing the binaries describing the first term of the binary as naturally dominating the second term. By destabilizing binaries, Bhabha (2005) argues that cultures can be understood to interact, transgress, and transform each other in a much more complex manner than the traditional binary oppositions can allow. According to Bhabha, hybridity and "linguistic multivocality" have the potential to intervene and dislocate the process of colonization through the reinterpretation of political discourse (2005, p. 178).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a South Asian literary critic and postcolonial feminist. She is best known for her translation of Jacques Derrida's book *Of Grammatology* (1976) and for her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), which is considered by many theorists to be another founding text of postcolonialism. In this essay she criticizes Deleuze and Foucault for their "disinclination to 'speak for' the subaltern other and renders problematic their rather facile assumption that the other can 'speak for' herself" (Bignall & Patton, 2010, p. 4). Spivak critiques Deleuze and Foucault for being guilty of an implicit Eurocentrism that "does not acknowledge how such 'speech' must be presented within the privileged structures of Western epistemology and representation in order to be comprehended or perceived as sensible" (Bignall & Patton, 2010, p. 5). Her scathing reading of Deleuze and Foucault complicates issues of political and ethical nature and the notions of Western responsibility in the face of postcolonial projects of representation. Although Spivak's essay remains an important benchmark for understanding Deleuze's relationship with postcolonialism, she is not without her own critics. Bignall and Patton's (2010) edited collection of essays entitled *Deleuze and the Postcolonial* offers a critique to the *doxa* or stratified set of assumptions which have developed among scholars as a result of Spivak's critique of Deleuze and have captured Deleuze as a sort of

designate character (Deleuze, 2007). Their edited volume seeks to unsettle this *doxa* in order to open up a more reflexive reconnection between Deleuzian philosophy and postocolonial theory.

Spivak has often referred to herself as a "practical Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist," seeing each of these fields as necessary but insufficient by themselves, yet productive together. "Spivak's critical interventions encompass a range of theoretical interests including Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonial theory and cutting-edge work on globalisation" (Morton, 2003, p. 1).

Along with Said (1990) and Bhabha (2005), Spivak has challenged the disciplinary conventions of literary criticism and academic philosophy by focusing on the cultural texts of those people who are often marginalized by dominant western culture: the new immigrant, the working class, women, and the postcolonial subject (Morton, 2003). Spivak's (1984) statement that "plain prose cheats" illustrates how the basic syntactic structure of the monosyllabic sentence is contradicted by the semantic content of the sentence. The point of Spivak's remark is not just a play on words, but rather to demonstrate how her essays and books carefully link disparate histories, places, and methodologies in ways that often refuse to adhere to the systematic conventions of western critical thought. As Stephen Morton (2003) remarks,

> Such a refusal to be systematic is not merely a symptom of current academic or theoretical fashion, but a conscious rhetorical strategy calculated to engage the implied reader in the critical interrogation of how we make sense of literary, social and economic texts in the aftermath of colonialism. (p. 6)

One of the most important contributions that Spivak (1988) has made to contemporary critical thought is in the effective reworking of western theoretical concepts and ideas to address contemporary political concerns in the postcolonial world (Morton, 2003). Postcolonial literary critic, Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997) argues that Spivak (1988), along with Said (1978, 1990) and Bhabha (1994,

2005), has been one of the foremost figures to accommodate ideas and concepts from western critical theory within the field of postcolonial studies.

However, postcolonial theories are not without their critics. As Peter Hallward (2001) suggests in *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific*, one of the peculiarities of postcolonial theory is "its own apparent resistance to distinction and classification" (p. xi). He suggests that "postcolonial theory often seems to present itself precisely as a sort of general theory of the not-generalisable as such" (p. xi), claiming an "almost global jurisdiction" (p. xi). I do agree with some of the dilemmas Hallward presents surrounding postcolonial theories, such as the name postcolonial itself which suggests we are in a "post" colonization state; the tension between a discursive or theoretical stance and the lived experiences of formerly colonized peoples. However, I argue against his criticism which extends to challenging the major tenets of postcolonialism (the hybrid, the interstitial, the intercultural, the liminal, the indeterminate, the counter-hegemonic, etc.). Hallward claims "In this era that can be trivially (and in actual fact only partially) identified as 'after-colonialism', *anybody* can be postcolonial, provided that they conceive things in essentially singularizing terms" (p. xiii). Hallward's major argument here is that postcolonial theory is an "aspecific enterprise" (p. xii) or as he claims "a singular mode of individuation" which proceeds "internally through a process that creates its own medium of existence or expansion" (p. xii). Similarly, in her critique of the Subaltern Studies historians, Gayatri Spivak has also questioned the ability of western theoretical models of political resistance and social change to adequately represent the histories and lives of the disenfranchised and formerly colonized peoples. More specifically, Spivak has argued that the everyday lives of many Third World women are so complex and unsystematic that they cannot be known or represented in any straightforward way by the vocabularies of western critical theory (Morton, 2003). For Spivak, this presents a crisis in knowledge, highlighting the ethical risks at stake when privileged intellectuals make political claims on behalf of oppressed groups.

Although this application of western critical theory has had a mixed reception from critics like Peter Hallward (2001), Aijaz Ahmad (1992), and Arif Dirlik (1997), postcolonial literature has the potential to create a more flexible ethos or way for people to be in the world and experience difference and thus fundamentally shift how they create and understand literacies. In addition, postcolonial literature has become one of the most important ways to reflect on ways in which colonialism has influenced the perceptual frameworks of contemporary people living in the world today (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001). Pertinent literature on postcolonial literary theory and critical multiculturalism reveals that the connection between literature and the students' cultural world needs to be further explored (Bhabha, 2005; Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001; Giroux, 1992). Many postcolonial literary theories offer critical transdisciplinary interpretations of the human condition and therefore can have significant implications for curriculum and educational practices which are challenged by the strength of diversity and cultural change. These texts question the essentializing project of English literature study through addressing ongoing issues pertaining to continued use of the western literary canon, helping to negotiate the worlds of establishment aesthetics and popular/vernacular culture. In my own experience, I have encountered many postcolonial texts that enabled me and my students to negotiate cultural identity formation amongst the complex bicultural existence of growing up as Canadians of visible minority by addressing issues of identity, power, race, and gender. The study of English has always been a heavily political and cultural phenomenon, a practice in which language and literature have both been called into the service of a profound and embracing nationalism.

Although there is the danger of creating a new canon of literature, Ingrid Johnston (2003) offers us ways to help us think about the importance of using postcolonial texts in the secondary English classroom. Teachers are encouraged to develop a practice of postcolonial pedagogy that will guide teachers and students to see the world through different lenses. Postcolonial material and teaching strategies geared towards critical thinking provide students with

opportunities to begin to consider the significance and historical past in helping to shape their lives and from there to look outward and to see ambivalences in their own cultural heritages and intersections between their own lives and those of others (Johnston, 2003). The development of English as a privileged academic subject in the 19th century came about as an attempt to replace the Classics at the heart of the intellectual enterprise of 19th century humanistic studies. Proponents of English as a discipline linked its methodology to that of the Classics, with its emphasis on scholarship, philology, and historical study, the fixing of texts in historical time and the perpetual search for the determinants of a single, unified, and agreed meaning (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2004). The historical moment, which saw the emergence of English as an academic discipline, was also complicit in the production of the 19th century colonial form of imperialism. Literature has become one of the most important ways in which colonialism has influenced the perceptual frameworks of contemporary people living in the world today. The use of the term postcolonial suggests the poignant sense of ambiguity, porosity, and translation that is expressed in the cultural forms of modern societies (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001) and includes all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. Postcolonial is the most appropriate term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted (Ashcroft et al., 2004). The common element shared by these postcolonial literatures is that they have emerged in their present form out of the occurrence of colonization and have asserted themselves by problematizing the tension with the imperial powers and by underscoring their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center, making them uniquely postcolonial (Ashcroft et al., 2004).

Postcolonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing (Ashcroft et al., 2004). European theories belong to certain cultural

traditions, which are laden with notions of the universal. Postcolonial writing problematizes theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies, and value systems. For example, Ashcroft et al. (2004) state,

> The process of evaluation in universalist and nationalist theories which are overwhelmingly representationalist, becomes a process of establishing a mimetic adequacy. Because such theories propose a predominantly mimetic view of the relation between text and a *given* pre-constituted reality, evaluation becomes the business of establishing the representative 'truth' of the text… An 'intrinsic' value, linked as it is with an 'essential' meaning is crucial to the operation of the universalist conception of the literary. The intrinsic and essential must, by definition, be universal and of the course the universal is the province of the discourse which imposes its criteria. In the evaluation of post-colonial literatures it is the center which imposes its criteria as universal, and dictates an order in terms of which the cultural margins must always see themselves as disorder and chaos. (p. 186)

Indigenous theories have developed to accommodate the differences within the various cultural traditions and the desire to describe the features shared across those traditions in a comparative manner. The very existence of postcolonial literatures problematizes the essentializing project of English literature study, which is currently based on a single culture under the guise of the originating center.

I believe transactional theory and postcolonial theories can help students to become better critical readers. These theories support multiple interpretations and because readers learn techniques that help them recognize the ways in which their own arguments are formed, they are better equipped to examine the arguments of others. While these techniques encourage a broad range of textual interpretations and reactions, students must learn, however, that not *every* response is equally valid or appropriate. The meaning of a text is not an entirely

subjective matter, of course, and it is crucial that responses be grounded in the text itself and in the context in which the text is read. One way of ensuring that textual indeterminacy is avoided is to make sure that there is a community restraint on interpretation. If the reader-response exercises are carefully structured each individual is challenged by the discussion to go beyond his or her first response. Even though an individual reader's reactions are based on his or her own schema, s/he will realize through discussion that not everyone shares that same perspective.

Using Postcolonial Texts in the Classroom

Ingrid Johnston (2003) offers us possible ways to develop a practice of postcolonial pedagogy in secondary English language arts classrooms. Postcolonial material and teaching strategies geared towards critical thinking provide students with opportunities to "begin to consider the significance and historical past in helping to shape their lives and from there to look outward and to see ambivalences in their own cultural heritages and intersections between their own lives and those of others" (Johnston, 2003, p. 4). Salman Rushdie's young adult novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) is one example of a postcolonial text that has potential for adolescent readers. This text is an allegory for several problems existing in society today. Interspersed in this tale are some important issues dealing with freedom of speech and expression. Some critics say that Haroun, the pre-teen protagonist, and only child of Rashid, a storyteller, was loosely based on Rushdie's son, Zafar. Rushdie named these characters after the legendary Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun el-Rashid, who features in many Arabian Nights tales. Rashid is a prolific and inventive storyteller who ascribes his success to his subscription to water from the Sea of Stories. When Rashid's wife runs off with the clerk Mr. Sengupta, Rashid is heart broken and unable to continue his profession of storytelling. He suddenly finds himself unable to speak in public, and discontinues his subscription to the magical story waters of Kahani, the Sea of Stories, which gives all storytellers their imagination. Haroun feels he

started the problem by asking his father "What's the use stories that aren't even true?" (p. 20) so he feels compelled to help his father. In order to reverse the cancellation Haroun must go to Kahani, or "story" in Urdu, to try to get his father's subscription restored. Haroun embarks on a mystical journey to Kahani, a hidden moon of the Earth. Rashid mysteriously manages to appear on Kahani, too, and together, Haroun and Rashid manage to save the forces of Language from the forces of Silence. Rushdie's texts are an example of postcolonial literature that problematizes notions of Western and Eastern literary history as well as the concepts of identity and geographical place which raises important and engaging questions about how English teachers and students know or think they know about the cultural others they read about.

Rushdie's (1991) allegorical approach can be seen as an attempt to communicate his own beliefs about his own situation facing a "fatwa"[14] and those responsible for censorship, while subtly poking fun at himself and his relation to the larger picture of universally opposing the oppression of writers. Rushdie's texts problematize notions of Western and Eastern literary history as well as the concepts of identity and geographical place, raising important and engaging questions about how English teachers and students know or think they know about the cultural others they read about. Rushdie uses fictionalized history as his subject, which creates interesting ways for teachers to bring postcolonial literature into existing curriculums. An ardent critic of colonialism, Rushdie writes texts that offer ways for books to draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world (Rushdie, 1991). Holcombe (2004) states:

> Rushdie is renowned for taking symbols and figures from different myth systems and religions and interweaving them with different juxtapositions as themes from Islam and Hinduism are interwoven with figures from

[14] As politically contentious as these books were, Rushdie is most famous, however, for the extraordinary furor surrounding the fatwa-inspiring *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which earned him international notoriety amongst Muslims for its unfavourable depiction of the prophet Mohammed, and its fictional reworking of an apocryphal episode from Islamic history. A fatwa is an Islamic religious ruling, a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law.

> English literature and English literary references. His work advocates that the cultural exchange brought about by Empire has enriched rather than cheapened contemporary literature; in his fiction Rushdie has demanded the right, in a fractured and confused post-colonial climate, to be a part of the telling of one's own history. Rushdie has challenged official historical truth, launched vituperative attacks on petty nationalism and the censorship of the state, all the while wrapping his readers in the magic realist swirl of dreamscape and fairytale in which the conventional is challenged with astonishing wit and intellectual daring. (¶10)

Rushdie's texts are among many other postcolonial literatures with potential for the English language arts classroom. Using a text like Rushdie's is one way to help students make sense of how their cultural world can fit within the context of the literatures explored in classroom settings. Rushdie's essay (1991) entitled "Imaginary Homelands" had therapeutic qualities for me. In his essay, he notes, "The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (p. 11). I interpret this quote to mean our view of ourselves may be flawed according to our own standards, yardsticks, or internal measures by which we judge (the broken mirror). When we learn to accept our flaws, biases, prejudices, and other "less desirable" attributes, we are open to accepting ourselves in a more humble, more perfect way, and less inclined to think we should be like the other. The other seems more perfect, more desirable, more . . . unflawed. This quote captures my arguments for the usefulness of applying psychoanalytic thought to self-reflection as it caused me to look within to re-examine my thoughts about my own cultural identity and how it affects the lens through which I view the world.

The Possibilities of Applying Psychoanalytic Thought to Critical Self-Reflection and Reflective Practice

Teachers must embark on a personal journey in order to understand our own identity and to realize how this sense of identity makes a difference in our

classroom and our choices of text. Teachers need to intellectualize their work by remembering that who we are is always in relation to others and to our place in the curriculum. This chapter invites you to imagine the possibilities offered to us by the contributions of psychoanalytic theory and how it may start new pathways and trigger old ones with regards to critical self reflection and reflective practice, both necessary elements of excellent teaching.

One way of locating ourselves within our own cultures and realities involves thinking about how our own "selves" are reproduced in *how* and *what* we teach. The implications of using psychoanalysis to think about curriculum discourse is challenging but there is the possibility of encountering knowledge that is vital in helping us to investigate questions intimately tied to our selves. The contributions of psychoanalytic theory can help our understanding of teaching and *critical* self-reflection and reflective practice (Taubman, 2007). The idea is not to apply psychoanalysis to critical self-reflection and reflective practice; rather, it is to think analytically about how to make conscious the unconscious or to see things as they really "are." One way to address this is to begin with the autobiographical excavation of why we are who we are. Curriculum theorist Deborah Britzman (1998) argues that teachers often feel constrained by the perceived demands of the curriculum to impose particular expectations and wishes on their students. Education conceived as "interference" may take the shape of engaging students in unfamiliar postcolonial texts that provoke complicated conversations, opening up spaces of dialogue between teachers and students that allows "difficult knowledge" to emerge (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). This knowledge may allow students to develop new insights into their evolving personal and national identities (Bhabha, 2005; Johnston, 2003). What pedagogical strategies can educators undertake to better understand themselves and their students and to learn how identity shapes the meaning making of texts in the classroom? Being cognizant that there are no fixed truths that will replace our current notions about teaching, rather these insights will help us to arrive at different perspectives and allow us to see the world through a

different lens. Once we shift our perspective about the *how* and the *why* of our teaching practices, we are able to think differently about what it means to engage in these practices.

Understanding this psychoanalytic discourse can help us to understand the dynamic of how to go about critical self-reflection and what this really means for education. Once we understand the psychic processes behind identity and desire, we can be free to stand back and look at ourselves in a much different manner than just reflective practice. What is the essence of what it is like to teach as a woman of visible minority? How do my race, culture, and gender affect the curriculum I teach? How do these identity markers affect the message being received by my students? I want to know how time, space, the body, and relationships all relate to this experience. Teachers cannot teach well unless their own worldly concerns and commitments animate their work. This is a conscious understanding of how the world around us shapes our ways of knowing and being. Our ways of knowing situated in sexuality, class, race, religion, and ethnicity shape our attention to a world that is the object of attention and desire. How do we come to know ourselves? The contributions of a psychoanalytic discourse help to understand some of the unconscious factors that underpin all our actions in everyday life.

According to Grumet (2000) curriculum is re-conceptualized in two ways. Derived from psychoanalytic theory, the first phase is free-associative. The content of curriculum is reclaimed by a reflexive process that allows the mind to wander but notes the path and all its markers; "detail is required to demonstrate lawful possession of the tale" (p. 26). The second phase involves reexamining the tale for themes, interests, and biases that get clouded by daily life activities. How we organize our story is similar to how we organize our world; it is our story that tells us of the past that can tell us where we are and where we are going. This is what it means to bring the private or the autobiographical nature of education into the public space of the classroom. But how does one bring subjectivity and meaning to inform the objectivity of a highly "scientized" institution where

solutions are sought to problems within the schools? To think of problems in psychoanalytic terms implies that people are complicit in the creation of their own problems. This idea shifts the focus of the problem solving approach to one of language, perception, with particular emphasis on the use of language as a way to see our world. Thus, we can move away from binaries like the personal and the private, the subject and the object, and problem-solution and move towards more open possibilities for inquiry.

In "Is There a Problem in Knowing Thyself? Toward a Poststructuralist View of Teacher Identity," Deborah Britzman (1994) argues the point that the problem of identity is a problem of language. Often, due to the very language associated with psychoanalysis, teachers and professionals find themselves swimming in a sea of ambiguities. However, psychoanalysis and autobiography can give teachers a language to explore issues of identity in curriculum. When using autobiography as a curriculum discourse it is important to avoid sounding overly self-centered; one needs to listen closely to criticisms of the tale. By remaining married to the story, one risks the dangers of not seeing common threads, themes, and details which may be central to why the story had a particular meaning in the first place. Psychoanalytic approaches[15] help to analyze autobiographical narratives in a more critical way as these discourses help to balance the subjective and the objective interpretations of experience.

Lacan's Registers: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, the Real

Lacan (1901–1981) was the most influential second-generation Freudian. Lacan was deeply influenced by structural linguistics. In "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," (1957) According to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan, 1977). The unconscious is not a primitive or archetypal part of the mind separate from the conscious, linguistic ego, he explained, but rather a formation as complex and structurally

[15] There are a number of approaches to the unconscious that are heterogeneous to each other. For example, Britzman is Anna Freudian, Pitt has had a brush with Lacan, Grumet can be considered to be object relations, Taubman is Lacanian and jagodzinski is considered to be Deleuze & Guattarian.

sophisticated as consciousness itself. One consequence of the unconscious being structured like a language is that the self is denied any point of reference to which to be "restored" following trauma or a crisis of identity; the unconscious reveals meaning only in the connections among signifiers. Lacan made the signifier the primary component of the signifier/signified scheme, thereby—like Derrida—reversing the traditional Western notion of the primacy of the concept. His revisions of Freud often centered on analyzing the unconscious rather than the ego.

Lacan's ontological registers of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary are best understood contextually.[16] However, at this time I will offer a summary of Lacan's three registers as they apply to identity. Some of my understanding of Lacan has come from reading Lacan's primary essays, but most particularly from interpretation of his ideas in the works of Peter Taubman and Slavoj Žižek. A great deal of Lacan's theorizing relies on metaphors of an imposition of some kind of system or process onto a tentative amorphousness (Taubman, 2007) thereby ordering or bringing it to form, but also thereby consigning the excluded portion to a kind of "irreality." It isn't that reality only exists in one's mind. Rather, the excluded portion doesn't exist in our conscious life or in our rational thought or in our linguistic repertoire or in the world we assume as there everyday[17].

Lacan's proposition that self-identity is impossible becomes central in structuration of the subject. The identity of something, its singularity or "oneness" is always split. There is always too much of something, an indivisible remainder, or a bit left over which means that it cannot be self-identical. The meaning of a word can never be found in the word itself, but rather in other words; its meaning therefore is not self-identical. This is the principle of the impossibility of self-identity. For Lacan, the system of language and

[16] Please refer to "Participant Negotiation of *The Namesake* (2007)" for a contextual example of the 3 registers as they are applied to the film *The Namesake* (Nair, 2007).
[17] However, one of the difficulties with all attempts to overview Lacan, is that he continuously changed his position and at times, his signifiers. The 'late phase' is a key one.

signification, what he called the Symbolic, constitutes our reality, limits or confines, or orders or systematizes how we know the world and ourselves in that world. To understand what Lacan means by the Symbolic, a quote from Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954) might be helpful. Huxley wrote:

> Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which they have been born. The beneficiary in as much as language give access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him [sic] in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which . . . is called "this world" is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed and as it were, petrified by language . . . Most people . . . know only [what] is consecrated as real by the local language. (p. 4)

According to Peter Taubman (2007), such a view assumes a kind of gap between the world we know (that is the one constituted within language) and an ineffable reality (that which we do not have access to or that which makes no sense in our daily understanding of life). Such a view assumes that even on a more personal level, there is a gap between who we tell ourselves we are, that is the narratives that constitute our sense of self, and the ineffable reality of our being[18].

This "world of words" is our world.[19] It is not as if there is a world already constituted that is simply waiting for the appropriate word to name it. Rather the world comes into being through those words. For example, imagine walking into a room where nothing is recognizable, no object, no *thing* looks familiar. It would not even be possible to imagine where one thing or object begins or ends. Everything is foreign, strange, and unknown to you. It would be

[18] There is always the concern that just how this gap is problematized forms the problematic of approaches to 'realism' or what constitutes reality.

[19] One issue with Lacan's ideas is that he remains fixated on the structure of the unconscious as a "language." The concern then, becomes how representation reduces the world to discourse of the signifier and then raises concerns of asignifications.

hard to experience if something is inside or outside you; swirling colors, moving objects, pulsations and vibrations, and here and there pieces of creatures or what may be creatures that are appearing and disappearing. You may be dreaming or you may be conscious. As you enter this space, a voice appears in your head (or outside it, you can't tell) using words, signifiers to bring order to this world and you, and finally some semblance of reality comes into being. Through this internal/external voice that names or narrates this space, you come to find yourself in the midst of a world in which you have a place in which you now have words, in which you and a world have come into being. For Lacan, the Symbolic has this effect on reality. It creates our world by hollowing out or carving up reality. We, our psyches, our unconscious, are structured by and through language.

As reflected in the quote above, Lacan posits that the Symbolic doesn't mirror reality. It "creates" it by presenting it to us. Of course, much of reality remains outside the realm of words, escaping linguistic domestication. However, this reality may erupt into our lives, leaving us "speechless." It is the eruption of nature that seems to "make no sense," ripping asunder the Symbolic. Think of familial traumas that may occur unexpectedly, which leave us flailing for words to give some order to our experience.

Lacan's departure from mainstream psychoanalytic theory was mainly the conception of the Imaginary and his conceptualization of the ego within that register. Lacan rejects the conceptions of the ego and identity and their role in psychoanalyis. He maintains that the ego is formed in the "mirror stage."[20] Lacan elaborated several versions of the mirror stage, but for this discussion, I will explain it on a figurative level referring to what Lacan called the Imaginary register; the moment when the infant assumes its sense of self in the eyes of a primary caretaker and the moment in the Symbolic register. It is at this stage when an identity is imposed by language. In his early essay entitled "The Mirror

[20] This stage refers to the way an infant, is a bundle of sensations, fragmentary images, and acoustic and visual hallucinations, comes to experience itself as a separate, bounded entity, a self or in mainstream psychoanalytic theories, an ego.

Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949) Lacan identifies the point at which the "I" (ego) begins to formulate itself as a socially constructed agent. In Lacan's terminology, the mirror stage is the hinge between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. These concepts are used frequently in contemporary literary criticism and theory. Lacan writes in "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" (1949),

> the important point is that this form [the mirror-stage] situates the agency of the ego, *before its social determination*, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone...by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality...[and which consequently]...symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination. (p. 62)

According to Lacan, this ego is alienated because it is totalized and formed in the eyes of the Other. Lacan maintained that while the development of the infant into a person occurs intersubjectively between parent and infant, the parent lines the infant's psyche with words, sensations, and reactions that both initiate and respond to the infant's own responses. The psyche which begins to crystallize or coalesce as the infant's ego is *necessarily* alienated because it is *dependent* on and shaped by the reactions and words of the parents. In other words, "who I am" (how I see myself) becomes to a large extent *how I am* consciously *and* unconsciously seen and treated by my parents. The images of who I am and what I mean to them (the images that they consciously and unconsciously give to me as an infant) begin to form the envelope of my ego; but the ego, the envelope, or package can never capture my own internal experiences, so that something is left out, something remains, something disturbs the seamless fit between the internalized image I have of myself that comes from how the Other sees or treats me. And yet, that disturbance remains outside the realm of consciousness, remains as only a trace. That remainder is in effect nothing, because it hasn't

taken on reality in language, but it is a "nothing" that will emerge later through language, in part constituting the unconscious (Taubman, 2007).

Lacan calls this register the Imaginary, because it is at the level of the image rather than the word. The image itself is framed by the Real. The Imaginary doesn't mean unreal or made-up; it refers to the images, hallucinatory and otherwise, that begin to structure our ego. According to Lacan, the fundamentally unanswerable questions that structure our existence are: Who am I to my parents? Who are they to one another? What messages are they directly or indirectly sending me? And most important, what do they want from me and how can I be what they want? Žižek writes in *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997),

> The child cannot fathom what object, precisely, he is to others, what the exact nature of the games they are playing with him is, and fantasy provides an answer to this enigma: at its most, fundamental fantasy tells me what I am to others. (p. 9)

Keep in mind, these questions do not exist in the realm of the conscious; language hasn't developed such that they could be formed. They do, however, exist as feelings (which will be restructured in the Symbolic).

Lacan's ego or self, then, is an alienated fiction that unfortunately constitutes both our madness and our compass as we navigate through life. It is our madness because such an ego limits and freezes us; it is our compass in that we cannot do without the ego or versions of the ego that constitute us, for without them we fall into psychosis. We speak then *from* our unconscious but *with* and *through* our ego. That is why we always say more than we mean and mean more than we say. In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX* (1988), Miller writes,

> [T]he real I is not the ego. But that isn't enough, for one can always fall into thinking that the ego is only a mistake of the I, a partial point of view.... [T]he ego isn't the I, isn't a mistake...It is something else - a particular object within the experience of the subject… (p. 44). [T]he ego is like the superimposition of various coats borrowed from what I would

call the bric a brac shop of its props department…(p. 155) [It] is structured exactly like a symptom. . . and is the mental illness of man. . . That the subject ends up believing in the ego is in itself madness. (p. 247)

For Lacan, the many egos and identities that we take for who we really are, are fundamentally necessary fictions. As Lacan was fond of saying, a commoner who thinks he is a king is insane, but a king who takes himself for a king is just as mad. The same could be said of the identity of a teacher; a teacher assumes an identity that is dependent for confirmation on the eyes of the students, the images of a teacher that have accrued over the years in the psyche of that teacher, and the teacher's position in the Symbolic. The teacher identity or teacher ego is again a fiction but a necessary one to move through the world, even though if we take it for who we are, we fall into a trap of reifying who we are and thus, block self-understanding[21].

Lacan's third register, the Real, is not only opposed to the Imaginary but is also located beyond the Symbolic. There is no *absence* of anything in the Real as there in the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The symbolic opposition between *presence* and *absence* implies the possibility that something may be missing from the symbolic, the real is "always in its place: it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from there" (Lacan, 1966, p. 25; 1972, p. 55; translation modified). If the symbolic is a set of differentiated signifiers, the Real is in itself undifferentiated without fissure. The symbolic introduces a cut in the Real, in the process of signification: it is the world of words that creates the world of things. Thus the Real emerges as that which is outside language: it is that which resists symbolization absolutely (Taubman, 2007). The Real is impossible because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order. This character of impossibility and resistance to symbolization lends the Real its traumatic quality. There are three modalities of the Real which include: the "symbolic" Real, the signifier reduced to a meaningless formula; the "real" Real,

[21] Essentially Lacan's three notions of identity – the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, that are o complexly related, changes with the late Lacan of the sinthome where one "makes" one's own identity against the symbolic – the artist. (jagodzinsky, 2012).

a horrific thing that conveys a sense of trauma or horror; the "imaginary" Real, an unfathomable something that permeates things as a trace of the sublime.

The importance of Lacan's ideas in my work is critically helpful to my understanding of my experiences with education as a student and as an educator. Educational experience, most specifically, critical self-reflection and reflexive practice takes into account the importance of language and allows for a focused examination of our own selves, our motives, our actions without reifying our identities. Lacan's ideas also take into account the nature of social experience and how we relate to others. Psychoanalytic theory makes thinking an ethical practice as we take full responsibility for who we are, to own our actions and desires, and to understand that this informs all that we do in the classroom. In my next chapter I will apply psychoanalytic theory to a personal close reading of my selected text, *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003).

CHAPTER 6: My Own Reading of *The Namesake* (2003)

In preparation for my doctoral study I engaged in a close reading of *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) and psychoanalytic analysis of the film *The Namesake* (Nair, 2007) because I felt that this text had the potential to address questions of racial and cultural identity and to offer my own analysis of the story. I take up a Lacanian analysis of identity issues as they present in the film to open up a discussion about second generation South Asian identity.

Indian director Mira Nair has adapted the best selling novel *The Namesake* by J. Lahiri[22] (2003) into a film of the same name. I am reminded by Andrew Goodwyn, in his book *English Teaching and the Moving Image* (2004), that "an adaptation is a text that has been created to suit a particular medium, and which is based on another text, conceived for different medium, most frequently a novel" (pp. 24–25). This adaptation of a novel to a film is a complex process, including the ways screenplays are working scripts that are "realized" and changed as they go into production and editing. Goodwyn further explains,

> Adaptations may also perhaps be treated as mutant texts. In a sense, the 'original' literary text is itself the first adaptation. The vision of the world offered by any artist is a representation of reality, not reality itself, and is necessarily moulded by the social and cultural context of its production. (2004, p. 33)

So I am reminded that Nair's film, as a translation from Lahiri's verbal text into a filmic medium, was necessarily altered by numerous external forces that exerted their power on the text. The story of *The Namesake* is deeply attuned to feelings of shame, ethnic identity, and intergenerational/cultural differences between South Asian immigrant parents from West Bengal and their American-born children. Both the book and film chronicle the struggles between generations with extraordinary visual and cultural detail. Lahiri (2003) and Nair (2007) outline the stark differences between South Asians in the United States trying to

[22] The movie to some extent portrays an almost autobiographical recollection of Jhumpa Lahiri's experiences as a young adult, born in London and growing up in Philadelphia. She was born Nilanjana (her good name) but due to a chain of events, her 'pet name', Jhumpa persisted.

embrace parental Indian values whilst also seeking inclusion in the American way of living. *The Namesake* (2007) frequently floats between New York City and Calcutta, two ostensibly yet innately similar cities and worlds. The film's governing metaphor is bridges, like the Queensboro Bridge in New York, the Howrah Bridge in Calcutta, and like Gogol himself, a human TriBoro linking India and America. The two cities are juxtaposed throughout the movie, contrasting New York and Calcutta on various levels: harbor, bridges, traffic jams, trams, cultures, and arts. Lahiri's (2003) book is full of detail and eloquence; readers will meet humanely observed characters, finely nuanced relationships, and a sharply felt cross-cultural interaction. Whether it is her description of Ashima's craving for the "humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones," (p. 1) or how Ashima, Gogol's mother, "wipes the sweat from her face with the free end of her sari" (p.1), Jhumpa Lahiri's (2003) writing style is flattering in its descriptions, acute in its observations, but intensely intimate and subdued. The carefully measured narration in the text is sometimes lost in the movie due to limitations of time where many little insights and plot developments that the movie, by necessity, left out. However, given the challenges of cramming 291 pages into 117 minutes, the movie is faithful to the book, retaining the most important plot points (e.g. Gogol's internal angst and struggle with the dissonance he feels towards his name) and some of the details that made the book so memorable (e.g. the quiet, growing love between Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke or the heaviness that fills the air as Ashima trudges through the snow on her first visit to the American Laundromat to do her own laundry). While the book is perhaps more nuanced and certainly more eloquent than the movie, the movie admirably captures the bittersweet themes of the book.

Sooni Taraporevala adapted the story for the screen. Although the script is necessarily different from the book, the film retains most of the major themes. In the book, Ashoke leaves Calcutta with new bride Ashima to make Boston his home. In the film, he sets base in New York. Ashima is made a singer in the

film, which only helps in adding to the great range in Nitin Sawhney's background score. Many scenes in the film are not in the book, including the barbershop scene where Gogol meets the violence of the Real (See section on "Lacan's Ontology".) Similarly, the film does away with a lot of languid detailing which makes the narration of the film seem a bit crammed. The film seems to stop just a little short of the overwhelming emotional impact of the book; it stirs the viewer though I feel not as deeply. Like the book, the film is non-judgmental about the characters and their relationships, but the film focuses more on the development of Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke. Some of Lahiri's (2003) insightful lines are retained as full-blown dialogue. Gogol, played by Kal Penn, is caught between two cultures, saddled with a name from a third culture. Ashima, played by Tabu, and Ashoke, played by Irfan Khan, are a little awkward, halting, and held back, but it is precisely this type of idiosyncratic character detail that works, given the context of their situation. Initially, Ashima and Ashoke are unsure of themselves in an alien land, a land in which their love is carefully and intimately crafted. They grow to love each other and share happiness and disappointments, as Nair manages to capture on screen, the culture and ethos of this dynamic and evolving relationship. The book brings out the conflict between Eastern and Western cultures with brilliance and simplicity. Lahiri (2003) brings to life in the book the identity crises that a confused American *Desi*[23] suffers. The conflict arises because of his double identity as Gogol Ganguli, the Bengali boy and son of immigrant parents—an identity which he is ashamed of—and the western identity, his American persona, Nikhil (which he later shortens to Nick). The reader suffers with Gogol throughout the book, but not as much in the movie. Many chapters in the book are dedicated to Gogol's experiences, thoughts, and feelings as he explores what it means to be "Nick." Lahiri (2003) dedicates an

[23] **Desi** is a word originally from Sanskrit literally meaning "from the country" or "of the country." In North America and Great Britain *desi* is used colloquially to mean South Asian immigrants and their descendants. This self-referential colloquialism for those of South Asian heritage living outside the Indian subcontinent was created in the United Kingdom during the early 1960s to late 1980s and is sometimes pronounced "dezzi." Source : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desi

entire chapter to the dilemma Gogol faces when he decides to officially change his name to Nikhil.

> But he doesn't want to tell Kim his name. He doesn't want to endure her reaction, to watch her lovely blue eyes grow wide. He wishes there were another name he could use, just this once, to get him through the evening. It wouldn't be so terrible . . . He could introduce himself as Colin or Jason or Marc, as anybody at all, and their conversation could continue, and she would never know or care . . . But he realizes there's no need to lie, he remembers the other name that had once been chosen for him, the one that should have been.
>
> "I'm Nikhil," he says for the first time in his life. He says it tentatively, his voice sounding strained to his ears, the statement turning without his meaning it into a question. (Lahiri, 2003, pp. 95–96)

> But now that he's Nikhil, it's easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas. With relief, he types his name out at the tops of his freshman papers. He reads the telephone messages his suitemates leave for Nikhil on assorted scraps in their rooms. (Lahiri, 2003 p. 105)

Lahiri (2003) draws out Gogol's indecision, frustration, and finally resolve to change his name, detailing his inner thoughts and feelings on the decision with precision and depth. She chronicles his trip to the courthouse, drawing readers into the scene, as if we were sitting right beside Gogol through the whole ordeal. The explanation Gogol gives to his father is also most pivotal to how Gogol severs his last tie to his Bengali heritage—or so he thinks. His father's reaction is vivid, visceral; readers are quickly made aware of the deep hurt and sadness felt by Ashoke as he quietly resolves to accept his son's decision.

Even if readers/viewers have never experienced this kind of identity crises, Lahiri (2003) and Nair (2007) manage to represent the hard-to-articulate experiences of the first and second generation poignantly, through various instances in the text and film, so that readers and viewers have no trouble

identifying with Gogol and his family. Gogol struggles to elude the embarrassment and conflict caused by his name and what it implies . . . his Indian-ness. The subsequent rejection of his name becomes evident when he leaves home and involves himself with various American girls, which are limited to only one relationship in the movie. In the text, Lahiri (2003) demonstrates Gogol's growing rejection and resentment of his heritage through his relationship with his first serious girlfriend, Ruth. As Nikhil, Gogol's relationship with Ruth gives readers insight into his dissonant feelings about how his two lives are so different.

> He imagines himself in the farmhouse she'd described to him, waking up to eggs frying in a skillet, walking with her through snowy, abandoned fields. But such a trip would require telling his parents about Ruth, something he has no desire to do. He has no patience for their surprise, their nervousness, their quiet disappointment, their questions about what Ruth's parents did and whether or not the relationship was serious. As much as he longs to see her, he cannot picture her at the kitchen table on Pemberton Road, in her jeans and bulky sweater, politely eating his mother's food. He cannot imagine being with her in the house where he is still Gogol. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 115)

Nair diverted from the book, for example, as the movie does not show Gogol living with Maxine's (his girlfriend) parents and just shows him spending a few days with them. However, the issue of Gogol vacationing with his girlfriend's parents is what informs readers as to how Gogol has completely rejected his Indian identity; preferring her American parents to his Indian parents (As a South Asian male, living with your wife's parents, let alone your *girlfriend's* parents is considered to be a "touchy" subject – or to be frank- completely frowned upon) . In the film, his break up with Maxine is sudden and inexplicable, but well crafted and thought out in the text. In the book it's clear why Gogol leaves Maxine. It's his realization that his girlfriend is not really interested in his Indianess (this has been shown subtly before) but finds it exotic, thereby reducing Gogol to an

object. Maxine wants him to be completely American and can only grudgingly accept his parents and their culture as foreign. At times Maxine sees Gogol as American, but when she sees him in his home environment with his family, she realizes how *foreign* his culture really is. His relationship with his parents is more strained and terse, while her parents are open and comfortable. He can fit into her lifestyle, but she can't fit into his, as we see in the scene of his father's funeral in his living room. She is inappropriately dressed and later, she cries, "What do you want me to do? You keep pushing me away" (Nair, 2007) when Gogol tells her that spreading his father's ashes is a "family thing." When Gogol's father dies, Gogol feels guilty about how he rejected his culture and all that represents "Gogol." Although he has not fully come to terms with his Bengali-American identity, he does decide to end his relationship with Maxine—a relationship that symbolized all that he was trying to be, but never could be.

Gogol becomes more accepting of his Bengali culture and accepts an offer from Ashima to set him up with a Bengali-British girl, Moushumi. Lahiri (2003) develops this relationship over a series of complex chapters. But before his relationship with Moushumi, Gogol involves himself with a married woman, Bridget. This relationship shows readers Gogol's confusion, desperation, and isolation as he searches for something to fill the void his father's death has created for him. This void further complicates his multiple identity crises as he feels he finally needs to find someone who understands Gogol. Again, in the book, we understand why his wife, as confused as he, finds her own identity torn apart trying to be a good Bengali wife by sacrificing a life and career in Paris. In the book Moushumi's own struggle with identity comes through very well, but this aspect is completely neglected in the movie.

Nair (2007) focuses her lens more on the identity crises of Gogol as a young man and on his parents' stories (Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli) of immigration. As with any film adaptation, decisions need to be made about what to preserve from the original, what to ignore, and what to highlight. In the next

section, I focus my attention on a close psychoanalytic reading of Lahiri's (2003) story as interpreted by Nair's film.

A Psychoanalytic "Close Reading" à la Žižek – The Significance of a Name

> Gogol Ganguli hates his name. He hates it so much that he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having to constantly explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything "in Indian." He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian, nor American but of all things Russian. At times, his name, an entity shapeless and weightless manages nevertheless to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 76)

Arguably one of the most influential short stories ever written, "The Overcoat" is the title of a short story by Russian author of Ukrainian descent Nikolai Gogol, published as part of a four-volume publication of its author's *Collected Works* (*Sochinenya*) (1842). The story and its author have had great influence on Russian literature and on Ashoke Ganguli.

> He carried a single volume for the journey, a hardbound collection of short stories by Nikolai Gogol, which his grandfather had given him when he'd graduated from class twelve. He had read "The Overcoat" too many times to count, certain sentences and phrases embedded in his memory. Each time he was captivated by the absurd, tragic, yet oddly inspiring story of Akaky Akakyevich… Just as Akaky's ghost haunted the final pages, so did it haunt a place deep in Ashoke's soul, shedding light on all that was irrational, all that was inevitable about the world. (Lahiri, 2003, pp. 13–14)

From the very beginning of the film, the issue of names and identity is apparent to the viewer. The film chronicles Gogol's cross-cultural experiences through the rejection and the subsequent exploration of his Indian culture. Gogol's disavowal of his name is used as an extended metaphor throughout the film to explore larger

issues of integration, assimilation, and cultural identity; but why the name Gogol? Significant as it is to the viewer, the name Gogol only fills the young American with anxiety. Gogol is soon to be faced with a series of identity crises which infiltrate his entire life. How did Gogol's parents come to give him this Russian name? Once moving to the United States, Ashima and Ashoke set down their roots and begin a family. As Ashima's water breaks in the cold and desolate New York City hospital room, she calls out to Ashoke. However, she does not use his name, because in Bengali culture, as is the case in many South Asian cultures, this would not be proper. According to Ashima, "It's not the type of thing Bengali wives do—a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 2). Faced with hospital red tape, baby Ganguli cannot be released without a proper birth certificate and Ashoke is forced to name his child before he receives instructions from Ashima's 85-year-old grandmother in India, who must be consulted on this vital decision, as part of Bengali tradition. At a loss for words, Ashoke mutters "Gogol" to Ashima, and hence their son's *daak nam* (nickname), Gogol, is created, named after the Russian author of Ukrainian descent, Nikolai Gogol[24]. The viewer questions the significance of the name Gogol. Gogol's entire identity will hinge on this fateful name, a name passed down along such a peculiar and delicate chain of accident.

Gogol vs. Nick: 'From i(o) to I (O)'[25]

Throughout his life, Gogol greatly suffers from the uniqueness of his name. In Bengali families, "individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 28). However, Gogol spends much of his adult life ashamed of his family life, his Bengali heritage, and tries

[24] Gogol's writings have been seen as a bridge between the genres of romanticism and realism in Russian literature. Progressive critics of his day praised Gogol for grounding his prose fictions in the everyday lives of ordinary people, and they claimed him as a pioneer of a new "naturalist" aesthetic. Yet, Gogol viewed his work in a more conservative light, and his writing seems to incorporate as much fantasy and folklore as realistic detail. "The Overcoat," which was written sporadically over several years during a self-imposed exile in Geneva and Rome, is a particularly dazzling amalgam of these seemingly disparate tendencies in Gogol's writing.

[25] The Lacanian graphemes *i(o)* and I(O) stand for ideal ego and ego-ideal, respectively.

his best to reject all things Indian. Growing up in America where children are often ashamed of their differences, all Gogol desires is to blend in and live unnoticed, presenting his struggle between cultures. Ashoke and Ashima want to raise their children according to traditional Bengali culture and values. On the other hand, Gogol and his sister Sonia grow up relating mostly to their peers and the surrounding American culture. Ignoring the importance it holds for his father, Gogol views his name as an obstacle to his desire to be a normal American teenager and acutely feels the pain of a conflicted identity.

Once Gogol Ganguli is in high school, his English teacher assigns "The Overcoat" (Gogol, 1842) as homework and Gogol approaches the class with a growing dread and a feeling of slight nausea. "The Overcoat", or the book is the *objet a* his anxiety, the "cause" of his symptom and exists as a Thing in his mind; it overwhelms him. *The Overcoat* also acts as a mise-en-abyme, or self-reflection, an endlessly repeating frame in the film and book. Upon discovering that his namesake was a severe depressive—who slowly starved himself to death— Gogol feels freshly betrayed by his parents. According to Gogol's father, the only person who didn't take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol Ganguli. It is the struggle to reconcile his rejection of his name and ultimately, his Bengali heritage, where readers and viewers get a first hand glimpse of Gogol's crisis of identity. He refuses to accept his name and fully identify with it.

It is useful to understand the distinction between *i(o)* the ideal ego and I(O) the ego-ideal as they present in this discussion, through Žižek (1992). A nickname stands to replace the good name, or the legal first name. According to Žižek (1992), in Lacan's theory of forename and family name the first name designates the ideal ego, the point of imaginary identification, while the family name comes from the father—it designates, as the Name-of-the-father, the point of symbolic identification, the agency through which we observe and judge

ourselves. According to Žižek (1992), the facet that should not be overlooked in this distinction is that "i(o) is always already subordinated to I(O); it is that which dominates and determines the image, the imaginary from in which we appear to ourselves likeable" (p. 108). On the level of formal functioning, this subordination is attested by the fact that the nickname which marks i(o) also functions as a rigid designator, not as simple description, thus demonstrating that names can hold great emotional and psychic significance for an individual.

Conversely, Ashoke Ganguli, bestowed the nickname of "Gogol" to his son (as we learn very early on in both the film and the novel) and the name holds great emotional and psychic significance for Ashoke. Gogol comes to identify with this name early on and prefers his *daak naam* to his good name. It is not until early adolescence in the novel, and entering high school in the film, that we see Gogol resent his name. Situational and cognitive factors create a disconnect and shift in Gogol's identification to his name. He judges himself negatively and goes to great lengths in the novel to begin the process of dismembering his name from his identity, changing it from Gogol to his good name, Nikhil (which gets Anglicized later to Nick). He experiences dissonant and conflicting feelings associated with his new identity as Nikhil and suffers the accompanying phantom pains. Gogol's crisis emerges more and more when he has to differentiate and come to terms with his father. Viewers are left to question whether this may ever happen (for many individuals, it never does) and we are left to wonder if Gogol will always live under the shadow of his guilt and grief he suffers at the loss of his father, or perhaps he reconciles this much later in life. In Gogol's case, he anticipates negative attention for his name throughout adolescence and therefore copes by changing his name. Žižek (1992) questions why precisely this difference between how we see ourselves and the point from which we are being observed constitutes the difference between the imaginary and the symbolic. Žižek (1992) asserts that in imaginary identification we imitate the other at the level of resemblance—we identify ourselves with the image of the other inasmuch as we are "like him," while in symbolic identification we identify ourselves with

the other precisely at the point at which he is inimitable, at the point which eludes resemblance. Gogol's decision to change his name, in effect, is his effort to resemble his I(O) or ego-ideal Nikhil (Nick) Ganguli, the American who speaks without an accent, who does not smell Bengali, who does not act Bengali, ultimately rejecting the symbolic order of his Bengali culture.

The American Gaze

Now a college student, Gogol purchases a gift for his girlfriend, Maxine Ratliff[26], daughter of the archetypal Upper East Side family, old-money culture snobs who have mastered the art of inconspicuous conspicuous consumption. He signs his name Nikhil Ganguli on the VISA bill, and we are aware that Gogol has been left behind with adolescence. In Nikhil Ganguli's new world, he has been happily living on his own for some time, away from all things that remind him of his heritage. Gogol is not just a name; it signifies all his discomfort and struggles to fit into two very different cultures. Being away from home at an Ivy League school makes it easier for Gogol to live as Nikhil in an American culture. Nick moves further and further away from his heritage and into the grasp of the Ratliffs who slowly take over Gogol's life. It is clear that Gogol prefers Maxine's parents to his. By South Asian standards, a boy living with a girl's parents is mildly . . . shocking.

In another compelling scene, Maxine's mother, Lydia, introduces Gogol to one of her friends as "Nikhoool Ganguli, the young Indian architect who has so captured Maxine's heart." In this scene, Nikhil becomes a show piece as "the model minority" and therefore exoticized to the Ratliffs, and perhaps to Maxine. Gogol cannot see past the Ratliff's fascination with his exotic Indianness and attractive South Asian features and intellect; a common stereotype of Indian men being smart and therefore signifying financial virility. Gerald and Lydia Ratliff

[26] In the novel, Gogol's next relationship is with a girl named Ruth. This relationship is far more passionate than the first (Kim). He goes through this relationship as Nikhil, never revealing his inner struggle between Nick and Gogol. He hides Ruth from his family, as many South Asians do because 'dating' is not socially accepted practice in many South Asian cultures. Burying a part of himself, he hides from his past life. When his relationship with Ruth ends in heartbreak, Gogol reverts even more to his alter ego, Nick.

represent the American brand—consumerism at its best. Guggenheim-leeching artistes, they form a tight little corporate family unit the reader/viewer can't help but detest, down to their Ralph Lauren sheets and their stainless steel little stockpots hanging in their gargantuan sized kitchen (Metcalfe, 2003). It seems as though Nair (2007) is saying, perhaps this is how Americans feel most at home, absent of proper kinship ties, among their things.

The scene cuts to a bedroom shot with Gogol and Maxine. As Gogol stares blankly out of a window, it is clear he is in a mental space far away from the intimacy he should be sharing with Maxine. Maxine asks, "Don't your parents want you to marry a nice Indian girl?" Gogol blankly replies, without a blink, "I don't care what they want. This is what I want." This brief and superficial discussion between Gogol and Maxine highlights Gogol's ongoing internal battle between his life as the Nick his Caucasian girlfriend knows and the Gogol his parents have raised. These two identities, Nick and Gogol, are at odds, opposite, conflicting, self-hating, and indicative of the various schemas Gogol must negotiate between, allowing a glimpse into the split between who Gogol thinks he wants to be and who Gogol really is struggling to become.

The viewer is a first-hand spectator into the conflicts between South Asian culture and American culture as it is lived out for second generation youth when Gogol decides to introduce Maxine to his parents. It is here viewers are made fully aware of the immense precedent Gogol (knowingly) sets with his mother by bringing his girlfriend home. He instructs Maxine on proper etiquette for personal space and distance, stating, "There's some things you should know, no kissing, no holding hands, no touching, my parents are not Lydia and Gerald. I've never seen them touch, let alone anything else."

According to Lacan, what sustains our fantasy, what accounts for our investment in it, is the enjoyment we take in it (Taubman, 2007). Gogol's life as Nick can be seen as *jouissance*, or the kernel of enjoyment that Gogol gets from being accepted in White society, by Maxine and her parents, as someone other than Gogol; someone far from his culture, parents, and home life. Gogol persists

in self-defeating and self-destructive behaviours, such as the rejection of his parents and all aspects of his Bengali heritage by dating outside the culture, living with his girlfriend's parents, etc., and unconsciously finds pleasure in this pursuit. *Jouissance* then becomes helpful in trying to understand what appear to be logical and rational reasons to shed attitudes that we would consider counter intuitive to healthy identity development.

At this point in the film, Ashoke leaves for Ohio for a teaching position at a university, while Ashima decides to stay back. The film cuts in and out of touching scenes of loneliness and solitude; Ashoke on his own in Ohio, an unused rice cooker on his counter top, Ashima making Christmas cards in solitude while Gogol enjoys time with his in-laws. Gogol's internal conflict continues as he is sucked deeper and deeper into Maxine's world, knowing that how he is living is so different from the way he has been raised. Suddenly, the Gangulis' suffer a debilitating and life altering trauma; in psychoanalytic terms a Möbius strip, a psychic break when Ashoke dies of a massive heart attack, alone in Ohio. Nair (2007) captures Ashima's grief in indescribable detail, as viewers watch the life ripped from her lungs. Ashima learns of Ashoke's passing over the phone—she runs though the house, turning on the lights as if it were a dream—collapsing on the front lawn in the dark and snow. We witness life through Ashima's skin.

Lacan's Ontology: The Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic

The Lacanian psychic register of the Real has broken through the Ganguli's Symbolic order. It is the ineffable reality that comes into being in the unconscious, thereby erupting in the social and into the psyche as something traumatic and indescribable is the Real. Nair (2007) focuses on the reconstruction of Ashima and Gogol's identity which both undergo a radical redefinition. Upon returning to his father's empty apartment in his search for the ineffable, Gogol sees the empty world in which his father lived. He glances down at his father's shoes, awkwardly stepping into them, visualizing the last few days of his father's lonely life. He enters into his father's room and sees the unmade, freshly slept in

bed and collapses on to the pillow, weeping, reeling in pain, he cries, "I'm sorry Baba." The Real floods through, unleashed, unbridled. The inevitable wound creates a series of life changing realizations for Gogol.

The highly emotional scene is abruptly interrupted; rap music floods the background and the film cuts to a barbershop. We watch Gogol watching himself. Over lyrics rapping of "the old and young, the torch being passed down," a red-eyed reflection watching his head get shaved, in keeping with traditional Bengali custom of mourning the loss of a family member. Memories and images of watching his father shave his head after the death of Ashima's father, cut back and forth. We see Gogol's internal struggle with identity in a different light; as Ashoke shaves his own head, a young Gogol peers at him, and asks, "Baba, is that you?" Gogol stares at his reflection, a freshly shorn head, a part of his ongoing ego also freshly shorn with the death of his father, the Real has cut through the stability of the Symbolic which helped him survive for so many years. As he gazes, lifeless, into the mirror, we are acutely aware of the question, "Is that you?" which swirls around in Gogol's psyche. This is a key scene where the plot twists like the Möbius strip; the transformation of Nick in the mirror. He becomes someone else—or has a line of flight into a new unknown that reminds him of his father doing the same.

Acting as a limit to the Symbolic, Gogol is confronted with the Real with the news of his father's death. He completely loses his sense of "who he really is," as is evident in the barbershop. The stability of Nikhil has been ripped out from under him; the reality Gogol came to know in his life as Nikhil in Lacanian terms, is actually a perspectival distortion, one that cannot be otherwise (Taubman, 2007). As Žižek and Daly (2004) note, "our distortions of reality occur precisely because our mind is part of reality and therefore does not have a neutral part of it: our perception distorts reality because the observer is part of the observed" (p. 92). If our being is structured by gaps between our ego, our conscious moi/me and "I" or the unconscious Je, Lacanian psychoanalysis contends that we resort to fantasy to fill those gaps, which structures how we see

the world and ourselves and therefore structures them. Gogol's fantasy life as Nikhil is his answer to the questions: "Who am I to my parents . . . to the Bengali community . . . to the American community? Who are they to one another? What messages are they directly or indirectly sending me? What do they want from me and how can I be what they want?" and thus helping to fill the gap between the Imaginary and the Symbolic; between the crises in identity caused by grief for his father. This eruption is a result of the Real which exists as a loss of footing in the Symbolic and the fantasy of the Imaginary, and the conflicts of the Bengali/American Symbolic order. The resistance to his father falls away and in order to recover this loss—to mourn rather than fall into melancholia he has to mourn each part object of his father. This involves coming to terms with his father's Bengali identity . . . and his own. Shaving his head was the first part object that falls away as he starts his new journey. As Gogol greets his mother for the first time since Ashoke's death, we also watch his mother's shock at her son's decision to shave his head. The second part object that falls away on this journey to a new self is when we also see Gogol speak in Bengali marking the very first time we see Gogol speak his native language. "You didn't have to do this, Son," says Ashima sorrowfully. "*Amare checoro Ma…* (I wanted to Ma)." It is after this Möbius "twist" in Gogol's life that major changes occur in Gogol's effort to reconcile the effects of the Real with the Symbolic order which has governed his life.

It is also at this point in the movie where things speed up in action. We see Maxine entering a religious ceremony in honour of Ashoke. Inappropriately dressed in a black sleeveless mini dress, Maxine is an outsider in a room full of Bengali men and women, all dressed in the traditional mourning colour of white. The stark difference in cultural norms is once again very obvious. Even Ashima's Caucasian friend from the library is appropriately dressed, in a modest white blazer, a pashmina wrapped around her shoulders. Gogol is shocked and embarrassed at the sight of Maxine and also for himself, as Gogol's Bengali heritage was never a part of their life together. She watches as Gogol participates

in religious rituals, chanting and praying and one can see she too has realized just how different Gogol really is. Can Maxine accept Nick's (Gogol's) difference? Can Gogol's Bengali culture accept Maxine's difference? All this while, Gogol had managed to hide his ethnicity quite well; however, with the death of his father, he is drawn back home. Home is a large part of who he is, he must mourn away all of his father's memories as part objects. In order to begin to mourn his father, he can no longer flee from his Bengali identity.

Gogol realizes Maxine is not really interested in *Gogol*; she is interested in *Nick*. She wants him to be completely American, thus assimilating into her culture rather than accepting Gogol and his bicultural upbringing. At the service for his father, held at his home, he realizes through a series of major psychic traumas that he cannot reject his Bengali heritage any longer. Nick has slowly started to mesh with Gogol, creating a third space for Gogol to begin to think about hybridized Bengali-American persona. He no longer wants to run away from his cultural and American identity. Maxine asks if she can go to India to scatter the ashes. Gogol replies, "It's a family thing" making a clear delineation between his family life, the Bengali side of his identity and Maxine, the American side of his identity. The multitude of schemata Gogol has negotiated for so long have led him to place them into separate, non-penetrable categories. We are beginning to see that the more Gogol knows, the more he understands he needs to learn.

According to Taubman (2007), the Symbolic in Lacanian psychoanalysis is the system of language and signification, constituting our reality, which limits, confines, orders, or systematizes how we know the world and how we understand ourselves in that world. There is a gap between the world we know (governed by a system of language) and an ineffable reality—

> that which we have no access to or that which makes no sense in our daily understanding of life. There is a gap between who we tell ourselves we are, that is the narratives that constitute our sense of self, and the ineffable reality of our being. (p. 1)

According to Lacan, the Symbolic creates our world by hollowing out or carving up reality; we, our psyches, our unconscious, are structured by and through language (Taubman, 2007). The Bengali symbolic does not mirror Gogol's reality, it creates it by presenting it to Gogol. Much of it remains outside linguistic domestication, this reality erupting into his life, leaving him at a loss for words. The trauma of Ashoke's death left Gogol unable to continue living his life in the manner to which he was accustomed. Gogol had to return to his Bengali roots in order to find some meaning and reconciliation between the worlds he was living between, thus allowing him to grieve the loss of his father.[27] The excluded portion of Gogol's reality does not exist in his conscious life or in his rational thoughts and everyday behaviours, or even in his linguistic repertoire, but rather disrupts all of these. The symbolic dimension of language is that of the signifier in which elements have no positive existence but are constituted by virtue of their mutual differences.[28] It is the realm of the Other or radical alterity. The unconscious governs the discourse of the Other, belonging to the Symbolic order, also the determinant of subjectivity. For Lacan, the Symbolic is characterized by the absence of any fixed relations between signifier and signified. The gap between signifier and signified is always there. Any correspondences of representation are misrecognitions that are always temporary, at best.

The Symbolic seeks to close the gap between categories and therefore seeks to place people in binaries as opposed to a "third space" (Bhabha, 2005).[29] Gogol cannot fulfill the desires of both Symbolic orders which dominate his life and therefore flees from Nikhil and attempts to reintegrate into Bengali life by finding momentary solace in the marriage to Moushumi, a second generation Bengali-British girl. There is no representational space for him in the Symbolic. When this relationship fails, we are aware that this was an attempt on Gogol's

[27] Not developed here in this chapter, however, it also begs the question how each member of the family psychically live with this in-between in their singularity. Are there differences in Sonia and Ashima's experience of living in between?

[28] This is where the 'Proper Name' stands out in the alphabetization of the world picture begun by the Egyptians. The 'Proper Name' escapes this morass of perpetual differentiations.

[29] This is the notion that categorizations as binaries cannot deal with 'creativity' as such. Any typologies are pre-evolutionary in theoretical thought.

part for a quick remedy, a soothing fantasy to cushion the effects of the Real, a social reality created to escape the Real. Fantasy fills the gap between the Symbolic and the Real by covering up the Real with soothing or terrifying images of it. In both cases, fantasy serves as a defense against the horror of the Real.

As seen in the film, on a final trip home to spend the holidays with his family before Ashima lets the house go, Gogol returns to his room for one last walk though. He returns to his room and finds the copy of *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* in a box. He opens it and reads an inscription from his father, one he had not seen before, in the front cover. It reads,

"*For Gogol Ganguli -*

The man who gave you his name, from the man who gave you your name.

June 7, 1995"

Gogol leaves his childhood home where we see him on the train, reading for the first time, the book his father gave to him so many years ago, in a way, embracing Gogol for the first time. In effect, Gogol has begun to find his way into a third space of identity, no longer resisting his name given to him as a symbolic gesture from his father. Although the viewer is left to wonder what happens to Gogol after this scene, it is clear Gogol has found his way to a third space integrating his Bengali heritage, his namesake, and Nikhil. There was always too much of something and an indivisible remainder or a bit of left-over which means it could never be self-identical. As Žižek (1992) so aptly quotes Bogart in the film *Casablanca*, "I guess the secret is not being you, it's being me." As long as Gogol continued to reject his name and Bengali culture, he needed an ideal ego to identify with, a figure to guide him through life as an American teenager, Nikhil. The moment he let go of the disavowal to his name, his father, and his heritage, he no longer needed an external point of identification (Žižek, 1992) because he achieved identity with himself—became himself, an autonomous personality, as supported by an American gaze. By outgrowing identification with Nikhil, he really re-identifies with Gogol. He becomes an autonomous personality through his identification with Nikhil, hegemonically supported by this American gaze.

The loss of his father and subsequent unraveling of the self he knew as Nikhil was necessary for his identification which, according to Žižek (1992) is "no longer imaginary, but at least in its fundamental dimension, symbolic—that is, structural" (p. 110). Gogol realizes this identification by enacting in reality Nikhil's role by assuming a certain 'mandate,' by occupying a certain place in the symbolic network. It is this symbolic identification that dissolves the imaginary identification: more precisely, that radically changes its contents.

The basis of the Imaginary order is the formation of the ego in the "mirror stage." Since the ego is formed by identifying with the counterpart or specular image, "identification" is an important aspect of the imaginary. The relationship whereby the ego is constituted by identification is a locus of alienation, another feature of the Imaginary and is fundamentally narcissistic. The Imaginary, a realm of surface appearances as, in Gogol's case, his alter ego, or how he sees himself, becomes a large extent of how he is consciously and unconsciously seen and treated by his parents, and therefore structured by the Bengali Symbolic order. In terms of the linguistic dimension, the signifier is the foundation of the Symbolic, the signified and signification belong to the Imaginary. The images of "who Gogol is" to Ashoke and Ashima are based on the images that they consciously and unconsciously give to him as an infant. These images begin to form the envelope of his ego, but that envelope (ego) can never capture his own internal experiences, so that something is left out, something remains. There is something that disturbs the seamless fit between "the internalized image of Gogol's self". This image of self is not the same as how the Other (his peers, girlfriends, colleagues) sees or treats him. "Who Gogol is" (that which remains outside the realm of consciousness) remains only a trace. This trace will emerge and alter through language and situational factors as Nikhil, in part constituting a part of his unconscious desire for something indescribable, as a part of something he needs to reconcile before he can truly be Gogol; Bengali-American. As Gogol struggles against the laws of the Symbolic, his perception of who he thinks he is remains in constant tension, consequently, in tact. He needs the tension to avoid

facing the choice offered by the binaries which govern his life: Bengali or American? Yet he cannot belong to either category as he is neither completely Bengali nor completely American. The Imaginary exists at the level of the image rather than the word and thus refers to Gogol's images, hallucinatory and otherwise, that begin to structure his ego. It problematizes Gogol's original questions presented earlier in this dissertation framed in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, "Who am I to my parents . . . to the Bengali community . . . to the American community? Who are they to one another? What messages are they directly or indirectly sending me? What do they want from me and how can I be what they want?" These questions exist as feelings of rejection and disavowal for Gogol and will become restructured in the Symbolic. The Lacanian ego or self is an alienated fiction that constitutes both our madness and our moral compass. It is our madness because the ego limits and freezes us; it is our compass in that we cannot do without the ego for then we would fall into psychosis. According to Taubman (2007) we speak then *from* our unconscious but *with* and *through* our ego.

The barrier to Gogol's self-understanding was the reification of his persona Nikhil, which got tangled up in expectations that were associated with Gogol. Gogol had to exist in the Bengali Symbolic order: pet names, dependence on family, private family life, and weekends spent with his parents at the homes of other Bengali family friends, crowded family vacations, marrying within the culture, a son's duty to his parents, Bengali food in metal tiffin containers, customs, religion. These orders were in direct conflict with the Symbolic order of American teenagers: Anglicized names, independence from the family, active social life with his friends, vacations with his White girlfriend's parents, neglecting his mother in his father's absence, McDonald's, no religion or cultural affiliation outside his home life. For Lacan, our many egos or identities that we take ourselves to be, are fundamentally necessary fictions. But these fictions are necessary to function in this world, otherwise we risk suffering the effects of the Real.

CHAPTER 7: Pilot Study

Participant Negotiation of The Namesake (2007)

In the winter term of 2008 I completed my own psychoanalytic reading of *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), and conducted a pilot study for a film analysis course where I worked with four, second generation South Asian Canadians as they discussed Lahiri's film. (All participants had read the book on their own at an earlier date, by choice, prior to watching the film. I decided to conduct a pilot study to see if other second gen South Asian Canadians shared my experience. As most doctoral students feel, I constantly questioned whether my research was even worth researching. What if no one cared? I had to somehow check the "validity" of my research path. So I decided to first interview four adults to learn more about their past secondary school experiences as South Asians Canadian students. Was racial or cultural identity even an issue for them? If so, could a contemporary postcolonial text and film like *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003; Nair 2007) help them to better understand their racial and cultural identity? With particular interest for how these findings might impact how I conducted my larger research study, I wanted to probe whether contemporary postcolonial print and media texts could help second generation South Asian Canadian secondary students interrogate notions of cultural identity. Could these texts help South Asian Canadian students explore some of the questions and issues that come from living as a visible-minority Canadian that are not always that clear and easy to articulate? Was the protagonist Gogol Ganguli's crisis of identity similar to their struggles as South Asian Canadians? What did their responses mean in the contexts of secondary English language arts?

The findings presented in this section are drawn from my work with the participants, both male and female, between the ages of 25 and 35 years. Following ethics approval, I administered a questionnaire for the participants to fill out about their personal responses to the film and collected some demographic information. I also conducted interviews on-line, over the phone, and in person.

The two male participants, Sam and Oz, and one female participant, Anam, came from small, middle to upper class suburbs of a larger city in central Alberta, with a dominantly White population. The other female, Saira, was born in Arusha, Tanzania and immigrated to Canada by the age of 5 (I have used pseudonyms for each of these participants). All four are well-educated, post-graduate students and young professionals whom I contacted through professional organizations and acquaintances. My respondents came from families that represented earlier waves of post-1965 Pakistani and Ugandan immigrants who are also well-educated, upper-middle class professionals.

During the data analysis, I was aware that the narratives may have been influenced by my gender, ethnicity, and my own history as a second generation South Asian Canadian, which makes me an insider to second generation South Asian Canadian experiences. I was also well aware that the respondents may have presented ethnic identifications partially in response to the context, the questions, and their relationship to the interviewer and the way the questions are formulated.

From the very beginning of the film, the issue of names and the link to identity are apparent to the viewer and chronicles the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli's, cross-cultural experiences through the rejection and the subsequent exploration of his Indian culture. The disavowal of his name is used as an extended metaphor throughout the film to explore larger issues of integration, assimilation, and cultural identity. The participants of this pilot study also discussed similar complexities with the issue of having an ethnic name. One male participant answered,

> *Officially, I have 5 names. If you were to ask me why I have so many names, why I have two last names, or which names are on my birth certificate, I would be hard pressed to answer honestly. My first name has been the most awkward for me. The name ____ is not the easiest word for English speaking Canadians to pronounce phonetically and causes me to become somewhat anxious when introducing myself to new friends or*

colleagues. It can get somewhat irritating spelling your name out every time you meet someone new. (Oz)

Throughout his life, this participant struggled with the "uniqueness" of his name. However, in South Asian culture, names are of great importance, something to be proud of; "individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 28); they are something special. However, like Gogol, the participant expressed that much of his adolescence was spent embarrassed by his name, his culture, and trying his best to reject all things Indian. Growing up in Western society where children are often ashamed of their differences, this participant wanted to just to blend in and live unnoticed. By discussing his own struggles with growing up with an ethnic name alongside those of the protagonist, this participant came alive when describing how he too, went through many difficult times growing up different. He had many stories to tell about his struggle with an ethnic name in a Western society, which also translated to additional struggles well into adulthood. When discussing how he felt about his name during the interview process for medical school, this participant expressed anxiety about being introduced by others or introducing himself to others.

People would sometimes not make an effort to learn my name; it becomes a barrier and makes it somewhat difficult to evaluate me out of a hundred others when they can't put a name to the face. (Oz)

Another male participant reflected similar frustrations with how his name was received by others.

Growing up it was bothersome to a point, but after a while, I never cared, because no matter how often I would correct people, they still would screw up a three letter name. (Sam)

Both male participants struggled to varying degrees with how their names were received by their dominant White peer groups and social groups. Both males indicated however, that their names had special significance and subsequently had an impact on how they saw themselves in relation to their cultural and religious

understandings of identity. They also indicated how helpful and cathartic it would have been to identify with characters like Gogol as they moved through high school. As transactional theory posits, there should be a focus on the reader and his/her creative and imaginative activity in constructing meaning under the guidance of the text. Meaning has no existence outside the mind of the reader who interprets the text in light of his/her own experiences and values. If a reader's experiences with culture, history, and values are not represented in any of the texts they read there is the potential for a disconnect and detached stance to texts studied in the English language arts classroom. One of the female participants also alluded to difficulties with names growing up in Canada, "*Often, we are prejudged by our names. In part, our names define us to the world and in turn we may or may not identify with our name*" (Saira). Not only are first introductions a source of anxiety, but as both female respondents indicate, names have an intimate connection with identity in relation to the Western/Canadian gaze. When the cultural, social, and public practices of the dominant culture intersect with South Asian culture and specifically with the significance or the rejection of a name, it is evident there is a cultural conflict between how a second generation individual perceives themselves to be and how they are perceived by others. In an effort to find a more congruous blend with the dominant society, second generation South Asian Canadians must deal with the mispronunciation of their names as well as having their names Anglicized. The implications of names and the impact of names on identity were discussed at length by the participants . They pointed to the coping practices that were used as having influential consequences on identity.

> *Having an uncommon name in society, we often find ourselves changing the true pronunciation, modifying the name thereby changing its meaning and ultimately changing how we define ourselves to society. I believe this is where we run the risk of disconnecting with our true identity and being comfortable with who we are and where we come from. It's often ignorance that forces us to do so.* (Anam)

We may come to identify with a name early on in life and thus we may prefer this *daak naam* or nick name to our proper name, if it is more convenient to the persona that fits best with a particular situation. Conversely, it may have negative effects on how we see ourselves.

> *I went through a period of 7 years (teens through to early adulthood) where I used a different name in the workplace, initially given to me by a co-worker who just could not pronounce my name. I adopted this nick-name and I believe it affected how I saw myself, how others saw me and how I interacted with people around me. I finally decided at the age of 22 to go back to using my real given name and as a result began to feel like I was once again my true self.* (Saira)

Adolescence is commonly known as a time of identification with one's peers when institutions place children together mostly because of age. Situational and cognitive factors during adolescence create a disconnect and shift in the identification with an ethnic name. Many South Asians experience dissonant and conflicting feelings associated with a new identity trying to negotiate multiple identities that are dependent on situational factors. The struggles of second generation South Asians to define themselves in the contexts of family and two diverse cultures throughout early adolescence and well into adulthood are evident in the narratives of the participants.

> *Like Gogol, I believe that part of my ability to make friends in High School and University was my ability to properly assimilate in many ways to Canadian culture; with dress, sports, music, and relationships, I was able to somehow create a Canadian personality in Indian skin. While I know that this was merely a product of my surroundings, I could see those who did not assimilate as well get shunned and actively teased by our peers for their accent, dress, etc.* (Oz)

Žižek (1992) helps us understand the difference between how we see ourselves and the point from which we are being observed as the difference between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In Imaginary identification, we imitate the other at

the level of resemblance, therefore identifying ourselves with the image of the Other. This is precisely why South Asians identify more with an Anglicized nickname. In Symbolic identification, South Asians identify themselves with the Other "at precisely the point at which he is inimitable; the point which eludes resemblance" (Žižek, 1992, p. 109). A decision to change their name, in effect, is their effort to resemble the I(O) or ego-ideal; the Canadian/American/Brit who speaks without an accent, who does not smell Indian, who does not act Indian, ultimately rejecting the symbolic order of our South Asian culture. The two identities of the Canadian self and the South Asian self are at odds, opposite, conflicting, self-hating, and indicative of the various schemas South Asian youth must negotiate between, allowing a glimpse into the split between who we think we are and who we want to be as well as who we are really struggling to become. Participants were also asked to discuss what details made the characters realistic and what details reminded them of their own story growing up between cultures. The participants commented on how the film related to their own experiences of growing up as a second generation South Asian.

> *I felt guilty for not embracing my culture more and angry at Canadian culture and school system for the pressures it put on me as a child to repress any sort of culture I had. My parents did not encourage us to learn their mother tongue out of fear we would develop accents and be teased at school or have lesser opportunities at success in the workplace.* (Oz)

> *I knew that my cultural heritage was important, but I wanted to embrace being a Canadian more, therefore thinking some traditions were stupid or old.* (Sam)

Reflections on the Pilot Study and Implications for Doctoral Research

Reflective of the different struggles of growing up between cultures, the participant responses were helpful for me as an educator and researcher to see

how difficult the negotiation of culture, identity, and schooling can be for bicultural adolescents who live at the juncture of two cultures and can lay claim to belonging to both cultures (Lafromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). This exploration helped me to consider how identity acts as a key site for narrative constructions and reconstructions and points to the various ways that postcolonial text, media, and film can act as particularly relevant producers of public narratives of individual or collective identities.

Theoretically, there is a homology in the conceptualizations of memory, identity, and media experiences. According to Brigitte Hipfl (1995) all three of these conceptualizations are defined by provisional and continuous processes; they are negotiated and modified in the light of experiences of the present. At the same time, these three concepts supplement each other because of the different aspects being elaborated. In the case of the participants' engagement with the film, their experiences reflect a deepening of our understanding of the complex and contradictory ways in which media are of relevance for our constructions of second generation South Asian identity. Similarly, Roland Barthes (1972) conceded that there are certain codes that readers have learned from their experience of both living in society and reading literature. Both author and reader share the codes to create a kind of network through which a text passes to become a literary work. Readers construct a work of literature out of text by filtering the text through the network of codes they have internalized. These codes recognize the importance of readers' life experiences to literary understanding. As Iser (1974) notes, the reader's activity is not independent of either textual or cultural constraints but rather guided by the text and influenced by personal experience and cultural history, his/her present representation, and the reading conventions s/he has internalized.

The pilot study helped me to formulate the research questions of my proposed study, allowing me to delve into some of the identity issues second generation South Asian Canadians are dealing with. The pilot study also helped me to determine whether or not cultural identity could be explored through the

use of film and novel. It helped me to arrive at the questions: "How do South Asian Canadian young adults see themselves, and what are their understandings of "South Asian Canadianness", national identity, ethnicity, and citizenship? How do they move through institutions of higher education and into the workforce? What meanings do they make of South Asian Canadian cultural production and the rites of Canadian youths in general?"

The findings of my pilot study suggested to me that South Asian identity *is* an issue that many second generation youth struggle with. There is also need for a more critical understanding of a liminal notion of identity as negotiated by second generation South Asians in order to better understand their identity struggles and the implications of these struggles for literacy activities and text selection in English language arts classrooms. As reflected in the participant responses to the identity and assimilation struggles of second generation South Asians as presented in *The Namesake* (Nair, 2007), it is evident there are difficulties for second generation South Asian Canadians to straddle the cultural and racial divide between White and non-White categories.

The findings of the pilot study also suggest that cultural identity is an issue on the minds of South Asian Canadians and it is an issue that is not understood by many educators. The participants in the study indicated they had a difficult time switching back and forth between their Canadian self at school and their ethnic self at home. The participants felt there was a large disconnect between school and culture and that school made them feel ashamed that they were *different*. I wondered *what* it was about school that made them feel ashamed. I also wondered *how* school contributed to much of the identity confusion they felt and *how* school further complicated what it meant to be Canadian to these students. An issue that came up in subsequent interviews was the limited selection of text in their secondary classes. The participants felt the choice of texts was strictly limited to a White, European perspective and none of them had the chance to read ethnically diverse material at the senior high level. The Alberta English language arts curriculum has since changed and the approved reading list does in fact

contain some diverse reading and viewing materials. However, I wanted to explore whether reading diverse texts does, in fact, help South Asian students negotiate cultural identity and what these students experience as a result of reading and viewing postcolonial texts.

South Asian identity is an issue that many second generation youth struggle with. There is a need for a more critical understanding of a hybrid notion of identity as negotiated by second generation South Asians in order to better understand their identity struggles and the implications of these struggles for literacy activities and text selection in English language arts classrooms. As reflected in the participant responses to the identity and assimilation struggles of second generation South Asians as presented in *The Namesake* (Nair, 2007), it is evident there are difficulties for second generation South Asian Canadians to straddle the cultural and racial divide between White and non-White categories. These very conscious and reflective participant responses point to the existence of a re-creation and a renewal of cultural traditions with Canadian culture in the second generation. The notions of cultural authenticity in relation to hierarchies of race, class, gender, and national identity that mark this generation as Canadian are important to consider. Many second generation youth explore their ethnic identities as young adults prompted by circumstances of being slightly detached from family culture and embedded with a Eurocentric school education. Many of these youth are not able to take cultural assumptions for granted and therefore find it difficult to blend into dominant society. By focusing only on the "hybridization" of Western with Eastern cultural elements such as music, film, or text, the term "hybrid" does not fully capture the complexities of racial ideology and class expectations that South Asian youth negotiate in their daily lives. As indicated in the pilot participant interviews, many second generation Canadians are self-conscious about the hybrid nature of their experiences as children of immigrants. With this comes the reflexivity inherent in the participation in anything related to their culture that is outside the home environment. Contemporary postcolonial texts have the potential for creating a space to begin

the complicated conversations around what it means to belong to a national identity, a conversation that was resumed with my doctoral research.

In the next chapter I will take up a discussion of being able to read about and discuss the small nuances the author shared about the characters' rituals of everyday life, the shared experiences of the internal self-talk that goes on in ones' head about the minutiae of cultural identity as described in *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), and how it seemed to be a strong point of identification for the young students in my study. I will also discuss the impact of a critical teaching pedagogy on the aesthetic experience of reading.

CHAPTER 8: The Minutiae of Identity

> For being a foreigner . . . is sort of a lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated, more demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner . . . is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 49)

I'm not sure if there is any other topic of discussion that I have come across in my teaching experience to date that makes students and teachers more uncomfortable than race. Social class, sex, or politics may make people feel uncomfortable, but nothing shuts down conversations faster than the topic of race. Whether it is overtly discussed, alluded to, or even referenced, this topic makes students defensive, polarized, and guarded (Williams, 2004). Sometimes students self-identify or retreat into protective statements at the outset of a conversation immediately by declaring, "I'm not a racist!" or "I have a(n)___ (insert race/culture/religion here) friend." As Fox (2001) notes, in such situations "all of us fear saying the wrong thing, or not being understood, or not grasping the experience of others, especially once we begin to see how different that experience can be from our own" (p. 4). The other common reactions include the *inoffensive* platitudes that support "colourblindness" or "everyone should be treated the same . . . because they are!" or (my personal favourite) "tolerance," or the expression of frustration and resignation from visible minority students that "they just can't understand." I empathize with these students because I also know the discomfort that comes from walking into a room or meeting people for the first time and having them realize, "Oh . . . you're . . . Brown . . but you don't *sound* Brown . . . or really *look* Brown . . . Really?!"

The Influence of Teacher Pedagogy on Reader Response

There are, of course, more considerations about race and culture that influence our teaching than can be covered in a single chapter. However, in this

chapter I'd like to focus on how schema theory affects reader response, especially with regards to cultural identity. In the past decade, many theories on reading processes have been developed, re-discovered, debated, and contested. Often there is more emphasis on differences than on similarities, especially with regards to schema theory and transactional theory. Typically, these two theories often appear as polarized viewpoints but in fact, they share much in common.

Schema theory posits that knowledge is stored in abstract structures called schemata (singular is schema). Schema theory also comes from an area of research in cognitive science which contends that every perception of human experience, including reading, involves an interaction between the input we receive and what we already know (Vacca, Vacca, & Begoray, 2005). We have schemata for many things such as objects (chair), events (birthdays), roles (teachers), and episodes (running a race). Current schema theory seeks to explain how we meld new information into old information. According to Palmer (1981) the structure of what is known is called a schema, which is somewhat similar to a concept. As it pertains to reading comprehension, research has maintained that reading comprehension is contingent as much upon what is in a reader's head as it is upon what is contained in a text. Rumelhart (1982) calls comprehension in which both world knowledge and text information play key roles an interactive process.

Readers' mental stores are divided (Carrell, 1983) into two main types: content schemata (background knowledge of the world) and formal schemata (background knowledge of rhetorical structure). Therefore, it can be said that when students use prior knowledge to construct meaning for new material that they are studying, they are activating a set of schemata which reflects the experiences, conceptual understandings, attitudes, values, skills, and strategies a reader brings to a text situation. By accessing what they know in order to construct meaning from a text, students build on prior knowledge, therefore accessing their schemata. Rumelhart (1982) called schemata 'the building blocks of cognition' because schemata represent elaborate networks of information that

people use to make sense of new stimuli, events, and situations. Students should thereby comprehend a text more deeply if they are able to call on schema that relate to the material they are reading. It has been argued that schemata are also culture specific.

What teachers say and do, the texts they choose, how they choose them, and the instructional strategies and pedagogy they draw upon for their students' instruction all affect the transaction between students and text. When students encounter a text the comprehension of a message entails "drawing information from both the message and the internal schemata until sets are reconciled as a single schema or message" (Hudson, 1988, p. 187). Students' prior experiences and engagements with text involve powerful expectations: "we are already prepared for certain genres but not for others before we open a newspaper, a scholarly journal or the box containing some machine we have just bought" (Swales, 1990, p. 88). As teachers, we often assume that our students not only possess all the relevant schemata, but also that these schemata actually are activated by the types and genres of texts we choose. Where this is not the case, then some disruption of comprehension may occur. While it is likely that "there will never be a total coincidence of schemas between writer and reader" (Wallace, 1992, p. 82) such that coherence is the property of individual readers, teachers are still able to make conscious choices to vary their selection of texts as well as involve their students to have some significant choice in the texts they are expected to study.

In one study conducted by Blue (2012), when no cultural cues were familiar, students had difficulty identifying with and understanding literary text. Blue's study was designed to determine whether diverse students draw upon their socio-cultural perspective during reading and while interpreting text and was designed to ascertain whether visible minority students from diverse backgrounds draw upon their sociocultural perspectives during oral reading and during interpretive responses of literary text. Findings of this study suggest strong evidence for the need to make room for students' personal interpretation of text as

the engagement and meta-cognitive processes of visible minority students do in fact draw upon their socio-cultural perspectives.

Despite the fact that teachers may help students develop specific tools to use as they read and respond in a particular classroom, the cultural tools that students bring to the classroom remain varied, sometimes closely aligned to those perceived to be in link with those of the teacher, sometimes in opposition (Galda & Beach, 2001). By creating opportunities for students to choose, read, and respond to texts and film, teachers enhance their students' ability to make sense of the worlds their students encounter in the text as well as their students' cultural identities and lived worlds. By encouraging their students to make connections between their own experiences and the experiences of the characters in the books they read, or by giving them the tools they need to explore how their own identities and the settings and identities of the characters they are reading about are constituted by culture, teachers make it possible for students to use their responses to classroom texts to construct and critique their worlds. The next section discusses what tools are necessary for teachers to explore texts and their own cultural experiences by teaching them how to interpret any texts from a critical, multicultural perspective.

The Impact of Critical Pedagogy on an Aesthetic Reading Experience

Critical media pedagogy provides students and citizens with the tools to analyze critically how texts are constructed and in turn construct and position viewers and readers. It provides tools so that individuals can dissect the instruments of cultural domination, transform themselves from objects to subjects, from passive to active. Thus critical media literacy is empowering, enabling students to become critical producers of meanings and texts, able to resist manipulation and domination (Kellner, 2000).

My participants' responses to the novel we studied in class were bound by narratives about race and culture that dominate their everyday lives. They felt that in the past, discussion of the topics of culture and race were limited by the

discourse and conversations that usually happen in classrooms. Over and over (in reference to discussing varying aspects of South Asian culture as portrayed in the novel and discussed in class or with our research group) I kept hearing them say, "*Why can't we ever have discussions like these in our English class*" or "*We only talk about topics like this in Social Studies*" or "*We don't ever get to talk about that stuff, really, and it's a chance for us to get to know what everyone thinks about it*." What these students didn't necessarily recognize was that their teacher had prepared them with the necessary skills. The background information, the reading and analyzing skills, the ability to articulate and argue a point as well as the literary techniques used by the author were all the background skills the students didn't realize they had until they encountered a text that held some kind of *meaning* to them (see Appendix D for assignments). These were all the ingredients for a critical pedagogy which approaches analysis of a text, characters, situations, plots from multiple perspectives. Critical literacy requires educators to teach the skills that will empower students to become sensitive to the politics of the multiple representations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and cultural differences. This type of pedagogy as applied to media and text fosters critical thinking and aims to make viewers and readers more critical and discriminating readers and producers of texts. According to Giroux (1994),

> Critical pedagogy . . . signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities . . . Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power. (p. 30)

One afternoon, my participants and I were picking up on a discussion that had started in class the day before. We were discussing topics that emerged out of "Chapters 4 and 5" of the novel (Lahiri, 2003) as possibilities for an oral commentary. The research group decided on the topic: "Gogol struggles to accept his ethnic background . . . and is slowly recognizing there is conflict between his ethnic background, his colour, and who he *wants* to be." We moved from the

large group setting of the classroom into the library where we usually met with our participant group. As we got to work, ideas, questions, and themes emerged from the students as hard thinking and interesting themes made their way to the surface of the discussion. Here is a sample of their thinking that day:

- What is the significance of Gogol ordering an American meal vs. an Indian meal on the plane?
- Is there a link between the Western world and his Indian culture?
- What other devices does Lahiri use to portray Gogol's identity conflict?
- What is the significance of the visit to the Taj Mahal?
- What is the role of the architectural constructions? Setting?
- Appreciation of literary features:
- Lahiri deliberately constructs parallels in how the plot is constructed from chapter to chapter, i.e., Chapters 3 and 4. Why does she include/exclude events in Gogol's life? Why the switch in the omniscient narrator to see more of Gogol's point of view? How does that affect the way we interpret the novel? Is this effective?
- Chapter 5 is dripping with irony. It takes 10 min. to change your name, "everyone he knows still calls him Gogol" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 103).
- Colour has become an important motif.
- "he doesn't feel like Nikhil . . . not yet" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 105).
- Irony of the situation—changing his name is not going to change his identity/ his colour see text, Lahiri, 2003, p. 100.

The participants began to unravel the layers among race/identity/culture and realized on their own that these concepts were fluid and are not mutually exclusive. (I screamed inside with excitement for I was present to witness this light bulb moment!) One student remarked,

> *The only reason he wants to change it to Nikhil is because it sounds like Nick. It is his own way of separating himself.*

Another student shared,

I totally get why he wants to be White—that is what he wants to be—he has no one around him that is even remotely Indian, he looks at his parents and sister like they are total FOBS (fresh off the boat) *and he wants nothing to do with them. We've all been there at one point.* (Kamran)

They *had* had discussions with their teacher about these topics based on the reading and analysis of a novel entitled, *Woman at Point Zero*, by Nawal El Saadawi (1983) and the essay, "Growing Up in Two Elsewheres", by F. S. J. Ledgister (2001), where the teacher had done extensive background work in an effort to activate her students' prior schematas. Just a small sample of examples of her critical pedagogical approach include:

- research on historical information, setting, culture
- writing activities: "point, proof, discussion" (make a point, find the proof, discuss your argument)

  personal response to text
  personal essays
  extended essays
  critical analytical response to texts
  - Inkshedding
  - Free writing[30]
- in- class discussions
- literary circles

The bell rang! (Always at the WRONG time!) The discussion was dropped as the students jumped out of their seats and started to assemble their books. I scrambled to keep them all in one spot long enough to request an MSN

[30] Inkshedding is an adaptation of freewriting: have students write on a particular subject, and then pass their writing on within a group. Members mark areas of the writing that are interesting or that make an impact on their understanding of the subject. These are observations that constitute deeper thinking, or a different viewpoint, on the part of the writer. The difference between inkshedding and regular freewriting may be perceived as students composing *for an immediate and known audience* – perhaps changing the way that they write, making the writing a conscious dialogic exchange.

chat to further this rich discussion. All agreed happily and scrambled off to class. As the students filtered out, one of my female participants, Kavita, came over to talk to me.

> *I just wanted to tell you, I'm suuuuper looking forward to taking part in this research project. When Mrs. V told us we were reading* The Namesake *I freaked because I actually own the book! It was given as a gift from my sister after a year in which I had had many a fight with my parents . . . my sister said that I could learn something from it. And after reading it, I felt a very strong connection to the happenings in the novel, though I can't effectively explain it. I guess that's why you chose us right?* (Kavita)

I was surprised by her warm remarks and I also felt an even deeper sense of obligation to make sure I listened very intently to what my participants had to say about their experiences with the text and that I represented their views accurately and contextually. Off she went. I grabbed my voice recorder and headed off to the car to try to capture my thoughts as soon as possible.

I saw two threads that began to emerge from my discussion with the students that day as well as from previous class discussions and assignments. One thread was that the students had a strong sense of connection to the text as an entity. They carried the text around from class to class and they were comfortable navigating the text—well aware of particular passages and certain chapters. Some participants actually bought their own copy of the text so that they could make their own notes inside the text. The second thread that emerged was that it was easy for them to "come up with things to say" in a précis[31] or in a critical response. They felt they didn't have to "bulls--t our way through" an argument or make things up. Many of them felt that Gogol's story and Lahiri's (2003)

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[31] A **critical précis** is an expository style of writing, analogous in structure to an essay but which contains a summary of another piece of text. In essence, the entire content summarizes all the main ideas, arguments and abstractions[1] within the text into a shorter passage a fraction of its original length, in order to provide insight into the original author's thesis. The writer of the précis is careful to avoid copying any direct wording from the original text in order to avoid academic plagiarism, except in short passage quotations where necessary.
Source: Wikipedia

narrative style really captured the small details of their everyday lives that made being a second generation South Asian unique. It became clear to me that these students found discussions like this gratifying because they *get it*—"it" being Gogol's position and point of view. They had all been in similar situations and therefore could speak with conviction, emphasis, and authenticity. The discussion that day seemed effortless for them because they all jumped at the chance to share their sense of connection to Gogol and his parents and the dilemmas these characters seem to get involved in. Another participant, Anjali, shared

> *I really saw my Mom in Ashima's character. She had a really hard time adjusting 'cause with me and my sister 'cause she already had 2 kids and so it was a bit harder. It was like Ashima's words were coming right off the page—like right out of my Mom's mouth and I thought wow, it was like no one else could have the same thought—but she did.*

I heard her share with the group how she "*actually understood—like properly, like the way they've* {their parents} *always wanted us to—what they went through to make us have a good life.*" This text helped with her essays, and her written and oral responses had an authentic voice and tone about which she felt confident and proud.

Both reader response and schema theory help us to understand the depth of the affect the meaning of a particular passage or text has on its reader as well as the reader's ability to access prior knowledge about a context, situation, or character based on lived cultural experiences. Central to reader response theory is investigating and describing readers' processes of engagement and involvement for composing their own "poem" [the reader's construction of a text] (Rosenblatt, 1964). Louise Rosenblatt's theories allow for a whole gamut of different response strategies, first expressed in her 1938 edition of *Literature as Exploration*, which focus on responding as an "event." While examining responding as an "event," Rosenblatt writes:

> The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely

> determine what the work communicates to him [sic]. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. (pp. 30–31)

Rosenblatt's second major work entitled *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* (1978) examined a classroom approach and application to the literary transaction. She provides a useful distinction between two opposing modes of experiencing a text—the "efferent" and the "aesthetic." When responding from the efferent stance (from the Latin *effere* to carry away), readers are motivated by specific needs to acquire information; they just want to understand what the text is saying. In contrast to this stance, the aesthetic experience is when readers respond in the aesthetic stance, their own unique lived-through experience or engagement with a text becomes the primary source for understanding, gratification, and interpretation ("*I really saw my mom in Ashima's character . . . like Ashima's words were coming off the page.")*. During any one reading experience, readers may shift back and forth along a continuum between efferent and aesthetic modes of reading processing. Thus, with an aesthetic stance, a reader may briefly focus on analyzing the techniques interacting in a text or in an efferent stance a reader may be stimulated to remember a related personal experience (Rosenblatt, 1986). This shift was evident in their personal response to a text assignment where they had to use the "point, proof, discussion" method to support their personal responses, find proof in the text, and discuss. However, according to Rosenblatt (1986), despite the mix of private and public aspects of meaning in each stance, the two dominant stances are clearly distinguishable. "Someone else can read a text efferently for us, and acceptably paraphrase, but no one else can read aesthetically—that is, experience the evocation of—a literary work of art for us" (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 125).

To complement reader response theory, researchers have begun to make

overt connections between schema theory and multimedia, pop culture and film. Recognizing that students already possess a wealth of stored knowledge, incorporating schema theory allows teachers to access that knowledge and use it as a vehicle to form new pathways for deeper and more meaningful understanding. Students use cultural identity and insight from lived experience as a foundation to discover and examine other elements of a text/film such as relating to characters, plots, complications, settings, foreshadowing, themes, and symbols. Research has shown that students in reader-response-based classrooms like the one found in my study make richer personal connections with texts than students using more teacher-directed methods to arrive at analysis and synthesis of a text. The students seem to be more understanding of multiple interpretations and because they learn techniques that help them recognize the ways in which their own arguments are formed, they are better equipped to examine the arguments of others, therefore becoming more critical readers. As demonstrated in the teacher pedagogy found in this study, it is important to note that students must be aware that not every response is equally valid and the meaning of a text is not entirely subjective; responses must be grounded in the text itself and in the context in which the text is read. Each student must be challenged by the discussion to go beyond his or her first response, as the teacher in this study modeled. Even though an individual reader's interpretations, reactions, and analyses are based on his or her own schemata, he or she will discover, through class discussions and critical engagement of a text, that not all share his/her perspective.

Inkshedding is an excellent example of how the teacher in my study taught her students to examine their own thoughts and look for unspoken assumptions that interpretations of text are arrived at through some formula or randomness or by only a privileged few (usually English teachers). Inkshedding is a Canadian term which originated in the early 1980s by Jim Reither and Russ Hunt as an attempt to make freewriting into something "dialogically transactional" for use not in only classrooms but at annual conferences and other writing institutes.

Inkshedding differs from freewriting in the sense that inkshedding is designed to be shared first with the people at one's table by exchanging the pieces of writing, marking them up and annotating them, writing exclamation marks and "me too" in the margin, and then sometimes later among the entire classroom whether by being edited and photocopied or merely by being stapled to the wall (Sargent, 2011). It is this on-the-wallness that marks a fundamental difference between inkshedding and freewriting. This process ensures that all voices are heard. Whether students are able to understand the reading better than their group members (which was the case in this study while studying *The Namesake*, as reported by the students in my study) or whether they believe that everyone else understands it better than they do (which was usually the case as reported by my students, before they had a chance to study *The Namesake*, Lahiri, 2003) they are able to see and enjoy the written track of their peers' thinking. Reading and writing become a reflective and an active process that happens in stages. According to Sargent (2011)

> writing down your first impressions and thus leaving a physical record for yourself and others to trace later, reading the first impressions of other, asking questions about the similarities and differences in those early "readings," going back in the text to refute or support certain readings and finally negotiating one or more interpretations as a group, interpretations that seem to make the most sense of the most details of a particular text. (¶17)

Another example of an in-class discussion which showed me the depth at which my participants were invested in this novel, occurred one afternoon in March. My participant group had to begin gathering evidence for an extended essay. These inkshedding pieces were saved by the students and eventually became part of a larger critical/analytical (modeling the diploma exam) essay on a given topic. The students were in charge of building a profile of the character. They had to refer to the text and copy quotations that would support their inferences. The

teacher collected the notes from random groups in order to check that they were actually doing it. Here is the topic for class that day:

Inkshedding Prompt #2 The Characters

Today's assignment:

You must choose a page you can relate to and bring it to class:
required for class is the bright pink handout and green handout, vocabulary handout (see attached Appendix D) which provide words that help describe the psychological state of the character and your emotional response to the character.

Preparation:

From the vocabulary list provided at the beginning of the year to you, select a series of adjectives that, in your view, best describe the title character featured from Lahiri's (2003) novel.

Describe the character and his or her psychological state in as much detail as possible, discussing his or her reasons for feeling a certain way (could be in point form).

Whenever appropriate, explain the characters' motivation and how you respond to him or her. Are you annoyed? Confused? Discouraged? Excited? Sympathetic?
Resort to the list of attitude words enclosed to describe your emotional response(s) to the character.

Inkshedding: You have 10–15 minutes of non-stop writing to complete the assignment. *Not point form, just non-stop stream of consciousness.*

> Identify a particular passage that affects you the most. Indicate the page number, and look at it sentence-by-sentence, even word-by-word if necessary. Can you identify the precise spot that makes you feel that way? Where do you think your reaction comes from?
>
> Share your ideas and observations with the members of your literary circle. Try to find answers to some of the questions above. (Miss V, 2009)

What interested me was the degree to which my participants engaged in the text and the affect they realized through discussion and interpretation of various events in the characters' daily lives. The first few minutes of this discussion were awkward for them. Referring back to my notes, I scribbled, "This part of the conversation was awkward as I was just getting to know them and they were unsure of me—a trust thing I think—it is also apparent to me that they may not have had experience discussing issues of culture in English class. *This topic recurs in future conversations." Below is a snippet of the conversation we had regarding the assignment outlined above. My comments and thinking during this conversation are located within [brackets].

> **FARHA:** Are you talking about Ashok?
>
> **KRITIKA:** No, his son Gogol and how his relationship with his parents is kind of different how most Indian kids have their relationship that their parents. I guess like more modern. I don't know if modern is the right word but he's more I guess . . .
>
> [awkwardness, shifting, unsure of her response]
>
> **FARHA:** Westernized?

KRITIKA: Westernized, YES, and is very involved with his friends, and he has this White girlfriend . . .

FARHA: Gogol?

KRITIKA: Yes, and foreshadowing, because when there's a train accident and then we kind of lead into how his son was . . . we're just going to talk about how, him sitting in the hospital and remembering the train accident was foreshadowing because then they lead onto how he got his name from that book that he was reading on that train.

FARHA: Did you focus on Ashok? You guys were supposed to pick a character?

SANAM: She did page five.

FARHA: And you did?

SANAM: 26.

[at this point it was like pulling teeth to get my participants to discuss freely without any prompts. This was my first time I had a chance to sit with them and discuss a chapter with them . . .]

KRITIKA: Do you wanna talk about yours now?

[this participant was extremely engaged, unlike the other participants, and had read the book already. She was waiting for her turn to contribute to the discussion . . .]

SANAM: Mine was when the baby's born and it's talking about the baby and naming the child and how it's not important name your child right away because she, because back in India or whatever . . . they wouldn't name kids, like parents took their time to name the kids and stuff and even her cousins or something wait until they were seven, like six, seven years old, like registering for school was the reason why they got named and stuff. And how [it] was more important to her to bless the child with gold and silver, and love and care over a name.

[instant embarrassment because she knew this information, almost like she didn't want to say the word India out loud, she had opened the discussion for others, some awkward moments had passed and everyone was a little more comfortable talking about the cultural nuances of the chapter out loud . . .]

KRITIKA: It is important . . . I think with her though in the first few pages you realize that she's very like a traditional Indian way and has very traditional values, like with the whole, the chicken and,

SANAM: She doesn't understand the American values,

KRITIKA: way of living, and then she's, when she's cooking too, she's cooking Indian food and she's remembering back I think,

SANAM: oh how they did it and stuff.

KRITIKA: Yeah, and I think it's 'cause it's earlier on in their marriage so like she still kind of remembers her values that she would have in India, 'cause like living in Canada is so much different from there.

[the girls are talking over each other, Sanam is now eager to share what she has to say]

FARHA: She hasn't quite accustomed to the western way of life yet?

KRITIKA: Yeah . . .

SANAM: and I think she does understand it, she just knows her way and that's the best way.

FARHA: Was it at that point in the novel where she meets the neighbours when she comes home from the hospital. She kind of reflects back on meeting the neighbours, the other grad student and his wife, the guy who goes to Harvard?

KRITIKA: Yeah.

FARHA: Or is that too far ahead? And she kind of looks at the way they live and she's really appalled at the way they live and how different, easygoing the wife is. And how she just kind of leaves her kids and you know just kind of goes off and goes, and then comes home and,

KRITIKA: Yeah.

FARHA: I think it kind of shows how shocked she is with the American way of life. I think she's . . .

SANAM: [interrupting] And then in the beginning she mentions like miniskirts and bikinis and laying on top of each other, like it was funny

that she's just so appalled by it [giggling . . . they are far more comfortable making references to cultural nuances].

KRITIKA: Yeah. I think this book makes a lot of sense to us though,

SANAM: Yeah, we were totally laughing at it, it's just like, even our parents are like that, where like they used to be like this, like we bent them a little.

KRITIKA: But it's kind of like I think when her husband leaves she was very, I guess she didn't say anything to him, like I think if it was one of like someone that was more western they would've been like, where you going (over talk). Like stick with me through all of my labour, and he was just kind of like I'm leaving and she didn't say anything to him,

SANAM: And he'd be like conservative, like stays behind the curtain, like respects the, yeah.

KRITIKA: Yeah.

FARHA: I think at that time though they didn't allow husbands in the delivery room anyway.

KRITIKA: Oh I think she was yelling at her…

SANAM: 'Cause no wasn't the American lady with her boyfriend or were someone,

KRITIKA: Oh, I don't remember,

SANAM: She's like yelling, she's like this is hell.

KRITIKA: Oh you're right ok. You're right.

SANAM: He was like I love you sweetie or something,

KRITIKA: You're right, and she was cussing him out.

SANAM: And then she was like what's her name was saying, and she was like I could never imagine my husband saying that to me, not even thinking it, yeah. And like the two single beds being pushed together.

KRITIKA: Yeah. But I also think it was maybe because it was earlier on in their relationship, so it might've been a little weird, but it, weird for them to get to know each other.

SANAM: But like I think we had the whole intimate part but they didn't have that kind of, the more deeper, and bonding and,

FARHA: The relationship part.

SANAM: Yeah, I think like Lahiri does a really good job of depicting that awkwardness you know,

FARHA: Where she washes his sweater and it shrinks or something like that,

SANAM: And we could totally understand 'cause both of our parents are like arranged marriages,

KRITIKA: And my cousin got an arranged marriage too recently, but I think the difference between us now getting an arranged marriage and before is now you talk and then you date,

SANAM: Date for a while.

KRITIKA: And if you like them then you marry them, but with my parents it was like you kind of point them out and then you would have tea with them but no formal talking and like the four, the first time you've kind of met is like. My parents hung out before they got married to each other, it was really sudden, they didn't have the chance really to be with each other and talk.

[at this point in the conversation the personal part of their lives intersect the text. They fully understand the small nuances that make sense to them because of personal cultural experiences. They feel empowered and confident in sharing their responses with each other because they share similar narratives.]

FARHA: And I think now it's more like in modern times as you said, it's more matchmaking as opposed to arranged marriage.

KRITIKA: Yeah. Like good family, good guy (over talk).
[The rest of the conversation was completely off task and the girls shared their own stories of how dating in Indian culture is completely taboo.]

They related to Gogol's struggle and discussed how similar Gogol's circumstances were to their own, telling me how all the little inside references made them laugh and nod their head while reading chapters for class. Never

before had they had such an experience, one participant told me during this discussion,

> *I wish I had even known that this genre of writing existed, I had no idea there was an entire genre dedicated to people like us—I would have been waaaay more interested in reading. I kind of feel cheated in a way*. (Anjali)

The girls were talking over each other, affirming and discussing similar experiences growing up, and relating to each other on a deeply personal level. Before this research group, most of these girls knew each other but didn't necessarily "hang out" because it was "*weird to hang out with other Brownies.*" By the end of our time together, these girls became quite close and were extremely open to share lived experiences and laughs about family and cultural life. Through our discussions, they discovered for themselves that although they may appear to look *modern* or *western* (as opposed to traditional, ethnic, immigrant, too Brown) they realized through relating to the events and characters in this book that they had more traditional ways of thinking and relating to their environments, situations they may find themselves in, and reactions to events in the text.

It was clear from the initial research group discussions and in large group discussions with the class that this text, coupled with the teacher's critical pedagogy, created opportunities for my research group to fully appreciate the aesthetic qualities evoked for them. I recorded my female participant's comments about the book and how the book helped her make sense of the fight with her parents and to link her comments to transactional theory into my voice recorder. I also made a mental note to go back to the oral commentary that my group of male participants presented back in April and select the passage on their discussion of the exoticization of Gogol to this notion of reading a text aesthetically. The group picked up on some very salient and pivotal points in their discussion that I felt accurately demonstrate how well my participants were able to tease out complicated and sophisticated elements of Gogol's complex predicament with

identity and how he is perceived by those who surround him, especially Maxine, his White girlfriend and her parents.

The students' task was to explain the concepts of individualism and cultural conflict for their oral presentation in front of the class. I facilitated the group's discussions and helped them think through ideas in preparation for the presentation. Here is a small portion that demonstrates how well this group was able to bring forth the subtle nuances of Lahiri's (2003) attempt to demonstrate the exoticization of *Gogol in the eyes of Maxine and her family.*

> **SAHIL:** *When Gogol meets with Maxine's parents he notices that there's a lot of things different about the way they have dinner with guests than the way his parents would have company over. Maxine's parents even let him set the table and he notes that if his parents were having people over they [the parents] would do everything . . . like a special individual and they incorporate him into their dinner almost as if he's family but given an elevated status.*
>
> *And on the other hand when Maxine meets Gogol's parents, there's a big cultural difference in comparison to Gogol's parents who tell him they're not able to kiss or hold hands with each other and they're not able to drink wine (p. 45) which is a big cultural difference. Another indication of the cultural difference because Gogol's parents always seem to be worried and they ask him to move the car that he came in, whereas Maxine and her family, they have a more carefree attitude towards life and sort of taking it more as they come. So, they're sort of relaxed and Gogol likes that because he's been brought up in North America and he doesn't always understand why his parents are worried and why they bring formality into so many situations.*

The teacher was nodding her head. I gazed over to the students in the class and they seemed interested and engaged. Many students were jotting notes down. I looked at my South Asian participants, at three girls in particular who (as indicated by their teacher) rarely took interest or contributed to class discussions,

and who were now furiously flipping back and forth through the text, conferencing quietly and scribbling down page numbers . . . (I smiled inside!)

TEACHER: What page did you have?

SAHIL: Well, when he meets with Maxine's parents, I think that's page 132, ya, and . . .

TEACHER: 132.

SAHIL: And then 145 when Nikhil . . .

TEACHER: So why do you think she includes those two episodes? What is that purpose of having the two dinners?

SAHIL: It shows the distinction between the different cultures that Gogol's involved in. So that's, the whole book is about him finding the culture that he sort of fits in with. So . . . it basically represents cultural differences between two cultures the author wants to highlight that, that's what she . . .

TEACHER: Are the two cultures of equal importance to Gogol, or does he have preferences for one or the other?

SAHIL: Well, he probably feels more close to Western culture in many ways. I think he's a young adult and he's rebelling from his parents but he seems to think that . . . So, he, as he grew up and went through his teenage life in North America, he's kind of separating himself from his parents, he actually feels closer to the Western culture. He seems to always find that what his parents are doing is kind of awkward and they're not really fitting in. That could be either for the cultural or for the generational difference.

TEACHER: Why is the relationship with Maxine not successful? Because the entire chapter is about his relationship with Maxine right? If he likes all the things about her lifestyle, which is basically the lifestyle of her parents, why does that relationship not work?

SAHIL: Well, he does in some ways, he wants hold on to his parents' traditions and there's a difference in understanding in the way Maxine connects sort of, earlier we had the article on "The Exotic," I think when we were reading the short story, "Woman at Point Zero" there were some similar themes. For Maxine's family Gogol's lifestyle sort of fits, Gogol's parents, his traditions sort of fit in to that exotic sort of thing . . . so it could just be a novelty sort of more for them. They are fascinated with how different Gogol's family is.

Sahil understood much of the complexity which encompassed the notion of "the exotic," otherwise coined as Orientalism by Edward Said (1978). The term has since acquired a negative connotation as it usually refers to the imitation or depiction of aspects of Eastern culture in the West. Said (1978) used the term to describe a pervasive Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of prejudiced outsider interpretations of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Exoticism, or the charm of the unfamiliar, usually linked to Orientalism, can also take on the form of ethnocentrism and is pertinent to this conversation between Sahil and the teacher. With some further prompting, Sahil was able to effectively explain how Gogol's family as well as his culture fascinated Maxine and her family. In the novel and film, Nikhil (Gogol) becomes a show piece as the model minority and therefore exoticized to the Ratliffs, and to Maxine. The discussion continues . . .

TEACHER: I think that's an excellent point. Could you find evidence so we can discuss that with the class? How does Lahiri handle that sense of exoticism? How does she convey it, what devices does she use to convey

that about Maxine's family? Do you think he understands the Western culture, which is represented by Maxine? I want you to look, all of you, page 138. Maxine is open about her past and Gogol is really shy about her past, about his past, right? That's a big contrast between the two of them and how they look at their background and what it is, and their legacy, right? "Showing him photographs of her ex-boyfriends in the pages of a marble-papered album, speaking of those relationships without embarrassment or regret . . ."

[Sahil is thinking . . .]

TEACHER: So you were talking about the exotic, right? How does Gogol see Maxine? Does he understand really, her culture? Or are there certain things he wants to see in how that relationship is and how she behaves?

At this point, the teacher is trying to show the students and Sahil the other side of the exotic. Gogol is fascinated with Maxine's life and how uncomplicated it seems. Gogol wants nothing more than to be a part of her culture, the nonchalant ways of her parents.

SAHIL: I think he does understand it because he has no problems conforming to it and accepting it and liking it, but he does notice the differences. Towards the end when their relationship does break up there are some obvious disparities between the two.

TEACHER: Could you elaborate on those? What causes them?

SAHIL: Because Maxine's style of living is much more intimate, much more friendly, whereas Gogol's is more independent . . .everything. When his father dies he wants to be alone, she wants to support him, that's kind of, the most obvious one.

TEACHER: Any other comments?

SAHIL: Well, I think, you get the sense that Gogol feels more at home with Maxine's family. I don't think he completely understands their culture but he just feels more comfortable with it and also, 'cause when he's at home, he's more Americanized from his culture, so his culture always clashes with his parents and with Max he's able to relate with Maxine's family because he wants to be so much like them. Also, I think, it shows that he's confused and the one part where Maxine's father hands him the utensils and then he's thinking to himself that he's holding the everyday utensils of people that he barely knows.

[He picked up on this small detail in the novel because of his position as an insider to the culture and he was easily able to see the connection between his own culture and the little minutiae of culture the author was trying to convey.]

And so he's confused even though ultimately the American culture is what he wants but he still doesn't completely understand it. And I think that this is a turning point because he realizes that no matter how American he is, he's still different.

TEACHER: OK. I also want to draw your attention to page 146. We have, you know, Gogol and Maxine come to New Hampshire at Pemberton Road for the lunch meeting with their parents, and he tells her about these restrictions or something. And the comment is:

> *"The restrictions amuse her; she sees them as a single afternoon's challenge, an anomaly never to be repeated. She does not associate him with his parents' habits; she still cannot believe*

she's to be the first girlfriend he's ever brought home. He feels no excitement over this prospect, wants simply to be done with it. Once they get off of his parents' exit he senses that the landscape is foreign to her: the shopping plazas, the sprawling brick-faced public high school from which he and Sonia graduated, the shingled houses uncomfortably close to one another, on their grassy quarter-acre plots. The sign that says CHILDREN AT PLAY. He knows that this sort of life, one which is such a proud accomplishment for his own parents, is of no relevance, no interest to her, that she loves him in spite of it."

Now we're talking about a neighbourhood in America, correct? I would like to hear your comments. How do, how do we know that the relationship is doomed?

KRITIKA: That he cares so much about her culture and her ways . . .he wants to be like her.

Evident in the teacher's discussion prompts and gentle nudging for the students to keep digging into interpretation lies Rosenblatt's (1976) main argument that teachers need to help specific human beings—not some generalized fiction called "the student"—to discover the pleasures and satisfactions of literature. Also evident here is the teacher's role which is so vital for the students to scaffold their interpretations and move them a step further. What is also demonstrated in the passage above and supported by transactional theory is captured in Rosenblatt's quote from *Literature as Exploration* (1976), "There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are in reality only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary works" (p. 32).

Much of literature instruction in schools involves employing correct answers, worksheets, and tests and textbook questions require students to adopt an efferent rather than aesthetic stance. Instead, (as indicated in the above discussion between teacher and student) the teacher focused on the concept of shared criteria

of validity of interpretation in this particular passage and encouraged the different interpretations of the same physical text/passage as acceptable (while accepting that some readings may satisfy the criteria more fully than others). Thus readers can be open to alternative readings of *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), but teachers may also consider some readings superior to others according to certain criteria. "Always, therefore, a full understanding of literature requires both a consciousness of the reader's own 'angle of refraction' and any information that can illuminate the assumptions implicit in the text" (Rosenblatt, 1976, p. 115).

Rosenblatt's focus on the uniqueness of a particular, momentary transaction, known as the "transactional theory," (1969) considers that the meaning of a text is derived from a transaction between the text and reader within a specific context thus,

> emphasizing the essentiality of both reader and text, in contrast to other theories that make one or the other determinate. . . . "Transaction" . . . permits emphasis on the to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence or reader and text in the making of meaning. The meaning—the poem—"happens" during the transaction between the reader and the signs on the page. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xvi)

Because each individual reader evokes his or her own unique, subjective meanings this theory calls into question the New Criticism assumption that the meaning resides solely in the text, accessible only to the trained eye of the critic/teacher. The essential purpose of instruction from a transactional perspective is to foster students' trust in the expression of their individual lived and cultural experiences with a given text. Thus, English language arts educators play an absolutely crucial role in influencing how students perform in response to a text. By including texts that are culturally engaging and diverse, teachers open up the breadth and scope of their students' responses.

Given the fact that South Asian cultures are very diverse, my participants discovered more commonalities to the ways in which they were raised, parental expectations, and perceptions about education and success. This insider

knowledge was important for capturing subtle nuances the author was trying to convey. The duality of Western vs. Eastern ways of life, cultural and generational clashes, as well as identity troubles were all themes my participants felt they could relate to in a deeper way with this novel because of their positioning as insiders to the culture of the text—an experience they had never had before. They admitted that the cultural values instilled in them by their parents had a great deal of influence over the way they thought, acted, and reacted to life in general . . . "*But don't ever tell our parents that!*" they declared. Second generation South Asian youth in Canada have a slippery presence that disturbs all notions of *cultural authenticity*. Their very presence in the Canadian mosaic points to the ruptures and contradictions between commonly held notions of East and West, traditional, and modern.

My next chapter will continue to take up how these youth struggle to fashion an identity that speaks to their experience of being South Asian in Canada through the meaningful conversations they had reading and viewing *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003; Nair, 2007). The following chapter will focus more on how discussing the events and characters in the book led to in-depth conversations about their position as second generation South Asians in Canadian society and how culture clash theory does not adequately explain their complex position in Canadian schools. In sharing their experiences, I hope the discussion will unsettle and resist certain mainstream definitions of both South Asian and Canadian.

CHAPTER 9: Culture Clash or Cultural Omission

> This is where I am caught: not between two cultures, but between omissions, between fragments of myself. (Handa, 2003, p. 3)

The challenges confronting postmodern and culturally diverse societies are usually understood as arising from cultural clashes and/or value conflict. Popular and common sense understandings of generational or cultural conflicts faced by youth—specifically second generation youth and between White and non-White youth—are usually discourses around "cultural conflict." As indicated in the beginning of this manuscript, there are several limitations to the current study of cultural or ethnic identity, especially the identity of second generation South Asian-Canadians. Currently there is very limited Canadian research available (almost all of the research available about second generation South Asian Canadians is limited to US and British information and research).Ethnic/bicultural identity is studied as though it is fixed over time and across situations. It is almost always studied as an independent variable and finally the role of youth in the acquisition and expression of their identities is unclear.

Culture[32] clash theories seem to focus on how certain individuals or groups manage the threat of modernity or westernism in the face of assimilation. Culture clash discourses are also framed within the power dynamics of minority and majority cultures often measure the "success" of immigrants by the degree to which they assimilate into the mainstream Canadian culture (Handa, 2003). The yardstick by which to measure success is commonly attributed to the adaptability of the immigrant to the dominant culture as opposed to the dominant culture's ability to adapt to new immigrants and their cultures. It can hardly be argued that assimilation is usually an involuntary process and it may often be destructive to many cultural values, norms, and beliefs. As it pertains to educational and curricular considerations for students, assimilation is a taken for granted concept that is often overlooked by educators and sociologists as a prerequisite for social and economic success. Immigrants who hold on to cultural markers, traditions, or

[32] *Culture* here is defined as values, attitudes, habits and customs.

values that are visibly distinct or seem out of the norm from the dominant Canadian way impact their offspring leading to assumptions and statements regarding cultural conflict. In my research, I discovered that my participants felt that the degree to which second generation youth are able to acculturate or fit in is really based on their *parents'* flexibility and willingness to change the way they (the parents) think or act.

> "Don't call us 'guys'! Sometimes when I close my eyes I feel like I've given birth to strangers." (Nair, 2007)

When my participants were discussing references to culture and values in the life of the protagonist Gogol and his family, they felt as though it was the first time they ever had a chance to talk about, share, or reveal any aspects of their own cultural lives in a school setting. They could interpret what was happening to these characters throughout the text and make personal connections to the characters and the complications throughout the story. It also allowed them to understand their own histories, the stories, and lessons their parents shared with them about the experience of immigration and assimilation. Most importantly, these discoveries through the text created feelings of connection and belonging which infused their writing and responses with authenticity, voice, and clarity. For some of my participants, the experience allowed them the courage to speak up in class and share thoughts and ideas with conviction and confidence. I have selected a few samples of an MSN (The Microsoft Network Instant Messaging) conversation at the halfway point in the research project, which captures the participants' feelings about studying the text.

> **Farha says: (9:04:52 PM)**
> So how are you feeling about this novel now that most of you are half way into it? Do you like the story so far?
>
> **Sahil says: (9:07:04 PM)**
> Love the story. I connect with it; it makes me feel kind of guilty though

Farha says: (9:07:27 PM)

Why did you feel guilty?

Sahil says: (9:08:29 PM)

Because at the end he sees how he reflects upon his identity and sees that perhaps that's not what he actually wanted . . . he was White washed and I don't want to become like that lol (laugh out loud)

Farha says: (9:10:08 PM)

That's fair . . . I conducted this research with some South Asian Canadian adults and it was amazing how "into" the story they were—especially the movie. They also felt a bit guilty about their personal experiences growing up and how they were hard on their parents . . .

Sahil says: (9:10:55 PM)

Ya this book really made me realize what my parents went thru so I could be here. Be me. It makes me wonder how much of how I thought and acted was because of school—I felt like I needed to fit in so badly—fitting in with my surroundings at school was the opposite of what I experienced at home.

Isolation is a dominant theme in *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), as Gogol's parents, Ashoke and Ashima, are faced with utter disillusionment having no family support in America on how to raise children, let alone American children. They had to deal with many situations which challenged their Eastern ideals of parenting, including Gogol wanting to keep a more Americanized name, dating a White girl, going on holidays with a White girl, even living with his girlfriend's parents, with very little experience or cultural reference points. In the film, the viewer is made painfully aware of Ashima's culture shock in one scene where she visits a laundromat down the street from her apartment for the first time and her eyes are assaulted when she catches a glimpse of a homeless man talking to

himself, undressing in public and throwing his clothing into the washer. Ashima turns her face away in horror and her eyes tell us that she feels violated for witnessing such a thing. On a daily basis, Ashima and Ashoke are reminded of the decision they made to move to America and are constantly bombarded by the doubt of whether they made the right decision or not.

> But she has gathered that Americans, in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 3)

A constant battle between expectations at home and life at school with his friends was a daily negotiation for Gogol and for my participants. However, the proverbial "caught between two cultures" is a simplistic and inadequate phrase that does not adequately capture the minutiae of how complex this negotiation really is for second generation Canadian youth. Second generation South Asian Canadian youth, like my participants, whose parents were more open to embracing Canadian cultural norms, described having less conflict in their adolescent years than those whose parents were more reluctant to let go of the "outdated" traditions of their heritage cultures.

> There were things for which it was impossible to prepare but which one spent a lifetime looking back at, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 287)

The culture clash model overlooks how important race and culture are as determinants of cultural identity as well as how students perceive themselves in relation to their peers (White or non-White). Consequently, a student's cultural identity has a direct influence on their feelings of connectedness and satisfaction with the literature they are reading, his/her achievement in English language arts, and his/her perceptions of success and contentment with assignments related to a given text. I also argue that the generation in which these students find

themselves has given rise to fluid notions of identity as actualized by the students themselves due to influences such as social media, pop culture, music, and the internet. The students in my study were highly aware and comfortable with having to negotiate the terms of their identity in a school setting based on where they were, and who they were with what they were reading. They accepted this as a part of their daily lives. Their ability to capitalize on their own cultural identity was fluid and dynamic and constantly in flux. However, with this text they felt that they could be more open about their cultural identity: they felt at home talking about excerpts from the text, and they were surprised at how their peers (White and non-White) openly discussed passages from the text.

Farha says: (9:11:16 PM)

It seemed that you were quite comfortable sharing your thoughts during the class discussion with regards to how Gogol felt, why he felt this way and perhaps as an insider to the culture. Did you feel more confidence or better prepared for this assignment because of the nature of the story or because you could relate to Gogol's experiences?

Sahil says: (9:12:43 PM)

You know, the whole class has never been so into a discussion before. I felt that I could speak openly about the topic and not be judged because I have some authority to do so . . . lol—I don't know if that's the right word . . .

Sanam says: (9:21:16 PM)

We don't really get a chance to talk about that stuff really and it's a chance to get to know what everyone thinks about it. It was really easy because we live it everyday. Normally, no one cares to hear about immigrants—but because this entire story was about immigrants and their experiences raising kids—it's like it was telling our story—only it was important, because we were studying it in class, you know. It's in a

book—*and* we're studying it—so it tells everyone, hey listen up this is important now.

Sahil says: (9:24:25 PM)

Well, actually in world lit we talk about how culture is used to portray something but we never really talk about the actual culture, like the every day details that actually make up the substance of a culture . . .

Sanam says: (9:24:25 PM)

Ya I agree . . . Yea its allll analyzing which can get amazingly boring

Sahil says: (9:24:41 PM)

I guess this novel gave us the opportunity to be more open about Indian culture.

The concept of "identity capital" is derived from this framework, depicting how individuals can negotiate life passages in an increasingly individualistic, complex, and chaotic world (Coté, 1996). The extent to which and the ways in which culture and identity are interrelated has been researched by sociologist, James Coté, who maintains that during adolescence there is a heightened need to conform to society's accepted norms, or image consumption, and it is customary to spend great amounts of time in experiences that similarly project images while gaining validation from others, through the consumption of music, mass media, computers, and assorted games. This process involves image consumption in the sense that illusions are used as a basis for key interactions with others (Coté, 1996). Those who reject their culture of primary socialization may be particularly prone to this, given that they do not see themselves reflected in their surroundings i.e, print, media, literature, music, pe.

My main argument calls for a more inclusive and equitable discourse around the English language arts curriculum. The English language arts curriculum must encompass the notions of culture and race as facets of the study

of humanities. Teaching pedagogy invested in a postcolonial lens contributes to all students' sense of well-being and cultural identity. With this text, the participants in my study expressed feelings of connectedness, pride for their cultural community and being able share, discuss, and relate through similar life and cultural experiences. The teacher in my study approached her pedagogy through a postcolonial lens, which directly impacted how the students were able to experience the text and other pieces of literature studied in conjunction with this text, in a deeper, more aesthetic way. In addition to these benefits, at the core of a student's sense of cultural identity are several features that are particular to each culture. Clothing, choice of friends, dating, parties, curfews, etc., serve as powerful markers and reference points around which these students made sense of their lives in and out of school. When these important aspects of their culture are omitted and left out of their experiences inside the classroom, what messages do teachers send to students about what is considered to be valuable and important? Approaching the curriculum and text selection from multiple perspectives is as important as providing a safe learning environment, assessment, or student achievement. To consider curriculum as a powerful discourse with liberating or dominating influences over students makes me question whose ideas, text, information, and knowledge are educators propagating. Given the complexity of impossible boundaries that attempt to corral culture as representation, will there always be exclusion? Perhaps the "endgame" has been reached when it comes to the institutionalization of the curriculum.

Henry Giroux (1981), one of the founding theorists of critical pedagogy, notes that curriculum should be considered to be a discourse that may either embody the elements of domination or liberation. By interrogating the functionalism of most educational theory, he emerged with a non-functionalist theory of education and particularly the curriculum itself as its principal language by which it makes its ideology intelligible to itself (Giroux, 1981). Like Paulo Freire, Giroux probes deeply into the conditions of pedagogy and tries to understand the ways in which it is possible for education to be a force in working

towards democracy, rather than asserting its leveling influence within the social hierarchy. His ideas describe schools as institutions of cultural and social reproduction that embody "cultural capital" (Sullivan, 2001). The pedagogy of current models of education draw upon western Eurocentric ideology and function as an effort to transmit cultural tradition and ideology as knowledge of hegemonic groups in society. The conditions of learning—classrooms, texts, film, and other spaces—are areas in which students gain power through understanding and can serve a counter-hegemonic function, hence the need for a change, starting with the current English language arts cannon of literature. Cultural omission then, can be considered as one of the ways educational institutions continue to promote ideals of what knowledge is considered to be of value and importance to the dominant groups in society. Again, the question of gaze comes into my mind: who decides what is omitted lies in the difficulties of negotiated meanings. In most cases important knowledge takes the form of an invisible curriculum which can complicate how relations among unequals are powerfully shaped by the histories and contemporary realities of oppression. To quote Razack (2006),

> Although an encounter between colonizer and colonized changes in historically specific ways, and is always highly gendered, it remains a moment when powerful narratives turn oppressed peoples into objects, to be held in contempt, or to be saved from their fates by more civilized beings. (p. 3)

The negotiation of various aspects of one's cultural self in order to fit in, belong, get the same chances, understand the discussion, be a part of something, are all ways second generation Canadian students navigate the current school system. It is clear that educators do need to talk about cultural differences in the context of schooling given that culture is the terrain in which racial Othering occurs.

> **Sanam says: (9:25:30 PM)**
>
> It's kind of like if u say something, teachers don't say its wrong, they just leave it at where u said it and move on. They don't really affirm what you say . . . most of the time we can't relate to what we're reading anyway—

it's so disconnected. With this book, we were so connected to the story, we could feel the characters' struggles, their pain, their frustrations, everything. We were better able to connect the events of the story to what we were writing about. And the writing felt natural—not painful! LOL

Farha says: (9:25:43 PM)
Thank you for sharing that. I think it is important that you speak honestly about how you felt about the story.

Sahil says: (9:25:47 PM)
Like it's not that common we'll just start talking about Indian people, and how we act, like our culture doesn't matter, and what our customs are and what is expected of us. Nothing of our "selves" gets brought to school. It's like we have to be one person at home and one at school.

Farha says: (9:28:47 PM)
What issues or questions, if any, related to your own identity as a second generation South Asian came up for you as you reflect on the story?

Sahil says: (9:29:33 PM)
Well the issue of Brown kids trying to be White always reminds me of this story and probably the fact why most people can accept both aspects of their culture, contrary to what most people think—don't people realize that we know we are born Brown—we have learned to walk around and act a certain way in certain situations—and that's ok. That's part of what Gogol had to figure out—he didn't get it until the end of the story—but the minute he stopped trying to fight it—he figured it out. The thing about us is that being born in Canada—that's just a part of the game of fitting in—you either accept it and deal or you fight it and have an identity crisis

like he did LOL! So we related when we saw Gogol adapting the western culture . . .

Farha says: (9:38:06 PM)
what about school? how important is what you read? If you could include more novels like The Namesake, do you think that it would make Eng class more meaningful?

Sahil says: (9:38:34 PM)
yeah for sure

Farha says: (9:38:55 PM)
why? explain?

Anjalie says: (9:49:26 PM)
That's true, and come to think of it I probably would have developed an interest in reading a lot sooner if we had read more books like the namesake in school. Isn't English through the curriculum supposed to provide different types of topics to engage people in English and literature

Kamani says: (9:53:37 PM)
I understand to why most of the books that we read are from Canadian authors or most of the time but to be honest . . . I don't really see the "Canadian" theme or culture in most of the books that we read. Like sometimes I often ask myself "what is the Canadian culture?" I remember that I came over a question in this thing once and it was like "how does this relate to the Canadian culture?"

Farha says: (9:55:35 PM)

20% of the reading must be CDN content . . . but there are South Asian and Asian Authors that are CDN . . . like Fred Wah and Shyam Selvadurai . . . Have you heard of them? They are both Canadian and they are Asian and South Asian respectively.

Kamani says: (9:56:11 PM)

Yeah never heard of them—the only thing I see about Canada is that we're multicultural . . . but we don't really seem to show it in the aspects of education except for social classes.

According to Razack (1988) there is an increase in the popularity of the cultural differences model in education. For example,

> Researchers exploring the schooling issues of Asian Canadian students in Canada, the United States, and Britain often attribute both their school achievements and failures to their cultural values and practices. If these children do well in school, it is because of the value their culture places on education; if they do poorly in school, it is because of their failure to *acculturate* to the *host* society. Teachers are advised then, to become familiar with various cultural practices and values so that they might intervene appropriately. (p.9)

According to Razack (1998) Christine Sleeter (1993) and others have documented that "the adoption of apparently helpful 'cross-cultural' strategies does little to ensure that white teachers will view their Asian and Black pupils as fully capable of the same level of achievement as their white students" (p.9). Furthermore, teachers are not held accountable to examine whether the behaviour that is labeled cultural for example, passivity towards authority figures, is a response to an alienating and culturally ommissive environment.

The popularity of the cultural differences model can be paralleled with the culture clash model in educational practice and discourse. Educators who are find diversity and equity pedagogy to be an 'add on', difficult or challenging, think

they can 'cover' the topic of diversity by using a variety of 'pedagogical tricks' that accommodate culturally diverse groups. According to Razack (1998), often there is a misappropriation, misuse, or othering of cultural practices or values of the subordinate group. Examples commonly include the food, fanfare, festivities, and musical approaches, which can be disconnected, thematic, and often emphasize the exotic nature of a culture. According to Razack (1998) the culture clash model reinforces "an epistemological cornerstone of modern day colonialism" (p.10). The colonized, by nature of being *the* colonized, possess knowledge that is deemed to be of value, importance and even merit. According to Razack (1998), this set of knowable qualities managed by the colonizers allows their to complicity remain denied. With direct relation to my study, I question the efficacy, the use, and the equity involved when teachers rely on canonized texts, thereby reinforcing the dominant culture's interpretation of what information and whose knowledge is deemed important and valuable. Whose experiences are being denied? According to Razack (1998),

> We are each implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies. Tracing our complicity in these systems requires that we shed notions of mastering differences, abandoning the idea that differences are pre-given, knowable and existing in a social and historical vacuum. (p. 10)

By relating the practice of text selection and cultural omission I also am challenging a position of innocence maintained by teachers, curriculum instruction, school boards, faculties of education, and anyone involved in the creation, dissemination, reproduction, and instruction of information designed to teach students about the world around them. In my concluding chapter, I argue that a process of accountability needs to be in place that must begin with a recognition that educators need to invest energies into exploring their own histories and their own social relations. By examining these structure and concepts, we can begin to examine what Razack (1998) has determined as

"conditions that create and structure groups unequally in relation to one another and *that shape what can be known, thought and said*" (p.10).

CHAPTER 10: Afterthoughts

One hand, five homes. A lifetime in a fist. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 167)

> He wonders how his parents had done it, leaving their respected families behind, seeing them so seldom, dwelling unconnected, in a perpetual state of expectation, of longing. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 281)

The goal of this research was to explore and deconstruct cultural identities to examine the role of the unconscious and situational factors in cultural identity development and how these unconscious factors affect our reading and viewing experiences as well as our interactions with text and with reader response. I discovered at the outset of my data interpretation that this question was better framed as, who owns the 'gaze' to name a 'true Canadian'? Once I realized that my participants were very aware of how the politics of cultural identity were played out in the school setting, the nature of my research questions were constantly being re-shaped and fine tuned by my student participants; and in turn the original questions evolved into richer, more salient points to ponder. The students helped me to think hard about questions that seemed important at this time in their lives: what does it mean to live "multiculturally," to rethink literary education through a postcolonial lens; how do second-generation South Asian Canadian youth describe their cultural identities; how does cultural identity impact a student's response to literature and interactions with text; how does the 'gaze' of the dominant other affect our ideas about what it means to be 'Canadian', and finally, what were the reading and viewing experiences of second-generation South Asian Canadian youths as they read a contemporary postcolonial novel? I also sought to understand how identity intersects with reader response and reading schemata and in turn shapes a student's ability to respond aesthetically to a given text. Does selecting a contemporary postcolonial text affect diverse students' experiences in an English language arts classroom?

I set out to write this manuscript from my own vantage point as an educated, second generation South Asian Canadian female educator. In telling the

story of seeing students' experiences in the classroom impact their sense of cultural identity, and more specifically, seeing the importance of infusing the English language arts curriculum with more diversified selection of texts and film, I have chosen to base my arguments and my thoughts on my own South Asian cultural experiences, historical background, and lived experience. To paraphrase Dei (1999), I acknowledge there must be space in the story for other (South Asian and non-South Asian) experiences to be read and shared. I also acknowledge the vital links between South Asian ways of knowing and various groups of indigenous peoples' social knowledge that is grounded in historical and material experiences. My research affirms the value for students of visible and non-visible minorities to experience and read contemporary postcolonial literature and film. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) assert that postcolonial texts "provide another language and voice by which other students can understand how differences are constructed, for better or worse, within the dominant curriculum" (p. 101) and that these texts "offer all students forms of counter-memory that can make visible what is often unrepresentable in many English classrooms" (p. 102). It is important for all students from all backgrounds to understand that our cultural identities are our lens through which we see the world, understand relationships, and make sense of our lives. Tymoczko (2000) suggests that, "postcolonial texts are communicative agents with powerful resonances, having the capacity to mediate between languages and cultures in radical and empowering ways" (p. 148).

These theorists also point to the importance of the dangers of representation. Teachers have to be cognizant of not re-stereotyping students by assuming students would want to be associated with a particular cultural group. Teachers must be aware that we will always face the challenges of understanding and addressing the needs of our students and we must try to understand the "policies of multiculturalism, human rights, and antiracist teaching philosophies" (Johnston, 2003, p. 25). Johnston (2003) goes on to warn us of the dangers of representation in culture, race, gender, and ethnicity. She states,

> When we speak of issues of representation in the context of literary education, we need to look beyond the presence or absence of "positive" images of minority or "third world" people in literary texts, toward the question of how social power operates in cultural and ideological practices in schools and how we call attention to complex relationships between culture, knowledge, and power. (p. 28)

In Miss V's Grade 12 class, there was one student who was a second generation South Asian Canadian, who chose not to be a part of my study and vehemently denounced Gogol as a pathetic, self-deprecating character. He had moved to Canada from India at the age of 9. In class discussions, he expressed strong opinions that he did not relate to the characters or the perils of immigration and/or assimilation. "*Any immigrant coming to a Western country should expect to assimilate fully into that country . . . why would you expect the host country to accommodate you? You chose them. They did not choose you. Adapt or go home.*" He expressed his gratitude to be Canadian in other class discussions, and he indicated that he was a proud Canadian and that India was a backward country. My initial thoughts were that he was trying so hard to fit in with his peers (who were not South Asian) that he wanted nothing to do with anything foreign out of fear he may be grouped into this category. However, this type of reaction is not uncommon among students who feel that they must choose their preference for a Western identification or an Eastern identification. For this student there was no in-between. It is for these students that teachers must be aware of the dangers of representation and not force students into uncomfortable situations where they become involuntary victims by association. Growing up in a monochromatic city, I too wanted nothing more than to fit in with my White friends, be accepted by my White teachers, and I most certainly would have reacted to an ethnic novel in the same manner.

What does it mean to re-think English language arts through a postcolonial lens?

The historical moment which saw the emergence of English as an academic discipline was also complicit in the production of the 19th century colonial form of imperialism (Ashcroft et al., 2004). By infusing our resource lists and teaching pedagogy with diverse literature from around the world, we are negating the dominant Eurocentric style of pedagogy that continues to plague educational institutions today. By teaching from a postcolonial perspective, we allow students the opportunity to understand that we must understand the world through multiple perspectives. A postcolonial approach to teaching English language arts provides both teachers and students with opportunities to begin to consider the significance and historical past in helping to shape the world in which we live today. This approach encourages our students to look outward from within and see the ambivalences we all have in our own cultural heritages, perspectives, and intersections of our own experiences and those of others. Students know when there are imbalances in the way we teach. Students also know that teaching from one perspective is just something they don't normally question because they have taken it to be an institutional norm. But when given the opportunity, they do begin to ask why this continues to be an acceptable way to learn about the world.

> **Farha says:** How do you see the schools and teachers supporting this (diverse) literature? What do you think we (teachers) should be doing?
>
> **Anjali says:** I only see multiculturalism brought up in social class, this is the first time it has ever come up in English. To help promote understanding of many cultures they should look into incorporating books from authors of all backgrounds (culturally), including those from other countries.

Kamani says: I think if we did that in English classes it might also help us in social classes too!

Anjali says: I always hear that our country's greatest strength is our different cultures; well why isn't that more incorporated into our education system?

The students in my study had a strong desire to speak about their past schooling experiences as a way to describe how they felt about their place in the English language arts classroom. Many of my participants didn't think that student choice in text selection was even an option. None of them thought to question or think about why texts from diverse cultures were not incorporated into their English language arts course work. Many of them felt the way Anjali did in the comments shared above, that any discussion pertaining to the concept of culture belonged in Social Studies class. The concept of multiculturalism was not foreign to them as they all believed in the premise, as evidenced in thought provoking and evocative comments such as,

Kamani says: I think they should be putting some of these cultural differences into English classes. I mean . . . in social classes, I often hear how the teachers are always so proud of Canada being multicultural but honestly, are we really that multicultural? Or is it that we look like it?

The comments shared by my student participants quite impressed and perplexed me at the same time. It seemed quite apparent that these students were very well aware of the complexities and paradoxes of the grand narratives of Canadian multiculturalism. Anjali notes, "*I always hear that our country's greatest strength is our different cultures, well why isn't that more incorporated into our education system?*" She asks an important question.

I had a hard time negotiating my own feelings about how I felt growing up in a Canadian education system that was supposed to be equal for everyone. I used my internal sense of conflict as impetus and motivation to listen carefully to what my participants had to say and how I could represent their thoughts in a way

that would make my readers listen. "*The struggle to define ourselves in a multicultural society should not be that much of a struggle, if we are in a multi culture, should it?*" asked Sahil. I pondered Sahil's comment and thought immediately of M. G. Vassanji (2006) who questions the content of Canadian literature by characterizing an essential picture of Canadian literature:

> [I]t would explore, address the core of what Canada is and means; you might think of the theme of survival; you might think of nature—the cold, the wilderness, the prairie, the mountains, the Atlantic; of a certain, privileged kind of colonial experience. We all know the Prairie-grandmother novel; the growing-up-in-Newfoundland-or-Nova Scotia, walking-along-the-beach-with-an-ancestor novel; the World War I novel; the cool-thirtysomething or -fortysomething Vancouverite novel. (p. 8)

He goes on to question, "What is multiculturalism?" as did Sahil. The themes Vassanji alludes to in the quote above are all venerable themes studied in most Canadian secondary English language arts classrooms. However, having experienced a novel like *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), my participants noticed a story like theirs was absent from their previous experiences in English Language arts. They wanted to know where *their* story was in this canon of *Canadian* literature. The story of what multiculturalism was supposed to represent did not equate to *their* Canadian experience, because if it did, we would see more contemporary postcolonial fiction being studied in secondary classrooms and on approved reading lists for English language arts.

> But I ask myself, what is multiculturalism? Isn't it simply a waiting post, a holding area for immigrants, a quarantine to hold the virus and keep the peace while succeeding generations have time to emerge, fully integrated, assimilated? What a joy to behold a young Canadian of Asian or African background, speaking an accepted Canadian dialect; and what a pain in the backside, the contentious parents who claim their version of English is as good, if not better, and curry is simply great? Who is multicultural except the immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East; those whose language

> is not English, whose culture is not western and Christian? (Vassanji, 2006, p. 9)

An essay like Vassanji's (2006) asks readers to consider what it would mean to accept "diverse" literature as in fact being a part of Canada's history, landscape, politics, character, and psychology. What would that mean? What would that tell our second generation students whose history was not previously included in the traditional canon of English literature, other than being savage, slave, or other? Would this be a validation that Canadians can come from a diverse history, background, time, and place? Would this help to reconcile the perils of cultural identity these young Canadians face as they ride the bus to school, buy a magazine from the convenience store at lunch, write an essay in response to a text read in class? Vassanji argues,

> One might define and truly recognize a category and a phenomenon called Canadian Postcolonial; those of us who would be described by this term are essentially those who emerged from the colonies in the 1960s and 1970s; we tell the stories of those societies—stories which have not been told, or do not have a ready reception in the centres of the world; we are the historians and mythmakers; the witnesses. We are essentially exiles, yet our home is Canada, because home is the past and the present, as also the future. We belong to several worlds and Canada has given us a home, an audience, a hospitality, a warm embrace. We get a category all to ourselves because there are so many of us. (p. 11)

I feel that maybe Vassanji has made an important point in referring to the term "Canadian Postcolonial." Perhaps the study of English language arts will evolve and include categories such as this in order to address the needs of Canada's changing demographics. Perhaps Canadian Postcolonial is the way educators can reframe the way we think about the individuals who are sitting in our classrooms so as to honour and not negate or omit the cultural experiences of all of our students as opposed to only the students who had ancestors who look European Canadian.

How do second-generation South Asian Canadian youth describe their cultural identities?

The participants in my research belong to "Generation Z." After spending time with the data, I quickly began to see that it was important to understand how their minds work, how they understand the world, and how they naturally see the world from multiple perspectives. According to Wallis (2012), Generation Z[33] is a common name in Western nations for the group of people born after the Millenials (also known as Generation Y), born roughly from the second half of the 1990s through to the late 2000s or early 2010s. This generation is currently growing up as children and younger teens in the 2010s decade. Some citations show that the oldest members are entering adulthood as of 2012 (Horovitz, 2012; Micholeta, 2012; Wallis, 2012). The generation was born into a time when the World Wide Web and personal computers were already commonly used, as opposed to Gen Y members, who were born before the beginning of the Internet boom in the mid-1990s but were close enough to grow up with it. Like most Generation Z'ers, the students in my study are members who were exposed to computer technology, in some cases as young as early childhood, dating as far back as 1990 or 1991. This is important to note because the students in my study are used to a constant stream of stimuli coming from pop culture, media, their peers, their parents, and school. Their thoughts about the world and their place in it come from so many different sources of culture. I was pleasantly surprised to see how quickly they make sense of and analyze the stimuli coming at them and integrate or incorporate it into their cultural schemata.

In so many ways, the students in my study showed me how their generation has handled the complexities of cultural identity in a post-9/11 world of Islamophobia with sophistication and determination. They believed their own identities to be a blend of their own cultural norms, values, and expectations with Western ideas and the result was their cultural identity—not South Asian, not

[33] (also known as Generation M (for multitasking), Generation C (for Connected Generation), the Net Generation, or the iGeneration)

Canadian, but Brown. Brown was a term they used frequently to connote a generalized all-encompassing category of what I would describe as common Eastern values, traditions, customs, quirks, ways of doing things.

However, there is confusion about the terms Canadian and Canadian identity. The students in both the Grade 11 and 12 classes, visible minority or White, believed that there was a binary relationship between being Canadian and being from somewhere else. They thought you cannot be a true Canadian if you were born in another country—even if you immigrated here. One is either an immigrant (not Canadian) or an immigrant-Canadian (Canadian, but not truly). So therefore, to them, if you are of South Asian descent, you are not really a Canadian. Even though these students believed in the spirit and ideology behind multiculturalism, there was much ambiguity in their comments. One student's comment on Canadian identity as "a unique construct and separate from anything ethnic or cultural" sums up the perspectives of most students in the survey (both visible minority and White, in both Grade 11 and Grade 12 classes). Yet, interestingly, most South Asian students in the survey said they did feel connected to a Canadian identity for the most part. However, they qualified this connection to a Canadian identity or feelings of belonging by indicating these as being fleeting and highly dependent on context, peer group, familial connections to the heritage culture, and the degree to which their parents were flexible when cultural values were non-congruent with western values. Sanam noted, "*Sometimes, but I feel I'm kind of in between my own culture's identity and Canadian identity. Like stuck in the middle."* Sanam also shared some interesting responses with me which revealed her ideas about now being Canadian was strongly associated with the term White or Caucasian.

The ideas my students shared about Canadian multiculturalism and being Canadian are, to say the least, troubling for me. I feel that more research needs to be done on where this disconnect in thinking occurs and why students feel this way. I wonder, what are the cultural and educational experiences that both visible minority and White students have had thus far that have led them to believe that

being Canadian does not equal anything multicultural? Many students still believe that Canadian identity is a collection of Canadian values mixed with patriotism, habits, attitudes, and traditions that are considered to be Canadian. Not many students had a clear idea or could effectively articulate what Canadian meant (but I'm wondering, can most adults articulate this?) but they were sure that it did not mean anything ethnic, different, or cultural. These statements allowed me to raise the question of what actually constitutes a Canadian identity. Does a Canadian identity actually exist? What are the qualities on which this identity is based? What or who is the measuring stick against which we compare ourselves? Who is included or excluded from this category?

These questions raised by my participants led me to an article in the *New York Times Magazine* from 1989. Gerald Marzoratti, senior editor of Harper's and New York Times Magazine circa 1989 was interviewing Salman Rushdie at a time when Rushdie's controversial novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), was just hitting the shelves in the United States. As I read Marzoratti's interview with Rushdie, I made connections between his viewpoints and how my participants felt about their identities as South Asians growing up in Canada. It didn't matter if they were born here, if they came here as babies or 10-year-olds, or if they came yesterday. It was evident to them that they were not Canadian by the standards of Canadians who left them out of this category anyway. They were Canadian by their own standards; this is the way they saw and interpreted the world, the way they experienced life inside and outside the classroom, and it was the way in which they saw themselves. "And even as they reinvent themselves in a new city—which is what they do—there remain these old selves, old traditions erased in part but not fully. So what you get are these fragmented, multifaceted, multicultural selves" (Rushdie, 1989, ¶19).

How my participants described themselves as second generation South Asian Canadians was evident in many of our conversations. My participants saw themselves in a flexible and hybrid manner; not Canadian, not South Asian but Brown and *willingly* shifted between the two. They knew how to shift from one

label to another and were aware of the necessity to do so. They also described their cultural identities as having shifted over time and knew that these cultural identities would continue to do so. The youth in my study were strategic about relating to, discussing, and responding to a text studied in class depending on their perceived comfort with the situation, with the selection of text, and their vested interest in the topic. Second generation Canadian youth identity is multi-dimensional and highly contextual. These dimensions are interrelated and meaningful depending on school setting, teacher pedagogy, diversity within one's circle of friends, youth's connection to cultural community outside the school, and exposure to school content (including text selection) within and outside a school setting. Although this idea was unsettling to me, my participants were quite comfortable with the idea of shifting back and forth and living *in between*. The confidence they exuded allowed me to step past my own discomfort to see how they truly lived with cultural hybridity as a part of their daily lives. Canadian identity was considered to be a static and outmoded definition and did not really fit with their personal sense of who they felt they were evolving to become.

Despite their sophisticated worldview about the hybrid nature of their cultural identities, the participants in my study still believed in the various narratives supporting the belief in the ideology of Canadian multiculturalism. The narratives they recounted to me of their parents' hard work and perseverance in Canada were, for the most part, met with security, equity, access to free health care, education, and work, making most of them grateful to be here. It is this sense of belonging and deserving entitlement to have the same experiences and opportunities as every other Canadian, that left them scratching their heads and asking why their schooling environments, and particularly the English language arts classroom, were places where they had to make a shift in mindset. "*You think teachers would figure it out—we're being left out.*"

> *Well I remember doing international authors in Grade 11, but that was in the IB curriculum. I could definitely name them on one hand . . . and all these books were from World Lit in Grade 11 and 12. What about all the*

> *other years before that? We never studied about or read books about other people . . . and all those are only a few that we've read. Compare all the books that we've read throughout elementary to high school?* (Anjali)

It was not until encountering the texts in Miss V's class, specifically World Literature texts, that the students felt more engaged and connected to the texts and films they were studying. They also felt the content in *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003) represented many of the hard -to-name struggles and hardships of their generation, specifically the struggle of trying to grow up South Asian Canadian, and it also helped them to articulate specific details about this experience and why it is unique.

How does cultural identity impact a student's response to literature and interactions with text?

Many of the students in my study felt disconnected to the texts studied up until Miss V's course. They felt they had to make up answers and they were constantly searching for the *right* answer (the teacher's answer). Upon entering Miss V's course, the students were exposed to a wider variety of texts that encompassed more diverse themes. Even some of the White students remarked that being exposed to diverse texts opened up their worldview of the other. One White student remarked,

> *I had read enough books with western or European settings and culture and it is far more interesting to be exposed to books from other cultures. In fact, I find these books more interesting and I enjoy the class discussions more because we hear from everyone in the class, because our class is so diverse.*

Text selection was regarded as highly important to all the participants in my study. They all felt a greater sense of belonging and personal connection to a text that was considered to be familiar to their own cultural experiences. I argue that the meaning of students' responses is ultimately grounded in personal

resonances with cultural and historical experiences, environments, and guided by the instruction they receive around response to text. I suggest there is great value in creating pedagogy and instruction based on developmentally appropriate inquiry about the socio-cultural environment or systems portrayed in literature as well as students' own related cultural experiences. Students read through the socio-cultural perspective from which they emerge. They interpret text and film through personal and cultural cues acquired from the cultures and in the particular cultural contexts in which they dwell. Meaning derived by one reader is also very different than meaning derived by another reader. This meaning is also highly contingent upon the lens through which we view the world. This research suggests that youth are influenced by a distinct history which may include class, ethnicity, and race, and culture. For my participants in particular, their cultural experiences greatly affected their interpretation of texts. To my participants, their cultural identities are multidimensional, flexible, and created/re-created as they interact with others. In light of the findings of this study I argue that Canadian educators must pay attention to the issue of text-selection and student choice as it is highly influential in how youth connect and respond to a text and their feelings of belonging and connectedness in an English language arts classroom. By no means am I suggesting that teachers select texts to "match" the backgrounds of their students but rather, to offer a variety of texts written by authors from diverse backgrounds, who see the world through a variety of lenses. Student choice is also imperative, as no one novel will appeal to all students in a heterogeneous class.

The Canadian 'Gaze' and the limits of representational thinking

I discovered that students were constantly questioning which gaze establishes 'dominant' culture ('real' Canadian). What were these indicators? How would you move into the category of immigrant to 'real' Canadian? Could you ever really be considered to be a 'real' Canadian if you didn't 'look Canadian'? Does it mean 'full citizenship' on paper when 'full citizenship' never really equates to really feeling Canadian? We moved around these questions constantly through

our discussions only arriving at the conclusion that no one of us could really define what a 'real' Canadian looks like, sounds like, acts like or thinks like.

However, the complex nature of race and culture's influence on how the minutiae of cultural identity affect reader response to text is severely underestimated by educators and those responsible for creating culturally balanced curricula. Race and culture are pervasive and powerful forces that permeate most curricula including most of the selections in current versions of Alberta Education's approved reading list for English language arts curriculum or many mainstream teaching resources put out by popular publishing houses, or even provincial English language arts curricula. Sometimes teachers are able to go outside this approved list and include texts and films pertinent to the topic they are teaching (with appropriate permission). When left to interpretation, teachers may choose, consciously or not, to leave out, negate, avoid, or exclude important elements of students' cultural identities by avoiding the topics of race and culture (see footnote[34] for popular choices among Grade 11 and 12 teacher colleagues of text and film by high school English teachers in the field). Text and film selection, class discussions, assignments, field trips, guest speakers, just to name a few, are all pedagogical considerations that send strong messages about what is considered to be important and what is considered to be outside the scope of English language arts. If we think students are not noticing—we're wrong. If we think that cultural identities do not affect the lens through which students choose to interpret text or film—I believe we are also very wrong.

As I synthesize my thoughts about this research in this final chapter, I realize that other questions emerged throughout the research and my study is only able to offer partial insight into a number of these questions and in some cases,

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[34] Popular selections among Grade 10, 11 and 12 teachers:
Novels: To Kill A Mockingbird, Into the Wild, Lord of the Flies, The Catcher in the Rye, The Hobbit, Great Gatsby, Song of Solomon, Fear and Trembling, Of Mice and Men, and The Pearl. **Plays:** Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, A Streetcar Named Desire, A Doll's House, The Crucible, Antigone, Taming of the Shrew, The Glass Menagerie, and Les Belles Soeurs. **Films:** UP!, The Birds, Stagecoach, Citizen Kane, Ghost World, Billy Elliot, Chocolat, V for Vendetta, Good Will Hunting, Cinderella Man, Gladiator, Lord of the Rings, The Power of One, The Sixth Sense, Legends of the Fall, Ten Things I Hate About You, The Shawshank Redemption, Lion King, and Dead Poets Society.

these questions only exist to further problematize the issue of cultural identity and reader response for future study. One surprising theme that emerged from many recurring conversations about how my participants negotiated the terms of their cultural identities was the ways in which my participants used race-based comedy to make sense of the fluidity of cultural identity.

New Avenues for Research: Race-based Comedy

> We are increasingly becoming a world of migrants, made up of bits and fragments from here, there. We are here. And we have never left anywhere we have been. (Rushdie, 1989, paragraph 73)

A couple of interesting points found their way into my analysis and have led me to examine race based comedy as an aspect of pop culture that I did not expect to be related to the notion of South Asian Canadian cultural identity. Although the comments and arguments here are only the beginnings of some theorizing around this topic, I present it as considerations for future research. I found it important to bring forward some of the comments and issues my participants brought to my attention. The students in my research described some experiences with regards to race and culture as if they were everyday phenomena—part of being South Asian Canadian, often joking about it, which led me to questions for future research. "What are the aesthetics and cultural norms that Canadian students are particularly reacting to and what makes these aesthetics and cultural norms particularly 'South Asian' in context?" "How might contemporary South Asian Canadian comedy play with or re-perform notions of South Asian aesthetics, literary texts, cultural norms, or histories?"

As resonated by the sentiments in Salman Rushdie's collection of essays in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) aesthetics and cultural norms addressed by comedians which are appealing to Canadian youth include the residual effects of immigration on the second generation: losing one's country, language, and culture and finding oneself forced to come to terms with another place, another way of speaking and thinking, another view of reality. Although many second and third

generation South Asian Canadian youth may not have experienced these effects firsthand, the resonances and stains left on their parents all have direct implications for how these youth experience everyday life.

> *I somehow had a feeling of confusion and clarity, a deeper understanding and appreciation for my parents, my experience and my life. Somehow knowing that someone shared similar experiences to your own can somehow serve a therapeutic and educational need all at the same time. More importantly, to read about, laugh about and hear about the hard to articulate nuances, funny situations, family politics, strange rituals, and the mundane everyday normal experience of life to kids like us validates the fact that our experiences are not in isolation.* (Kamran)

It is the affective feeling of clarity, satisfaction, and understanding that the student participants shared with me as they described their connections to these comedians. The content of race-based comedy can be considered as essential statements about contemporary urban society's conflicts. Through jokes, my participants' reflections about the migration experiences of their parents created conversations which deepened their connection to and understanding for the metamorphosis that is immigration. Through the text, they made deeper connections about their own diasporic and hybrid identities. This understanding permeated their jokes as thoroughly as embodiments of the issues of immigration and assimilation populate Rushdie's novels. Peters (2010) states, "I think that's what so many immigrant parents hope for: not necessarily a great life for themselves . . . but at least the promise for an easier one for their kids" (p. 23). This form of comedy contributes to the discussion of South Asian texts in a world literature or comparative literature context. Azhar Usman, another South Asian Muslim American comedian notes, "The standup is quintessentially an American art form and is a form of political protest. There's a history of the underdog using standup comedy to speak truth to power. People take notice and are transformed by the experience" (Usman, 2012, ¶ 2). While world literature takes a serious look at power relations, racialization framed in a theoretical framework whereas

comedy addresses these issues through the backdoor. Other than race, some of the cultural, literary, linguistic, or historical norms that these kinds of South Asian-Canadian comics question seek to promote cultural understanding and awareness—not tolerance—by appealing to the comedic and idiosyncratic nature of culture and identity. By finding commonalities across cultures both comedians seek to challenge their audiences to confront and recognize one's own stereotypes, bias, and racist notions through comedy. Although Peters' form of comedy imitates many racial groups and cultures, Usman's sole goal, through comedy, is to promote better understanding of Islam and Muslims. In the post-9/11 world, Usman's work began to garner attention: "It's equally my obligation as a comedian to point out what is wrong with us and get us talking about our problems as it is pointing out what's wrong (with) the way, for example, the government is treating us" (Usman, 2012, ¶12). Usman states, "My act is about identity. It's about exploring my own identity and the identity society wants to project onto people like me, but through the language of humor" (Usman, 2010, ¶10).

Small nuances, invisible subtleties present in everyday activities all make their way into the comedic styles of Russell Peters, Azhar Usman, and Sean Mujumder. Youth may or may not be consciously aware of these residual effects; nevertheless, they are still drawn to race-based comedy as it mirrors aspects of their everyday life. It is this type of affective feeling of clarity, satisfaction, and understanding that my student participants shared with me as they described their connections to these comedians. Can we consider comedy as an art form or comedy as a text?

Race-based comedy contributes to the same discussion of the complexities of cultural identity—from a different lens. If we are looking for an approach to go beyond postcolonial paradigms and theoretical structures and to find ways to rediscover South Asian canons, modes of cultural contact, and literary histories which cannot be easily or readily explained by colonial or postcolonial narratives then comedy can be interpreted as another facet of pop culture appeal. It is an

alternative way to give youth a language that they can identify with and relate to some complex issues surrounding identity politics. Comedy is a way to challenge our fear of the foreign and to leave our safe spaces and the disciplinary conventions of literary criticism and academic philosophy. By focusing on a cultural text such as a comedy sketch of a group of people who are often marginalized by dominant western culture—the new immigrant, the working class, women, and the postcolonial subject, and now second generation youth—comedians help us to confront our fear of the foreign in order to discover new ways to understand each other.

Initiating a Postcolonial Pedagogy for English Language Arts Educators: Challenges

Implications of this research have led me to argue that although multiculturalism is an important educational objective, I have come to understand that multicultural and anti-racist education along with education for social justice education are not the same as postcolonial pedagogy. Some may argue and contest that these approaches should be closely aligned, but I argue that postcolonial pedagogy should not be categorized as an add-on, a theme, a social movement, or fad to address today's current societal problems. I am rather uncomfortable with the titles of "education for social change" or "education for social justice" as these titles connote the investment of authority comes from the teacher and at the same time, set the teacher up as expert. Understanding this notion allows us the space in which to search for value in a more fully nuanced understanding of history, what is happening in our world, and the ideas of rethinking the notions of local and global. My discomfort about teaching postcolonial material under the guise of multicultural education suggests that there is no single solution to the challenges of initiating a postcolonial pedagogy in educational institutions and it will not be easy or maybe even possible to develop a postcolonial pedagogy that is appropriate to all locations. As my research participants suggest, each nation, each location—local or global—has its

own history, culture, and people that make it a location of culture. Let me explain.

The term postcolonial itself is a problematic term, as outlined in Chapter 5. I have not attended one class, as teacher or student, one conference, as presenter or attendee, that didn't ask the question, "What is postcolonialism?". As a result of this study, I have fine-tuned my own working definition of a postcolonial pedagogy as applied to the study of English language arts. Postcolonial pedagogy is a fluid pedagogy that examines the colonial discursive practices and various kinds of resistances of colonialism addressed by writers from all over the world. A postcolonial pedagogy does not attempt to homogenize differences addressed by these writers. Rather, it is an attempt to understand their world-view and locations of culture. Postcolonial pedagogy attempts to analyze the current limitations of education in culturally diverse societies, and envisages creative solutions to those problems. Postcolonial pedagogy enables students and teachers to challenge dominant histories: identity forms and knowledge sets are reproduced in schools and acknowledge there are power relations that exist as a carry-over from a colonial past. Postcolonial reading strategies include a self-conscious and reflective approach well theorized in understanding literature comparatively with a focus on history, culture, economics, and politics while noting the values of a variety of literary texts from authors from all locations. A postcolonial pedagogy also involves an understanding that the teaching of English literature itself is an ideological and institutionalized construct.

A postcolonial pedagogy is more than what we do with postcolonial literature in the classroom. In the preface of *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics: Texts for Change* (1991), Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh argue that pedagogy is more than just "classroom practices or instructional methods" postcolonial pedagogy is "the act of producing and disseminating knowledges in culture" (p. vii). Adopting a postcolonial orientation to teaching English language arts allows teachers to decenter their own position as expert and open up the space for both

teacher and student to question our own inherent and natural biases and stereotyping. Selecting culturally diverse literature and teaching from critical and diverse perspectives takes patience, skill, research, determination, time, and most of all, courage. Grounded in Bhabha's (1994) notion of the third space, this research helped my students describe and articulate how they were able to fragment a "homogenous and transcendental sense of identity" and cross boundaries of "fixed scheme[s] of location and identity" (Johnston, 2003, p. 123) imposed by society, the education system, and friends. According to Brydon (1997), an extensive literature on pedagogy exists that is relevant to postcolonial goals, but there is very little that addresses postcolonialism itself. In preparation for my own research, I found there was a plethora of research and resources available for "critical literacy," "critical pedagogy," "multicultural education," "antiracist education," "feminist theory," "education for social change" etc., which are all relevant to reshape the current Eutocentric model of educational objectives that still exist in some university and educational institutions. There is much work to be done.

There is no single solution to these challenges faced by conscientious educators. In some ways as I compose the final chapter of this research I am overwhelmed at the task that awaits educators like myself, who would like to make a difference, a measurable and marked difference, in the lives of our students. The students I worked with have shaped and reshaped how I view the importance of this work. How can educators respond to this huge undertaking?

We can begin, as my student participants demonstrated to me, by not accepting the terminology of an older paradigm of English language arts. We can begin by listening to our students lament when we study Shakespeare, again, and realize we are over-privileging his greatness as an extra-historical achievement. We can move away from using authors' names in our thematic units or courses, thus giving some authors primacy over others; instead a focus can be on the historicity and the issues that literature creates and mediates for people in specific periods and places. We can begin by focusing on literature's role in creating

national identities, like Canadian, and question why this is a very misunderstood, contested, and often stereotyped term. In this vein, a study in transnational formations and literary contributions could benefit our student. With a focus on titles with key words such as diaspora, cross-cultural, colonial, etc., while engaging students in a study of colonial periods of writing across cultures, we can begin by modeling our teaching units and themes around those of institutions like the University of Guelph[35], who adopted a degree requirement category in the late 1990s called "Colonialism/ Postcolonialism," requiring high school students to take at least one course from a group of six courses designed to engage students in topics such as "The Atlantic Diaspora," "Cross Cultural Encounters," and "British Imperial Culture." Courses like these signal to students that postcolonial reading requires a set of reading strategies that necessitates a rethinking of the way the discipline of English has traditionally been structured and taught.

Guelph's curriculum is a good example of how postcolonial pedagogy cannot simply be an "add on." It must permeate everything we do in the classroom and force us to reexamine, rethink, and reconceptualize everything from classroom interaction to how we teach our students the reading strategies necessary to make sense of the texts they read. I am not stating that we do away with all traditional texts, or canonized texts. I am arguing that we organize our teaching of Canadian and international literatures historically and not by author or text. Anthologies can be helpful with this as they make available a diverse set of literature for classroom use. We have access to and can engage in contrapunctal reading of multiple texts that offer an alternative vision of how a text can be interpreted in order to help students see the limitations. However, one must note that anthologies tend to sometimes reinforce a focus on resistance or alternative themes, and end up in some cases over-privileging a set of authors unnecessarily. Selecting anthologies that do not stress chronology over historicized modes of understanding is important to consider. We must also be aware of inherent biases

[35] The University of Guelph has also designed a special set of courses specifically focussed on English as an imperial, colonial and postcolonial discipline, but they have also written an international perspective and a specifically postcolonial set of questions into almost every new course in their new curriculum.

that exist in the choice of texts that are included in an anthology. These can be considered good teaching opportunities as a way to let our students know that the best anthologies usually contextualize their material and do not preserve the author as the central unit of organization. By placing value on the historical and cultural specificities of a text, we stress the importance to students that we all come from various places, other places. We must always be cognizant of the aesthetic nature of imaginative literatures and not get too caught up in promoting historical and cultural aspects of texts. By constantly engaging ourselves and our students in questions like, "What is it about literature that attracts us to imaginatively see ourselves in a text, to engage with the characters and situations?" "Are we looking for historical and cultural aspects?" "Are all texts equal in quality?" we are able to engage in a critical study of literatures from a good cross section of variety and student choice.

It is these places we come from that affect how we interact with the world. This curiosity needs some prompting when the sources of our curiosity are not always clear.

Dear Reader,

So here we are, at the end of our conversation… I took you through a maze of terms, statistics, theorists, and theories. I realize that our conversation was composed over a span of a couple years. I realize that our conversation is one of many.

Since beginning my doctoral research, I have become a mother to three young girls. As I write these last few words, I am sitting in the rocking chair I used when my third daughter was born; a time where I had just finished hearing the stories of my participants and I had no idea where their stories would take me, or how their stories would intersect the stories of my children, or affect my life as a mother, a teacher, and a teacher educator. I must admit, the one thing that surprised me the most about this research was that my participants taught me a lot about how to be a better parent. They taught me about how they think about the world and how they come to see themselves in the sea of students that attend their school. I could see my children in their stories. I could see how my children will also have their own stories one day. They taught me that it is important to continue to keep working at making changes so that educators may see just how important and vital a student's experiences with texts are to their sense of belonging.

This research has made me highly aware that my daughters' lives will be enriched with "challenges" they will have to negotiate on a daily basis. Even though second and third generation youth have established a strong presence in Canadian society, representing about 20% of all young Canadians under the age of 18, and are expected to reach 25% by 2016 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006), I will still teach them to challenge the idea that they are limited by the colour of their skin or their gender. I will teach them that their first and last names or the kind of lunch they choose to bring to school does not matter. I will teach them to see themselves in all of the texts they read—to try and search for some type of connection to the literature they encounter.

Reader, I'm sure that we have both discovered through this research that Canadian identity is a research project on its own. My daughters are made aware from as early as Grade 1 that their identities as third generation South Asian Canadians will be even more challenging to preserve. So early on, they were taught that Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter are all more important than the holidays we celebrate at home, even though we live in Canada; even though Canada is the only country in the world with an official policy on multiculturalism. But, my daughters are the girls who decide to come to school dressed in shalwar kameez on Navroz and Eid and bring a piece of themselves to the classroom by sharing with their friends and teachers why they are dressed this way. They call their Nani and ask them to make samosas and meat pies by the dozens for their class presentations. Like the students in my research, my girls work hard, all by themselves, to carve out their own hybridity amongst the messages in school to be Canadian.

My daughters are already highly aware that most of their teachers don't "look like" them, even though the school they attend is highly diverse. My daughters have learned that even though they are third generation South Asian Canadians, born and raised in Canada, they go through life daily correcting people as their names are mispronounced and correct their classmates when discussing countries from around the world, that they are not Native, or Indian, or come from India, nor are they from any other country but Canada.

My daughters meet these challenges on a daily basis and are not exhausted, discouraged, or even frustrated. My daughters are strong young women who look at paintings on the windows in their classroom of children playing and hand their teachers a brown paint-dipped brush and declare, "that painting is not yet finished! I don't see me in there!"

Like the participants in my research, my daughters will always look for connections, ways to mix their cultural identities with that of the world around them. My daughters' pictures are not yet finished. . . . They will leave their mark on the world—in brown paint.

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APPENDIX A

The International Baccalaureate Program

The International Baccalaureate program is designed for students interested in advanced academic preparation for success in university. Universities around the world recognize IB's standard of excellence. The IB program at this school is one of the largest in Canada and offers the most diverse selections of IB courses. Students should achieve an honours average with no grade below 75% in their junior high core courses to enter the Grade 10 Pre-IB Diploma program. Grade 10 is a Pre-IB Diploma year with a focus on skill building in preparation for the curriculum demands of the senior years. All Grade 10 students must register in a full Pre-IB Diploma schedule to ensure that they receive the proper preparation for the full IB Diploma Program in Grades 11 and 12. The IB program meets the curriculum demands of the Alberta High School Diploma as well as the standards of academic excellence established by IB International. Critical thinking skills are enhanced as preparation for post secondary study. The caliber of IB students from this school has drawn praise from academics around the world. A large proportion of graduates have received major scholarships at major universities across the continent and early admittance into limited enrolment faculties. The IB Diploma is completed during Grades 11 and 12. It is a six-course program offering with three subjects studied at the higher level and three at the standard level. Diploma students also take the Theory of Knowledge course, undertake a self-directed 4000 word extended essay research project in their final year and are required to participate in extra-curricular CAS activities (Creativity, Action, Service).

The IB program is a direct path to university and is a rigorous academic program that gives students the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. The IB students at this school have stated that they value the dynamic classroom environment, individual instruction, challenging curriculum, dedicated teachers and the opportunity to develop self-confidence.

This school has been graduating IB students since 1984. Over the years, the school has seen 1007 students earn the IB Diploma and approximately 3970 earn IB Certificates. Each year, approximately 650-700 students are enrolled in the Pre–IB diploma and IB diploma program. This substantial population provides the opportunity for a wider selection of IB courses and more flexible timetabling for students.

International Baccalaureate Diploma Requirements:

- Three higher level (HL) and three standard level (SL) courses (maximum of 4 HL)
- Theory of Knowledge course
- A self – directed research paper (Extended Essay) no longer than 4,000 words
- A minimum of 150 hours of Creativity, Action, and Service in Grades 11 and 12
- The classic IB Full Diploma includes English, History, an International Language, Mathematics, a Science and a Fine Arts Course. (Students can also choose to take a second Science or a second International Language instead of a Fine Arts course.)

Higher Level Subjects include:

- English
- European History (1790-1990)
- Biology, Physics
- Art, Theatre Arts

Standard Level Subjects

- Mathematics
- French (FSL or FLA)
- Spanish, German or Japanese
- Chemistry, Physics

- Art, Music, Theatre Arts

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEY

Please fill out the survey questions below.

1. I am: male female
2. Age: 12-15 16-18
3. I was born in Canada: No Yes If No, where were you born: _____ When did you emigrate to Canada? _____
4. My mother is an immigrant to Canada No Yes If Yes, where was your mother born: _____ **When did she emigrate to Canada (approximately) : _____**
5. My father is an immigrant to Canada No Yes If Yes, where was your father born: _____ When did he emigrate to Canada (approximately) : _____
6. English is my first (home) Language (the language spoken *the most* at home) No Yes If No, what is/are your home language(s)? _____

7. English is my mother's first language

No Yes

If No, what is/are your mother's first language(s)? _____

8. English is my father's first language

No Yes

If No, what is/are your father's home language(s)?

_____

9. I have Aboriginal ancestry? Y N Description: _____

10. Do you think that being "Canadian" means something different for people who were born here than it does for people who have immigrated to Canada? Please elaborate.

11. In your previous courses, have you ever had the chance to read a novel/text that involved/depicted characters, setting, themes of a multicultural/ethnically diverse nature?

Y N

If yes, which novels/texts? _____

Did you enjoy reading this type of novel text? Why or why not?

_____

_____

If you have not had the chance to read a novel/text that involved/depicted characters, setting, themes of a multicultural/ethnically diverse nature, did you ever wonder why you did not have the opportunity to do so? Please explain your answer.

Would you have enjoyed reading a novel/text that involved/depicted characters, setting and themes of a multicultural/ethnically diverse nature in your English language arts courses? Why or why not?

12. Do you read for leisure? Y N

If yes, what types of books do you enjoy reading?

What criteria do you use when selecting books to read for leisure:

If not, why don't you read for leisure?

13. What does "Canadian identity" mean to you?

14. Do you feel that connected to a "Canadian identity"? Why or why not?

Do you feel that your experience with English language arts courses thus far

have helped to shape your perspective on "Canadian identity"? Why or Why not?

15. Do you feel that there is enough diversity represented in the materials that you have studied or currently study in English language arts classrooms? Why or why not?

Does the above mentioned issue matter to you? Why or why not?

If you had a say in the choices of texts that your teacher selected for classroom use, would this make a difference? Why or why not?

16. How would you describe "identity" as presented in some of the books you have read in previous and current English language arts courses you have/are taking?

17. Would you be interested in discussing the questions above in further detail with the researcher at a later time most convenient for you?

APPENDIX C

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why does Gogol prefer his ‘dak nam’ to Nikhil in Kindergarten?

Did any questions about the film come up for you?

What did you think about the book vs. the film?

Did you better understand certain elements of the book better by watching the film?

Did the depictions of the characters change for you while watching the film?

What kinds of things came up for you while watching the film?

Did watching the film make you think of any personal experiences?

What are your thoughts of Nair’s artistic choices to change, modify, re-order the events of the film?

What are your initial thoughts of Gogol and Sonia? How do you feel about them? Can you relate to them? How and why?

What are your initial thoughts of Ashoke and Ashima? Do they remind you of your parents in any way?

APPENDIX Ci

The Namesake – Sample Critical Questions for Film Analysis in the Secondary Classroom (adapted)

The Namesake explores the importance of names and naming practices. The title *The Namesake* reflects the struggles Gogol Ganguli goes through to identify with his unusual names. He tries to remake his identity, after choosing to rename himself.

1. How do our names precede us in society, and how do they define us? Do you have a pet name, or a secret name — and has that name ever become publicly known?
2. Do different people call you by different names? Did you ever wish for a new name?
3. How and/or why was your name chosen? Does your name hold any special significance?
4. How does reading and/or individual pieces of literature shape the lives of characters in the novel? How are individuals and/or societies influenced by literature? What roles do books or reading play in your life?
5. The novel represents a fictional depiction of the immigrant experience. What, if anything, surprised you about the Ganguli family's experiences? What questions does the film raise for you about real life experiences of immigrants or growing up in Canada as the children of immigrants?
6. Gogol struggles throughout the film to define himself in the contexts of family and two diverse cultures. How and why does Gogol's sense of self, family, and relationships shift throughout the film? Does this reflect your own experiences? If it doesn't, please explain.
7. At the conclusion of the film, has Gogol successfully reconciled both of the worlds he inhabits with one another? If so, how do you think he achieved this? If not, why do you think he was unable to do so?
8. The Namesake raises questions about what constitutes home. Where is home for each of the characters at the conclusion of the film? What defines home or family for you?
9. Gogol encounters a number of new environments creating both challenges and opportunities for growth. Similarly, attending college can present opportunities for personal development. How or why might attending college/university influence your sense of who you are?
10. Do you feel this film captured your story or your experience as a South-Asian Canadian?

11. Do you think Lahiri's work is simply a representation of second-gen South-Asian America that can only be appreciated by that specific group or does it appeal to a broader audience? Please explain.
12. Do you feel there was any unfair stereotyping in the film? Especially of Ashima and Ashok, Gogol's parents, as first gen Indians?

<u>More Questions… Book VS Film</u>

Why does Gogol prefer his dak nam to Nikhil in Kindergarten?

Did any questions about the film come up for you?

What did you think about the book vs. the film?

Did you better understand certain elements of the book better by watching the film?

Did the depictions of the characters change for you while watching the film?

What kinds of things came up for you while watching the film?

Did watching the film make you think of any personal experiences?

What are your thoughts of Nair's artistic choices to change, modify, re-order the events of the film?

What are your initial thoughts of Gogol and Sonia? How do you feel about them? Can you relate to them? How and why?

What are your initial thoughts of Ashoke and Ashima? Do they remind you of your parents in any way?

Farha D. Shariff

APPENDIX Cii

POSSIBLE CONVERSATION PROMPTS

Please respond to the interview questions below.

What are your responses to viewing the movie, *The Namesake*? What issues or questions, if any, related to your own identity as a second generation South Asian came up for you as you reflect on the movie?

The Namesake explores the importance of names and naming practices. The title *The Namesake* points to the struggles and the significance of naming practices for Ashoke Ganguli and for his son Gogol. What significance, if any, do naming practices have in your own life?

What significance has (have) your name(s) had in your life?

How and/or why was your name chosen? Does your name hold any special significance?

The film represents a fictional depiction of a South Asian family's experience of immigrating from India to North America. What, if anything, surprised you about the Ganguli family's experiences? What questions does the film raise for you about your own life experiences of growing up in Canada as the children of immigrants?

Gogol struggles throughout the novel to define himself in the contexts of family and two diverse cultures. In what ways, if any, do Gogol's experiences relate to your own experiences?

At the conclusion of the movie, it is unclear whether Gogol has successfully reconciled both of the worlds he inhabits. As a 'hyphenated Canadian' (Second-generation South Asian Canadian) do Gogol's identity struggles remind you of similar struggles pertaining to your own cultural identity?

Educational settings challenged Gogol to negotiate his identity in a number of ways, creating both challenges and opportunities for growth. What influence has school or post-secondary educational environments had in your life?