University of Alberta

Imagining English Teaching Through Currere: An Exploration of Professional Identity in High School English Language Arts Teachers

by

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Dedication

My wife, Charlaine, and my two children, Sara and Samson, have been unfailing supports as they accepted my too frequent absences with little complaint, and never failed to inspire me to be the best teacher and researcher that I could be. Being able to come home to my family every day made even the tough days not so tough.

I was fortunate in having the good guidance of five professors from the Department of Secondary Education as I progressed through this journey. Dr. Terry Carson, Dr. Florence Glanfield, Dr. jan jagodzinski, Dr. Greg Thomas and, particularly, my advisor, Dr. Ingrid Johnston were all instrumental in shaping this thesis. Every aspect of this document is informed by the work I did in each of their respective classes and I am indebted to them for their graciousness and support.

Abstract

The overarching purpose of this study was to consider how high school English teachers' perceptions of the challenges and joys of their profession revealed their underlying identity constructs and needs. This study is also exploration of William Pinar's concept of currere as a means of exploring the concept of identity in this subject specific context and, ultimately, to consider whether currere could become a catalyst for meaningful change within the profession.

The study combines both quantitative and qualitative methodology to explore two primary data sources:1) An open-ended survey of 56 high school English teachers and 2) A detailed discussion with 6 of the participants. The data collected through these two components of the study are filtered through the lens of the four stages of currere – regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical – and draws on a range of theoretical discourses, including Narrative Inquiry and Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

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Part One: Beginnings

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the last essay in the print version of Thomas King's Massey Lecture Series *The Truth About Stories*, King reminds us of the following words from the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri:

> In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives" (153)

This study is an attempt to both understand, and change, the lives of high school English teachers. In this introduction, I would like to offer some insight not only into the parameters of the teacher identity study that follows, but also into the evolving identity of the study itself. I have been asked by a number of colleagues – including a professor or two – "Why identity? Why does this matter?" and while I have rarely been in short supply of a ready answer, that answer has shifted substantially as this project has grown in breadth and depth.

One of the things I realized, quite early on in this process, is that there is no easy way to separate out an identity issue from any other kind of issue. Virtually everything we do is connected to the innate desire to establish and

maintain our identity structures. Identity – by its very nature - is a part of every aspect of our lives, but I am particularly interested in how the multi-faceted work of the English Language Arts teacher informs this discourse. I began to sense fairly early on in my career as an English teacher that the types of conversations I was having with my colleagues and students and, indeed, the literary works that framed my life, would often surface a profound level of identity discourse that was either more complex – or at least more transparent – than what we might find in other teaching disciplines or in other work contexts. Once, while teaching a Diploma Examination preparation course for grade twelve students, I had a student tell me that her teacher had told her this golden rule: "Any question you are asked about a literary text is always, ultimately, a question about identity." While I am sure that we could find a work or two to refute this truism, it seems at least intuitive that the text-driven nature of our work means a high school English teacher will spend more time discussing identity issues than most people in most other professions.

I began my graduate studies under the illusion that there was some way to step back from the fray and gain an objective measure of the identity issues playing out in my chosen profession, but with every new step, it became clearer that I was – and am – irrevocably immersed in the beautiful quagmire of what it means to teach English. My story is both the cognitive framework and a rich data source for my research project. When I look back over my career, there are many moments that I could point to as leading directly to this research, and I would like to provide some insight into how I locate myself in this study, thus, providing a

window into why research into the professional identities of high school English teachers is so important to me and, I believe, to our profession.

A Sea Change at School.

At the time I began my graduate work I was the English Department Head at one of the largest and most academically and athletically high profile high schools in a large Alberta city, and home to an English Department that has featured many "legends" in our field. I knew of, and indirectly learned from, many of the teachers in that department before I was ever able to meet them, and I always felt humbled and honored by the tangible evidence of their efforts – in the form of the resources they created, and the colleagues they had mentored and inspired – that were very much a part of the fabric of the school. Not long after I took my position, and coinciding with the beginning of my graduate work, our department experienced a year like no other in the history of this storied department. Within a calendar year we lost – through retirement and internal transfer – the five most experienced teachers in our department, and they were replaced by teachers in the very early years of their professional practice.

I am sure it is not difficult to imagine some of the challenges that the subsequent year held. We had inexperienced teachers being asked to take on a very challenging array of academically diverse classes, and we also had our more experienced staff members taking on, not only an increased share of the senior level academic courses, but also an expanded mentorship role. It was a year that forced many of us to change the way we saw ourselves as professionals. For me,

that year was alternately deflating and inspiring. There never seemed to be enough time to do what needed to be done, and the result was that my colleagues and I often left the building with a sense of incompleteness, if not, usually, defeat. I also felt that I was not able to devote the time to offer my new colleagues the mentoring that they deserved. On the other hand, it was an inspiration to watch these dedicated young professionals rise to the many challenges they were faced with, and to see my more experienced colleagues shepherd them along with unfailing kindness and support.

Now that I have had some time to step back from those intense moments to see what I could learn from the whole experience, I realize that I had been immersed in what I would term "a perfect storm" of pedagogical inquiry. That term " a perfect storm" – a meteorological description of what results when all contributing weather factors reach their height at one specific place and time – came into popular parlance with the 2000 movie (based on Sebastion Junger's book of the same name); and while the dominant images of that film – rogue waves and sinking ships – would seemingly portend only disaster, I think there was something of value to learn from my perfect storm, although there was certainly some rough weather throughout the year. The various fronts of my storm included the exodus of so many good friends and respected colleagues, the influx of a core group of idealistic and hard-working young teachers, a new principal and finally, my decision to embark on my graduate work which had me engaged with both personal and pedagogic discourses from a range of different perspectives.

My Location of Inquiry.

I am currently in the fifteenth year of my career and it has been a career that has been, in many ways, everything I could dream of. I found my passion for English at a fairly early age, as I was always intrigued by language and literature. My family often jokes that it is very difficult to find a picture of me as a boy that does not include a book. It wasn't until I began university, however, that I began to think of myself as a student – if not quite a scholar – and my passion for literature was ignited by some of the books and professors I was introduced to through my undergraduate English classes. I had thought about being a teacher from as far back as the sixth grade – inspired by the almost archetypal dynamic and caring teacher – but I'm not sure I ever really thought about what that meant beyond finding a type of identity affirmation through my familiarity with the daily trappings of the schoolhouse, which, of course, has been always been a place of comfort and security for me.

When I first found myself in academic and professional circumstances where I began seeing myself – and being seen – as a teacher, I viewed the profession very much through the subject specific lens of English. I saw myself as an English teacher rather than just a teacher. Indeed, in my early course outlines, I actually wrote: "I am not a teacher; I am an English teacher." I am not sure what I imagined that meant to my students, but I was surely clear about what that meant to me. I would be a teacher who would inspire and create and ultimately, change my students. Why would we read literature, after all, if we were not attempting to affect a change? Literature, however, would remain my muse and my medium.

It came, I think, as a somewhat mild surprise that after my first year of teaching in Edson, Alberta, while my passion for literature was undiminished, I could see that it was really my passion for connecting with students in a meaningful way – in helping them use literature not just as a road to a brighter future, but as a way to begin the journey into who they were as people – that was going to drive everything I did as a professional. To this day, I love the classroom experience, but from my second year of teaching on, I began being drawn to leadership roles and I was fortunate to be given access to such roles at a relatively young age. I began as an English department head in my third year of teaching and then spent the fourth and fifth years as an assistant principal. I then moved back to my hometown and after a year there began a stint as the English department head at a large, urban high school which lead directly to my previously mentioned department head role at another large, urban high school. As I write this, for the first time in my career, I find myself removed from a classroom context – or at least my own daily classroom context – as I explore a new role as an English Language Arts consultant within my school district.

I am fortunate in that I have had the chance to look at some of the big issues in education from both a teacher's perspective and an administrator's perspective and I have also done a considerable amount of work for the Diploma Examination branch of Alberta Education, which has given me an even broader scope. After my tenth year of teaching I really believed that I had an excellent grasp of what I needed to do to be an effective classroom teacher, but it has only been in these last few years that I have been afforded the context to understand

some of the pressing needs of the profession. In that year of change at my last high school, I had the opportunity to speak at length with colleagues who were leaving the profession after rewarding and fulfilling careers, and I also worked closely with our new teachers and had a chance to listen to them speak of their hopes and dreams for their professional careers. I was struck by how common the concerns were at both ends of this spectrum and also, how common the joys and passions. The first-year teachers and the thirty year veterans, alike, had broad and wide ranging passions for language and literature, and it was that passion that had driven their professional practice whether it's been for six months or thirty years.

The challenges inherent in choosing this profession are daunting, however, and, I fear, too often consuming to our professional and personal identities. In discussing these matters with my colleagues it seemed as if there are three broad areas that emerged in any discussion of the "realities" of teaching high school English. These three areas became the starting point for my location of inquiry.

The Martyr Mentality.

Anyone who has spoken at length to high school English teachers about their day-to- day lives will realize that the preparation and marking load takes such an enormous toll on our personal and professional energies that it often becomes - more than just a rallying cry - the defining feature of our professional identity. There is a very real sense of being a part of an oppressed fraternity that emerges when one is immersed in discussion with colleagues about the demands of our profession. We often revel in being in the presence of someone who "gets it" in a

way that no one outside of our subject specialty really could. This is a particularly pervasive problem for English teachers because it has its roots in a systemic problem – an intellectual and fiscal failure to acknowledge the unique time demands of our profession – but I have begun to wonder if our efforts to combat this problem may have only served to further entrench it by attaching it to our professional identity.

If we embrace this martyr mentality, even if only in our personal laments within the profession, do we risk a subconscious attachment to that mentality that will prevent us from seeing our way through to its eventual dismantling? If I define myself as the hard- working, heavily burdened English teacher is there a part of me that clings to that identity structure even as I rail against it? I would suggest that in any lengthy discussion with high school English Language Arts teachers about their professional lives, it would not take very long before the discussion turned to the personal and professional sacrifices necessitated by our preparatory and marking load. How many conversations like this does one take part in before the echoes of that lament become embedded in our sense of self? I wonder to what extent we allow this aspect of our professional lives to define our identity as educators.

Limits to Our Imaginative Construction of Self.

Connected to our fundamental time conundrum, but also to the aforementioned martyr mentality is the inherent failure of imagination that occurs when we allow

ourselves to be defined by circumstances that are largely outside of our control. I see this failure of imagination functioning in three distinct ways: 1) Do we become so consumed with just surviving and so locked into that survivor mentality that we let the pragmatic dominate the ideal? Do we sacrifice our ideal selves by reconciling our own beliefs and values about teaching English, with the English teacher that we are "allowed" to be, given the time constraints we face? 2) Connected to this point is the question of professional development, where far too often the dominant discourse is framed by this question: "What can you give me that I can use in class tomorrow?" I fully understand the sentiments behind this question – and realize that it brings us back to the issue of systemic deficiency – but I fear that in giving in to the short sighted thinking inherent in the demand for immediate pedagogic gratification only puts us further behind in our professional endeavors. 3) Finally, and perhaps, most importantly, is the failure to imagine ourselves beyond the multi-faceted roles we take on as classroom teachers. I think that our undertakings tied to our classroom practice are sometimes so vast that they stop us from embracing other possibilities stemming from our work as classroom teachers. Why is there such a dearth of administrators with a background in the humanities, and particularly English? Why are there not more English teachers who are actively engaged with the publishing industry as writers and editors? Why are so few high school ELA teachers entering back into graduate studies? These are avenues of professional growth and alternate career paths that may not only be personally fulfilling, but also result in meaningful change within the profession. Again, we come back to time, but this is a circular

problem in that if our voices are never heard, either in the corridors of power in education or in the larger world beyond the school- house, how will we ever effect meaningful change?

The Emotional Toll.

In a profession in which we try to kindle a deep appreciation and respect for the emotional and intellectual power of literature, it's remarkable how little we speak of the emotional investments that meaningful engagement with literary texts and the writing process demand of us as teachers. I do not think I have ever seen a student take a wrong answer on a math question personally, but I do think that when students put pen to paper – or fingers to keys, as is more often the case these days – they are investing something of themselves in that process, just as we do when we read their work. Likewise, when we read a literary text with our students we are engaged in a communal process, but one that has at its heart a deeply private process, the act of reading. It seems to me that we give too little voice to the process of reading our students, and indeed, to investing them with the power to read us, as well. How do we reconcile the intellectual endeavor of teaching the language arts, with the intensely personal– and intensely human – act of understanding the world we live in, and indeed, ourselves, through language?

Towards a Process of Identity Construction.

I think that anyone who knows me well would recognize that I have a genuine passion for teaching English. It has given me rewards that few professions could match, but what even my closest friends would be unlikely to guess that hardly a

day goes by that I don't – at least fleetingly – consider a career change. For all the joys I take from teaching English and working with English teachers, there is also something deeply unsatisfying about the emotional, and even, to an extent, the physical toll of this profession. The questions at the end of each of the preceding sections are questions that are intrinsic to what it means to be an English teacher, and they are questions that have been circling my professional practice even before I could articulate them. I think we need to get to the heart of some of these questions and I am interested in exploring if there is a way to use the tools of literature as a mechanism for creating a meaningful sense of who we are as English teachers. Essentially, I'm wondering if we can use our passion for language and literature to provide a framework for a more meaningful and more far-reaching process of identity construction. When we read literature, be it fiction or drama or poetry or film we do not just attend to the signifiers within the text, but also to the gaps between these signifiers. Even a simple sentence – "A man walks down the street." – requires us to enter into the spaces within these words to imagine a specific man, with a distinct stride walking down a certain street. Great literature demands even more of us in that we have to enter into the sometimes messy ambiguities of a particular word or phrase and actively construct meaning, but even the greatest works of literature are not as demanding as any human being. Yet, a literary work – often, a work of fiction – can sometimes allow us to move beyond the limits of public self. In the final volume of his masterwork *A Dance to the Music of Time, Hearing Secret Harmonies* (1975) Anthony Powell reminds us

> People think because a novel's invented, it isn't true. Exactly the reverse is the case. Because a novel's invented, it is true. Biography and memoirs can never be wholly true, since they can't include every conceivable circumstance of what happened. The novel can do that. The novelist himself lays it down. His decision is binding. (p. 84)

As English teachers, we are uniquely positioned to understand the nuances of Powell's words, but we are also uniquely prone to allowing our biography to subsume our creativity.

As English teachers, we have allowed our complexities to be reduced by accepting the signifiers placed on us by those outside of our profession. We can see this in the often – although not exclusively – narrow lens through which English teachers are seen on the popular culture landscape, where self-sacrificing free spirits such as Robin Williams' John Keating or Hillary Swank's Erin Gruwell look large in our collective imaginations. We can also see a typecasting evinced through colleagues and friends both within and beyond the teaching profession as a whole. How many administrators have struggled to figure out what makes their English department tick and settled for only the most perfunctory of answers? Even worse, we have then given up the responsibility of filling in our own gaps, settling instead for these ready-made narratives supplied by others. Thus, we become "the overworked teacher," "the tough teacher," "the academic" or "the fun teacher," to cite just four broad categories. What I would

like to know is if identity studies can lead us out of this wilderness, by offering a methodology that will allow us to recreate ourselves. Can we take a page from our craft and learn to write ourselves, and perhaps more foundationally, to read ourselves? Can we create an image of our profession that allows us all to flourish as educators and as human beings? In order to answer these questions, I can see myself drawing on a wide range of modes of inquiry, particularly autobiography and narrative, but I think I would also need to embrace tenets of phenomenology, hermeneutics and critical pedagogy. Most importantly, I need to embrace the spaces between these modes, just as we – as a profession – need to embrace the spaces between the signifiers that threaten to hold us rooted in place.

Professional Crisis.

While I will explore both the applicability of various theoretical lenses and the specific methodology of my study in my literature review, I would like to share an experience that can serve as a microcosm for many of the issues I have outlined above. Almost exactly two years ago, I submitted a pair of presentation proposals for an English language arts conference. The second proposal was for a joint presentation with one of my colleagues from another high school. Not long after we submitted our proposal for a session dealing with texts that blur the boundaries between genres (what I termed "liminal texts") we both received the following email from the chair of the organizing committee:

> *Thank you so much for this proposal. We are very interested in this presentation; however, I am wondering if it would be possible for you*

to make some revisions. I have run this proposal past my conference focus group (i.e. my colleagues) and we are a little baffled. (I actually had to look up the definition of "liminal" – and I always thought my vocabulary skills were reasonably strong. What a blow to my self-esteem!)

This is a little academic for the average conference attendee – my new English teachers who should be attending a session like this would be too intimidated by the description. Is it possible for you to dummy it up a little for those of us who are not geniuses like the two of you?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Now, I should note that I know the writer of this email as a thoughtful, intelligent and caring professional who is genuinely trying to do good work for our profession and who certainly would not, herself, be intimidated by such a session. Her decision to accept the often-thankless position of chairing a professional conference is, in many ways, proof enough. I think it's also clear that she is trying to infuse her email with a little self-effacing humor as a way of approaching the potentially awkward task of asking two colleagues to revise their work. With all that being said, it was difficult for me to read this email and not see it as being symptomatic – and even emblematic – of the position we find ourselves in as English teachers here at the beginning of the twenty first century.

The conference chair's assumption that a group of educated professionals who have dedicated their professional – and in many cases, their personal – lives to exploring the possibilities in language and literature would be intimidated by a session description that was " a little academic" rankled me at first. I began mentally listing off my colleagues who would embrace such a session and began composing my fiery – yet, dignified – reply and then, I stopped, because I realized that, not withstanding a few notable exceptions, her assumption was correct. I have been to many of these conferences – as well as other conferences with English specific sessions – in my years of teaching, both as a speaker and as an attendee, and I have invariably left feeling as though I had been offered very little that furthered our professional ethos. That is not to say that I have not heard from wonderfully eloquent speakers or been presented with thought-provoking models of class-room practice, because I have, but invariably the overriding mentality at any conference I have been to, has boiled down to this: "Give me something I can use in class, tomorrow!" I have heard some variation of that exact phrase used in relation to professional development innumerable times and I would argue that it has actually become the dominant discourse in all teacher professional development, but perhaps even more-so in the field of high school English Language Arts.

This embrace of pragmatics over possibilities is hardly surprising when we consider the fundamental time-conundrum that drives our professional practice. While the specifics of every full-time English teacher's assignment varies according to school-specific structures such as class length, timetable framework,

“marking time” allowances, semestered versus full-year course delivery etc. we can safely assume that any full-time high school English teacher would be responsible for anywhere from 75 (a rarity) to 200 (an all too common reality) students. As if these numbers were not daunting enough, it is a shameful hallmark of the Albertan – and indeed, the Canadian and American – education system that teachers spend the bulk of their working hours in the classroom with their students. Marty Schollenberger Swain and Stephen C. Swain’s “Teacher Time (Or, rather, the lack of it)” (1999) provides a concise overview of this professional crisis, with an emphasis on how American teachers’ preparation time pales in comparison with those of industrialized nations throughout Europe and Asia.) I can already hear the cheering right-wing voices: “Of course, we want teachers in front of kids! That’s what they get paid for!” But such rejoinders beg the question, if we spend all of our time in front of our students, when are we actually preparing what we present to our students, collaborating in meaningful ways with our colleagues and, perhaps even more troubling, when are we actually responding to students as individuals?

If we take the median of the range of student numbers cited above and assume that a high-school English teacher teaches 150 students, some relatively simple calculations bear some truly rotten fruit. Should that number seem too arbitrary, consider that twelve of the fourteen full-time English teachers in my department at my last high school – one of the most high achieving and financially stable schools in the province – in my last year there taught in excess of 150 students in the first semester alone. If we imagine that each teacher spends

only five minutes a week assessing each student's work, we see that teachers would need 12.5 hours per week to do the job. Unfortunately, these same teachers would have, at the most, six and at the least, none, of their working hours dedicated to this seemingly minimalist marking task. If we consider that most of the assignments our students engage with are written in nature and demand not only an intellectual, but also an emotional investment on behalf of their instructors, the numbers begin to mount in alarming fashion. What if all we did was ask our students to complete one written assignment every two weeks and we devoted 20 minutes to each assignment? This would amount to another 50 hours every two weeks.

The speculative numbers above simply account for assessment tasks, but what of preparation in a discipline in which each lesson demands of its instructor a reading or viewing task prior to the delivery of that lesson? While the process-based skills that I am developing with my students from course to course may have some similarities, the specific context – the literary universe that each specific work creates for us – of each lesson is forever changing. Every time we choose a new work – something we are excited about because of the possibilities it holds for our students – we necessarily accept a daunting preparatory task. I recently spoke to an experienced high school teacher who found that, upon switching schools, she would need to teach no less than seven novels that she had never read before. How long does it take to read a complex literary novel? Five hours? Ten hours? And what then? What does it take to plan our lessons and design our assessment tasks? But again, the time necessary for preparation is but

one piece of this increasingly bitter pie. How many hours are spent reading and responding to professional emails? (In an ad hoc monitoring of my own email correspondence the week after I received that note from the conference chair, I *responded* to 85 work-related emails in my previous five working days and I shudder to think of how many I must have read) How many hours do we spend inputting marks and comments to computerized marks systems that are now the norm in all jurisdictions in Alberta? How many hours do we spend pouring over results from standardized exams? Unfortunately, there is seemingly no end to these types of questions, but suffice to say, we are in a professional time crisis and have been for far too long.

Let me return to where we began with a seemingly innocuous email correspondence that I would now like to hold up, as evidence of what William Pinar, in *What is Curriculum Theory*? (2004), would call "the deep –seated and pervasive anti-intellectualism in the field of education" (p. 9). I see this anti-intellectualism to be a direct derivative of the impossible time constraints – "profoundly anti-intellectual conditions of our professional labor" (Pinar, p. 8) – that we have allowed to form the frame for our professional lives. We remain closed within, in the humiliating position of what Pinar would term "gracious submission" (p. 46) and find ourselves mentally enslaved, even while our physical energies ebb and wane. If our new teachers are, indeed, intimidated by the academic and the intellectual, we have placed ourselves in a position of imaginative failure where the potential for a better future is locked within a present held captive by the past. In freely borrowing from William Pinar I

embrace his vocabulary as a way of considering the specific plight of high school English teachers within the larger context of our professional crisis.

The complexities of this crisis were even more effectively illustrated through an experience I had during that final year at my last high school as I took part in a school wide professional development day. The first part of this day involved an intimate breakfast with five of my colleagues from differing subject areas and a subsequent discussion framed around these five questions: 1) Why did you become a teacher? 2) What do I stand for as an educator? 3) What are the "gifts" that I bring to my work? 4) What do I want my legacy as an educator to be? 5) What can I do to "keep track of myself" – to remember my own heart? As one might imagine, these questions fostered some honest and moving dialogue and I was struck by how wide-ranging – and deeply personal – the answers were. One of my colleagues in the English department spoke with eloquence and passion about how she saw herself as standing for high standards and how holding students to these high standards ultimately benefited students in all aspects of their lives. After hearing these words I realized that every conversation I had ever had with that teacher and her students, and every moment I spent in her classroom were now crystallized for me. I now had a better understanding of the decisions she made as a classroom teacher and as a member of our English department. Other colleagues spoke of the personal relationships they had with students and with their subject areas and how these relationships shaped their professional practice. As the morning continued on into more traditional professional growth activities, it was impossible not to notice how virtually every comment by

teachers, administrators and presenters represented a marriage between how that individual saw his/herself as both an educator and as a person. It was also clear, that the most passionate moments in any discourse were provoked when there were conflicting views about what it means to be an educator. My research project is an attempt to enter into this point of tension in such a way as to foster dialogue rather than merely dissent.

Not long ago, one of the most respected members of the local English teaching community announced his retirement mid-year. He had been awarded a life-time achievement by our provincial professional association (ELAC), had contributed to the development of our current program of studies and had a long and respected career in our school division. In his email to the group of English department heads that I chair, he offered a typically graceful acknowledgment of the many "wonderful teachers from all parts of our Province" that he had worked with throughout his career, but the focus of the email was very much on his current working conditions. He noted that he was currently teaching seven ELA courses and a total of 217 students.

Not long after receiving this email, I was asked to sit on the interview committee to find a temporary replacement for this teacher prior to the official posting of the position in the spring. The position was offered to a recent university graduate and this would be his first teaching position. I was struck by the juxtaposition of these representations of the beginning and end of the life of the English teacher. If the dominant presence of numbers in those final words from my dear colleague lingered with me long after I had read the email, I was

correspondingly struck by the complete absence of pragmatic concerns in the interview with his young successor. Instead, he spoke of his inspiring high school English teacher and his vision of himself as an English teacher moving forward, and if he had concerns about the nature of his assignment, he kept them to himself. Yet, even as I write this, his world has become the world described in the email. His life has intersected with 217 students, not to mention numerous colleagues, and they will each become – and take – a part of him. He will never be the same. This study explores the complicated conversation he will engage in as he begins to see himself, and begins to be seen, as an English teacher. It is my story, as much as it is his, and it belongs too, to the numerous teachers who have lent me their voices in this study. It is my profound hope that as we listen to the stories that play out, we pay them the profound respect of joining with them to change the stories and change their lives.

Part One: Beginnings

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the questions that I hope to address with this research study is the question of how our subject specialty impacts how we see ourselves as professional educators, and, by extension its potential to affect our classroom learning environments. I am beginning from the fairly large premise that there is something inherent in teaching English Language Arts that distinguishes it from other subject areas. We can recognize, intuitively, that teaching someone to throw a baseball has different dynamics than teaching someone to appreciate iambic-pentameter or to dissect a frog. Apart from these surface differences, however, I would suggest that there are two very fundamental overarching differences that factor into both the classroom learning environments in English language arts classrooms, as well as the construction of a professional identity for ELA teachers.

English is Foundational

Teaching English in a predominantly English-speaking school means that the basic elements of our craft are infused throughout the curriculum of all other subject areas. A student's proficiency in reading, writing, viewing, speaking, listening and representing – the six strands of the English language arts according to the Alberta Curriculum – has an impact on his or her performance in all other subject areas. The rudiments of English are interwoven into the fabric of the whole of the high school curriculum and by extension into the fabric of our lives beyond the school walls. When we make choices about what to teach in our

courses, we are making choices that have ramifications in many other aspects of our students' lives. In an intriguing study by Drake et al (2001), researchers compared the mathematics and literacy stories of ten elementary school teachers, and they found that while all of the mathematics stories were physically located within a school setting, there was much greater diversity when it came to literacy stories, where the proverbial schoolhouse was not the setting for the teachers' literacy identity. Counter intuitively, despite the variance in the setting of the literacy stories there tended to be much more common ground in terms of the plots and themes running through the literacy stories than the mathematics stories. This suggests that what we would consider to be the building blocks of an English identity – literacy – to be both uniquely personal and powerfully communal.

Literary Lenses.

While our curriculum is process based, the frame for these processes is the study of literary texts and this places some unique demands on English teachers. It means that in order to teach a process it is always through a series of literary lenses, each one having a distinct focus. Imagine that before teaching student how to kick a football or solve a mathematic equation there was a preliminary reading of a short story, poem or novel – to name three possibilities – on which the teaching and learning of that process would be dependent. This analogy provides a sense of the magnitude of that one constant in our profession. If I teach a course in two successive years I will be working with the same learner outcomes, but if I choose to use different texts from year to year – as many teachers do – I am adjusting the focus and naturally enhancing and enlarging the

planning component of the course. This is no small thing, as evidenced by Scherf and Hahs-Vaughn's (2008) attempt to create a portrait of middle and high school teachers in the United States to better understand the working conditions specific to the discipline of teaching English as well as some of the reasons for a too high attrition rate. The article begins with a personal anecdote about a former student of one of the authors, who, after a very trying first year as a high school English teacher, decided to quit the profession. This sets the context for the article which is an attempt to use data from the Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the hopes of getting a better understanding of who middle and high school English teachers are, what conditions they face and why, ultimately, so many of them leave the profession. In looking at survey data involving six hundred ELA teachers (ranging from grade 6-12 classroom assignments) they found a consistent lack of both formal content area specialization: over half of the teachers did not have degrees in either English/Composition or Secondary English Language Arts Education and 77% of the teachers in the survey were not involved in any networking with other teachers. In addition to the strains on teacher time that this suggests, consider the ramifications if English teachers considered subject expertise and collaboration to be at the core of their identity as teachers.

Towards an ELA Identity

The two studies cited above provide a starting point for discussion, but it was an article by Stodolsky, and Grossman (1995) where the researchers sought out perceptual data from teachers of five academic subjects that provided the strongest theoretical base for further research into a discrete English Language

Arts identity. In this article the authors explore the nature of teachers' perceptions about learning and teaching specific subject matter with a particular eye towards how these perceptions can foster – or hinder – reform efforts. By administering a questionnaire to teachers in five different subject areas the authors sought to explore this question: How do different views of subject matter facilitate or hinder how teachers adapt curriculum and instruction to foster learning and achievement on the part of students from different backgrounds? The study was carried out by looking at survey data from academic teachers across five subject disciplines (Math, Science, Social Studies, English and Foreign Languages) in three large high schools. The researchers offered some compelling comparisons between the subject areas. While the English language arts specific data was not particularly surprising, (ie. English is less clearly defined, offers a traditionally greater degree of autonomy, is more dynamic, the emphasis placed on English for graduation and university requirements puts different demands on English teachers, etc.) it did reaffirm my sense that there is a valid case to be made for a unique ELA identity. This contention lies at the heart of my research study.

Of the many articles and books I have reviewed in this subject area, a 2008 study entitled "Teachers' Value Orientations in the Literature and History Secondary Classrooms" is probably the article that speaks most directly to both the spirit and some of the methodology of my study. In their study, Frydaki and Mamoura are exploring secondary teachers' observable value orientations in secondary history and literature classes. The researchers use individual case studies developed through qualitative research methods to form the body of their

research. Their subjects were nine secondary literature and history teachers who taught in large public high schools in the Athens metropolitan area. Their focus was on looking at how individual teacher values are infused in the instructional frameworks that teachers establish in their course. This study has direct relevance to my research interest area as one of the issues I am exploring is the degree to which personal (and cultural) value sets influence teacher identity and, ultimately, teaching practice. I see this article's value relating not only to its conclusions, which are, not surprisingly, more open-ended than definitive, but also in regards to its methodology and cultural context. Regarding the latter, the authors clearly established a specific cultural context for the study and took pains to elaborate on the national Greek values that provide the broader context for the teaching and learning situations they observed. It was clear to me in reading the article that they anticipated that their work would be read by a primarily North American (predominantly American) audience and took pains to make their research accessible. I also found the details of their data collection and analysis to be instructive, both on a micro-level – such as certain interview questions that have informed some of the questions that I asked my participants – and the macro-level – including an extensive section establishing how they validated their research methods.

Professional Identity Structure

Having established a reasonable base for pursuing a subject specific identity structure, I began to explore the slightly broader issue of the professional identity of teachers. In a study by Beijaard (1995), the author draws on a paper by

Sikes (1991) to establish three main features of teachers' professional identity: teaching subject area, relationship with pupils and role or role conception. In total, 28 teachers from 5 secondary schools participated in the research. Two aspects of this article had significant relevance for this particular study: 1) The author notes subject specialty as the first factor in the development of professional identity 2) It also offers some insight into a narrative approach to identity which is very much a part of the mixed-methods research I use to explore English teacher identity.

Articles by Burn (2007) and Day et al (2006) also provided some potentially promising starting points for exploring how teachers construct their professional identity. The Burn article explores an action research approach to curriculum development within the framework of the Oxford Internship Scheme, a one-year postgraduate initial teacher education (ITE) program for secondary school teachers. The purpose of this program is to help develop student teachers' content knowledge and the researchers are exploring the profound challenges to one's professional identity that occurred both for the student teachers and the mentor teachers during this partnership. Student teachers were encouraged to test all ideas as a way of creating a climate in which all ideas, from all sources, including the student teachers' personal histories, were subjected to close scrutiny. Essentially, what we are seeing here is a constructivist approach to pedagogy that is generating some profound questions about how teaching professionals construct their professional selves. The potential challenges of such a framework are readily evident as we will inevitably see the seemingly contradictory situation where

student-teachers are approaching their mentors as subject area specialists and then actively questioning the nature of that specialist knowledge. This article has profound ramifications for my study. In particular, the exploration of the distinction between subject area knowledge and subject area knowledge *for teaching* is one of the key challenges for teachers of English Language Arts. There is a distinct difference between knowing English – largely defined by one's own reading, viewing and perhaps to a lesser extent, writing of and about literary texts- and knowing how to teach English. This study is framed by the history curriculum, but offers considerable promise for cross-curricular application. The most interesting – and inspiring aspect – of the article is the call for educators to embrace an identity which includes a role as learner, not merely one as an expert teacher.

The Day article offers a detailed literature review of this subject area with a substantial focus on the data stemming from a four-year UK Department of Education and Skills funded project involving 300 teachers in 100 schools. The authors conclude that

> the architecture of teachers' professional identities is not always stable, but at certain times or during certain life, career and organizational phases may be discontinuous, fragmented, and subject to turbulence and change in continuing struggle to construct and sustain a stable identity. (p. 613)

However, the review of the research "suggests that neither stability nor instability will necessarily affect [teacher] effectiveness." (p. 613) It was through this article that I was drawn to the work of Geert Kelchtermans. Kelchtermans (1993) uses biographical narrative inquiry to explore teacher identity and the most important aspects of this article for my research involved a concept of professional identity. Kelchtermans identifies five interrelated components of teacher professional identity: 1) Self-image (how teachers describe themselves); 2) Self-esteem (how "good" teachers are, as defined by themselves and others); 3) Job-motivation(what makes teachers choose, remain committed to or leave the job); 4) Task perception (how teachers define their jobs); 5) Future perspective: (teachers' expectations for the future development of their jobs). Kelchtermans also noted two recurring themes in the career stories. Teachers revealed a consistent concern with the stability of their job situations and, connected to this, the teachers saw themselves as quite vulnerable to the outside world. Both the framework for the conception of identity and the idea of teacher vulnerability have profound implications for my study.

In their 2004 meta-study, "Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity, Beijaard et al. conclude that recent research on teachers' professional identity can be divided into three categories: (1) studies in which the focus was on teachers' professional identity formation, (2) studies in which the focus was on the identification of characteristics of teachers' professional identity, and (3) studies in which professional identity was (re)presented by teachers' stories. After a detailed review of the research base, the authors point to four

issues that need addressing in this field: 1) We need better clarity about how the terms "identity" and "self" relate 2) There has been little attention paid to the role of educational theories in the teacher's professional landscape 3) "What counts as ‘professional’, then, is related to ways in which teachers relate to other people (students, colleagues, parents) and the responsibilities, attitudes, and behaviors they adopt as well as the knowledge they use which are, more or less, outside themselves." (p. 123) 4) There is a need to reconcile the cognitive, biographical and sociological realms of identity formation. This study provides important insights into both the focus areas and the methodology used in professional identity studies, but it is far from comprehensive, covering only twenty-five studies featured in two specific data bases. Beijaard et al. look exclusively at discrete articles and have not mentioned the substantial research in the field that has been published as book-length studies or collections. A number of these books have formed a strong theoretical base for my study and I would like to highlight the most important ones in the following sections and provide some brief insights into how they inform the study.

Major Book Length Studies

In their 2004 study, Bejaard et al classify the field of professional identity scholarship as largely featuring studies that are “small scale and in depth” (119) and this certainly holds true in the most substantial book length explorations of teacher identity issues that I have read. I would like to make particular note of the books that formed the base of my reading, as they each provide important ideas

and information that inform all aspects of my study from theoretical stance to methodology.

Signature Pedagogies

Gurung, Chick and Haynie's *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind* (2009) uses L.S. Shulman's concept of signature pedagogies – characteristic forms of teaching and learning belonging to specific professions – as a focusing lens for exploring scholarship in teaching and learning that is subject specific. The book features a series of articles looking at signature pedagogies in fields ranging from History to Agriculture and features two articles directly related to my area of inquiry. Interestingly enough, there is no article focused on a signature pedagogy for English Language Arts as an entity. Instead, we find two separate articles on "literary studies" and "creative writing"; and while both are instructive in terms of highlighting the professional and personal tensions that exist in each signature pedagogy, these very distinctions beg the question of what other signature pedagogies exist. In the Alberta high school ELA context I am exploring it would seem reasonable to expect to explore signature pedagogies in writing instruction, film and media studies, and grammar, to name at least three additional aspects of our current ELA framework. In my initial survey – explored in depth in my review of methodology to follow – I have one distinct question that asks teachers to identify the most significant roles in their lives as high school ELA teachers. This question encompasses more than just pedagogy, but there is no doubt that the way that teachers categorize and prioritize various signature pedagogies within the larger

ELA pedagogy would affect their perceptions of the significance of the roles they take on as teachers.

Practice Makes Practice

Deborah Britzman's *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* (1991*)* is one of – and arguably *the* – seminal text in teaching identity studies. Britzman describes her study as "an ethnographic study of the contradictory realities of learning to teach in secondary education and how these realities fashion the subjectivities of student teachers." (p. 9) and frames her study around two overarching questions: 1) What does it mean to learn to teach? 2)What does it mean to those involved? Her study follows the pre-service teaching experiences of two teachers – Jamie Owl and Jack August – and is notable not only for what it reveals about teacher identity constructs, but how she breaks down boundaries between critical stances. She is clearly operating from academic roots deeply woven in Critical Pedagogy – indeed, Henry Giroux is a co-editor of the series in which the book was first published – but she is also pushing the boundaries in considering the roles of psycho-analytic theory, queer theory and narrative. This blurring of ideological stances is very important to my study, as I see all identity issues – and certainly the ones being explored in English Language Arts – as being informed by a range of critical discourses.

In a key passage early in her book, Britzman speaks to the reasons why she locates her site of inquiry in the world of student-teaching:

> My focus is on the situation of the student teacher because the student teacher's delicate position in the classroom allows insight into the struggle for voice in both teaching and learning. Marginally situated in two worlds, the student teacher as part student and part teacher has the dual struggle of educating others while being educated. Consequently, student teachers appropriate different voices in the attempt to speak for themselves yet all act in a largely inherited and constraining context. This struggle characterizes the tensions between being and becoming a teacher as student teachers draw from their past and present in the process of coming to know. Often, however, it is this struggle that is absent both from the research on learning to teach and from the normative practices of mainstream programs in teacher education. Part of this text will account for these silences as it reconstructs the polyphony of voices that mediate, persuade, and produce particular forms of practice and the concurrent discourses that legitimate or challenge them. (p. 13-14)

I would like to explore the way that this "tension between being and becoming" plays out in high school English Arts classes through the lived experience of the teachers of those classes. As I discussed in my introduction, I believe that the specific challenges of teaching high school English Language Arts puts even the experienced teachers in my cohort in this position of being and becoming, not unlike what Britzman sees happening in pre-service teachers.

In Britzman's study she identifies three myths that frame the teaching discourse of our profession:

Myth #1: Everything Depends on the Teacher

The Myth Tells Us:

- Unless the teacher establishes control, there will be no learning
- Outside aid is perceived as incompetence
- We must be masters of anticipation and instantaneous response
- We can play the role of Tyrant or Comrade
- When things go awry, blame ourselves

Britzman notes that "[s]tudents are never simply learners, they arrive in the classroom already knowledgeable" (p. 226) and yet one of the myths that frames our teaching lives seems to leave them entirely out of the equation. To accept this myth would seem to see us adapting a teacher-centric pedagogy that would leave little space for constructivist models. I am interested in exploring teacher perceptions of the extent to which their sense of self and the various roles incorporated within that self affects classroom practice.

Myth #2: The Teacher as Expert

The Myth Tells Us:

- We should know everything there is to know about the material and how to deliver it
- Knowledge is valued as product rather than process
- Knowledge is simply an accumulation of experience

Britzman considers this to be a dominant mode of discourse playing out in her study: "The teacher as expert, then, is in actuality a normalizing fiction that serves to protect the status quo, heighten the power knowledge to normalize, and deny

the significant problems of how we come to know, how we learn and how we are taught." (p. 230) This myth has the potential to stop us from becoming inquiry based learners, thus robbing our students of powerful working models of inquiry at a point in their life when they need to value process just as much as product.

Myth #3: Teachers Are Self-Made

The Myth Tells Us:

- There are "natural teachers"
- There is very little that teacher education can offer
- Teaching style replaces pedagogy and is merely an extension of our personality
- If one cannot make the grade, one is not meant to be a teacher

Britzman notes that "The myth that teachers are self-made serves to cloak the social relationships and the context of school structure by exaggerating personal autonomy." (p. 232) How we reconcile this sense of autonomy with our professional duties has a profound impact on the way we position ourselves as teachers and learners within our classrooms. I am interested in exploring the extent to which others affect the development of English Language Arts teachers' sense of self, and how we ultimately reconcile a powerful culture of autonomy with the desire –and in some cases the mandate – to collaborate.

I am very interested in seeing how these myths play out in the lives of my research subjects and also what other myths are revealed. Ultimately, I am positing that myths like these have profound effects on how we see ourselves as professionals and by extension, how we conduct ourselves as professionals in our classrooms. Britzman borrows Louis Althusser's term "interpolation" in

suggesting that we are "summoned" by these myths and understand ourselves to be the source rather than the effect of that summons. This suggests that these myths are often deep-seated and woven into our identity structures. Britzman's solution is both intuitive and complex: Take up the dialogic in teacher education, by recognizing that nothing exists in isolation. Every moment and every idea is connected to other moments and other ideas. Do away with dichotomies and hierarchies and embrace the multiplicity of voices that inform the experience of education. Britzman essentially calls for a vision of the teacher as researcher as a step towards meaningful and sustainable teacher education.

Identity and the English Language Arts Teacher

Britzman's book has also clearly informed three other works that are even more closely tied to the English Language Arts landscape: Lad Tobin's *Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Class* (1993), Jane Danielewicz's *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education* (2001) and Janet Alsup's *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces* (2006). These three books are all squarely situated within a specific English Language Arts context; and because of their location at the beginning, middle and end of a fifteen year time frame, bookmarked by Britzman and Alsap's books respectively, they also provide a sense of the shifts in the academic discourse around professional identity that have occurred over this time. Tobin's book, for example, is an autobiographical exploration of his lived experience as a writing instructor at the high school and college level and while it is engaging and honest, almost to a fault, it is very clear that he is writing at a time

where the academic "credentials" of this kind of narrative inquiry were still being established. When one compares his work to the Danielwicz and Alsup texts, we see that the latter two are informed by a much more significant theoretic base. While Tobin's book focuses on his lived experience through his students, both Danielwicz and Alsup take an essentially ethnographic approach as they each follow the journeys of six pre-service English teachers.

All three of these books delve into important areas of identity constructs that inform my study. The Alsup study is perhaps most instructive, not only for what works, but also for what doesn't work. Alsup reports and theorizes a multi-layered study of teacher identity centered on case studies of six pre-service English education students. Alsap is exploring the contention that forming a professional identity is central to becoming an effective teacher and therefore, teacher identity formation should play a seminal role in the teacher education program. Alsup's study is not without distinct limitations, most notably the homogenous nature of her study sample: Her six subjects are all of a type (Young, female, middle-class) and this limited the breadth of the study. That being said, this study has important implications for my research. Alsap's own framing narrative is very much a product of her own frustrations as a teacher in an admittedly blighted American educational landscape, and I found it instructive to see her grappling with understanding how she positioned herself in her study. The theoretical groundwork that Alsap lays, both in terms of providing a historical framework for teacher education and in exploring the larger concept of teacher identity, is impressive. In particular, she draws on the work of James Gee and Deborah

Britzman (who also wrote the forward to her book) and both of these authors provide important insights into the process of identity formation. Alsap subverts Gee's concept of "borderlands" which she defines as "discourse in which there is evidence of contact between disparate personal and professional subjectivities and in which this contact appears to be heading toward the ideological integration of multiple senses of self" (p. 36). In addition to such direct content applications to my research area, Alsap's study also provides some genuine insight into narrative methodology and affirmed my initial sense that narrative will almost necessarily play a role in my research.

One of my largest concerns throughout the process of working on my thesis has been the sheer scope of material dealing with identity in education because these issues are never solely educational in scope. In his previously mentioned research review, Beijaard concludes that there is a distinct need to reconcile the biographical, cognitive and social realms of identity research and two books in particular have helped me arrive at a better sense of how to do this. Richard Jenkins *Social Identity* (1996) and Stephanie Lawler's *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (2008) have provided me with a foundational understanding of the larger social/psychological concept of identity and some of the larger issues playing out in the research beyond the educational realm. Anthony Giddens' *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991) has been essential in helping me to consider how the continually evolving stresses of modern life are impacting our sense of self. Given the wealth of research emerging on educational change and 21st century literacies,

I believe that this is important contextual knowledge to consider and it greatly informs the synthesis of my study in the final chapter.

Radical Pedagogy

And finally, Mark Bracher's *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity and Social Transformation* (2006) is undoubtedly the work that best informs and encapsulates all aspects of my study, but most substantially in regard to its moral purpose. Bracher's book is divided into four sections, all having profound resonance with the existing research base and the structure of my study. In part one, Bracher provides a comprehensive model of identity in which he demonstrates "how it motivates learning and resistance to learning and how it is also a key cause underlying many social problems." (XIV/Preface) In attempting to address the question of why identity matters, Bracher draws on psychoanalysis, cognitive science and social psychology, he shows how identity maintenance is the ultimate motive for all behaviors. In part two, he explains "how teachers' identity needs motivate certain prominent pedagogical practices that do more to threaten the identities of many students than to support and help them." (XIV/Preface) This section gets to the heart of the rationale for my study: a teacher's identity needs have the potential to do great harm and great good, but the former is certainly more likely if we are not aware of what those needs are. Part three addresses this directly as Bracher looks at how self-analysis can help us to take responsibility for the ways in which our identity needs drive our professional practice. In section four, Bracher looks at pedagogical practice –

primarily in the field of literary study – to promote identity development in students.

This literature review is foundational in nature and represents the most salient aspects of the research base that informed the origins and the cognitive structure of the study, but there are other works that come to the fore in each section of the study.

Part One: Beginnings

Chapter Three: Methodology, Research Questions and Design

The working title for my study was “An Exploration of Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Identity Formation in High School English Teachers” and at every step in the process, I considered it to be an exploration in the truest sense of the word, in that I was not only exploring my research interests but allowing participants to explore their own unique identity frameworks in relation to their jobs as English Language Arts teachers. This is a mixed-methods study that incorporates and blurs the boundaries between a number of different theoretical lenses including critical pedagogy, narrative inquiry, and psycho-analytic theory. I am also loath to frame my research within the narrow confines of the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy, preferring instead to look for ways that seemingly diverse approaches can meaningfully inform and provide more substantial depth to the main research questions.

In “Meaning in Method: The Rhetoric of Qualitative and Quantitative Research” by William A. Firestone (1987), the author argues that the conflation of method and paradigm is partly – and perhaps largely – rhetorical and I would like to steer clear of getting bogged down in this rhetorical swamp, while acknowledging that certain approaches may indeed inform certain aspects of the study more effectively. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie’s “Mixed Methods Research: A Paradigm Whose Time Has Come” (2004), a comprehensive argument for

mixed –methods research, provided a useful history –and a future, perhaps – of the debate around this paradigm, and helped me to reconcile my own decisions as a researcher.

I was intrigued by the idea of a mixed-methods process model in relation to my own research from the outset of graduate work. I see my study as fundamentally mixed-methods – indeed, my original design called for the development of a more traditionally quantitative instrument modeled on Thomas MOLES-S (2003) – but I did not have faith that even the most well-constructed quantitative instrument could adequately represent the necessarily messy world that emerges when exploring fields as necessarily tied to narrative as the concept of identity and the experience of teaching English. Ultimately, I see my study more as a liminal study – forever on the threshold of qualitative and quantitative research frameworks – and hopefully never defined by either extreme of the paradigm.

As a guiding principle for the study I am trying to stay true to the ethos expressed in David Berliner's "Educational Research: The Hardest Science of All" (2002). Berliner points to what I would consider to be the single most dangerous – and most pervasive – manifestation of educational research: a privileging of studies that offer simple answers to complex problems. If there is one aspect of my thesis work that troubles me, it is the possibility that my research on English teacher identity will at some point be selectively sampled for a few points that appear generalizable, while the complicated conversation the study should begin is ignored. I see this happening far too often in professional

learning contexts, usually prefaced by the phrase "The research says . . . ." Berliner's example from the Helmke study – where "the generalizable finding was that the higher the scores on the evaluation anxiety questionnaire, the lower the score on the achievement test" (p. 19) actually obscured the true complexity of the classrooms studied – is a powerful reminder not to be seduced by the siren song of alluringly simple conclusions, while ignoring what is truly important: an evocation and deeper understanding of our complex and contextual world of educational research.

My study is framed by two overarching research questions: 1)What are the factors that influence the construction of a High School English Language Arts teacher's professional identity? 2) How do English teachers' perceptions of their teaching lives – including, particularly, their relationships with students and colleagues, and their approach to preparation, instruction and assessment – reveal identity constructs and needs? I explore the concept of identity in greater depth throughout the study, but as a working definition of identity, I offer Anthony Giddens' (1991) salient observation: "A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity *to keep a certain narrative going*." (p. 54) I am interested in how this narrative is constructed and sustained within the professional context of teaching English Language Arts and this is what I would consider to be one's professional identity. The concept of "identity constructs" may seem to be at odds with a definition of identity that stresses movement and flux, but while our identities may not be fixed in the sense of being unchanging, we still must necessarily

construct ourselves in any given moment we find ourselves in. A teacher may, indeed, construct slightly different selves from class to class, or during the walk from the classroom to the staffroom – to offer two examples – and so these constructs exist even though they are not fixed.

For part one of the study, I devised an eight question open-ended survey. I engaged in considerable debate about the form and structure of this stage of the study and as I mentioned previously, even went so far as to design a 50 question instrument utilizing a five-point Likert scale and built around Kelchtermans' conception of teacher professional identity. Designing this instrument was invaluable to me in terms of considering the advantages and disadvantages of this type of survey. I relied heavily on three resources as I worked through this unfamiliar territory: Lewis Aiken's *Rating Scales and Checklists: Evaluating Behavior, Personality, and Attitudes* (1996), Barry Fraser's "Classroom Environment Instruments: Development, Validity and Applications" (1986) and Greg Thomas's "Conceptualization, Development and Validation of an Instrument for Investigating the Metacognitive Orientation of Science Classroom Learning Environments: The Metacognitive Orientation Learning Environment Scale – Science (MOLES-S)" (2003). All three works provided insight into the intricacies of these types of instruments and helped me to make an informed decision about my methodology.

Ultimately, I decided to move towards the open-ended survey design for a number of reasons: 1) I did not feel that I could enter into a full validation process of an instrument – such as the one I built based on Thomas' MOLES-S – without

that validation becoming the main focus of my research. 2) I was concerned that by designing the survey around a particular concept of professional identity, like Kelchtermans, I might be unintentionally privileging that concept and affecting the integrity of my participants' answers; and 3) In his 2004 review of the literature in Professional Identity studies, Beijaard et al conclude that "A structured though open method of data collection seems to be desirable. By using a 'structured' method, justice is done to what is contextually given and socially legitimated; by using an 'open' method, justice is done to the personal norms and values teachers themselves find important." (p. 125)

Part One: Survey Questions

The eight questions that make up part one appear below in Table One and I have highlighted the specific articles mentioned in my literature review that have most concretely shaped their form and structure, but they are also connected very profoundly to the larger texts that I explored in the latter part of my literature review, particularly the Alsup, Bracher, Britzman, Danielwicz and Tobin texts. In the data analysis, I briefly explore the rationale for each question and some of my anticipations and reservations with each question, prior to exploring the responses in depth.

Table One: Survey Questions and Connection to Literature

1. Why did you decide to become an English Language Arts teacher? (Beijaard, 1995)

2. What are the most difficult aspects of your job as an English Language Arts teacher? (Beijaard, 1995; Day et al,, 2006; Kelchtermans, 1993)

3. What are the most rewarding aspects of your job as an English Language Arts teacher?

(Beijaard, 1995; Day et al,, 2006; Kelchtermans, 1993)

4. What are some of the factors that you consider when you select literature to use with your classes? (Burn, 2007; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995: Frydaki & Mamoura, 2008)

5. Is there another teacher - For example, a colleague, a former teacher, or even a character from literature or film etc. - who has been particularly instructive in helping you establish your sense of yourself as an English Language Arts teacher? If so, please describe that person and his/her influence upon you. (Drake, 2001; Scherff & Hajs-Vaughn, 2008)

6. When you consider the many different roles that we assume as classroom teachers, are there one or two that you consider as being your most important roles? Why are these more important than others? (Beijaard, 1995; Kelchtermans, 1993; Frydaki and Mamoura, 2008)

7. Please describe your post-secondary education. (Degrees/diplomas earned, additional coursework etc.) and briefly describe your teaching career. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching English Language Arts? Do you teach other subjects? Etc. (Kelchtermans, 1993; Burn, 2007; Scherff & Hajs-Vaughn, 2008)

8. Please describe the school and community in which you teach, including an approximate population for both school and town/city. (Frydaki and Mamoura, 2008; Scherff & Hajs-Vaughn, 2008)

All questions were validated by a collection of experts including, but not limited to 1) Subject specialists ie. English Language Arts teachers who are not viable subjects for the study; that is, they have not marked diploma examinations 2) Graduate students familiar with research ethics and questions of methodology 3) Subject experts outside of the field of English Language Arts. I am fortunate that both my work within my school district as a subject area consultant and my graduate work provide me with access to colleagues in all three of these categories and I was also fortunate in receiving feedback from my various professors regarding the suitability of these questions. These many discussions helped shape and inform the questions that were eventually used in the study. I, of

course, rely on the basic honesty and integrity of my colleagues to answer these questions in good faith. I expect the teachers who respond to the survey to tell the truth to the best of their knowledge.

For this first part of the study, I planned to approach approximately seventy-five to one hundred high school English Language Arts teachers from school boards across the province of Alberta who had had at least one experience marking English 30-1 Diploma examinations. I ultimately sent initial contacts to 79 teachers and 56 of those teachers (71%) participated in part one of the study. As a few teachers wished to remain anonymous it is impossible to know exactly how many school boards are represented in the study, but of the participants who revealed their identity there are eleven boards represented, but a large percentage of the part one participants (32/58 or 55%) and part two participants (10/11 or 91%) teach in the school board I am employed with, a large urban board.

A teacher who is marking Alberta Diploma Examinations must have 1) a continuing contract 2) at least two years experience teaching ELA 30-1. My hope is that by narrowing the field to those with this particular experience with large scale assessment, I have established at least a semblance of a common base of experience and a common vocabulary. To illustrate why I see this as important I would like to provide some sense of the wide degree of latitude afforded English teachers in the way that they structure and deliver their course. Our curriculum is framed by five general outcomes that remain consistent through the ELA curriculum from grade one to twelve. Table two directly below illustrates these

five outcomes as presented in the Alberta Program of Studies for English Language Arts (2001):

Table Two

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to:

explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences

comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual and multimedia forms, and respond personally, critically and creatively

manage ideas and information

create oral, print, visual and multimedia texts, and enhance the clarity and artistry of communication

respect, support and collaborate with others.

With these as are our guiding principles we are then provided with a series of specific outcomes dependent on grade and subject level. The Alberta program of Studies has two streams -1 and -2, so students typically would follow one course sequence through their three high school grades (ie. ELA 10-1, 20-1, 30-1 or ELA 10-2, 20-2 and 30-2) although some students do switch streams for various reasons . There are approximately 150 specific outcomes at each level. Here is an example of a section of our curriculum featuring a few specific outcomes as presented in the Alberta Program of Studies for English Language Arts (2001):

Table Three: An Excerpt from General Outcome Area #2

ELA 10-1	ELA 20-1	ELA 30-1
2.1.2 Understand and interpret content		
a. use a variety of strategies to comprehend literature and other texts [for example, reading passages out loud, forming questions, making predictions, using context to determine the connotative meanings of words, using graphic organizers and making annotations], and develop strategies for close reading of literature in order to understand contextual elements [for example, understanding subtext]		
b. paraphrase a text's controlling idea, and identify supporting ideas and supporting details	b. describe how supporting ideas and supporting details strengthen a text's controlling idea	b. analyze the relationships among controlling ideas, supporting ideas and supporting details in a variety of texts
c. summarize the plot of a narrative, describe its setting and atmosphere, describe development of conflict, and identify theme	c. describe the relationships among plot, setting, character, atmosphere and theme when studying a narrative	c. assess the contributions of setting, plot, character and atmosphere to the development of theme when studying a narrative
d. describe the personality traits, motivations, attitudes, values and relationships of characters developed/persons presented in literature and other texts; and identify how the use of archetypes adds to an appreciation of text	d. compare the personality traits, roles, relationships, motivations, attitudes, values and archetypal qualities, when appropriate, of characters developed/persons presented in literature and other texts	d. analyze the personality traits, roles, relationships, motivations, attitudes and values of characters developed/persons presented in literature and other texts; and explain how the use of archetypes can contribute to the development of other textual elements, such as theme

Now, an English teacher looking at even this small slice of the curriculum would have to consider, at the very least:

1) How do these specific outcomes link to each other and to the previous and subsequent stages of the course sequence?
2) What would be the optimal way for a student to demonstrate achievement of these outcomes?
3) How does one differentiate between achievement levels of these specific outcomes?
4) What literature will be connected with this learning outcome?

The answers to every one of these questions, plus a host of others, could be completely different for every teacher in this province and yet our students could

still be working towards the same curricular outcomes. This illustrates at least a part of the need for this study as it is imperative that English teachers, when making these complicated decisions, are aware of the degree to which their personal and professional identity needs are influencing their choices. Using the criteria of marking diploma exams for participants at least narrows the scope somewhat in that it provides a degree of common ground that will allow me to see the profundity of differences across participants.

Research Procedure

I contacted all potential participants via email using existing contacts that I had gleaned through my own experience as a diploma examination marker, supervisor and standards confirmer. At the June 2009 marking session, I spoke to a number of participants about my plans for a research study and asked anyone who might be interested to provide me with their email contact information. I then applied for and secured approval for the ethical framework of my study both at the University and through the four largest school districts in the region. In my initial email to potential participants (see Appendix), I provided an overview of the study, and a detailed informed consent letter. I provided them with an opportunity to respond to the survey in one of three ways: 1) Online Survey via Survey Monkey 2) Response via email or 3) Hard Copy. The last question on the survey (the ninth question) is this: Would you be willing to participate in any further stages of this study? (A personal interview, further written responses, etc.) If so, please indicate your name and preferred mode of contact (email, phone etc.).

I sent the majority of my introductory emails during the week April 20th, 2010, with a few more that followed in the first week of May. I completed the data collection by July 1, 2010 and focused on data analysis of Part One into the fall of 2010.

Part Two: Interviews

The last question I asked all participants in Part One of my study was whether or not they would be willing to take part in the next stage of the study which would involve either a personal interview or a more extensive written response. Of the 56 participants in part one, 53 indicated that they would be willing to participate. In my introduction to this stage of the study, I delve into more details about my rationale for settling on six specific participants for these interviews.

Part Two Questions

In this section of the study, participants were asked to respond to eight specific discussion prompts as a part of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. We generally proceeded in the order shown below, although occasionally the ebbs and flows of the discussion had certain questions emerging sooner or later depending on context. I also made the decision to have all interview participants read the short story prompt (Prompt #3) after the interview and to reply via email, so as not to further interrupt the flow of discussion. The complete email that was sent to participants is also contained in my appendix, but here I offer a brief

overview of each question posed to participants in Part Two of the study. I go into more detail about the nature of each question – and the rationale for those questions – in my exploration of the data for this part of the study.

Table 4: Questions for Part Two

1) Participants were asked to watch an approximately thirteen minute clip of a teacher teaching a tenth grade English class, and comment on what they observed.

2) Participants were asked to watch a film clip from the film *The Class*, which features a teacher engaged in a discussion with his class.

3) Teachers were asked to read James Lansdun's "It's Beginning to Hurt" and comment on what factors would dictate whether or not they would teach the story.

Teachers were also asked to respond to the following questions:

4) In as much detail as possible, please describe the most positive experience in your teaching career.

5) In as much detail as possible, please describe the most negative experience in your teaching career.

6) a) Has your classroom practice changed since you started teaching? In what ways and what prompted these changes? b) Have you ever had a professional development experience that has changed something substantial in your professional practice and/or your perspective on teaching? Please describe the nature of this change

7) I have framed this study as an exploration of English Language Arts Teacher Professional Identity. Do you have any observations about the nature of your own professional identity? What sustains it? What threatens it? To what degree is it tied to your personal identity? Etc. Please feel free to discuss any aspect of your professional identity that you find thought-provoking.

8) You have recently been through a significant change in your professional circumstances. How has this change changed your perceptions and practices?

Much of my research base is comprised of studies that are wholly or partially informed by interviews. Alsup (2006), Britzman (1991) and Danielwicz (2001) all provide valuable insight into the process and were invaluable resources as I formed specific questions and constructed interview protocols. I am also an experienced International Baccalaureate Oral Examiner with many years experience interviewing students and I was able to draw on that experience as I attempted to make each discussion comfortable and intriguing for each participant. My hope was that these interviews would yield a breadth and depth that brings greater meaning to the initial survey data and takes us well beyond those initial questions and I also hoped that the discussion itself would be an interesting and meaningful experience for the participants. The data for Part One was collated and coded, and informed the shape and scope of questions for Part Two; and there was an emphasis on getting at aspects of Research Question #2 (How do English teachers' perceptions of their teaching lives – including, particularly, their relationships with students and colleagues, and their approach to preparation, instruction and assessment – reveal identity constructs and needs?)

This emphasis is essential because the focus of the first part of the study is very much on the first research question: What are the factors that influence the construction of a High School English Language Arts teacher's professional identity**?**

Reporting and Methodology (Revisited)

As I worked to develop the organizing framework of the study, I developed a very strong sense that the success or failure of this research project would largely hinge on some of the decisions I made about how I would report the findings. I wanted to ensure that the end product was reflective of the mixed-methods research and the varied theoretical bases that form the roots of the research and was an engaging reading experience for teachers in the field and also opened doors to further study and personal action. If no one reads this document – or at least, sections of it – besides a thesis review committee, it would be hard for me to see it as a document that is truly representative of my commitment to affect change. In regard to the latter, the Alsup (2006), Bracher (2006), Britzman (1991), Danielwicz (2001) and Tobin (1993) texts have provided viable working models of writing that is at once academic and accessible.

As I considered possible modes of inquiry and expression, I was focused on three distinct factors: First, I think it was apparent from the outset that large themes would likely develop in both stages of the project and I could certainly envision these themes forming the structural framework for conclusions and recommendations for further study. I also think such a framework would allow a

clearer sense of how the research at hand fits with existing models of identity such as those posited by Beijaard, Bracher and Keltchermanns. I was, however, concerned about operating in a reductionist model where complex and messy ideas were represented in simplified or one-dimensional forms. The large themes that do emerge from the data are clearly articulated, but they do not form the exoskeleton of the study.

Second, I also think it was clear that narratives would emerge whereby the participants in Part Two essentially had their stories play out in relation to the data from part one. I think case studies clearly emerged that formed the basis for the narrative structure of the study. Third, an autobiographical framing narrative does provide a narrative thread to link all aspects of the study. My story is playing out both through my relationships with the participants and our shared lived experience of teaching English. As I illustrated in my introduction, my location of inquiry is a substantial part of this research study and I was always aware of the power in using an autobiographical approach either as a frame or in conjunction with another mode of inquiry. Again, however, I had reservations about a study that would stay too deeply rooted in my own experience and perhaps blind me to some of my own identity issues.

Ultimately, I decided that there was the potential to utilize William Pinar's theory of Currere as a way of linking the various complex theoretical and empirical aspects of the study. Pinar's *What is Curriculum Theory?* (2004) offers a stirring call for teacher self-study, arguing that understanding our autobiographical situation is the base for any substantial action. I will admit to

being somewhat underwhelmed as I stood in the bookstore, waiting to purchase *What is Curriculum Theory?* for one of my first graduate courses. The monochrome cover combined with the minimalist title brought back memories of over-priced and underutilized texts from my undergraduate days. I feared that I was about to purchase "Curriculum Theory for Dummies": a bare bones primer of the field of study. These fears were soon allayed. The second chapter of *What is Curriculum Theory,* "Autobiography: A Revolutionary Act," is not only the seminal chapter in the text, but a fitting testament to the critical spirit Pinar brings to the field of study. In this chapter, Pinar introduces the concept of currere – an idea that he first presented in 1975 at the Annual Meeting of The American Research Association as "The Method of Currere"- , which provides the conceptual framework for the text as a whole. He posits currere as a method through which autobiography becomes self-actualizing and, ultimately, revolutionary. Pinar's most concise explication of the concept comes early in the chapter, when he states that "currere seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one's understanding of his or her life (and vice versa), and how both are imbricated in society, politics and culture." (p. 36) Pinar's reversion to the Latin roots of "curriculum" not only activates the concept by bringing it into the infinitive, but it also exemplifies the reverence for the specifics of language that Pinar displays throughout his text. Even in the definition quoted above, we see Pinar using a word – "imbricated" – that is probably most often used in regards to roof construction, but also has applications in fields as diverse as the visual arts and biology. While Pinar's writing itself may appear difficult

and abstract at first, I have come to view its challenges as more of an invitation into this “complicated conversation” of curriculum theory, a conversation that demands a degree of introspection and exploration. These two qualities, not surprisingly, are at the heart of the autobiographical impulse, and the four stages of currere that Pinar identifies similarly ask us to look inside even while we look beyond ourselves.

This dynamic between looking within and looking without is what Pinar explores in the four sections of the second chapter of his book. He uses a historical survey of African American autobiographical writing as a way of exploring the large-scale impact of autobiography, explaining how African American autobiography can not only fill in the gaps in an American historical discourse that has been largely the domain of white, privileged males, but also a way out of the “historical present,” a present that includes not only a continuing racial hegemony, but an educational one as well. Pinar’s contention that African American autobiography functions as the “cultural ‘unconscious’ of the nation” (p. 41) also serves to prefigure his exploration of the links between autobiography and psycho-analytic theory in the final two sections of the chapter. The essence of Pinar’s argument about the power of the autobiographical – through the process of currere – is contained in his contention, at nearly the exact centre of the chapter, that “autobiography may have more political potential, possibly more integrity, than running for state senate, signing a petition, even voting.” (p. 47)

I would suspect hyperbole in the above statement, were it not for my own very visceral reaction to what Pinar puts forth in this chapter. He identifies four

aspects of currere: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical. And when I first read his description of each aspect, I felt a tinge of recognition. I was particularly struck by what Pinar refers to as the " fictive representations" inherent in the progressive stage and, indeed, two of the writers that I feel the strongest emotional and intellectual bond with – James Joyce and Margaret Laurence – are writers who have turned to fiction to get to the heart of their lives. They both have created fictional works that serve as, in Laurence's words, "spiritual autobiography[ies]." (Dance on the Earth, 1989) The creative impulse at the heart of autobiography of any sort – the idea that we create ourselves through language – has been a particular interest of mine from early on in my academic career and it has direct implications for this study.

I realize now, however, that my sense of recognition upon reading the description of the four stages of currere was provoked by a much more straightforward reason: I had experienced all four stages of currere in an educational context, without, of course, ever even hearing of the word itself. About four years ago, I engaged in the complete restructuring of my assessment framework for my English classes. The impetus for this change was a lingering sense of dissatisfaction with the relationship that my students and I had with the Program of Studies and the often dangerous simplifying process of using a number –a mark – as the final word on student performance. To begin with, I had to enter into the regressive stage in which I took a hard look at my own past as an educator "to capture it as it was" (p. 36) in Pinar's words. I was able to confront all aspects of my professional practice, those that I cherished and those that I

wished to excise. I then moved to the progressive stage where it was necessary to look into the future to imagine what had not yet existed. Essentially, I needed to imagine an idealized assessment framework. In the analytical stage, it was actually necessary to bring together the past, present and the future, with the present functioning as a third space – to borrow a phrase from the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhahba – which became both an actual space in the classroom where this process played out and a liminal zone – Pinar's "subjective space of freedom" (36) - where the boundaries between past, present and future broke down. This analytic process ultimately led to synthesis; where the entire process became infused in my classroom practice. My assessment framework had become one with my classroom practice, my core beliefs and values, and my relationships with my students.

This process was much messier than it appears in the sentences above and space limitations prevent me from offering much more in the way of specific detail, but two of the main components of this assessment framework have names that metaphorically speak to the essence of currere; Windows Assignments and The Foundations Workshop. A Windows Assignment in my class is a relatively small assignment designed to allow students to demonstrate their progress in a discrete area of the course. The metaphoric name for the assignment is derived from one of the first assignments that I ask my students to complete. I ask them to go home that evening, find a window in their home and do the simplest of tasks: look out the window once when it is light outside and once when it is dark outside. When I ask them to consider how the two experiences differ, it never

takes very long for the students to recognize how the window in the daylight becomes a mirror in the night. This experience serves as the guiding metaphor for their work with literature, which should bring them to a better understanding both of themselves, but also of a world well beyond their immediate surroundings. Similarly, the Foundations Workshop offers a metaphor as a way into a better assessment relationship between students and teacher by allowing both parties to become active participants in creating the curricula at the heart of the course.

I began by noting some of my initial trepidation relating to Pinar's title *What is Curricular Theory?* In hindsight I find this reaction very telling. As a person who has spent the majority of his life in school – in one capacity or another – I would hate to hazard a guess as to how many times I have been asked – or worse, have asked – a question in which the answer was already presupposed. This is very much a part of what Pinar would term" the nightmare that is the present" (p. 62) in our current educational landscape. I can see now that Pinar's title, rather than offering a rhetorical question as prelude to the answers in his book, is actually an invitation – even a challenge – to his readers to create an answer that takes us beyond the limits of past scholarship. *What is Curricular Theory?* is not just a title, but an impetus to create an alternative to what currently exists and to become a true student of currere. It is a call for revolution, but also a call to embrace the creative impulse at the heart of all revolutions.

In their article "Currere to The Rescue: Teachers as 'Amateur Intellectuals' in a Knowledge Society" Kanu and Glor (2006) provide a concise overview of the four stages of currere:

> In the regressive moment one's lived experience becomes the data source. To generate data, one utilizes the psychoanalytic technique of free association to recall "the past and thereby enlarge and transform one's memory". Regression requires one to return to the past, "to recapture it as it was and as it hovers over the present" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520). In the progressive moment one looks toward what is not yet present, what is not yet the case, and imagines possible futures. The analytical moment involves a kind of phenomenological bracketing where one distances oneself from the past and asks: "How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both?" (p. 520). The synthetical moment brings it all together as one reenters the lived present and interrogates its meaning.

Currere will form the basic structure of my study and it is my hope that this process as much as the "product" of the study data itself, becomes the driving force for change that I see as being the ultimate measure of my work. My original intent was to do a mixed methods study involving part one and two of my study, as articulated above. This study would be driven by and ultimately, answer, my two research questions; but as I started to delve into the data from part one, I began to realize that I was much less interested in finding definitive answers to these questions than I was in considering how exploring these questions could ultimately trigger change. Currere provided a framework that allowed me to delve into these questions, but it prevented me from stopping there. Instead, it allowed

me to explore the complex realm of identity in the context of English teaching as a transformative process, rather than a static – if multi-faceted – entity. Ultimately, I realized that my two guiding research questions were really just stepping-stones to a larger question: How does an understanding of and engagement with our identity constructs allow us to be agents of change in education?

Ethical Concerns

In the initial stage of the research, participants were presented with eight open-ended questions. They could decide the degree of detail they would provide and, indeed, if they even wish to respond. It is possible that these questions could invite participants to delve into unsettling moments from their past, but they would remain in control of how far they wished to move in any specific direction. None of the participants expressed any degree of discomfort with the level of control they were afforded in the study.

For the second part of the study, only those who expressed a clear willingness to continue were contacted. The questions for that part of the study are more exploratory and open-ended but as per the first part of the study, participants had the ability to limit their responses, not respond and/or terminate the interview at their own discretion. I also entered into these interviews in the spirit of true discussion and was prepared to let the conversation go where the participants directed it rather than framing the entire process with my preconceived questions. My discussion prompts were a presence in the discussion,

but I believe that each one allowed participants the opportunity to take ownership of the process.

I was conscious, however, of the potential of delving into personally sensitive areas, although I do not believe that there was any more potential to identify such things than would exist in a casual conversation about teaching. If in the course of the study a participant had revealed themselves to be suffering some form of mental distress I would – after ensuring that the circumstances of the interview were not causing some temporary signs of distress – act as any caring human being would in such a situation, seeking medical attention if necessary. A phone was always available in all interview situations. There seemed to be little in the way of potentially harmful outcomes although I remained vigilant throughout the research process and fully conscious that any questions, however seemingly benign, would inevitably trigger a change in both the participants and the researcher. I am happy to report that as of this writing there have been no concerns that I have noticed or that have been voiced by the participants regarding their well-being in any stage of the study.

My only other concern in the ethical realm has to do with my prior relationships with participants. I am dealing with high school English teachers throughout the province of Alberta and in my work with the assessment branch of Alberta Education, my position as a teacher and department head at two of the largest high schools in the province and my current work as an English Language Arts consultant I have established working and collegial relationships with a large number of teachers including many of my participants. My concerns in this realm

are two-fold: I regularly speak at conferences and have published an occasional article primarily dealing with assessment issues in high school English. My thoughts about assessment and about English leadership are widely known and I did have a slight concern that a level of prior knowledge about my critical stance as a researcher could have an impact on the way participants answer questions. Also, because I have existing relationships with many participants that I hope will continue after my research work, I was also slightly concerned that some participants – particularly those in the second part of the study – would not be as forthcoming as they might be if I were a complete stranger. That sounds counter-intuitive – and I think it is probably equally true that some participants might be more forthcoming because they already know me – but I am sure we have all had experiences – perhaps on a plane or train – where we have spoken to complete strangers with a candor we may rarely approach with family and friends. To address both of these issues, I was upfront about my concerns both with my research participants and in reporting my data; and if, at any time, I had a sense that my relationship with a participant had affected the integrity of the data, I would have removed that data from the study and noted the exclusion in my final report. Fortunately, this was not necessary. In fact, as the discussions played out it became clear that when I was talking with any of the participants we were both comfortable and conscious in acknowledging our roles in each other's lived experiences as English teachers. Just as I invited these participants to share their experiences, they too invited me to share mine and the research site of these

discussions became a place where we explored our individual and collective autobiographies.

Contributions

In turning to Pinar's currere, I clearly have revolution in mind. I hope that the study can effect some change within the teaching profession, but I also think it has the potential to function on a smaller scale within the hearts and minds of my participants. The study has the potential to allow participants to clarify and better understand the unique challenges and joys of their professional lives. This may allow them to better design and benefit from their teaching experiences and their professional development activities, and ultimately, become agents of change and inspiration within their own professional contexts.

There has been relatively little written about subject specific identity formation among teachers – although there is promising work in the area of "signature pedagogies" – and very little written about the unique identity demands placed on English Language Arts teachers. I believe that this study will not only add much needed primary research to the field, but also provide a basis for much further study. Given the somewhat limited scope of the study, I see its true benefit as being the opening of doors rather than the closing of them. There are tantalizing suggestions stemming from this research, but I have resisted the urge to frame any findings as iron clad "conclusions." I also recognized fairly early on in the process that despite this limited scope, I would actually be collecting a significant amount of

data in both of the two sections of the study proper. Either one of these sections could stand alone as a research project in its own right, so in choosing to bring them together under the framework of currere, I am making a conscious decision to leave some roads untraveled here that I may be able to revisit at a later time.

I think that this research has the potential to offer much in terms of a better understanding of the role that subject specialty plays in identity formation for teachers. This has huge ramifications given the rapid pace of change in the current educational landscape. Teachers are being asked to adapt and change in ways that few of them could have imagined when they made the decision to become teachers. My hope is that this research might point to more thoughtful ways of approaching meaningful change in all dimensions of our teaching lives. There could potentially be ramifications stemming from this research regarding professional learning design for teachers and this is at the heart of all change initiatives in schools today.

My hope is that this study could open up the following realms of possibility: 1) A better understanding of professional identity could allow for teachers to become better advocates for themselves and their students by designing lessons and assessments that speak to the identity needs of students and teachers in recognition of the discursive nature teaching and learning. 2) More meaningful and productive professional learning experiences could emerge as we learn more about our identities. In my role as an English Language Arts

consultant I have occasion to design, deliver and attend a wide range of professional learning experiences and I see the full gamut of good and bad, but invariably, when I see something going wrong, it is often an identity issue masquerading as something else. This research has potential to bring this discourse to the forefront and allow us to plan for professional learning experiences that reflect our diverse identity needs, contributing to richer and more meaningful collaborative enterprises at a time where all professionals in Alberta high schools are expected to be parts of learning networks and/or professional learning communities. 3) As a number of the foundational texts for the study clearly articulate, there is a problem with the way that we work with our pre-service and beginning teachers. My hope is that this research can help us explore the interplay between our personal and professional identities and help us frame a more thoughtful and forward looking approach to teacher education. 4) I also think there is potential to address some of the pressing logistical issues that often have direct impact on our teaching selves. This study has the potential to better inform school districts and administrators regarding staffing issues that could emerge if identity issues are not addressed. How many long term disability cases in our schools are as much a matter of unfulfilled identity needs as they are medical issues? This study could at least provide a base for further study into that important question. 5) Finally, while the subjects and the focus of the study are linked to the realm of English Language Arts, this study has ramifications that go beyond our specific subject area. As I argue in the final stage of the study, what

we learn about English teaching here can also serve as a microcosm of some of the larger issues facing all teachers here in the beginning of the 21st century.

In my literature review, I pointed to Mark Bracher's *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, and Social Transformation* (2006) as being closest in spirit to the underlying beliefs and ideals in my study. While Bracher blends a multitude of theoretical frames in his book, his critical pedagogy roots are clearly the guiding force. His book is an argument for increased teacher attention to identity constructs both within them and within their classroom practice. He notes, "A fuller understanding of identity and its needs will thus enable us to become more effective facilitators of student learning and development, as well as social change, by increasing our understanding and sensitivity to our students' needs and resistances as well as our own" (Preface, XIII). Conversely,

> . . . an undeveloped, insecure identity interferes not only with learning, teaching, productivity, and personal well-being, but also with social harmony and justice, functioning as a root cause of social problems such as violent crime, group hatred, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and substance abuse. Education can reduce these behaviors – a function that is increasingly being called upon to assume – and also promote effective learning, teaching, and personal growth, by helping individuals incorporate more benign identity contents, integrate and coordinate those contents with each other, and develop more inclusive and flexible structures of identity . . . (Preface, XIII)

It is my deepest wish that this research can help some of my colleagues not only better reconcile their own personal identity structures with the demanding professional structures connected with teaching English Language Arts, but also allow them to be better advocates for the professionalism of teaching. It may seem odd to suggest that the professionalism of a role as historically indispensible as teaching should need advocacy, but one need do little more than read the editorial pages of any local paper when collective bargaining ensues to understand how tenuous our identity as professionals is in the world at large. In Garung et al's *Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind* (2009), the editors note that a "signature pedagogy's commitment to what it means to think like a disciplinary practitioner answers Shulman's call for professionalizing teaching, and fulfills the vision of teaching as a professional activity in which the classroom is a site where apprentices learn the ways of the profession." As much as I hope that participants in and readers of this study will benefit on a personal level, I also think it is imperative that they emerge as more cognizant and articulate advocates for the professional needs and ideals of our signature pedagogy.

We exist in a profession – teaching as a whole – that is always in flux. There is seemingly never an end to the next new wave of initiatives offering a panacea for all that ails the system. And yet, as Terry Carson notes in his article "Beyond Instrumentalism: The Significance of Teacher Identity in Educational Change" (2005):

> A discourse of "teacher development" has now largely replaced the concept of "curriculum implementation" in the educational change literature. But having now repositioned the teacher more appropriately as being the acting subject of change, the teacher development literature has exhibited a curious lack of interest in questions of identity. And yet it is precisely the identity of the teacher that is being re-negotiated in socially transformative educational reforms. (p. 6)

Back to My Location of Inquiry

In thinking about the identity issues that emerge in this study, I have had to confront my own position within this location of inquiry, and I have realized that it is largely a position of privilege and authority. Within the larger framework of education in Alberta I very much represent the voices that have held sway in educational discourses throughout this province, probably for as long as there has been an educational framework in Alberta. I am a white, Anglo-Saxon, male, who is firmly entrenched in the middle class. I suppose one could argue that my subject discipline is predominantly female – indeed, I remember one of my undergraduate professors commenting on "how nice it was to see a young man interested in English" – but I don't think I have ever walked into a room in an educational setting where I have considered myself to be at any kind of an inherent disadvantage. I have also had no shortage of opportunities for professional growth and development come my way even in the early stages of my career. Quite frankly, I have nothing standing in my way from not only theorizing about a better future for the profession, but also actually making that

theory reality. Positions of privilege are in many ways dangerous positions because they too often lead us to embrace security, rather than seek out the necessary and meaningful changes that make life worth living. It's easy to be content with being successful, but not so easy to use your success as a way of challenging the status quo. Tennessee Williams (1947), on the third anniversary of his first big success *The Glass Menagerie* and on the eve of the opening of perhaps his greatest play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, wrote an essay in the New York Times that he entitled "On a Streetcar Named Success," and it is the final words of this essay that have been ringing in my ears as I have been considering the influence of my specific position on my location of inquiry:

> Security is a kind of death, I think, and it can come to you in a storm of royalty checks beside a kidney-shaped pool in Beverly Hills or anywhere at all that is removed from the conditions that made you an artist, if that's what you are or were intended to be. Ask anyone who has experienced the kind of success I am talking about--What good is it? Perhaps to get an honest answer you will have to give him a shot of truth-serum but the word he will finally groan is unprintable in genteel publications.
>
> Then what is good? The obsessive interest in human affairs, plus a certain amount of compassion and moral conviction, that first made the experience of living something that must be translated into pigment or music or bodily movement or poetry or prose or anything that's dynamic and expressive--that's what's good for you

> if you're at all serious in your aims. William Saroyan wrote a great play on this theme, that purity of heart is the one success worth having. "In the time of your life--live!" That time is short and it doesn't return again. It is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, Loss, Loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition.

While risking sounding melodramatic, I truly believe that this research is my attempt to devote my heart to the opposition of all the forces that threaten to grind down and dispose of my colleagues, and myself, in a profession I have grown to love and lament.

Part Two: The Regressive Moment

Chapter 4: The Initial Survey

Introduction

In the regressive moment of currere, one's lived experience becomes the data source. Pinar envisions the process as a type of psycho-analytic free

association that allows us "to re-enter the past – and, to thereby enlarge –and transform – one's memory." (2004, p.36) The three verbs Pinar uses here – re-enter, enlarge and transform – reflect the dynamic nature of currere and serve, in the context of this research project, as a reminder that identity itself is, as Richard Jenkins writes, "a process – identification – not a thing" (2008, p. 5). This process involves an inherent paradox: to embrace an identity involves both a connection and a separation. As Stephanie Lawler notes "the root of the word identity is *idem* (same) from which we get 'identical'" (2008, p.2) and we can recognize intuitively that we identify with those who are like us in some way. We also recognize what we are not and this, too, becomes a significant part of our identity construction. As the anthropologist Michael Jackson notes "one's humanity is simultaneously shared and singular" (2002, p.142) and correspondingly, our sense of self cannot be fixed or stagnant. Jane Danielewicz reminds us that identities "are always in flux, always multiple and continually under construction" (2001, p.10) and if an identity necessarily involves the blurring of boundaries, time is no exception. In this regressive moment, Pinar envisions a return "to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present" (1976, p. 55). Who we once were informs our sense of who we are.

In the first part of this study I designed an open ended survey intended to surface some of the components that may make up a discrete English language Arts teacher identity. It was my hope that by asking teachers to reflect on their past and comment on their present circumstances they would begin to reveal some common dimensions of their teacher identity. This provided me with some

foundational knowledge about my participants and also helped shape my approach to the second part of the study. The eight questions that make up part one appear below and I have previously (Table One, Chapter Three) highlighted the specific articles mentioned in my literature review that have most concretely shaped their form and structure, but they are also connected very profoundly to the larger texts that I explored in the latter part of my literature review, particularly the Alsup (2006), Bracher (2006), Britzman (1991), Danielwicz (2001), and Tobin (2004) texts.

I spread word at a diploma exam marking session that I would be conducting this study and invited teachers present to participate in a survey. I sent out 79 initial email invitations to those teachers who had expressed interest in the study at the session (by providing me with their email addresses) and to others I knew personally. 68 participants started the survey and 56 actually completed it. 54 participants used the online survey and two responded by email. My best guess is that some of the gap between the number of those who started the survey and those who completed it can be explained by confusion over the electronic survey format. Some started at school and then completed at home, but when they entered the site from their home account, the site read them as a new participant. Thus, a participant may have actually started the survey twice, but only completed it once. There was also a district wide network failure in large urban board that was most heavily represented in the survey that unfortunately occurred on the afternoon when the initial invites were sent. It is possible that some participants began the survey and then, because of the disruption, simply did not return to it.

Once I had acquired all of the data for part one, I set out to code the data looking for major themes. I coded the data once by looking at the responses to each discrete item and then again by looking at each individual's response. What follows is a brief exploration of some of the major themes to emerge from each question, followed by a discussion of some of the big ideas that emerged across this stage of the project. In addition to the written exploration of each question, I also offer a visual representation of the data in the form of a table that shows the frequency and distribution of major themes. These themes did not present in isolation and, indeed, within some questions, individual respondents may have touched on two or many more of these themes in their responses. This was particularly true of the first four items that required participants to engage with both the past and the present.

The survey in part one is comprised of eight discrete questions, some with sub questions either directly embedded or implied within the main question stem. The first six questions are actually the survey proper, while the final two are demographic in nature, allowing me to provide some context for the study as a whole. My purpose in devising this part of the study was never to offer a comprehensive or even generalizable portrait of the English teachers in Alberta. I attempt to stay true to both the spirit and the method of currere by surfacing the memories and the current realities of the participants as part of a the larger transformative enterprise of the regressive moment, which then informs the progressive, analytic and synthetic moments; but I have generally avoided the temptation to look for causal connections between the demographic data and the

large themes that emerge. You will not, therefore, see me concluding that urban teachers are different than rural teachers in one way, or that a certain educational background results in a particular type of answer to a particular question. This is not to suggest that such connections are not present, interesting or even important; but they are not the guiding focus of the study, and I do not believe that the sample size, while substantial in most senses, provides the demographic breadth necessary to draw such conclusions. This part of the study has generated enough data to serve as a stand- alone study and at some point in the future I would welcome the opportunity to re-engage with this data as a discrete entity to delve into some of the subtleties and factor analysis that are simply beyond the scope of this study.

Demographics

The first six questions invite participants to embrace and expand their past, even while it looms over the present, to paraphrase William Pinar, and they are ordered and structured to tap into some of the ideas that emerged in my initial literature review. In my exploration of each of these questions, I explore the large themes that emerge and try to provide some sense of how these themes connect both with the literature and the other items, before offering some conclusions that will lead us directly to the progressive phase. Before exploring the six main questions (which were, indeed, in their own section of the survey entitled “Survey”), I will provide a brief overview of questions seven and eight as a way of providing some context for the core questions.

Participants were asked two questions at the end of the survey that asked them to briefly explain their teaching context: *Please describe your post-secondary education. (Degrees/diplomas earned, additional coursework etc.) and briefly describe your teaching career. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching English Language Arts? Do you teach other subjects? Etc.* This question, in keeping with the six that preceded it, did ask participants to delve into their past and to consider some very specific questions about their pre-, past and present teaching lives. Again, the work of Geert Kelchtermans (1993) informs this question as his work exploring teacher's career stories reflects the interplay between these temporal realms. The three book length studies of preservice teachers – Alsup's *Teacher Identity Discourses* (2006), Britzman's *Practice Makes Practice* (1991), Danielwicz's *Teaching Selves* (2001) – all offer explorations of how the beginning of a teaching career is informed. This question offers a space where teachers, while answering fairly straightforward demographic questions, are asked to consider their career stories within a linear context. These same stories, have begun to unspool, of course, in the six prior questions. Katherine Burn, in her article "Professional Knowledge and Identity in a Contested Discipline" (2007) also looks at student teachers and explores the concept of pedagogical content knowledge as "a construction, built from many different sorts of knowledge" (p. 447) including, but not limited to, one's academic background and teaching history. Lisa Scherff's (et al) "What We Know About English Language Arts Teachers" (2008) reviewed the data provided by over 600 secondary English teachers in two large surveys to establish some

basis for what we know about English Language Arts teachers and it inspired me to add this dimension to the study by collecting data that could inform further studies about the teachers in our field, but again, this was not the main focus of the study.

Table Five: Post Secondary Education

Degree (s) Held	Responses
BED	18
BED/BSC	1
BED/BA	18
BED/BA/MA	1
BED/BA/MED	5
BED/MED	4
BED/BA/MA/Other	2
BED/Chem Eng./MED/M Chem Eng	1
BED/More	2
BED/BA/MA/PHD	1
BA/MA	1

In Alberta, the Bachelor of Education degree is the standard academic entry point for the profession and only one of the participants in this study does not hold a BEd, although he does hold both a Bachelors and Masters Degree in English. All the other participants hold at least a BEd, although there is considerable variety as to when they obtained it. As evidenced by the responses to question one, some teachers were drawn to a teaching career very early on and entered the Education program right out of high school, while others came to it

after they had pursued other academic and/or career paths. 32% (18/56) of the participants held only a BEd, while the other 68% held at least one other academic degree. There was an intriguing range of academic experiences detailed in this section of the study, but the other dominant academic history other than the BEd was the BEd/ BA combination.

Table Six: Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Responses
0-5	3
6 - - 10	11
11- - 15	6
16 - - 20	13
21-25	8
26-30	3
31-35	5
35 +	2

In regard to years of experience as teachers, it is important to note that the very newest teachers were excluded from the study because of the criterion that all participants must have marked English Language Arts 30-1 examinations. There were still three participants in the very early stages (first five years) of their careers as well as two participants who had taught for over 35 years. There is a relatively equal distribution around the other five year markers used to differentiate experience, with noticeable bulges of teachers between the six- to-ten year and sixteen- to- twenty year ranges.

Table Seven: Do You Teach Other Subjects?

Teach Other Subjects	Responses

No	28
Yes	21

Please describe the school and community in which you teach, including an approximate population for both school and town/city. Does this specific teaching context affect any aspect of the way that you approach English Language Arts in your classroom?

Table Eight: Rural or Urban School

	School
URBAN	46
RURAL	10

Table Nine: School Population

	School Population
Less than 500	6
500 - 1000	5
1000 - 2000	22
2000 - 2500	16

While the there is a broad cross-province representation of participants throughout the study, the majority of participants are located in urban schools in relatively large high schools. Again, I resisted any pull toward generalizations about what teachers experience as a result of being either situated in an urban or rural school, or in a large school versus a small school. It is clear, however, that context does matter and one of the questions I asked in conjunction with this very specific placement within a school context was whether or not the teachers thought that this context did have an effect on their teaching circumstances. Eight of the fifty-six teachers either answered no or did not respond, but 48 of the 56 teachers (86%) indicated that their context did change the way that they approached English Language Arts in their classroom. A number of teachers cited either a lack of diversity or great diversity within their school context and wrote

of how this affected their roles as English teachers. Here are some representative examples:

- It is an extremely culturally diverse school with a great deal of immigrants (from Africa, China and the Middle East). This definitely affects how I teach - I want to be culturally sensitive, but at the same time be representative of the Canadian culture. English as a second language issues also arise and I do have to admit that I feel that my teacher training in this area is lacking.
- There is also a large cultural diversity represented. Absolutely this affects the way that I teach. Diversity of culture, religion, economics etc. has affected choice of literature, topics of discussion. As we rely so much on prior knowledge of students in ELA their experience is so important to what we do everyday.
- Further, this is a pretty homogenous population, which contains a handful of reserve students and a token black family. Teaching about "racism" is a hard sell as they don't truly have any way of challenging their beliefs.
- This context is very different from the schools I taught at for most of my career in that it is homogenous. I spent most of my career working with very diverse populations. My

challenge here was to get students to realize that their school is NOT a microcosm of the world they will live in.

- Because of the lack of cultural diversity, the milieu has pushed in a direction in which our literature promotes tolerance and awareness of different cultures and overall human diversity.
- There is a fair amount of wealth in this area, so many of my students are quite well off. We also have a number of Aboriginal students in our school, and many of them are not very wealthy. As a result, we have a very fragmented student body. I do have to be careful to sensitively address the cultural divide. We are still a conservative community as well, so I do have to tentatively approach literature that pushes the envelope.

Many of the responses were much more specific, focusing on unique aspects of the school and community culture.

Survey Questions

Question #1: Why did you decide to become an English Language Arts teacher?

There were 56 discrete responses to this question. Two participants ended up submitting the survey twice, but they were flagged as duplicates and discarded. This initial question is both the literal catalyst for engagement in the study - in that the responses to this question inevitably provide an autobiographical frame

for what is to follow – and an immersion into the regressive moment of currere, as participants are invited to return to a past before teaching to consider how that past lives on in the present. At the outset of his study of "Teachers' Prior Experiences and Actual Perceptions of Professional Identity," (1995) Douwe Beijaard builds on Kelchterman's work to conclude that "biographical perspective insight can be gained into the origin and development of teacher's practical knowledge." (1995, p. 1) Using a storyline method that asked participants to graphically represent their narrative beginning with the present, Beijaard tracked the positive, negative or stable slopes of individual narratives. Beijaard notes that one of the areas where stability storylines predominate are in regards to the subject teachers teach and this suggested to me that the roots of one's relationship with a subject specific identity, must lead us back to a time before one's professional career begins. If subject area informs stability in perception of teacher professional identity, this should not be confused with a lack of complexity. As Jane Danielewicz writes about her interviews with pre-service teachers, while participants had no problem engaging with the question of why they became teachers, neither did they, consciously or unconsciously, provide the whole story:

> The longer students talked about themselves as teachers, the more intricate, interconnected , even tangled their responses became. In analyzing the transcripts, I discovered that there was no easy way to categorize or reduce them into definitive answers. Such a

> process obscured the underlying architecture that resulted in each student's decision to teach. (2001, p. 38)

My experience working with this part one – and perhaps, even to a greater extent, the part two transcripts – mirrors Danielwicz's experiences; and while I have identified major themes that emerge within each question, it would be a mistake to view these themes as generalizable. Instead, they seem to function as thresholds that both invite and connect. These themes invariably connect to other themes both within and between discrete items. This initial question about the decision to become an English teacher becomes both a microcosm of this interactive process and a part of the framing narrative for each participant's experience of the study. As such, I spend more time grounding a discussion of the data in this question before moving on to a relatively brief consideration of each of the other items.

Table Ten: Why Did You Become an ELA Teacher?

Factor	**Responses**
Aptitude for English	3
Circumstance	10
Connections with People	11
Continuous Learning	4
Family Influence	9
Influential teachers	13
Not Sure	1
Passion for ELA	36
Passion for Teaching	10
Social Responsibility	8

Major Themes

As noted above, there were relatively few participants who saw this question as being one dimensional. While some were certainly more expansive than others, the majority – even in brief responses – indicated more than one reason for their career choice, or launched into detailed reflection on that aspect of their past.

Family Influence (9/56)

Not surprisingly, a number of participants (16%) mentioned that family had some influence on their decision to become a teacher. Of these nine participants, only two presented as the archetypical "teacher's kid." One recalls, "[B]oth my parents had teaching careers, and as a kid, I was always asking to help mark or set up bulletin boards or labs. Therefore, I was familiar with the profession, and I knew I'd enjoy it." The other's answer is twofold: "I was raised in a family of teachers, which provided me with my initial focus. My mom was a school librarian, which initially provoked my love of reading." Another cited her discussions with her older sister – who was a teacher – as a guiding force, while another mentioned an almost off-hand discussion with her mother, who asked her "What will you be when you grow up?" in her grade twelve year, as the spark that launched her career.

There were also four respondents who admitted that they initially resisted the call to become teachers because of parents who were in the profession. Two admit to saying that they would never become teachers because of parents who were. Another, who had an English teacher mother and a Social Studies teacher for a father recalls, "When I started University, I was angry with my mother, so I

focused more on History in the beginning. Over the course of my Bachelor's degree, I kept coming back to English courses and eventually it became my major. When I was done rebelling and accepted that I would be happy as a teacher, I could make English my major without having to take any more courses."

Finally, one participant offered this poetic reflection on the role of her parents in her eventual career choice:

> When I was a child, Friday nights were very special, as my family would head to the local library where I would explore the shelves of polished oak, then head home with my latest treasures, after a stop at the local grocery store for a treat. I think this is where my lifelong love of reading began. To this day I still associate the smell of furniture polish with reading. My father was a coal miner, who left school at fifteen, as did my mother; despite their limited formal education, they shared a love of reading and consequently books were always a part of my life.

This response reflects the most common type of hybrid response that participants provided to these questions, one that demonstrates both the profound effect of another person on their decision to become a teacher and their stated passion for, in most cases, ELA, but also for the teaching process. This participant also reflects the pull of narrative in answering this question as a great many of the respondents transformed their responses into a narrative.

Influential Teachers (13/56)

In addition to those who mentioned familial influences, there were also substantial numbers of participants (23%) who mentioned the influence of former teachers on their career choice. Of the thirteen participants who mentioned the influence of a former teacher, eleven identified a former English language arts teacher, with seven of those being high school English language arts teachers. One participant writes, “I was inspired by my senior high English teachers and I felt that I could instill a love for literature, as well” and another notes, “I had an amazing teacher who inspired me.” Interestingly, one respondent reflects on both good and bad influences as inspiring her decision to become an English teacher:

> My ELA teachers in grades 7, 8, 9, and 10 were positive inspiration for excellence in Language Arts. These teachers love English and the art of language. They also have (had) great compassion for their students and found ways to draw in even the most difficult individuals. My grade 11 and 12 experience demonstrated what ELA teachers should not be.

This response is, in some ways, a microcosm of the responses that dealt with influential teachers in that inspiration and compassion were key components in many of these responses, but there was also a real sense that these “good” teachers had something that other teachers were lacking. The participants remembered these teachers for very specific and idiosyncratic reasons and this has clearly established a model of a teacher who is unique.

Passion for ELA, Reading/Literature or Writing (36/56)

By far the most common theme to emerge was that of passion; passion for English, passion for reading and passion for writing. Well over half the participants mentioned one or more of these passions in their response. The word "love" features prominently in the responses and we see many variations referencing love or passion. The following three responses were all received within one 24 hour period early in the study: 1) "I loved reading as a child; books have been my best friend" 2) "I have a passion for literature and literary analysis." and 3) "I am passionate about literature." The same participant who reflected on how her grade eleven and twelve high school English experiences provided her with models that she did not want to emulate, further noted that "When I thought about the experience of students who didn't have the teachers with passion and love for ELA, I really felt sad for them and came to believe that no student should be taught by people who don't have passion for their subject. I liked other subjects, but have a passion for English; thus, I teach ELA." This response also echoes a type of social conscience that was an important dimension of the profession for a number of participants and emerged as a discrete category in itself.

Passion for Teaching (10/56)

Another ten respondents reflected on an innate, or developed, passion for the teaching process itself. One writes of her initial reluctance to enter into the teaching profession only to find that she "LOVED being a teacher." Another goes

even further back into her history, to recall “At a very young age I used to line up my dolls and bears, and various neighbourhood children in front of a rickety chalk board and “teach” by sharing the stories I had read. I suppose it was almost preordained that I would one day become a teacher.” This sense of teaching, and English teaching in particular, as a calling is strongly implied by many of those respondents who wrote of their passion for the literary dimensions (reading and writing) of the profession, but this was more explicit and direct in those teachers who expressed a passion for teaching itself. Two teachers cite very different circumstances in how they became a teacher, yet end their responses echoing each other when they wrote, respectively, “I don’t know if I decided, or if it decided for me” and “It feels more like English teaching decided on me.” The respondent referred to earlier who used capital letters to emphasize her love for teaching, ended her response succinctly by noting “I guess that’s why it’s a calling and not just a job.”

Social Responsibility (8/56)

There were also eight respondents who wrote with great conviction and purpose, and typically, at some length, about the sense of social responsibility that framed their understanding of themselves as English teaching professional. This included deeply personal connections, such as the participant who wrote of being bullied in high school. For her, English classes were

> “safe” places where [she] could use writing, speaking etc. , etc. to reflect upon events and even, perhaps, attempt to make sense of

> things that were happening. It allowed me to measure my reaction to friends and family in an environment that supported the process in which I need to engage.

Another takes a much broader, but no less personally powerful, perspective in stating: “I believe education is the foundation of democracy.” This same respondent later expands on this notion:

> I believe having the capacity to communicate creates the capacity of self-fulfillment in personal, professional and societal relationships and that every person should have the opportunity to be heard and valued. Teaching ELA really isn’t a job, it is a mission!

Outliers

This initial question in the survey hinges on one very large supposition: that participants have indeed *decided* to become English Language Arts teachers and perhaps an even larger supposition that they, indeed, define themselves as English Language Arts teachers. Of the 56 respondents only five participants challenged either of these assumptions. One offers a whimsical – even slightly sardonic – response: “Not really sure . . . temporary lapse of judgment, I’m sure.” This participant later notes how her music teacher father taught her “how to have a sense of humor and a personality in front of students” and this humor emerges in some of her other answers. Despite the fact that she is one of the younger participants in the study – only six years into her career – she evinces the world-

weariness of the seasoned veteran in her response to the second question about the challenges posed by English teaching, where she bluntly cites "Marking. And knowing the first time I teach a text the unit will be total garbage.": This is balanced, however, by her recognition – and embrace – of her role as "cheerleader" for her students and her revelation that she will be returning to school to do her Masters in the fall. She also, in contrast to her stated uncertainty, or perhaps, reticence, in this initial question responds to question five, regarding influences on her practice, by citing her father, her mentor teacher in her APT, and influential text on pedagogy (Harry Wong's *First Days of School*) and a teaching colleague as having profound effects on her practice. I highlight this response at the outset of my analysis in the hopes that it can serve as a bit of a theoretical touchstone as I proceed with my analysis. This is the one participant who essentially answers "I don't know" to this initial question, and yet, her response as a whole, while generally quite succinct and not nearly as expansive as many of her fellow participants, actually serves as a microcosm of many of the big ideas and questions that emerge throughout the study. If she is not clear about why she decided to become a teacher, she is certainly clear about who she is and what this means for her students: "I try to model how to be a well-spoken, confident young woman who is ok with being a total Shakespeare nerd, and that seems to be working out for me so far." In this statement we see a blurring of who the participant is as a person and who she is as a professional. In this case, the professional self could not exist without the personal self and this gets to the heart of what I am exploring in this study.

Of the four other respondents who essentially disavow a sense of ownership of the decision to become an English teacher, three of the participants see themselves as little more than victims of circumstance. One forcefully and succinctly states "I did not." In direct refutation to the question of why she decided to become an English Language Arts teacher, noting "It was a chance occurrence because I happened to have a broad literary /language background and [the school I teach at] at the time needed an IB world literature teacher." Similarly, two of the other participants echo a certain pragmatic serendipity in lieu of a true decision. One notes "English is the first job I received, and I've stuck with it. My first teachable is not a subject area in this province," while the other states, "I did not really decide, It was thrust upon me," later noting "I became an English teacher in my first school because that is what they needed" but she is clear that she does "not totally consider [herself] an English teacher." It is worth noting that all three of these teachers have educational backgrounds that do not include a major or minor in English in either a BEd or BA program.

The last of these four respondents actually sees himself as not being in control of his situation, but nonetheless affirms his perception of English teaching as a calling in the truest sense of the word:

> I'm not sure how much I decided to become an English teacher. I enjoy literature and am predisposed in the impenetrable bedrock (that I can't get at nor fly from) to explore what it means to be human and the purpose of life. It feels more like English teaching decided on me.

Not surprisingly, this participant's academic history reflects this sense of English as a calling as he holds both a BEd and a BA with majors in English.

Table Eleven: What are the most difficult aspects of your job as an English Language Arts teacher?

Factors	**Responses**
Administrivia	8
Class Size	7
Classroom management	1
Creating relevance/Motivation	9
External Authority (Admin, District, Province)	15
Isolation	3
Keeping Current	6
Parents	1
Results Driven	4
Split Classes	2
Student Skill Set	6
Teaching Writing	3
Time	41

My decision to present this as a second question was not entered into lightly. The initial question situated participants squarely in the past and encouraged many participants to write of their most cherished ideals and also reveal the deep emotional and intellectual bonds that they have with their chosen

profession. With this question about the challenges, the participants are, of course, not leaving the past, but they are being confronted with both their past and present circumstances. The importance of "passion" for various dimensions of the teaching enterprise and strong emotional connection to the profession emerged through the responses to the initial question. As Day (et al) (2006) notes, " A significant and ongoing part of being a teacher . . . is the experiencing and management of strong emotions" (12) and this question, as it emerges from the previous question and anticipates the subsequent question relating to "rewarding aspects" surfaces a wide variety of contrasting emotions.

As with the previous question, there were very few one dimensional answers and participants typically listed more than one specific challenge. In Day's (et al) exploration of the personal and professional lives of teachers, the authors note that negative emotions can present as "frustration, anger exacerbated by tiredness, stress and students' misbehavior; anxiety because of the complexity of the job; guilt, sadness, blame and shame at not being able to achieve ideals or targets" (p. 12) and in these responses, the concept of "difficult aspects" of the job of teaching high school English, did surface this same emotional core.

There was a wide range of specific challenges articulated, many of them contextual in nature, but there was an overwhelming constant that emerged through multi-faceted reflections on the role of time – or lack of time – in our teaching lives. One of the five factors of professional identity posited by Gert Kelchterman's (1993) is job motivation. In his study of teachers' career stories he

notes that “when a decrease in job motivation was reported, it almost always had to do with the increasing demands teachers experience during the years” (p. 449).

Time

I struggled with the decision to consider time as a singular concept as it manifested as a multi-dimensional challenge, but it was clearly the pervasive concept to emerge from this question. The dominant three types of responses to emerge focused on these three things , in descending order 1) Time 2) External Pressures on Practice and 3) Creating Relevance and Motivation in students. Most of the other specific concepts cited could fit under one or more of these broad headings and time, again, presents as an overarching theme. Teachers noted, for example, the challenge of keeping up on all the administrative work associated with teaching (entering grades, answering emails etc), dealing with often daunting class sizes and the struggle to keep current in a text based profession. All of these factors reflect an underlying concern with diminishing time resources. Teachers reflected on the lack of time as a general, pervasive phenomenon and this participant’s response is representative, both in terms of highlighting the complexity of the concept of time, but also in her resignation to the fact that this is – and perhaps will always be – a part of her teaching life:

> Time. There is never enough. To cope with the increasing demands of the occupation, to plan adequately, to provide meaningful feedback, to maintain some kind of balance in life requires more than 24 hours in a day! But, that is a rather all-encompassing issue,

> so I will try to identify a few more specific aspects relating to my own context and teaching assignment.

This teacher then goes on to identify six other discrete "difficulties" that are separate (yet, always connected) from the time dilemma. Other teachers were more pointed in focusing on specific manifestations of their lack of time, often echoing this teacher's concern about work/life balance and planning time. By far the dominant motif to emerge in this question was a concern with both the time commitment and the emotional investment involved in marking student papers. "Marking" is the colloquial term referenced most often when referring to the grading/evaluating of student written work. The following responses will provide a sense of both the tone and the tenor of the responses that dealt with marking:

- Marking - finding time to keep up with the marking! I want to give students individual feedback and immediate feedback so as to help them improve, but I just don't seem to be able to keep up!
- Marking: For students to become better writers, I believe they need to write a lot, and I feel that it is my responsibility to at least read everything they've written. I also usually do a detailed analysis of lengthier pieces. When I have two or three full classes of English 30-1, it can be onerous to keep up with the workload. Using assessment for learning strategies, I have reduced the amount of writing coming in a little, but there is still a lot to mark.
- Marking, Marking, Marking....

- Marking. To be able to improve as an English teacher, especially with technology and new material, it's very hard to keep on either.
- The marking.
- The marking; it is one of the main reasons that I am not currently teaching English. Not that my overall marking load has really decreased but it was one of my main considerations when my administration asked for me to shift my focus to Social Studies in my school.
- The marking is never finished--one set goes back to the students and two more come in.
- Definitely marking. In fact anything to do with numeric assessment, considering the emphasis placed on marks as judgments and often fatalistically defining scars for so many students.
- The hours and hours of marking. I would happily spend those hours planning and preparing but the tedium and loss of personal time combined is sometimes too much.
- Bar none, marking. I hate and resent the amount of marking I feel compelled to do. Hate it. I hate the amount of time it takes, and I hate disappointing the students if they don't do well.

In this sampling alone, we can see what a complex concept this seemingly simple term represents. There are many different dimensions to the issue of marking. Much of the discourse revolves around time and that often becomes the unifying thread, particularly because a lack of time seems to frame so many other aspects of the educational world. The time it takes to mark

assignments naturally takes away from other aspects of our personal and professional lives, such as, to cite just two examples, time to spend with family and friends and time to plan engaging lessons for students. A participant considers this to be a question of

> Balance. I think that as teachers of ELA there are so many balls in the air in so many areas of what it means to be an ELA teacher. Personal life vs. work life: (not exclusive to ELA, but certainly an issue) This work could expand to take up my whole life. I could spend every night marking and every minute of every day working to better my students...but I cannot

The word "balance" comes up frequently in the discourse associated with marking. When we talk about marking, however, we are also talking about other dimensions of our emotional and intellectual lives as teachers. One teacher speaks of the responsibility she feels towards students and the marks – including both grades and comments – become the space where we and our students confront this responsibility.

External Factors

I use the term external here as an overarching concept to refer to those things that are outside the internal world of one's classroom, but also, as we will see, to how those things affect our internal conception of our role as English teacher. This external world includes colleagues and particularly, supervisors and some of the respondents view this in fairly practical and pragmatic terms: "The

most difficult part of my job is that administrators often do not understand the complexities of the job and put too many students in my class." Another respondent reflects on "Administrators who may have limited vision, experience with or understanding of what English teachers do."Another expands this to include the pressures exerted by parents and focuses on the emotional toll – the stress – this creates: I rarely find students or teaching difficult; the parents' expectations and administration's demands [are] the most stressful."

Others, however, see more shades of gray. One participant's response frames this in relational terms by discussing trust:

> I used to think it was the politics behind the job, especially being that there seem to be countless tiers of superiority everywhere I look. Now, I believe it is the lack of trust from those upper tiers, lack of trust that the lower cogs are doing everything they're meant to do. And, when they say they need support the first question is not "how can I help?", but "have you exhausted all of your tools?" Regardless, the most difficult aspect of my job has very little to do with English Language Arts.

Another participant goes even broader in scope and sees some of these external pressures as being indicative of larger concerns about the educational enterprise:

> "Leadership". Sometimes the messages from leadership suggests that they know little about what I do and do not share my expertise yet they often bring very generic one-size-fits-all "instructional" strategies that are seen as the latest trend in "engagement" or

> "literacy" "UBD" or whatever and they want us to adopt these practices into our classrooms. I am frustrated by how anti-intellectual the educational community has become. Some administrators and department heads throw around the phrase "research based" as if it is all the justification they need to support an idea; little if any time is spent in applying critical judgment to the actual research that was done in the area. . . . Leadership often appears to be no longer based on expertise, knowledge, experience, and passion for teaching. Rather than making progress we seem to be stuck or even worse, we are moving backwards as a community of educators.

One participant frames such external factors through the broad term of "Educational Initiatives" noting,

> Educational Initiatives: I am currently facing a very strong push toward serious integration of Mac technology and a host of new assessment strategies. In addition, new trends are also gaining momentum in my area. Generally speaking, my district is very focused on being at the forefront of new methods in education. The way that I teach English works for my students and for me; however, I find myself trying to preserve the integrity of my tried and true methods while integrating the newest pedagogical ideas. There is definitely merit to these ideas, but the frequency and speed with which they come down to the classroom sometimes

> causes me to have to manipulate strategies I know are effective as they are, and I don’t think the result is always better.

Another participant is more philosophical and objects to the ideological infringements on her professional autonomy:

> Imposition of pedagogical models and insistence on applying pedagogical approaches and practices that go against philosophical beliefs and values I hold dear. For example: placing assessment before instruction, 'engineering understanding,' and de-emphasizing the role of spontaneous discovery and creation of knowledge in the learning process. Generally speaking, thinking of education as a 'business.' The 'mechanization' / standardization of learning is an aspect that annoys me tremendously. The concept of 'social engineering' (and seeing pedagogy as a tool of 'designing' particular types of individuals) I don't fully agree with. The metaphor is cold and uninviting.

The curriculum and particularly, the role of standardized testing is also noted as an external factor that impinges on respondent’s sense of efficacy, and, ultimately, self:

> I find the "measuring yardstick" of diploma exams and the like difficult to fathom. Running schools as businesses means that our students' emotional, physical and social needs cannot be nurtured. Given the very nature of an English class, our students bring so much more than just their intellectual capabilities to our

> classrooms. How is it even possible to measure different students, who bring different life experiences "to the table," with STANDARDIZED testing? It probably goes without saying that the obstructions of insufficient government funding, large class sizes, lack of resources and the large marking load do not allow me to be the teacher I WANT to be.

Another decries the “difficulties of high stakes testing, accountability and results driven assessment practices that are found within my school. Yet another speaks to the systemic failure engendered by such concerns: “As well, there is an inordinate pressure on teachers to have all kids pass, to meet statistical expectations to ensure schools receive funding. The very open and wide- ranging curriculum is also noted as an external pressure. Teachers clearly embrace the autonomy that the curriculum affords, but are cognizant of the fact that it asks much of us as professionals, as we need to create rather than simply respond.

The Students

A number of participants also noted that the very nature of their students – and some saw this as changing, and others as remaining consistent – posed inherent dilemmas in their teaching lives. This response is perhaps, representative:

> I find it difficult to motivate students who don't have an intrinsic respect for literature. With a great focus on science and math, many students think of English study as a class they have to simply

> get through. English study is completely cumulative and students who have no foundation in literature see ELA failure on a daily basis.

Another participant notes that "students are very product oriented, which makes the study of language and writing challenging: where is the product (or what is the value of the product without the process)?" This speaks to an inherent dilemma involved in teaching a process based curriculum within a larger assessment framework of grades and large scale testing that does, ultimately, demand a product.

A participant wrote about the challenge of differentiating for classes that feature a range of skill sets:

> It is also hard to create reading experiences that are differentiated enough to allow a struggling reader grow at an appropriate level. Reading material is always either too high or too low. The amount of work necessary to get a struggling reader or writer to raise their ability level, even marginally, seems too difficult and time consuming during a normal year or in a traditional setting.

Another commented on how different beliefs and values about the type of texts that matter can complicate the job of the English teacher: "Trying to teach a love of literature to students who do not read, but find meaning in playing games on laptops." All of these responses provide insight into just how complex and multi-

faceted the challenges are when you teach English language arts. This also provided important context for considering the responses to the next question.

Table Twelve: What are the most rewarding aspects of your job as an English Language Arts teacher?

Factors	Responses
Collaboration	2
Connection with Students	53
Freedom and Flexibility	3
Interacting with Texts	4

When the question shifted participants' thinking from difficulties to rewards, the answers were no less passionate or complex, but there were clearly less broad overarching categories that emerged and this was largely a result of one strongly dominant factor: Connections with students. 95% of participants wrote that their connection with students was one of the things they found most rewarding in their experience as English teachers.

Here are some of the most representative responses that emerged from this question:

- Students - that light that goes on when, for them, the world unfolds as it never has before.
- Seeing the "A-HA" moment when a class or an individual "gets" the text studied. having reluctant readers say that the text studied was "pretty good", which is usually representative of high praise, indeed. Having kids come back after high school and say that they really felt prepared for University English, or having kids say "you are a good teacher"--although this is true across all subjects.

- Bringing great literature to students and have them appreciate the text. Students, through representation, also show some deep understanding of literature that is profound, at times. Over the years, some students have kept in touch as I have done something to touch their lives –that is rewarding – knowing after graduation, that you had some kind of positive influence.
- Without a shadow of a doubt, the joys of teaching English trump its difficulties and drains. Primary amongst those joys is the pure adrenalin rush of a meaningful conversation with young, bright scholars (at all levels of learning). Further, it is deeply rewarding to read their reflections and realize that the course matters to them; that I matter to them.
- I LOVE being in the classroom, chatting with the kids, talking about characters from literature as if they were real people. I love feeling as if I am helping students figure out who they are, what they think, and why they feel the way they do. I love when they laugh, or cry, or get angry about something they've read or viewed.
- When students realize that they can play with language and communicate their thoughts in the way that best suits them, I'm inspired.
- When the light goes on...when we have an amazing debate over Hamlet's struggle or Willy's anguish...when a poem brings tears to a student's eyes...when a student says "I can never watch a film/commercial/TV show again without noticing camera angles!"

- When the light comes on...when a student cries during a piece of literature...when we have a heated debate over Hamlet's decision or Willy's anguish, and the bell rings and nobody leaves... when a student complains that he can never watch a film/commercial/sitcom again without noticing camera angles or colour...
- The most rewarding aspect of my job is my interaction with students whether that be on a casual basis ("Hi! How's it going?") or in the classroom in a more formal way. Seeing students make leaps of understanding or produce a pieces of work beyond what they had done before is a delight. As well, working with committed, energetic, and creative comrades in the English teaching profession is a bonus.
- We are fortunate as English teachers to be able to communicate with our students on a different level. We can bond with them so much more easily than the other core subjects can. It is so common to hear students throughout the school proclaim that their favourite class is English and that is because of the flexibility in our programs and personalities.
- Connections with students. I truly believe that we, as teachers of ELA, have the potential to connect with students on a level that is untouched by almost any other adult in a school. This connection is what makes our jobs so rewarding. In a two week period I have had a student ask me if I would be willing to supply him with a place to live as he was being evicted...and another student confide in me that she was getting kicked out of home and needed some guidance on what her next steps should be.

This has nothing to do with *Hamlet*...but somehow our exploration of *Hamlet* brought these students to a point of feeling comfortable with me to discuss these two major issues in their lives. Though I don't hope for this particular type of connection (exactly) with all students, I do believe that the connections I make are what brings me back day after day, and not just brings me back, but makes me excited to come back.

- I love that I get to talk with students about life and about the things that create both universal and individual experiences. I love that I get to talk with young people about empathy and motivation. There is no other subject I would teach--I love teaching English.
- Opening students' eyes; seeing lights go on and hearing them extol the virtues of *Hamlet*.
- Looking into the eyes of students who understand the concepts I teach, and who feel these things matter--and knowing I have had something to do with making this happen.
- When they get that 'this' is life...that I could stand before them with my own stories - but that it would be too painful because we all have tragedy and sorrow - that what we do constitutes the very development of who they are as people - young adults...that the thoughts we have presently- generations before have endured or attempted to explain...and that regardless of social mileu - time - all human emotion has been and will always be...When they return and say - Thank You. When they clamour into class because they want to be first in line ...for the role of

Stanley...when they discuss after class... when they debate the reasons for a character... when they recognize themselves or their families...epiphanic moments...tears at the end of a play...real emotion and the comfortability to express themselves... when they learn catharsis and pathos..."priceless"

- My great days are the ones where I am able to forge connections with students, where I am able to inspire, enlighten, or merely introduce an idea to a welcoming individual. Realizing that, through all the hard work I have put in, students come to trust me with not only their High School education but often with events outside of school as well, is very rewarding; we are all here because we want to make a difference and when we do, it is a good feeling.
- When a student "gets it!" One comment made by a former student stands out in particular. After stating that she felt that I was by far the hardest marker she had ever encountered and that I gave her the most work out of any course, she stated that as a result of my course she now looked at people differently and she "read" things in the world differently. I tell students outright that I do not care if they remember when Shakespeare was born or what school Holden Caufield attended--what I care is that they can enter into the experience of literature and that they can in turn use their reading to inform and question their interpretations of the world around. The growth in a student. Few things are more rewarding that seeing a student come into a course struggling for whatever reason,

seeing that same student undergo a remarkable transformation and experience success, and thinking "I had a hand in that."

I present this representative sampling – approximately a third of the responses – in succession to demonstrate how closely aligned the responses are. There are clear echoes of the concept of passion that emerged so clearly in the responses to the first question about why one became an English teacher. In that first question that sense of passion was most often closely aligned to a teachers' personal relationships, their relationship with literature and their sense of purpose. In this question all three of these factors are situated in the student/teacher relationship. If there is a dominant metaphor to emerge it is that of a light turning on, with a number of teachers using that specific image, while others refer to such things as the "Aha moment." It is clear that the participants are engaging with the idea of themselves as the source of the light, but they are also clearly drawn to the light itself that emerges from their students. It is also very clear from these responses that a sense of recognition matters to these teachers. That recognition may be explicit – as in a student actually saying that one is a "good" teacher – but it also is implicit in recognizing that the engagement with literature and with the teacher as human being has come to matter to these young people.

Table Thirteen: What are some of the factors that you consider when you select literature to use with your classes?

Factors	Responses
Availability	5

Colleague Recommendation	1
Community Standards	8
Curriculum	3
Establishing Balance	4
Large Scale Assessment	10
Length	2
Resources	5
Student needs	39
Teacher Interest	22

In our program of studies, ELA teachers are guided by five general and approximately 150 specific curricular outcomes for each discrete subject. They are also responsible for choosing the texts that frame their students' learning experiences. The parameters of these textual decisions are neatly laid out in this chart from the front matter of the English Language Arts high school program of studies (2001):

Table Fourteen: Alberta Education Texts Studied Chart

STUDENTS WILL STUDY ORAL, PRINT, VISUAL AND MULTIMEDIA TEXTS

<table>
<tr><th></th><th></th><th>ELA 10-1</th><th>ELA 20-1</th><th>ELA 30-1</th><th>ELA 10-2</th><th>ELA 20-2</th><th>ELA 30-2</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">EXTENDED TEXTS</td><td>Novel</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td>Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td>Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Book-length Nonfiction</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feature Film</td><td>Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Modern Play</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td>Encouraged</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td><td rowspan="2">1 of the 2 Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Shakespearean Play</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">SHORTER TEXTS</td><td>Poetry (including song)</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Short Story</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Visual and Multimedia Text★</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Essay</td><td>Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>Encouraged</td><td>Encouraged</td><td>Required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Popular Nonfiction★★</td><td>Encouraged</td><td>Encouraged</td><td>Required</td><td>Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td><td>A Variety Required</td></tr>
</table>

★ Visual and Multimedia Text includes short films, video clips and photographs.

★★ Popular Nonfiction includes news stories, feature articles, reviews, interviews and other forms of informative and persuasive text, including technical writing.

CANADIAN LITERATURE REQUIREMENTS: In each senior high school English language arts course, it is expected that a significant proportion of texts that students study will be Canadian texts. The required minimum proportion of Canadian texts studied is one third of all texts studied in each course. Teachers are encouraged to select Canadian texts for study whenever possible and appropriate.

There is only one author cited by name – and, in two courses, he is required to be studied – and that is William Shakespeare. There is also a corresponding collection of suggested and approved texts for each course level that is drawn upon to a greater or lesser extent depending on teacher, school and district practice. I recently had a conversation with a teacher at a small, rural school who was shocked to find out that the suggested list was not in fact the

mandated list. Her principal had told her that she could only teach from texts that appeared on that relatively narrow list. The other extreme of that would be teachers, including some of the participants in this study, who teach virtually nothing that appears on the suggested text list. There is tremendous latitude given to individual teachers to make decisions about how they use texts to support their students in achieving the curricular outcomes. This question asked teachers to focus in on some of the primary deciding factors when making these decisions. As with all of the questions in this section of the study, very few of the answers were one dimensional and many participants listed several – occasionally, conflicting – factors that they weighed when considering the texts to choose for their classroom.

This participant's response actually encapsulated many of the major ideas that emerged throughout the responses, by providing a list of the key factors ranging from the pragmatic to the ideological:

> Availability--do we have enough in book room? Length--especially in non-academic courses or time restraints. Parental input/concerns for controversial texts (*Catcher In The Rye*, eg.) Did I enjoy reading this as a kid? Did other classes/groups enjoy it? Did I enjoy reading it as an adult? Will the gender composition of the class affect the enjoyment of the text? Do I "have to" teach this genre? Have I taught it before/do I have time to prep a new text?

The three dominant responses were not surprising. Nearly 70% of the participants (39/56) indicated that their interests and passions were a major deciding factor in their decisions, with many participants bringing this question back to the concept of passion and inspiration. Many participants echoed some variation of the idea that they cannot expect students to be passionate or excited about works that they do not feel passion and excitement for. A slightly smaller percentage 39% (22/56) mentioned framing specific works to specific student needs and another sizable percentage 18% (10/56) mentioned the looming presence of the Alberta diploma exam. In regard to this last factor, it should be noted that all of the participants are experienced diploma exam markers who know the exams and have internalized the process well enough that they may not see themselves as consciously considering the exam when they choose literature.

Table Fifteen: Is there another person- for example, a colleague, a former teacher, a family member, or even a character from literature or film etc. – who has been particularly instructive in helping you establish your sense of yourself as an English language Arts teacher? If so, please describe that person and his/her influence upon you.

Other Person	Responses
Colleague	28
ELA Teacher	8
Family	10
Fictional Character	5
No One Person	6

Other Teacher	5
Published Author	5
Spiritual Advisor	1
University Prof	9
Writing Contest	1

This question is an extension of the opening question of the survey that asks participants to consider their reasons for becoming a teacher. In asking that previous question at the beginning of the survey, I invited them to return to a past before they had "officially" become teachers, but of course, once we have become a teacher, we are still becoming a teacher and this question takes them into different areas of time and space. It also frames those dimensions in the context of relationships and interestingly, no participant rejected the notion that other people have contributed to who they are as a professional, although six were uncertain about identifying only one person. As one such teacher noted: "Not one individual I can point to: I think I have become the product of many influences." Another took this a step further, by acknowledging that who we are – or see ourselves as – at any given moment, may influence who we allow to become an influence on us:

> I don't think there is one particular person who has influenced me; rather, I believe I am what I am because of a collection of personalities and ideologies that mesh with my belief system and personality." I have spent my whole life trying to become myself. That is part of my relationship with my parents, but also my desire

> to become an authentic person. The subject/object relationship described by Freire is a good way to identify this. I want to be a subject not an object.

Not surprisingly given the close connections to the first question in the survey, a number of respondents wrote about the influence of teachers – including former ELA teachers, teachers of other subjects and university professors – on their sense of self. There were also, interestingly, a number of participants who considered published authors and/or fictional characters to be substantial influences on their teaching selves. One participant mentioned Robin Williams' portrayal of Mr. John Keating in Dead Poets Society – an iconic teaching film figure that would resonate for the majority of participants who were either close to embarking on or already immersed in their teaching careers when the film was released in 1989. He certainly captures the image of the passionate, devoted and revered teacher that we also see emerging in some of the earlier questions in this survey. Interestingly enough, however, he is also very clearly a one man show. His interactions with colleagues in the film are either outright confrontational or at least, framed by his role as an outsider in the oppressive culture of the school depicted in the film. In the responses to this question, conversely, a large number of respondents - 28/56 (50%) - cited a colleague as a guiding force in their professional life.

Table Sixteen: When you consider the many different roles that we assume as classroom teachers, are there one or two that you consider to be your most important roles? Why are these more important than others?

Most Important Role?	Responses
Cheerleader	10
Communicator	4
Expert	2
Facilitator	7
Guide/Coach	5
Inspire	2
Mentor	19
No One Role	1
Parent	6
Performer	10
Role Model	1
Writing Instructor	12

In posing this question, I operate from the assumption that our role as English teachers is necessarily multi-faceted and by asking teachers to make a decision about the primacy of certain roles, I force them to either accept this assumption or reject it. Few of the respondents were able to settle on one distinct role without at least qualifying the response by exploring – and sometimes rejecting – other roles. The charts above represent the frequency that roles were mentioned. The one respondent who shows the most discomfort with the question displays the tension that being confronted with such a choice can entail:

> I have to admit that this question frustrates me on many levels. I loathe the idea of selecting one role as being more important than any other aside from saying that to teach is the role that is most

> important (to teach meaning a collection of all of these other "roles") I believe that to distinguish different roles and place extra merit on any one would diminish the rest. My knowledge of the word teach means all of these roles without being able to exclude any of its parts. Now that I have said that, I can say that the connections that we make with students and between students and literature often stems from our ability to illustrate and communicate verisimilitude; this is often the key to all that we do. In short...we act as GUIDES though the intangibles about the human experience.

Interestingly, another teacher who begins by rejecting many of the roles she may be expected to take on, finds herself moving to the idea of a guide, as well:

> I would say the most important role for me is that of an adult human being. I don't see myself as a performer. I also don't see myself as a writing instructor. Sometimes, but not always, I am a literary critic, but this is not a role I frequently resort to. The level of high school literary studies is way below a conversation I would have with a professional literary critic, though I do offer, once in a while, a simplified version of literary theory to my students. I think the relationship I strive to create is similar to that between a zen master and a zen disciple: not a guru, but a "guide." I would use an analogy: last year . . . I visited a cave which had ancient paintings. We had a guide, the person who knew like the back of

> his hand the tunnels, and the paths, and the different formations that were of interest. He also had a torchlight to point to inaccessible to the eye beautiful patterns, either because they were far above our heads, or because they were on paths dangerous and inaccessible to tourists. This year, on several occasions I have thought of myself as this 'guide' --- I can only show a way, but cannot dictate what my students will see or experience once they take the journey into the cave.

Yet another participant, after noting how challenging the question is, settles on the idea of “a guide” and then explores how that simple term encompasses a range of other roles:

> This is a really tough question. I like to think of myself as a guide, pointing the way and drawing attention to some of the highlights along the way and an instigator, provoking/inciting change, discussion, love of literature, learning, discovery, and understanding. I guess, looking at the above roles, that would probably encompass performer, mentor and critic. A guide and instigator are important because we are dealing with young people. They don't need or want to be told what to do but are often a bit lost or confused about which way to go and because many are focused on self that they forget to look at what else is out there. And instigator because many times they will just

> take what is said and leave it at that. By being an instigator, they learn to question and wonder and often are willing to react when they weren't willing to act. I hope that makes sense.

The Regressive Moment Conclusion

Pinar (2004) reminds us that the regressive moment “is an effort to get ‘underneath’ the layers where one lives, to earlier layers where one can re-experience what is excluded in the presently constituted ego. Often this process “feels” like reaching more truthful versions” (p. 55) This idea of truth runs through the regressive moment as we are invited to engage with our authentic self. This part of the study brought participants back into their personal histories even while they engaged with a collective past framed by language and literature.

In Daniel Pink’s *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (2009) the author draws on a wide research base both within and beyond the field of education – acknowledging a huge debt to Alfie Kohn’s *Punished By Rewards* (1999) – to identify three dominant contributors to the complex concept of motivation: Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose. His claim runs counter to the behavioristic models that still dominate in our education system where all participants are driven by either the desire for rewards or the fear of punishment. All three of these factors can be seen emerging from my survey as the participants uncover what motivates them to engage in such emotionally and intellectually taxing work. Again, Pinar’s reminder about the Regressive Phase can help to contextualize these responses: “The regressive phase of currere is about

uncovering [one's authentic] self , and in psychoanalytic fashion, experiencing the relief of understanding how one came to be psychically, which is to say, socially. " (p. 55)

There is, indeed, a social dimension at the heart of so much of what emerged from this first part of the study. Throughout this chapter I've expressed my reservations about painting with too broad a stroke and I am reluctant here to simply present common factors as being representive of a unique ELA identity. Instead, what I think I see emerging from this initial stage of the study are the various dimensions of tension – and all that this word entails: tightness, strain, stretching, but also, interlay and balance – that emerge in our work. The regressive phase of currere allows us to feel and examine the tension between who we were, who we have been and to anticipate who we are becoming. In each of the dominant ideas to emerge in this first part of the study we are confronted with a different aspect of this tension.

Relationships \ Autonomy

To be an English teacher means to accept – if not always find comfort in – various shades of gray. We look at the characters who people our literary universes and see in them not the stock characters of melodrama, but the rich, vibrant, messy characters that could allow someone to teach *Hamlet* twice a year for thirty-five years and still find something worth exploring in our young Danish prince. This seems, at least, intuitive, and we will accept the idea that characters have many lives, many identities, just as we ourselves do; but less easy to

reconcile is a profession that is at once intensely personal and insular, and yet also deeply communal and relational. Every one of the questions asked of participants in this section, surfaced a collection of responses that had a foundation in relationships. The participants reflect on the personal and professional significance of their relationships with their families, former teachers, colleagues, even the characters in the works of literature they read and teach, and above all, their students. It becomes clear in reading these responses that to teach English means to connect to others. Yet, it also means engaging with a curriculum that invites – and possibly demands – us to design our courses in a way that is as unique as we are. Consider the question about the primary role of an English teacher and consider how different a student's classroom experience would be if his or her teacher answered "performer" or "mentor" or "writing instructor." Similarly, in the question about how we choose texts for the classroom I see two dominant concepts: teaching those things that we are interested in and teaching those things we know our students are interested in. To be an English teacher demands autonomy, ranging from the literature we choose to teach, to the roles that we decide are more important than others, to the type of classroom pedagogy and assessment that we believe is "right." Each one of the choices we make is belief and value laden, and so a choice of a literary text involves a professional decision that is also profoundly personal. Our role as a classroom teacher, however, is driven by intense human connections with at the very least our students and colleagues. Indeed, these are the relationships that the participants in this study credit with providing the most powerful and long lasting rewards of our

profession. How we reconcile our desire to be an autonomous agent with the desire to connect, often in life –changing ways, with those who share our space is one of the fundamental tensions in our lives and our ongoing identification process.

Passion and Suffering

In the introductory question asking participants why they became teachers, the concept of passion was very prominently featured in the responses. In every one of these responses, passion – or any of several synonyms for passion – is unequivocally a positive thing. I am reminded, however, that the word itself derives from the Latin *passio*, which means *suffering*. To have a passion for literature and for our students is something that we would all seem to aspire to. This passion, however, would seem to substantially raise the emotional stakes of our profession.

In my first year of teaching, I learned a powerful lesson about how deeply rooted – even at that early stage – my passion for literature and my students had become. The year before I started teaching, I had seen a particularly stirring production of Edmond Rostad's *Cyrano De Bergerac* at a local theatre. I was deeply moved and I committed to finding an opportunity to share this passion with my future students – I was already thinking of myself as a teacher – should the opportunity present itself. Not too far into my first teaching job, as a high school English teacher in a mid-sized rural high school, I found – or more likely, willed – that opportunity. I cannot remember all of the details of the specific context, but I believe that I planned to show a filmed production of *Cyrano De*

Bergerac as a part of a thematic writing unit. I recall being almost nervous as I presented it to these grade eleven students. I was nervous that they might not like it and, perhaps, by extension, not like me. All was going well, but as the end of the film neared, I realized that I had misjudged the time and that the bell was going to go, right in the middle of the deeply emotional final scene. It was the last period of the day on a Friday and for whatever reason, showing the rest of the film in the following week was not an option. This was also a rural school where most of the students were bussed in and out on very tight schedules, I knew that the bell would soon go and my students would be faced with an impossible choice. Even if they were so moved by the film (my deepest desire) that they wanted to stay through to the end, to do so would mean missing their bus and having to call their parents to drive into town to pick them up. This was not, in any meaningful sense, a choice. I knew intellectually that I could not expect students to stay to watch the end of the film and yet, when the bell rang and the students left – a number of kind souls, surely sensing my emotional stake in this, stopped to apologize for leaving – I felt crushed. It was a profound – and early – reminder that the passion that I brought to my work was both necessary for me to be the best teacher I could be, but also a reminder that I would always be only a few minutes away from having all of my doubts and fears surfaced. This is the double-edged sword of passion.

Creativity /Time

William Pinar reminds us throughout *What Is Curriculum Theory?* that the autobiographical enterprise is not for the faint of heart, and involves an intensely personal process that is as much about creation as it is excavation. As he notes:

> The regressive phase of currere is a discursive (hence specifically fictional in Mehlman's sense) practice of truth-telling, of confession, but not to a priest (as in regulative practices of the Catholic Church) or to one's fellow-travelers (as in the solidarity of Alcoholics Anonymous). It is to oneself one comes to practice the autobiographics of self-shattering, revelation, confession, and reconfiguration." (p. 55)

What Pinar points to here would appear to lead us to another paradox: to delve into truth-telling also involves an essentially creative process. Anyone who has read widely in the realm of biography and memoir, or, indeed, into the scientific realm of memory studies, will understand that there really is no paradox here. To enter into one's past requires a creative act. The English teachers in this study take this one step further: they are being asked to enter into the past to recreate a creative act, to consider how they created themselves as English teachers.

In Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000) we are introduced to a character named Leonard Shelby. Leonard was the victim of a violent home invasion that left his wife dead and him unable to make new memories. He could remember everything right up until the attack, but from that point on, no memories were retained for more than just a few moments. In order to live his life

and most importantly, find his wife's killer, Leonard becomes an obsessive note-taker, even taking to tattooing the most important "facts" in his search for his wife's killers on various parts of his body. The tattoos form the framing narrative for his life, but it is a narrative that can, by its very nature, never move beyond the past.

Leonard's limitations are rooted in time: he is unable to construct a world beyond his past for more than just a few moments. High school English teachers, too, are limited by the fundamental problem of time and this is clearly represented through the dominant presence of time as a factor when discussing the most difficult aspects of their professional lives. Do we, like Leonard, suffer from a corresponding failure of imagination as this time leaves us rooted in the past, repeating the same errors, locked in the same archetypal forms? The structural limitations placed on our teaching lives by our provincial government, our school boards and our schools themselves are no less debilitating than the physical limitations imposed by Leonard's catastrophic brain injury.

Our lack of time robs us of the ability to fully realize the marriage between our ideal selves and our actual selves. Our conceptions of ourselves as teachers become limited – even enslaved – by the pragmatic questions of day-to-day existence in the schools. I am not allowed to be who I want, or even need, to be as an educator, but rather, I am allowed to be only that vision of a teacher that time will allow for. My power to create myself as an educator becomes limited by what is practical rather than exploding out through an imaginative construction of what is possible. If we lack the time and energy to continually reconstruct ourselves as

professionals, we are condemned to relive the past, just like Leonard Shelby. How many young English teachers begin, and in some cases, end, their professional careers as little more than caricatures of their favorite teacher, co-operating teacher or mentoring colleague? Certainly we all have models for professional behavior, but ideally those models are subject to our own selective critical scrutiny and perhaps more importantly, are considered in light of the current context. I have had many wonderful English instructors in my life who I continue to borrow freely from, but I do so with the realization that their classroom practice, their assignments and even their professional ethos were rooted in a particular time and place. If I uncritically "pull on" those personas – in deference to what I view as a successful career – and use those lessons from another time and place – as so many of our young teachers do – I would seem to be making a choice, but it is really only a pantomime of choice.

Again, I will stress that I am not objecting to English teachers finding good professional models of practice, but I reject a current school structure that turns too many young English teachers into receptacles of the past, rather than co-creators of the future. How can one seek meaningful change if one is unable even to imagine it? This is our dilemma as English teachers: not just our present situation, but the way that we allow our past to inhibit our ability to imagine alternate realities.

Part Three: The Progressive Moment

Chapter Five: An Overview of the Second Stage of the Study

The last question I asked all participants in part one of my study was whether or not they would be willing to take part in the next stage of the study which would involve either a personal interview or a more extensive written response. Of the 56 participants in part one, 53 indicated that they would be willing to participate. That 95% percent of participants were willing to go further was a very powerful affirmation that this would be a study that had a chance to make a difference in the lives of English Language Arts teachers, but the reality is that I would not be able to reasonably deal with the time frames and sheer mass of data were I to

interview every willing participant. My initial plan was to interview five to eight participants for part two, and with such breadth in potential participants I was left with many questions regarding how to choose who would take part. I weighed a number of different possibilities and factors before ultimately deciding on one very specific criteria for inclusion.

As per my original plan, I designed interview questions – or more correctly, discussion prompts, as I framed these more as discussions than interviews and I utilized three text based prompts as well as more traditional questions – and selected six participants to sit for recorded discussions that ended up spanning from approximately 53 minutes to 90 minutes. As I mentioned previously, I considered many different approaches when selecting these participants. One possibility was to build on, and further explore, a distinct theme or idea that emerged through part one of the study; and while this, indeed, did happen, it was not my main criteria. For this part of the study I approached the six participants in the study who had been through substantial shifts in their professional circumstances over the past year. Of my six participants in this part of the study, two had moved into administrative positions (although they still retained a classroom teaching component), two had moved into instructional leadership positions (one became an English Language Arts department head and the other an International Baccalaureate coordinator), one had moved from an Assistant Examiner position with Alberta Education back into a full-time English teaching position, and another had moved from a senior English teaching position at one high school to another.

One thing that I have noticed in my, ongoing and intensive work with high school English Language Arts teachers throughout my career is that while we are, in general, a reflective and eloquent lot, we are also – and this is almost certainly connected with an always daunting work load – very immersed in our specific pedagogic and physical space. This often manifests itself as a lack of perspective and an inability to see beyond one's immediate circumstances. In choosing these teachers, I was hoping to engage with them when they were in a liminal space. I use this term as a way of building on the concepts developed by Arthur Van Gennep and, later, Viktor Turner to denote that space in time and place where we are between one state of being and another and without structural moorings. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), Turner describes it as such:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. This liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to the eclipse of the sun or moon. (p. 95)

Turner is a cultural anthropologist and while I certainly cannot claim a comprehensive grasp of his body of work, his work on liminality does translate into the realm of the teacher, particularly when he writes of "the blend [liminal

phenomena] offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship" (p. 96). This echoes the blending of difficulties and rewards, and autonomy and collaboration, that emerged in the first stage of the study. Turner goes further in suggesting that in these moments where we are between spaces – hence liminal, derived from the Latin limen, meaning threshold – we are confronted with a "'moment in and out of time,' and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond" (p. 96). It is here that I am hoping to use the liminal status of the participants in this second stage of the study to connect back to the first part and continue the exploration of English teacher identity in the progressive moment of currere.

In "Currere to the Rescue? Teachers as 'Amateur Intellectuals' in a Knowledge Society" (2006) Kanu and Glor explore the potential for currere as a transformative tool to create what they term amateur intellectuals. In their article, they write that in order to transform ourselves, educators

> need to do more than just examine their own pasts. . . they need to cultivate a position of exile from those pasts and the practices they have engendered and imagine a possible and different future. In this sense, Kierkegaard's statement (cited in Habermas, 2003) that individuals need to "detach from environment, become aware of individuality, become aware of actions and become responsible for them, then enter into a commitment with others" (p. 6) warrants

> thought. This detachment from environment is only possible if one understands the environment one is in. (p. 7)

In this part of the study, I have not only selected participants who have been physically exiled from their pasts through their change in professional contexts, but I am also actively engaging them with discussion prompts, particularly through the use of the two film clips that start the process, to take them out of their teaching context and to engage with and, ultimately, imagine their way into similar, but clearly distinct teaching contexts. Kanu and Glor (2006) suggest that

> [w]hen an individual goes through the process of detachment, a realization occurs of the impact of one's actions on others' lives. This realization has the effect of awaking one from a dream/nightmare where one gains insight into the harm caused to others, self, the immediate environment, and the world. This awaking allows possible growth to occur, but it is costly to the individual," (p. 108)

This cost involves "the leaving behind of an old way of being in the world" (p.108) and this often entails the severing – or at least the transformation – of profound personal relationships and a physical detachment from places that may have been sources of comfort and support. Kanu and Glor use Robert Kegan's term "disequilibrium" as a way of illustrating how these participants must then attempt to "regain equilibrium by reconciling the part of the self that has been made exposed. (p.108)

In this section of the study I am asking participants to confront this state of disequilibrium in their recent past, even while I immerse them in another layer of disconnect by asking them to view two teaching scenarios outside of their specific context. This is part of the process of breaking from the past and present to imagine the future; the process at the heart of the progressive moment of currere.

Pinar describes the progressive phase of currere as “a kind of free associative ‘futuring’ during which one seeks the revelation of one’s fantasies of what one might be” (p. 55) This step into the future, however, is not purely linear and just as we saw glimmers of the future in the regressive moment, we necessarily need to engage with the past and the present. Pinar sees this phase as holding the possibility of discerning “how who one is hides what one might be. These fictive representations of who I might be, what world I might inhabit in the future, these fictional versions of who I might be someday but am not now allow us to feel our way through the obscurity of the present.” (p. 55) Pinar further distinguishes the progressive phase in two ways. It involves stylistic experimentation and it is thematic, in nature. In this second stage of the study I attempt to change the nature of the discursive act by changing the medium of discourse at various times by asking participants to engage with film and literature as prelude to discussion. These discussion prompts both begin – with the two video prompts opening the discussion – and end – with the reading of the literary text after the discussion – the discourse and serve as spaces for the participants to enter into to recall what once was, reflect on what is and imagine what might be.

This intense futuring has participants moving between the regressive and progressive even while it anticipates the analytic moment yet to come.

As I noted earlier in discussing my relationships with the participants in my study, I am far from a disinterested observer. I have existing relationships or at least name and face recognition levels with every teacher in this study, but these six teachers who I have selected for the discussion portion of part two are unique, not only because of the recent changes they have experienced in their professional lives, but also because I know them all well, personally and professionally. I have established my connections with each in the brief biographical notes that follow and I do so because I am unquestionably a factor in these discussions and in some ways they are continuations of discussions that we have had before. To call them interviews would be disingenuous. In their landmark text *Narrative Inquiry:Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), discussing the work of Robert Cole, remind us that "it is the intimacy of the inquirer and the patient" (p. 14) that is key. They later caution that "narrative inquirers need to reconstruct their own narrative on inquiry histories and to be alert to possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research they undertake" (p. 56). It is my hope that using the framework of currere allows me to go beyond being "alert" to embrace and explore these potential tensions as we enter into this autobiographical process together.

In considering what emerged from these discussions, I feel it is important to note that there were actually three distinct stages to these discussions: 1) The participants viewed the *Change Leadership* clip first, and I look at the conversations stemming from this clip as discrete entities. 2) The film clip from *The Class* then opened up the next level of discussion that incorporated all of the other discussion prompts and we generally moved through these prompts in the order they are presented here. I will consider the responses that emerge from each question, moving from participant to participant. My hope is that by spending time with each participant framed by each conceptual component of the discussion I will be better able to illustrate the connections and disconnections that emerge between participants, but still retain a sense of momentum in establishing the flow and development of each individual discussion. I will briefly introduce each participant and establish some context for the discussion prior to exploring their responses to the first prompt. 3) Finally, the exploration of the short story actually was conducted via email and was not a part of the interview process itself, so I look at that as a discrete item, as well.

Part Three: The Progressive Moment

Chapter Six: The Discussion Prompts (10th Grade English)

To begin each discussion, participants were asked to view an approximately 13 minute video clip of an English teacher giving a lesson to a tenth grade English classroom. The clip itself is available on the *Change Leadership* website (http://www.gse.harvard.edu/clg/books/1.html) and is used as an exercise in the book of the same name. As its full title– *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming our Schools* (Wagner and Kegan et al, 2006) – clearly indicates this is a book intended to speak directly to education leaders about the challenges involved in any change initiatives. Specifically, the authors identify two capacities that need “sharpening” (Preface, xvi) if one is to effect meaningful change as a leader:

> 1) Leaders need to see more deeply into why it is so hard for our organizations to change, even when there is a genuine, collective desire to do so.
>
> 2) Leaders need to see more deeply into why it is so hard for individuals to change, even when individuals genuinely intend to do so. (Preface, xvi)

This film clip is used as a part of a lesson in the book. Readers are directed to view the clip at the website and answer the following question: "If you had to grade the lesson from F to A, with plusses and minuses allowed), what would the grade be?" (p. 36). They are then directed to consider the criteria they used in arriving at this grade, while also considering how that criteria might compare with those used by colleagues (Readers are encouraged to do this exercise in a group or with at least one trusted colleague).

Not surprisingly, the authors reveal that having conducted this exercise with groups large and small, they have never failed to find a substantial spread in grades, typically ranging from A to D-F, and again, to no surprise, these groups typically show very diverse criteria on which these grade are based. They make two observations about this phenomenon:

> First, our definitions of quality instruction are often tacit and built on an assumption we typically can't name. People tend to feel uncomfortable and awkward in trying to be specific about why they score the teacher's lesson as they did. Second, even if we are

> able to articulate our own assumptions, we may still have difficulty communicating with others, who might use the same word to mean different things. (p. 38)

In choosing this exercise as the opening piece of my discussions, I am attempting to surface some of these tacit assumptions, but in a much more homogenous setting. All of my participants are high school English teachers in the province of Alberta, bound by the same provincial curricular mandates despite disparate teaching contexts and they all share at least one common professional experience: marking English 30-1 Diploma Examinations. There is also a degree of subject specific comfort involved in showing a clip of a teacher teaching a high school English class to an English teacher that changes the discussion dynamic substantially. Presumably, there would stand to be more common ground between English teachers who view this clip, but there would also be substantial differences. It was beyond the scope of this study to incorporate classroom observations into the process, but it was my hope that by inviting the participants into the subjective space of this English classroom with me, they may be more inclined to invite me into their own classroom experience in our discussions. I also hoped that by seeing a video of a teacher teaching a tenth grade English class – something every one of them has done at some point in their careers – they would not only surface their own memories and present situation, but also imagine what they would do differently, thus inviting them into the type of fictive futuring that Pinar envisions as being a key component of the Progressive moment.

Mike

Mike has been a high school English teacher for the bulk of his nine year teaching career and he has also served a leadership role for many of those years at two large high schools. At the time of this discussion Mike had just started a new position as an Assistant Principal. We conducted the discussion about an hour after at the end of the school day in Mike's office.

Mike, who has expressed some pretty clear ambivalence towards the grading process, both in this discussion and beyond, starts the discussion by stating that he "doesn't know how" he could assign a grade without knowing more about the teaching context: "I need to know the intent of the lesson. . . I haven't read *The Pearl*, so I don't know if there is something specific he's trying to get . . . is there some kind of link that he's trying to make or if it's more of just a creative writing exercise . . ." This observation about the primacy of text – that the specific shape and sound of text could impact the shape and sound of a classroom – emerges at several points in the discussion.

He begins by simply listing some of the good things he sees emerging in the lesson, noting that the teacher makes "good ties to previous work," provides positive feedback and "attempts to make it relevant. " He remarks that there "seemed to be genuine engagement" but presents at least the possibility that this was false because of the presence of the camera. This raises the specter of a degree of artifice that anticipates Mike's major reservation about the lesson: "I didn't like the fact that he was trying to impose kind of a formula on to text and

on to a discussion about text and even when there was an attempt to say sometimes it's not formulaic where a problem where a solution creates another problem but then there was another formula imposed" Mike is clearly uncomfortable with the idea that the teacher is imposing a formula on both the original text – John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* – and the broader writing experience of the students.

Mike comes back to this idea of artificiality in response to my question, "Is this characteristic of what you would expect in a typical English classroom?" He states that

> I would say that that's not what the standard looks like. I don't think there's that much of an exchange. You'd have more definite teacher teaching time, this is student discussion time, there are student teacher discussion time . . . There seems to be a fairly solid connection with the kids and back to the teacher, like there is that give and take and, I don't know if it comes that easily, you know, it seems almost false. It's almost like it was set up and the kids were given what they were supposed to respond with . . .

In this last statement, Mike again raises the question of artifice. He then continues: "but even his attempt to almost speak the language of the teenager, maybe more than what is necessary, but, you know there is that element of is he faking it, but in the end, if he gets what he wants out of students . . ."

Mike's focus in this portion of the discussion is very much on authenticity, and while he is clearly uncomfortable with what he considers to be an inauthentic approach to literature and writing through a formula, he is a little more ambivalent about the idea that a teacher might "fake it" in front of the kids. He starts down this road by suggesting that the whole class itself might be a bit artificial, possibly because of the presence of the camera, before suggesting that a certain degree of artifice might be called for if you are getting what you want out of the students and in this context, Mike notes that "there wasn't any push back from the students" regarding the assignment and sees this as both evidence of engagement and good classroom management. Mike notes that the teacher "is using the language of the teenager, but I suppose if you are using it purposefully to engage . . . then they'll engage with what we're talking about and then we'll joke, but we will get to the end that I intend to get to . . ." and again he sees the teacher's idiosyncratic diction as being a deliberate attempt to engage the students by speaking their language.

Mike refers to the one student's question about "How many characters?" as being a "decent question" and an honest one ("He really didn't know") and brings it back to the teacher in that "The expectations weren't clear . . ."). Mike sees it as an honest question in response to a lack of clarity on the teacher's part. In response to my question "Do you see anything of yourself in that teacher?" Mike responded "Maybe a little bit. I mean I like to think that my students are engaged in the same manner. The discussions that I've been able to draw out of

students are somewhat similar or at least create a similar reaction. I did find that he picked on the same students quite often."

Again, Mike comes back to the camera and wonders about whether that is having any effect on what is going on in the classroom as he discusses the relative paucity of contributions from the majority of the class which he sees as

> probably pretty standard, we all fall into that where you go to the easy kid and potentially again when you talk about artifice, and as a teacher if I've got a camera on me and I know it's being filmed for some purpose am I going to call on the kids who I know are going to give the specific answer, whether it's the right or the wrong one, but I may pick on a kid who will give me the wrong one so that I establish my expertise or do I pick on the kid who gives me the right one because it demonstrates the fact that he learned something.

Mike later enters into an intriguing exploration of silence and speech in the classroom that is perhaps particularly relevant in light of the fact that Mike clearly – he affirms this when I ask him directly – would have been a very talkative student. Here he uses an example from his own teaching, but not his English teaching:

> I don't know if it's relevant for me to talk about Theory of Knowledge but I always, at the beginning of the year, give my kids permission not to talk. Even as a class, if I pose a question and

> nobody has an answer to it, silence is ok, but in the end in terms of discussion, well, and I find myself that sometimes I'm a bit of a hypocrite where I will drive at a kid to give me a response even though at the beginning of the year I said you can opt out at any point . . .

This admission actually illustrates both Mike's strong sense that it is important to be authentic in the classroom – and here authentic seems to equate with being genuine, honest and respectful – and his seemingly contradictory sense that you may need to dissemble somewhat in order to get the kids to where they need to go. In Mike's case, the determiner seems to be situational based what is in the student's best interest, rather than some black and white view of authenticity.

Despite his ambivalence to grading as a practice, Mike does come back to my initial suggestion that he give a grade, assigning a "B maybe" which he then elaborates on:

> What does it mean? Do you want to know my thinking behind it? My thinking behind a B is that there is always room for improvement because I did see room where things could be improved, because I don't understand the intent behind the lesson I have to give him the benefit of the doubt that he was doing what he intended. He got through it. There weren't any glaring faults in terms of what he was doing. Was what he was doing right? I don't know what the outcomes he was driving at . . . I

> don't know if there were any learning outcomes, but he was fairly clear [and] used all the tools that we learnt in university for teaching . . .

This last statement is quite interesting: he essentially gives the teacher the benefit of the doubt, because he does not believe he has the context necessary to do more, but in justifying his grade he draws on two paradigms – "what we were taught in university" and grading itself – that he seems to have little faith in. This suggests to me just how pervasive some of the structural pillars of our current education system can be, even if we are consciously opposed to them.

Barry

Barry has been teaching for about fifteen years, and the last half of his career has been spent at the high school level. He most recently accepted a position as an English Department Head at a high school and at the time of this interview, he was just beginning his second year in that position. We met at the end of the school day in a meeting room near my office which is located in our school board offices.

As with Mike, Barry is clearly reluctant to be too judgmental with limited context even though he would also very clearly not approach things in this manner:" I'm not quite sure why he was doing what he was doing." but "again, I think this is twelve minutes taken out of context of this guy's class and so I'm not sure what came before it, and what came after it"

He notes that the teacher "seemed to have a pretty good rapport with the kids," and "[t]hey seemed to be in a place of learning where they felt comfortable

expressing ideas" but it seems apparent to Barry – as it did to me – that most of the kids seem to already have an understanding of what he was teaching. This causes Barry to wonder "Why are you re-teaching something the kids already have?" Again, though, he allows for their being some legitimate reasons: "It's possible that he's doing things to get these kids on-side, you know?" an acknowledgement that echoes Mike's realization that we sometimes need to act a certain way – in this case, a way that may not appear to serve short term academic ends - in order to help the students achieve their larger goals.

Barry, like Mike, also addressed the presence of the camera: "I get the feeling that everybody was pretty aware that there was a camera on" and he also commented on the question of authenticity in the English classroom, but he approached from a different angle:

> [O]ne of the things that I found kind of worth commenting on is him taking this story that they read and relating it to real life, which is, which is something that teachers do a lot. It's just I sometimes wonder how real that is. I mean, like, the real life that he's relating to was a pretty artificial situation. I mean it is a sort of Betty and Veronica and Archie kind of situation . . .I guess (sighs) when I look at this, it kind of reminds me of what is often de rigueur at, say, a dash two level or junior high school level, where there's that whole idea that the teacher's working really hard to get kids to buy into stuff.

Barry seems to both recognize the limitations of such an approach and its occasional necessity and he acknowledges that this form of a classroom persona – the jokes, the idiosyncratic phrases – are part of this teacher's "thing." As he notes, "that's his routine."

Barry simultaneously realizes that teachers often have a persona – "a thing" – that they create for students to serve their ends as educators – this echoes some of Mike's prior comments – but he also asks some questions about the what and why of those ends themselves. In our discussion we talked about the fact that the teacher seemed to be teaching something that he didn't really need to teach and we talked about why that might be so and how likely it would be for a teacher to actually change things if they knew that what they were teaching was unnecessary. Barry notes, "[I]if they're coming in saying we're doing a lesson, you know, and this is a lesson on plot, a lot of people are, I think, going to stick to the lesson. But I think it brings back the other questions, a lot of people do these lessons on things, and they don't really know why anymore."

I used this as an opportunity to ask if he saw this lesson as being particularly characteristic of what we might see in English classes on the whole and this lead him to offer up a lengthy treatise on his perception of the potential for change in the English classroom:

> I find that a lot of people do a lot of things because they've always done them, you know, and therefore they're tried and true so they must be good. But when you sort of measure them against, even

things like diploma exams or some kind of standard, it's not necessarily making kids any better at anything, you know? And I think it's very difficult for teachers to be really reflective about what they do. I mean, I think teachers are generally pretty busy. They're pretty stressed. They don't want to re-think and re-do everything that they've done and, I mean, the sad thing is, it means that a teacher's got about a window of about two or three years in which to figure out doing what they're going to do, and then they just kind of just keep doing that for a number of years. I mean, there are certainly teachers that are thoughtful and they're going to change things up… and, there are certain circumstances like you move to a different school, sometimes that'll shake up what you're doing, right? Or you change grade levels. You're all of a sudden teaching high school but you taught junior high. I mean, those things can shake people up. But, I mean, I think generally speaking, teachers, and not just English teachers, I think they do what they do. They don't like curriculum changes. They don't like new approaches to things because it's perceived as being more work, right? I've got something that works. Why would I do more work, and I'm already stressed and busy and that's a reality, that's not just a perception, and then I'm going to do more work for something that might not work? You know? So that idea of sort of examining what we're doing as a profession and moving

> forward and trying new things, I think it generally is not a turn-on for a lot of teachers.

I asked Barry if he saw this as primarily a systemic problem – stemming from such things as lack of time, large classes, etc.; all factors which emerged in the first stage of the study– or something that was tied to individuals. In response to my question about whether cutting teaching loads in half would make a difference, Barry was somewhat ambivalent:

> It would make some difference. I don't think it would solve all the problems. (laughs) I mean, because . . . There's so many factors in play. . . maintaining the status quo is one way, I think, of reinforcing for yourself that you're doing a good job. . . I think for a lot of people the fact that you're keeping a standard and being consistent, and that allows you to say, well, I gave this assignment last year, and the kids got seventy-two percent, and I gave this class this year the same assignment, and this class got sixty-five percent, so I'm being consistent, I'm being centered, and the kids, you know, aren't as good. . . .I think that idea of routine and that idea of consistency and the greatest hits pack is part of the way that teachers mark their territory.

Barry brings this back to himself and relates a short, general anecdote about his own attempts to incorporate more "check for learning activities" into his

repertoire – attempts that were sparked by his move into a leadership position in a school with a strong assessment culture – and notes that it is

> so wrenching, because, you know, you go huh, I think I did really well, you know what? Uh, half the class didn't get it. Now, on one hand, it's good to know that. On the other hand, you walk around going, okay, I was really ineffective, I mean, I thought I was killing them. I mean, I thought those kids were walking out of there and getting it, and every indication says to me that they're not. Or a majority of them aren't. And, you know, you go back, and you re-teach and you try to get people up to speed. But, I don't know. I mean, I look at, you know, the guy in the, the room there… And I say, well, you know, look, his kids are listening, there are no behaviour problems, they're laughing at his jokes…He probably thinks he's having a pretty good class. And you know what? Compared to what could be going on, he probably is having a pretty good class.

Again, despite his reservations about this teacher's lesson and how it might reflect some of the deeper issues that plague our profession, Barry comes back to keeping things in context. Barry, as with most participants, opted not to assign a grade to the lesson, but he ends this section of the discussion with a fairly unequivocal assessment of the lesson and the teacher:

> I'd like to see that fellow take on something tough. Because, really, just saying there's a plot with a problem with a solution that leads to a problem, well, yeah, I think you could probably think of any TV show, even reality-based show, that runs that. I mean. . . I don't think that's a really hard concept for kids to get. And I don't know how useful it's gonna be. You know? And that, I think, is such a big thing with English, that so much of what we do encourages kids just to re-tell. I mean, even that is re-telling. Here's a story we read, let's re-tell it in a real-life context. Let's re-tell it in a modern context. And, of course, we know that re-telling by any measure of thought and understanding and detail, is not considered a very high-level skill, right? It's, at best, satisfactory. And sometimes not even that.

Barry is questioning the level of rigor that we impose on both our students and ourselves. He is conscious of the challenges we face as teachers, but clearly wants us to ask for more from our students and our selves.

Fred

Fred has been teaching English Language Arts, primarily at the high school level for 17 Years. He has recently taken a position as an Assistant Principal at a high school. We met at the end of the school day in a meeting room near my office, which is located in our school board offices.

Fred opens up the discussion by addressing what would have been one of my first official questions by noting “I would say that's probably a typical classroom.” Interestingly, he then notes how artificial the whole thing by saying “he seems not real to me in some sort of weird way” and goes on to question various dimensions of the class:

> I don't know if he's truly engaged in literature, or truly engaged in his lesson. . . it feels like he's just getting from point to point [and] even the digressions seem artificial or perhaps planned . . . there's never really any sense of real true acknowledgement of the kids input . . .

Fred suggests that this artificiality might, indeed, be a reflection of the “lesson itself” noting that “this is a pretty basic notion to be trying to communicate to Grade 10 kids.” This echoes Barry’s concerns about the level and substance of the learning is in this classroom. As with Mike and Barry, he notes the idiosyncratic diction the teacher uses with an air of incredulity: “[T]here's all that weird phrasing right? I gather it might be a virtue of the fact that it's in the 1980's but My Sweet Love and Sweet Honey and the Delicious Looking Lovely and That Poor Honey, right?” and is unsure of what to make of it other than that it he finds it “vaguely . . . disquieting.” He also addresses the seemingly small class size and notes “it would be really different if you had 16 kids in a class.” He also considers how the camera may be playing with our perceptions, drawing on his film expertise to note “we have a couple of cutaways a couple of times to kids who [are] there to suggest that maybe the kids are not engaged.”

Context is also very important to Fred who, as with Barry, is reluctant, at first, to appear critical, but he does demonstrate some real reservations as the discussion progresses. Fred notes that he is not familiar with the US curriculum, or the specific timeframe, so this indeed may be valid material, recalling once having to teach "how to address an envelope," and allows that the subject matter of the teacher's lesson may be "something that is actually relatively important." Fred notes "So again, it's hard to say, without the proper context what... but yeah, I would say, I mean, is he a little monotone for me? Yeah, yeah, lots of stand up and deliver kind of thing, he's not really walking around the room, not really… I don't see anything horribly..." and at this point he seems about ready to wrap up his discussion of the teaching sample, but he seems reluctant to let it go and actually comes back to where he began by noting that "at one point he [the teacher in the clip] says something about it's an artificial possibility" and he uses this concept to express his perception that "the whole thing is kind of an odd . . . this whole lesson is an artificial possibility."

I press him on this, particularly in regard to the degree to which he thinks the camera is causing this artificiality and whether we could extend this to what happens when someone enters a teacher's classroom. How does a typical teacher feel when somebody walks in the room? Does the presence of another person affect the authenticity of the classroom experience? He considers this: "That might be true, right? Because I know that just the other day, there's a teacher, my principal, she was taking a look, she [the teacher] was really panicked about it." This leads him to reflect on how our teaching practice is often an isolating

enterprise, where we do not often spend time in other teacher's classrooms. He observes:

> I wish teachers would be in each other's room more. I wish there was more joking. I wish there was more interaction between teachers, because kids love that and respect that. They love the fact that there's a community of teachers. . .

He then returns to the idea that "teachers should be in each other's classrooms all the time and, again, in no artificial way" and really embraces the potential for learning and modeling even in very brief visitations:

> [Y]ou can get a bead on good teaching just from observing for a few minutes, and not observing in a very critical way, but just like walking by. You can get the tone or the tenor of a room by walking by. The first two milliseconds, you know exactly if learning's going on. You know exactly if the teacher's in trouble, you know exactly if the kids are engaged, you know exactly if... and again, it's not just edutainment.

Interestingly enough, this whole discussion comes full circle and returns to the clip, and particularly, to the concept of there being a possible lack of engagement and almost an over-reliance on a pre-planned or pre-packaged lesson, and he considers this in relation to the whole concept of judging teacher effectiveness.

> That whole notion of what is effective teaching is certainly a pretty broad idea, right? And, you know, for some people, good teaching

is making sure the lesson plan's up on the board and I remember getting roasted by my dean in my first year, saying, you know, you didn't even have today's agenda on the board . . . I honestly, 95 percent of the time, have no idea what will go on in the classroom that day. I know all the stuff for that particular novel and that particular film that I want to hit, but I'm really happy if it takes a dogleg into something completely different than I thought about before. As a teacher, I know what I need to get through, in my head, and I don't even know if I can even communicate that to kids or an administrator, which is why I'm always so adverse to this notion of you know, even in the T.Q.S., this notion of, lesson plans and thorough lesson plans and long-term plans and year plans and, and, and. Like, I think many ineffective teachers could do a fantastic job of creating that kind of “who-shot John” that looks great and, you know, and if anything, I would say, well, it's very much akin to when you read a diploma exam from a kid...And you say if only this kid had never been taught the three-body paragraph thing, right? Like, this kid is a smart kid who is impeded by the fact that he thinks there's a certain rigid structure or formula to hang things on, and if only that kid had been given the leeway or given the green light to say, oh no, there's a thousand ways to write a paper.

Fred makes the connection between perceived in-authenticity in a teacher's classroom context and a deeper type of in-authenticity that exists in the work – and perhaps the hearts and minds – of our students. He suggests that a formula for good teaching, just like a formula for writing, may actually only create a situation that hampers individual creativity – and ultimately – teacher effectiveness.

Sally

Sally has been teaching for 10 years, but this is her first year in her current school. We met in Sally's classroom at the end of the school day.

As with the previous three participants, Sally comments both on the context – immediately noting how aged the clip seems – and on her reluctance – and our tendency as English teachers – to be critical, noting "we are really critical of English teachers." She starts by listing many of the positives that she sees in the lesson, before transitioning into her own teaching context:"I liked that he gave them positive feedback, like, yeah, that's good, okay, let's keep going. But, like, overall, I thought it was okay. Was it the best lesson I've ever seen? No. Were there things that I would immediately, instantly feel like my own sense of doing differently? Yes."

Sally's almost immediate reaction was to start imagining herself in this teacher's place, and so her reluctance to be "critical" reflects empathy in the truest sense of the word. She sees herself as an English teacher, even if she does not see herself as this English teacher. This causes her to reflect on "How many, many

things, and how much we expect of teachers generally to have on the go and juggling at the same moment, and that the really great teachers who seem to handle that all so effortlessly and seamlessly… it would be amazing to try and actually have them articulate what's actually going on." That is, in fact, what this prompt invites of the participants, to comment on both what you see and what you experience empathetically while watching.

As with the three previous participants, Sally is both conscious of the potentially distorting effects of film and concerned about a sense of artifice or lack of authenticity demonstrated through this lesson. She notes that when "watching this video of someone teaching, we have some sort of very understandable expectations of what something should look like on film" where a "film is entertaining, this guy is not that entertaining… maybe right there with him, he's got this smoothness that doesn't come across in film." This is a very interesting idea, that we bring our preconceptions of a medium to our understanding of this video-taped lesson. This begs the question, however, of whether we could ever truly be "with him" if we are not him and not the students. Is it the camera lens and our understanding of film that distorts or is it our understanding of what it means to teach that impedes our ability to connect? Sally goes on to say

> No, I didn't find myself relating to him very much, and a couple of times I felt, like, one of the words that came to mind is I thought that activity was a little bit gimmicky. But I've heard people do things like that, and the kids love it and they have fun with it. But

> the way it was going, I was, well, what's the point of this? Like, I needed more information because that first impression was, I'm like, that's something I might do in Grade 8, you know? And these look like Grade 12 kind of kids. Not that it's a bad thing necessarily. And also, with some of their responses, I had to wonder, like, what level that would be at. Like, would they be the equivalent of our, like 30-2's, or would that be like a 30-1, or, what kind of kid is in that particular classroom? And maybe some of his stuff seems to me to be a little bit simplistic and easy, and I thought, well, maybe that's where those kids are at, I don't know that about him. . . .

Sally then begins to delve into some very specific aspects of his pedagogical frame and to compare these facets to those that exist in her own teaching world:

> I didn't like some of his leading questions. I'm like, well, what do they think about this? I don't want to think… what do they think about it? I'm often finding myself, pushing back at the kids to find out, well, I don't know… what do you think? I don't need to think about this. I've already passed English 30. You tell me what you think. That kind of putting it back on their plate a little bit. I like that there was laughter in the class, and I liked that the kids could joke around a bit and he didn't seem the least bit flustered by that. But, I also found the lesson a bit slow for me. That, as a learner, I was like, let's go, what's the deal, what's going on here?

While often using qualification about her lack of context, Sally is clearly uncertain about the intellectual merits of what she has seen, and she questions a pedagogical framework that appears, despite an obvious comfort level, to be more teacher directed than student centered. Her reference to the lesson being "gimmicky" and to the use of "leading questions" suggest an artificiality that she is clearly uncomfortable with, but a little bit later , she qualifies this by noting "I remember thinking that the room looked like a real room. Like, there's stuff and papers piled up and sort of like a card with like, you know, detritus of, whatever. And I kind of like that. I was like, this is a real guy. It didn't seem to me staged. This wasn't Hillary Swank." This is a reference to Hillary Swank's performance as Erin Gruwell in *The Freedom Writers*, a film that was intended to be a powerful reminder about the inspirational and transformative power of teaching and, in particular, teaching literature, but that has often inspired tension in educators who have seen it.

A few years ago, I actually had the opportunity to watch the film with my entire high school staff – including all of the teachers in my English department – and to debrief with them after. What the teachers in my department rejected more than anything else was the heroic portrayal of the teacher who sacrifices all for her students – the character work's part-time to buy resources for the classroom and is shown sacrificing her marriage for her work – but ultimately, leaves teaching after only a few years. My colleagues rejected the idealization of a model of teaching that was literally unsustainable and that reflected a Hollywood idea of teaching that simply could not be replicated in the "real" world. I also witnessed a

very similar reaction from English teachers when I facilitated a professional development session in which Erin Grewell was the keynote speaker for the day.

In referencing Hillary Swank, here, Sally has illustrated just how complex this concept of authenticity in the English classroom can be. On one hand, she sees the teacher in the clip as being inauthentic in his teaching practices, and she views this as largely a pedagogic choice, but she also clearly sees him as a "Real" teacher with all of the imperfections to prove it. What Sally rejects here, ultimately is the concept of an "ideal" teacher.

Interestingly, she delves further into this – and creates a counter-point to some of the other participants when I ask her if this teaching clip is representative of what one might see in a typical English classroom. She responds, "No, I would say not." which is at odds with what Fred and Barry suggested, yet seemingly in line with Mike's response, but in fact, while she sees this as not characteristic, her rationale is directly opposite of Mike's: "I think that teachers are more engaging than that overall . . . That would look like more discussion from the kids, more open questions that let them run with it a little bit more. . . . It just, it looked flat to me. It would feel flat to me to be in that class, and watching that class feels flat, a little bit. Not horrifically, like not a disaster." She goes on to cite some of the dynamic classrooms of colleagues she has known. It is important to note, that of the six respondents, Sally is one of only two – Bob being the other – who is not in a formal leadership position and therefore, has no supervisory component to her position. She would be entering into a classroom with a different context and, possibly, on a less frequent basis than the previous three participants.

It is only after her discussion of some other teaching contexts, however, that she seems to free herself to be openly critical of the larger purpose of the lesson – thus echoing the three previous respondents:

> What does he want them to do? What's the point of this lesson? Other than to talk about connecting… like, it's good to connect real-world experiences to the story, and make it sort of meaningful or relevant to them, but is this a class on creative writing? Is this a short story assignment in a regular English class? What would… where is he going, and what's he doing?

This was a sentiment that I echoed in response by saying, "Well, I find myself wondering that, too, because what he seemed to be trying to get the kids to, it seemed like they were there before he started. You know what I mean? " Sally responds "Yeah, they'd already done it, and he took, like, whatever, twelve minutes to do something that I would probably take about two minutes to explain." Sally's comments here suggest that she has engaged in a type of "futuring" by imagining herself in this context and considering how she might have approached the lesson.

Larissa

Larissa is a senior English teacher and in an academic leadership role in a high school. She has been teaching in Canada for ten years, but she also has experience as a teacher in her home country. We met at the end of the school day in her classroom.

Larissa's approach to the clip was much more methodical than the other participants and she began by noting three things: 1) That the teacher had a very small class 2) That the class was culturally diverse and 3) That they were sitting at tables as opposed to desks. She then provides an overview of the lesson she has just watched:

> [I]t started pretty dreary. (laughs) With everyone kind of just snoozing. Not really excited, that's what I had. Most of the questions for almost the first five minutes were asked by the teacher? Around minute two there was one girl who participated in the conversation mostly. Um, what he was driving, actually, I thought the purpose was to write collectively a story but individual contribution for the different parts of the story. And, um, gradually the interest increased as he was leading them through a real-life situation and problem solving that sort of applied to what he had in mind before, or maybe he didn't. I'm not sure. Um, I would say that this is a fairly straightforward way to teach story writing. So for grade 10's probably it will work. Um, there was humour, definitely. But, even halfway through the clip, not all students were there. Not all students were caring and they showed this boy twice with his face kind of daydreaming or drifting. And then, in minute eight, he actually talked, which means somehow, somewhere, something clicked for him but the clip didn't show it.

She continues this blow-by-blow description and reflection for some time. In her exploration of the lesson, Larissa is much more focused on the students than the other participants who were largely preoccupied with the teacher's actions and idiosyncratic diction. Interestingly enough, while she too acknowledges that the lack of context is an issue in making any kind of judgment about the lesson, it takes her relatively little time to move from what he is doing on the screen to what she would do as a teacher and we see this process play out in her discussion with me, that ironically begins with her saying that she doesn't have anything else to say about the clip. This excerpt from our discussion captures the progression of her thinking:

> LARISSA: I don't think I have any other comments.
>
> BRENT: Were there things that you saw in the clip that you thought were resonant with your own teaching practice, or not?
>
> LARISSA: Mmmm, to some extent, yes. I think I start the other way around. I start with asking the kids to do the whole thing on their own and see what will happen.
>
> BRENT: Yeah. Why?
>
> LARISSA: And work it with them to break it down and probably become more analytical about it, more reflective about it after the first big fail.
>
> BRENT: So given the way that he did it, what do you think?

LARISSA: Yeah, he’s piecing it too much for my personal preferences as a teacher. It’s too, too many baby steps.

BRENT: What do you think the downside of that would be?

LARISSA: Um, they will definitely get a structure but I’m thinking they will be thinking this is the only way to write.

BRENT: Yeah. I had a very similar reaction when I watched it for the first time.

LARISSA: Yeah. And I’m not saying that this is necessarily, um, not one of the ways that we can teach them how to write a short story, for example, because that’s what he’s aiming. And then this is transferable to, let’s say, an argument. To some extent. But it is mandating that they follow a particular pathway in finding where they would lead to the final goal. How they will reach the final goal. So, in terms of method, I would rather have the kids just do the whole thing.

BRENT: So you’d turn them loose. Every one of them, all of about fifteen in that class would have a different approach.

LARISSA: Exactly.

BRENT: And then where would you go with that?

LARISSA: Um, well, again, it would depend on what I want to do with that. So let’s say they have created short stories. And, um,

my purpose is to teach analysis of short story. What I would probably do would be, um, take one of those short stories and talk about we can break it down into elements. Here are the elements. We know that a short story cannot exist without a character. So let's remove the characters and let's try to re-write the story without the characters. See what will happen. Take all of the characters from your short stories, re-write them, and see what will happen. Take out the setting. So remove the elements from that already-created text. Because most of the tens come to us with more or less an idea of how they can construct a short story. Whether they have been exposed to that through fairy tales or through junior high…It's not something that they're not familiar with. But what they don't realize is actually how you put the elements together purposefully. So one of my goals in teaching short story analysis would be to show them how the elements work together and to do that, I'll start removing the elements. Including, for example, with boys and girls I might even try that, but, um, what they're doing now, I started, I showed… it's a 20 IB class, so we have, I created a powerpoint and it's a comparative essay that I'm preparing them for, so we have *Antigone* by Cheryl Watson and Boys and Girls by Alice Munro. And we did the analysis of *Antigone* where I had different kids responsible for different elements. So two kids were responsible for setting, two kids were

> responsible for characters, all of them, divided narrator and whatnot. But now, um, those who were responsible, for example, for plant imagery or animal imagery so how that fits with the setting and enhances the symbolical function of the setting. So, let's say, working with a motif, it would be quite interesting to take out the motif again and see what happens to the story that you have already created. So, I don't know. I could play around with that. (laughs) But ultimately, the analysis is that dissection, that deconstruction that they need to engage and the most obvious one in the most shocking would be, probably, remove the characters. How do you write a story that doesn't have characters? They will have to figure out that the setting will eventually become a character, right?
>
> BRENT: Are they just paralyzed at first? When you first ask them?
>
> LARISSA: (laughs) I haven't tried that yet.
>
> BRENT: Okay. It's going to be interesting to see what would happen.
>
> LARISSA: I would like to.

I present this lengthy section of dialogue to give witness to the genuine creative process that Larissa is engaged in and also to the sense of joy and excitement that this process creates in both of us. When she is imagining this

prospective lesson, I actually assume that she is remembering, and then relating, a lesson that she has already taught, but I am also clearly caught up in a futuring moment of imagining myself teaching such a lesson with whatever modifications I would make to it. I am essentially mirroring Larissa's own process of watching a teacher teach and then creating. I watch Larissa teach through her description and then I am invited into the creative process. From this point, Larissa actually goes on to elaborate at some length about the shape and scope of her imagined lesson and we eventually start talking about this whole generative process as it plays out within the classroom. We consider that distinction between a lesson that grows organically versus a lesson that is mapped out from the outset – something that all the prior respondents noted and had reservations about with this particular lesson, with all of them recoiling somewhat from the idea of formula. I express my sense that while the teacher in the clip seems to have a clear sense of where he is going with the lesson and is willing to follow it regardless of whether he really needs to teach the lesson, Larissa seems to be always creating, even in the midst of a lesson. She affirms this by saying "I don't always know" – a clear echo of Fred's previous comments about not being sure where his lessons will go, even though he knows where they are going – and she sees this creative freedom as stemming from "pretty solid expertise," noting that "I have been doing it for so long that I don't, I'm not afraid to say that I don't know."

I ask her if she sees this same kind of fearlessness in other classrooms – in other subject areas – that she has been in and her response is intriguing: "No, not necessarily. Um, but because the subject nature is requiring certain approaches,

too, I mean, literature is fairly open. We could impose certain methods and certain limitations and guard it, but that's not what the essence of the subject is. But I think there is a lot of creativity for, a lot of room for creativity in a math lesson, for example." So Larissa is at once, noting that there is something specific about the teaching of literature that affects her approach, but she also sees the teaching process itself as being inherently creative.

Larissa then goes on to relate an anecdote about watching her husband – a university level math teacher – teach a lesson in which he used an analogy to convey a complex concept. She was obviously very impressed by this process and I press her as to why, and particularly why her husband's analogy was effective while the teacher we just watched – who was also using an analogy – was less effective. Her response was that had to do with the uniqueness of the analogy: "I would say the analogy of my husband was shocking. You would never expect, you know, a pyramid of champagne to explain a complex concept about a financial contract." The teacher in the clip, however, had an analogy that "was completely familiar." This is intriguing because that sense of familiarity was very clearly what the teacher in the clip was attempting to evoke. He was trying to tap into the lived experience of the students, to provide a connecting point for what they needed to do, but in Larissa's view this familiarity was actually counter-productive in moving the students towards new learning. The common analogy left the students rooted, while the analogy in her example moved the students forward in a memorable manner.

Bob

At the time of our discussion, Bob was in his first year back in the classroom after a five year secondment at Alberta Education. At his request, I met Bob at a coffee shop near his home on a Saturday morning.

Bob was actually the one participant who did not watch and respond to this clip. At his request, we met at a coffee shop not far from his home and I was unable to establish a stable internet connection to present the clip to him. We decided that I would simply send him the link and he would watch it on his own and respond via email. Unfortunately, despite his best efforts to access the clip, he was unsuccessful. If Bob had Real Player already downloaded this simply entailed a few clicks of the mouse. It took me less than 30 seconds to access the site and start watching the video with my interview participants. In one case, where the Real-Downplayer was not already installed, I watched a participant download it and start watching the clip in just under two minutes. I mention this here because I think this experience really highlights a dimension of our profession's uncertain relationship with technology. Even relatively simple tasks are not simple if no one has taken the time to guide you through the process and yet, this is exactly what most teachers have experienced as they grapple with an almost bewildering array of technological innovations that are now a part of their lives. The larger question of how the scope and pace of technological change has affected the teaching lives of English teachers is an area that needs to be pursued in a subsequent study.

Part Three: The Progressive Moment

Chapter Seven: The Discussion Prompts (The Class)

The second prompt is also a video clip, but this time it is an excerpt from the 2008 Palme d'Or winner and Academy Award nominee for Best Foreign language film, *The Class*. The film is based on Francoise Begaudeau's memoir about teaching French language and literature in a middle school in Paris. Like the previous clip, it was my hope that participants would be able to enter into a familiar space – a teacher engaging in a class discussion and a writing assignment after engaging with a literary text – but I also hoped that the language barrier – the clip is in French with English subtitles – and the constructed element of the film – the star of the film is Begaudeau himself and while based on his memoir the film is a scripted work – would complicate the discussion. In this clip, a reading of Anne Frank's diary leads to a thought-provoking class discussion, but we also get a glimpse into how high the personal stakes are – for both teachers and students – in these kinds of discussions. The clip itself presents a kind of funhouse mirror of

the process we are involved in as we enter into the dialogue. We are watching this film based on a teaching memoir that features a student reading from a memoir, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, as prelude to an autobiographical writing assignment. There are many layers of autobiography to wade through before participants can arrive at themselves.

Mike

Mike really says very little about the film clip itself except to note that

> the understanding that those students could walk out of that class with for the text, you know, blows anything out of the water. The discussion of shame, the deeper meaning behind our motivations . . . it's huge . . . I mean as much as I use the word engagement for that last clip, I mean compared to this clip, that's engagement in class . . .

Interestingly, he also specifically seeks clarification about the clip asking "that's not fiction is it?" This is by no means an easy question to offer a definitive answer to when we are talking about a scripted feature film based on a memoir by a former teacher who also plays the lead in the film. I provide a bit of context, but Mike was not particularly interested in pursuing this topic. He did, however, use the clip to open up into some of the larger topics about the way that we think about what an education is. As mentioned previously, Mike has recently moved into an administrative position, so he is not currently teaching English, but he is currently teaching Theory of Knowledge, a required course for the International

Baccalaureate Diploma, and that was the base for some of his discussion in response to the previous clip and he later ties this back to English. He also links himself, unknowingly, to Larissa, who is the only other TOK teacher in this cohort and who also speaks of her TOK experience in regard to English.

Mike was struck by the engagement level of the class in the video and he saw this as being directly correlated to the authenticity of the discussion in this scene. This causes him to consider the often inauthentic approaches to learning that we present to students and he reflects on a recent conversation he had with his TOK class where he asked them to explore the definition of science:

> So, is Science aboutlearning about the heart and chemical structures and all that kind of stuff or is it a way of thinking? I pose the question that when you go into a lab at school if you find that your results are different from what the teacher expected what would the result of that be and how many of you believed that the result would be that the teacher would redo the test and look at it. Would it ever come up that a teacher would say "I think you just disproved the . . . whatever" . . . but of course the kids said, "No, you'd be marked wrong" that it was wrong what you did . . . that if you get what they say you were going to get, then good, you talk about why you got there, if you get what they say you shouldn't get then you have to say why you are wrong. Justify why you are wrong. You have to explain why you were wrong. And so my question was, is that real science? Is that science?

Mike goes on to relate a personal anecdote about why he "got out of Science" – his first degree choice – and went into both Education and specifically, English education. He remembers entering university and considers whether he was truly ready for an authentic learning experience:

> I don't think that I was prepared to wrap my head around the idea that at some point I have to let go of the fact that someone in the room knows the right . . . knows the answer. And I didn't think I could get there and the minute I did get there in university was the most proud moment of my life in science and it was also the most difficult moment of my life in science. I did an activity, a research proposal which was an activity that was imposed upon me in class. And I truly handed something in where there was no answer. I could not find any research that either confirmed or denied what I was proposing, which would have made it probably something I should have followed up on . . . Which was something I should have actually done. And I was so stressed out about handing it in because I couldn't find the right answer. . . And I got the result back and I got the mark back on it and I did phenomenally well. Like it was probably the best mark that I got in university on anything and I was still stressed out about it. So I couldn't wrap my head around the idea that science was a way of thinking, not a body of knowledge. And I think , , , I've talked a lot about Science and not about English . . . but I think our school system even in

> terms of English doesn't . .. it doesn't allow or, not that it doesn't allow for it, but I think we're so ingrained that someone in the room has to have the right answer.

I followed this up by asking Mike what he thought the response would be if he replaced "Science" with "English" in his discussion with his students:

> A very similar place, I think. You know, and because of the way English is primarily delivered that when you interpret a text, here's what you look for and here's why you look for that and, there isn't that true, genuine sense that – from students anyway – that genuine sense that if I discover something even in English, if I discover something, the way I feel about a text, if I can justify it I'll get the marks that I deserve. There is the sense that I need to say what the English teacher wants me to say.

It was at this point that I asked Mike to consider how his new role as an Assistant principal was affecting his perceptions of teaching and himself as a teacher and while he qualified his answer by noting how relatively new he was to his position, he did note that his perspective had certainly broadened. He spoke about the use of data as a tool to generate questions and I asked him whether he thought that "teachers, and particularly English teachers are not so comfortable" asking questions. He responded:

> I wouldn't limit it to just English teachers, but I think there are certain teachers who are uncomfortable with asking questions . . .

> especially if you've been doing things for a long time and you've kind of, if you've been a silo where you've kind of locked yourself away and been the teacher that you wanted to be. That you feel is the right teacher to be and you've kind of ignored the change in the culture of schools and kind of ignored the change in what is coming to us as students. If you've finally hit a point where you wake up or you've finally hit a point – and I hate to use that because it's not as though you've been asleep, you're still a good teacher, but you haven't done the reflection that maybe other people have done or that maybe the system has demanded or has requested maybe then if you haven't done it there's that sense that I need to hold on because I might feel like I'm not . . . like, you know, everything I've done up to this point is for naught . . . then you feel like odd, like "Everyone around me has gone mad. I need to hold on to what I've got because everyone's going crazy . . .

Mike talks about seeing teachers eager to dismiss the "next big thing" because there is inevitably something new coming later, but clearly states, "You know, my opinion to that is, so what? Why not look at what is, even if you end up tossing it in the garbage later. Even if in three years it becomes obsolete, at least you've had, you know, at least you've engaged with it" and, the implication is, at least you have grown through it. Mike's earlier comments about what he hopes to show his students about the authentic discovery process both in Science and English clearly reflect his approach to professional learning as a teacher.

Barry

Barry immediately draws a connection between the two film clips, and unlike Mike, he sees this second clip as a construction:

> Well, interesting. Kinda the same thing in some ways, right? I mean, you're looking at a teacher who is starting from a text and moving towards some personal writing. Um, obviously this is scripted and has better writers than the guy in the classroom . . . It brings up one of those issues that I always have trouble with. That whole thing when you're getting kids to write from their personal experience, and, you know, what is the value of that, and where is the intrusion of that?

Barry recognizes this clip as representing a central tension that emerges when we ask students to engage in autobiography and this actually brings him back to his own personal experience as a student, reflecting on his "education training" in his English Major's course:

> where we had, you know, part of a mark was keeping what they called at the time the commonplace book. Mine was not a commonplace book, it was a spectacular book, but it was a complete work of fiction, right? Because, like, those kids, I said, well, you know what, I mean, I have thoughts and reflections, but I'm certainly not going to expose them to someone for a mark. Like, here are the things you probably want me to see, you want

> me to come in and be, you know, surprised by things, you want me to learn things, you want me to reflect on things, you probably want me to have an epiphany every now and then. I remember saying, day twelve of my practicum, epiphany, and I wrote it out, you know, and I handed the book in and, not surprising, I got great marks on it, which just made me more bitter about the whole process.

Barry is talking about authenticity and he is suggesting that when we as teachers confront our students with an essentially inauthentic task of writing about themselves "honestly" when we are really looking for something very specific from them, such as epiphanic moments, we are actually encouraging a distortion of self. He cites an example where he played the game and gave the teacher what was desired, and received great marks, and this made him jaded about the whole reflective enterprise. He reflects on his own children and their experiences in junior high and high school and how often they are asked to write autobiographically and considers how this plays into his own choices as a teacher:

> [Y]ou get these kids writing these stories that are just one plot twist after another plot twist after another plot twist that doesn't explore the thematic subject that they're given and, you know, you're just grinding your wheels with those things. . . . I wanna say "Kids, look, I'm interested in your ideas not your biography. You don't need to tell me personal details. I don't need a confession. I'm not a priest, I'm an English teacher. I wanna see you work some ideas

> through." On the other hand, I have to say, "Well, if you're not writing from something that is something that happened to you or someone you know or something that you have some connection to, you're probably not saying much except inventing a lot of artifice anyway." So I find there is that really, and again, I will tell kids both of those things, and I mean both of those things. And partly I feel like the teacher there who's sort of feeling hypocritical, because you're right, when the kid says, you don't really care what we think, you're right, we don't. Now, you know, and of course, in the story they start to have a conversation and the bell rings and you know that those things are never going to make it onto the page. Not in that form. And, um, but that's where I think sometimes, again, those good conversations, the guy didn't have a plan, you know, from what I see. He had no more of a plan than the guy in the first video.

What Barry has pointed to here is the fact that the whole process of writing about yourself and talking about yourself in an English classroom is fraught with tension and contradictions; and it is only when those things are surfaced, when the student in the film confronts the teacher by saying "You don't really care" that authentic dialogue emerges. Barry recognizes, however, that this authenticity will not make it onto the page and in a strange way – and this echoes some of Fred's comments regarding the first clip – it is the teacher's lack of planning that creates

a space where that dialogue can emerge, but again, Barry seems plagued by contradictions and unwilling to totally recognize the second clip as authentic.

In all of the responses in part one regarding our primary role as teachers, not one mentioned "priest" or "psychologist," yet Barry's specific naming of these two roles reflects his understanding of the deeply personal nature of what we do. Barry rejects this notion that part of our role is to allow kids to unburden themselves through their writing and interestingly, Barry's response to the question about our primary roles in the first part of the study was this:

> The key role in the classroom is Communicator: you must know what you are saying, why you are saying it and be absolutely aware of the audience you are addressing. Outside of the class, it would be Organizer: magic doesn't happen unless you are suitable prepared.

This combination of preparation and communication allows Barry to be at peace with providing what he calls a formula. Barry is also one of the few respondents who identifies himself explicitly as a writer, rather than, as he himself notes, a reader, as most English teachers do. Barry sees this as being a very important factor when it comes to teaching writing, which we all engage in as part of our professional practice. In this passage he highlights one of the challenges in writing and by extension teaching writing in an authentic manner:

> I used to be a writer, you know? I used to write dialogue. One of the things that I used to do when I was trying to write realistic

> dialogue is I'd go down to the Greyhound bus station and I would sit and I would write down the things that people said verbatim. This was before I had a recorder, so I would write these things down and then go back and read them. And you know what people say? When they're talking, … they say nothing.

Barry is pointing to an inherent problem when we demand authenticity from writers, but also have an implicit desire to be entertained and even inspired.

Barry offers a detailed commentary on the writing process and on the question of authenticity directing us to the inevitable tension that exists in a system that encourages us to ask, with the proverbial straight face, students to write authentically within the essentially false construct of a grade-based curriculum. We want students to tell us "their" stories and ideas in their writing, but in our current system we transform those stories into quantitative values that ultimately reflect a good/bad dichotomy.

Fred

Fred's initial response immediately brings us back to the question of authenticity:

> Okay, how does that seem ten thousand times more authentic than what we watched before? . . . The cadences of teaching are real, the give and take, the ebb and flow of the classroom discussion is real, he really listens to them. There's a certain honesty to the conversation, the way that you push kids to divulge more

> information or to think about thinks more indifferently. There's something intensely authentic about that. That's what classrooms smell like and feel like. Whether I think it's good, right? A lot is revealed by those kids.

He notes, however, that there is a sense of unrest evident in the teacher as the clip progresses and for Fred, this really comes down to narrative and its crucial role in the teaching process:

> We know how kids hang on stories, on anecdotes, on real-life things that make things come alive for them. We know that when someone tells a story, there's a difference between… you know, oftentimes kids, you know, like you say, you tell a funny story about a cat and sixteen hands go up and you're like, frick, there's going to be sixteen ridiculous cat stories come out. But we know the difference between someone telling an authentic cat story and when a kid really tells a real honest-to-god experience, and the whole class grows silent and rapt. Kind of out of respect for their classmates, and . . .that knowledge is being divulged. That humanity is laid on the table. That someone has the balls to speak or to share. And if someone feels that trust and that community you built the classroom to share something. . . .Hard, or difficult or funny, or something that they've never really shared with anyone else? And those are the moments where you go, oh my God, this is great. Those are also the scariest moments as a teacher…

Fred realizes that there was a moment in the clip when the text was left behind and the discussion became truly authentic and perhaps even potentially dangerous:

> Where did that class take that turn into something sublimely profound? Where did the class take that brief moment, and it wasn't the literature that was the springboard, it was that notion of revealing oneself. Right? Nakedly. And this whole notion that really you're just sort of an instrument to your teacher. And when the kids can see you as not that, some sort of instrument of the man or the establishment, that's when I think things can also get powerful, but I mean that's sort of teaching someone how to be an honest human rather than… How to be… but I think those two are indivisible in an English classroom.

Fred's words synthesize some of the discussions about authenticity that have emerged in the first parts of many of the discussions. As the conversation went on we both started to relate some of our experiences as English teachers and it became clear just how much Fred loves being an English teacher, and it was also very clear how important it is for him for his students to love English as much as he does. Yet, it is also apparent that there are many students out there who have a real disconnect with English and clearly do not see it as being particularly relevant to their lives. I asked him about what makes that difference between a kid who loves English and one who barely tolerates it.

> I don't know. I guess that's where the passion comes from, right? I mean, not to get back on the whole passion thing, but like I really believe the shit that I sell, right? . . . Like, I was just talking about the end of *Up* and I just started bawling in front of the Grade 10 class. Not because it was planned or anything, like suddenly it just became really moving for me. And I had just watched it with them. . . .But, what an honour to be able to have a human experience with kids . . . And that might be it, right?

Fred's last question is an interesting hybrid of the rhetorical and the authentic. This concept that teaching English is about – or at least, involves – creating authentic human experiences is at the core of Fred's understanding and experience of what it means to teach and this also reflects one of the dominant conceptual frames to emerge from the study thus far: To teach English means to engage in profound moments of connectedness with other human beings.

Sally

As with the previous three participants, Sally notes that there is "a big difference" between the clips. Sally was impressed with how he "kept jumping on those teachable moments" and it made her recall a very important book in her life:

.

> [I]t made me think of that great drama improvisation teacher, Viola Spolin, who has this whole fantastic book about getting kids to learn without them realizing that they're learning. . . And I thought that… that made me think of it, that they don't realize, in

> the best teachable moments, they don't realize quite what's happened and what they've learned until after it's all over. And then you articulate it for them, but they've really internalized something. And I thought that was really neat. Um, I just thought about how much teachers are in the firing line. Like, if he wasn't a confident, confident guy, and knew just how to deflect and move that away, like, how, anybody else would be, or so many other people would be just, to have that defiance and then that difficulty and that, whatever, from some of those kids, it's, like, as a normal human being that's quite crushing to see that.

As with her response to the first clip, Sally is very empathetic and it is interesting to see how her appreciation of the teacher's ability to essentially think on his feet and capture these teachable moments actually morphs into a realization of just how much is going on in the classroom at any given time.

> [I]t makes me think about how he was absolutely comfortable being in that firing range and how he could just use it and make it a teachable moment, use it and make it a teachable moment, use it and use it and use it. . . . [B]efore they even realized that they were fessing up to personal stuff, or getting into those ambiguities and those complexities of those issues in life. Like, what does shame mean? What does shame look like? Is shame different than, um, discipline I think was the other word that he used, when the one boy was saying he was ashamed for people or they lack shame, and

> do they just need discipline, and kind of milking that idea of what could it really turn into. You know, just that kind of thinking, which makes English the best thing to teach, because it has so much freedom with where, with what the kids bring and where they go. And that's what makes it the most fun for me, like, watching that was fascinating, even though I know it's a film and it's Hollywood and it's scripted or, not Hollywood but, whatever, scripted. That's typical of what goes on every day. Every day.

This brings us back to Sally's earlier point about "Hillary Swank" and that sense of the fake ideal teacher, but here we have a creation – a film – that is real. I mention to Sally that the actor playing the teacher is, indeed a teacher, and, in fact he is playing himself in a film based on his own memoir. She responds:

> Yeah. And you can tell, even with the body language and what he's doing, that he's like moving around and he's, like, exasperated and flops his hands down, I think, at one point, he's being a little bit more antagonistic. In a really good way. Like, really to push them, like, well, what do you think, what do you, would you do those kind of, like, honestly it's interesting because I was just talking lately about how much of teaching is a performance. How much of it is really a performance every day. That you are sincerely but, truly, acting out a role, and that you know how to act. And that sometimes that's the best thing,

> because when everything else is falling apart, you can at least act like a teacher and things work.

Sally and I spoke briefly about how different our backgrounds were in regard to performing arts. I was almost painfully shy moving through school and yet I really revel in performance moments in my classroom. Sally has a background in drama and notes how comfortable she has always been slipping into a performance. This leads us to a larger discussion about teacher types:

> I honestly think that teaching is the weirdest profession ever, because there absolutely isn't a type. I would think there is not a type. I think it's… when you go to a meeting full of English teachers, I cannot believe the different eclectic types of people that I meet. And they're all really good in so many different ways, but I could never even… like, I could, and maybe this is because I don't have experience, but I could sort of say there's a type of physics teacher. There's a type of biology teacher. There's a type of social teacher. That, I think, maybe, there's a type in those disciplines. But in English? I would say it is the wackiest group of people ever. Which is a tremendous strength, but also a tremendous challenge, because I wonder how one can (sigh) talk about and go between such different teaching styles. Like, if I wanna help someone, or, like, we're all so individual in how we approach teaching English, that it's really hard to maybe find, like, continuity between teachers. Or, even when you think about kids

> going from one grade to the next, and how differently we all teach. Not just our personalities or whatever, but how differently we organize our year, or how differently we organize how we teach a short story. … it's mind-boggling that there's so little consistency. And that can be great, or it can be a disaster

Sally's reflection about the diversity she has seen amongst various English teaching colleagues, allows us a glimpse into her experience of what it means to teach English. If there is, indeed, no "type" and our lives our framed by a curriculum that requires creation and invention rather than prescription, this multitude of teaching voices and personas transforms into a multitude of curricula.

Larissa

Larissa starts her reflection, with a smile, "Well, that's definitely more my approach. Especially with the instructions, you know, you have all to figure it out, go ahead and do it. (laughs)" and then, she too, enters into a comparison of the two clips by noting

> the similarity with the other clip was that students were not at all engaged in the beginning and, as the discussion progressed and as they were talking about personal experiences and the text was made, well, the text was forgotten, really. Completely forgotten, so I don't even know why the reading happened in the beginning.

> Like, it was pointless. Um, if I were to teach it, I would probably reverse it.

As in her response to the first clip, Larissa very quickly starts creating her own lesson, although she doesn't enter into a full envisioning of the lesson as she did previously and she generally stays focused on the lesson at hand. Unlike most other participants, she shows no reluctance to enter into a critical discussion of the clip. She sees the use of the reading from Anne Frank as "a waste of time" because the teacher never really addresses the text itself.

> So I would have reversed it. I would probably have gone pretty much like the other teacher did. He started with, he mentioned the story that they have read and then he went into discussion of what would be relevant, probably, to the students in order to explain the connection. This one I liked because it is my, like, random almost, um, although maybe it was almost too random in a way. What I liked about this teacher is something that I also do a lot, challenge the students. Like, put them in situations where they don't necessarily feel comfortable. And maybe reluctant, even, to talk about. But that doesn't prevent you from asking the questions. In comparison to the other clip, of course these kids asked more questions, they were more proactive in asking questions. Um, so the connection definitely comes through trying to make what you teach relevant to their lives or, if it is not even relevant, to somehow give them that opportunity to connect to real life and

> contextualize it through, I guess, what they know about it. But I definitely liked the questions of the teacher here, they seemed to be deeper. They were questions that were aiming, as you said, to challenge and maybe to shock them and to some extent to turn the mirror towards the students so that they can reflect and, they almost got into a sort of an argument.

Larissa clearly embraces the idea of teacher as provocateur and she was impressed both with the depth of the questions and the teacher's willingness to go into areas that are uncomfortable both for the teacher and the students. Larissa notes that the lesson may be "too random" even for her, suggesting that despite its strengths, the lesson may not have been as successful as it might be. I ask Larissa if she thought that the teacher would emerge from that classroom moment thinking that he'd done what he intended to do.

> Probably not. I don't think he was quite clear what he wanted. What he wanted them to do. He said, and self-portrait is not an autobiography at the end, which apparently is something that he wanted them to understand, um, but, again, there was no connection between the reading, in what way that reading helps the student understand the difference between a self-portrait. And was Anne Frank's diary offered as an example of self-portrait? Because that's where he started, but I'm not sure that he sort of left it as a loose end.

She sees the teacher, despite the probing nature of his questions, to be uncomfortable delving into the "cultural diversity" in the classroom and the "brewing tensions" that to her were obvious and this leads us into a discussion of how she deals with the cultural diversity – a hallmark of the school she teaches in – in her own classroom. She sees "cultural sensitivity" as "not a product of the environment and the students you face" but a "product of your own personal experiences." She continues

> I would say a lot of that, a lot of my choices in the classroom are influenced because I did research on post-colonialism. So to some extent my mentality is shaped by ideas that I have come to accept as part of what I believe I have to teach students.

When I ask her if teaching English allows her the latitude to teach what she believes, she offers a very clear response:

> I don't really think of myself as an English teacher. I think of myself as, um, probably a literature teacher. Period. Regardless of the language in which I teach because I've taught in two different languages. Um, what you teach is literature. You're teaching a reflection of human mind in artistic crafting of words. Ultimately examining the big questions. So I would say as a teacher of literature, that's also a misnomer, because if we go all the way it would be, I'm teaching theory of knowledge. (laughs)

Larissa is the second of the participants to expressly reject the notion of being an English teacher. Mike made the same point in his discussion and interestingly enough, both he and Larissa mention the International Baccalaureate Theory of Knowledge course as being very important to their teaching identity. Larissa also very clearly recognizes herself as an expert in literary discourse, while Mike actively – from the literal beginning of his career – rejected the idea of being an English expert. In both cases their rejection of the signifier "English teacher" allows them the space to create themselves.

Bob

As mentioned previously, Bob did not watch the *Change Leadership* clip, so this is actually the starting point for his discussion. Bob is the one participant who seems to know *The Diary of Anne Frank* well enough to enter into some of the subtleties of the teacher's decision to start with a reading of this particular passage:

> It actually, in hindsight when I look back at it and remark on how he started it by reading the Anne Frank thing out loud. Particularly because it's her last entry and it's both a very concise and probably accurate self-portrait in the context that they get arrested and she dies not long after, I think that really catches the students' attention, both the honesty and the self-criticism of Anne Frank at the same time she's making herself sound pretty special, but the fact that she dies right after is really . . . I mean I didn't see the students look stunned or, and they're very cool about it, but I think

> it was a really tremendous starting point although, of course, the teacher doesn't mention that Anne Frank when she's writing this doesn't know she's about to die. I mean, she doesn't know that, you know, this is a pivotal moment in her life, so she is just writing what she is writing, which would be a useful reminder to those kids that context is really important and at the same time, Anne is just doing her thing . . . And then the discussion that follows, I thought it was useful to hear her words – Anne Frank's words – because they were so genuine or seemed so genuine . . . a young but very crafty and crafted writer but very eloquent so I think for those kids who were listening, whether their heads were down on the desk or not, reading along or not, I think those words would penetrate most of their façade. I think it would resonate a little bit .

Bob's point here completely contradicts Larissa who saw the reading as essentially pointless, and this perhaps reflects how important it is – echoing what we hear from both Fred and Sally – to be passionate and love the text you are teaching. Bob is the only one who seems to be legitimately connecting with that text through his own experience and thus, he is the only one who can enter into that teacher's pedagogical rationale for choosing and having that text read aloud. Interestingly enough, Bob gives by far the most detailed exploration of the clip itself. The other five participants all used the clip to a greater or lesser extent as a jumping off point to bring the discussion back to their own experiences and/or broader issues in teaching.

In his discussion of the clip, Bob actually echoes a question that Fred asked in his reflection by inquiring into the moment when the tone shifted. Bob notes that there was some initial resistance before the conversation took off. "I'm trying to think when it shifted . . . it shifted with the guy in the book who said he couldn't eat with his buddy's mom and, to give the teacher his credit – I don't know if it was intuitive on his part as opposed to strategic – he is both acting curious and really stupid." Bob is uncertain whether this teacher is actually unable to understand what the boy is saying or whether he is simply feigning misunderstanding in order to open the discussion. Ultimately, he concludes that this was not the case, and that what we are seeing is a truly authentic moment of intense curiosity felt by teacher and students, but again, ironically, we see this play out in the construction that is a film. This brings us back to the issue of performance in teaching – which has been a part of all six of these discussions – and spurs this reflective exchange in our discussion:

> Bob: I think actually most of the class was involved orally or listening because if they were allowed to go to places of shame or embarrassment that really raises the level of interest and the level of openness and the one girl was quite rightly saying 'Are you really interested in what we have to say? I don't think you are. I think you are just performing' and he answers in the typical teacher kind of way, yes, of course I am and I am sincere about my interest and at the same time, probably, he's going to read a lot of

> stuff that won't be very interesting to read. It's both the truth and a lie or a half-truth .
>
> Brent: Well, that whole question of teacher as performer or teacher as actor is kind of an interesting thing to pursue; I mean, to some extent, we are putting on our teacher suits too when we walk into a class.
>
> Bob: Absolutely. We are. No, there's no . . . we'd like to think that we're enough of ourselves that there's not this huge gap between what we are in our personal life – our ordinary life, as it were – and our teacher life. That there isn't this absolute. But I don't know, for some teachers maybe there is, maybe there is this persona they put on when they walk into class, Certainly, anyone who has any performance background or has been teaching for awhile understands that to some degree, yeah, you want to perform. You need to raise your energy level to meet or exceed the kids' energy level or to inspire them to some energy level, as opposed to absolute passivity, so that is interesting about how he was performing yet at the same time he was saying he wasn't . . . It was an interesting modulation.

From here, we enter into a discussion about the distinction between the teaching self and the "real" self, when I ask Bob, what someone who knows him outside of his teaching context would see different in him in a classroom context. He begins

by joking that they would see “panic and stress,” but ultimately concludes “I think generally people would see me as I am.” He does not elaborate on exactly who he is – perhaps because he assumes I already know – but he does begin to explore the paucity of time for planning in his teaching life because of all of the duties – notably marking – that he has as a classroom teacher. He notes that because of this he is often left to “improvise” something he feels quite at home with because of his years of experience to draw on, but he wonders about the plight of a “poor new teacher.” When we consider what he is talking about here, it seems as though he has identified two distinct creative processes that we engage in as a teacher: 1) We carefully plan and construct a lesson in which we play a fairly scripted role and 2) We respond in situ and improvise to achieve our ends as teachers. Bob laments that he does not have time to do more of the former, but recognizes his comfort with the latter, but this also brings us back to the question of authenticity. Is one, ultimately, more authentic – more real – than the other?

As these thoughts develop, Bob actually directly brings our discussion back to the film clip to express just what a “beautiful discussion” it was and again he reflects his uncertainty about how much of this lesson was constructed with intent. He notes “I was amazed at the courage of the teacher or, again, the stupidity, I don’t know which it is, so what are you embarrassed about . . . I don’t think I’d ever ask that question”. So, Bob is simultaneously recognizing the beauty and power in this class discussion, but recognizes – and this echoes some of Sally’s comments – what a tremendous risk the teacher was taking, even if he is still unsure about how much calculation was involved in that risk. The last point

that Bob raises about the clip again has to do with authenticity as he notes how he could empathize with the teacher getting “surprised by the bell” and having to give – presumably, important – assignment directions over the din and shuffle as students get ready to move to their next class. This is a microcosm of the role that time plays in our teaching lives.

Part Three: The Progressive Moment

Chapter Eight: The Discussion Prompts "It's Beginning to Hurt")

James Lasdun is the winner of the 2006 BBC National Short Story Award and his latest story "It's Beginning to Hurt" was featured on the Story website (http://www.theshortstory.org.uk). My intention with this prompt was to have participants enter into a version of the process that they go through when they consider a work that they might use in their classroom. I chose the story itself because it was obscure enough and new enough that I thought it was unlikely to have been read by any participants. It was also very short and thus did not represent an unreasonable time commitment. It offered the promise of literary merit – with its crafted sentences and the writer's pedigree – and at least the potential for controversy with the plot dealing with adultery. Originally, I intended to have interview participants read the text and respond as part of the interview process, but I felt that it would be too intrusive when combined with the two previous film clips, so I simply asked participants to respond to the story in a follow-up email. Because I specifically asked for brief responses, I have provided the full text of each response, which is presented in italics at the beginning of each section.

Mike

Mike is the one participant who did not respond to this prompt despite two email reminders. I decided not to pursue it further and I'm reluctant to read too much into this other than a typically busy teacher/administrator life. I

will offer that Mike is the one participant who does not have an assignment that involves teaching either literature or film and thus, would have been the one participant reading the story who would not have entertained at least the possibility of teaching this story or looked at the Story website as a resource with immediate applicability.

Barry

I might teach the story. There's a lot of subtlety and ambiguity there and it might be fun to look at different interpretations of what's important in the story and how it all ties together.

I would probably teach it in the context of a discussion of some of the above features. Level is interesting. The extra-marital affair business might be a bit too mature for a 10 level class and maybe even a 20 level. I think it would be most suitable for a 30 level – probably a high-functioning 30-1. The problem is that it's a pretty obscure story that is wide open to interpretation – and I'm getting pretty cowardly about teaching that kind of story to a class of students who may choose to write about it on a Diploma exam. I know that's pretty pragmatic but that might be a reason why I would not teach it to any of my classes.

Although I am not concerned about the implied sexual content, I am always aware that some of my students might be. Another reason why I might not teach it.

In the end, I probably wouldn't teach the story – although I do find it kind of interesting.

Barry's comments reflect three distinct levels of tension that emerge when considering a text for class. He is personally attracted to the "subtlety and ambiguity" in the piece, but also sees this as inherently problematic in a culture of standardized testing. On one hand, we want students to recognize that there are multiple interpretations to a complex text, but in world framed by high stakes testing, we can't pretend that all responses are equally valid. Barry sees this as the biggest factor involved in his choice. He notes that the "implied sexual content" is also a factor and would partly dictate what level of class he would use the story at and perhaps why he might not use it at all. Barry also underscores, both in his opening and closing sentences, that tension that exists between what we personally are drawn to and what we know will function well in the classroom.

Fred

Nope.

But it may be because of my own analytical inadequacies. I'm not sure that I "get it," entirely. And, if I do, in fact, "get it," I can think of other minimalist British authors that would be more accessible for the kids, where I and they wouldn't have to work so hard to make meaning of every word, every symbol. I think that with some kids, it would come across as "too English-y," where meaning can only be constructed through some really concise syntax and interpretation of some symbols (the salmon, the gluetraps, etc.) that, for me, are necessary to establish even a narrative.

Having said all that, maybe I would teach it to a grade 12 class who had done some work with Carver or Wolff or Chekhov as an example of contemporary minimalism. The kids might be more willing to engage. Can I see them engaging in it right now? Not really. But, like I said, I am more than willing to agree that may be due to my own lack of acumen. It is not "mine" yet. But it could be.

The first time I read Galsworthy's "The Japanese Quince" I didn't "get it." But I couldn't get it out of my mind. And then I worked with it. And now I can't imagine English 30-1 without it. Really.

Fred's response revolves primarily around his own response to the story, and how that response dictates its teachability. He sees his reluctance to teach the story as perhaps reflecting his inability to "get it," and he elaborates on this at some length. Fred demonstrates a strong understanding of the genre and of how specific student background would impact student reaction to the text, and there is no doubt in my mind that he "gets it" from a technical standpoint. What he is really talking about is that process of shifting from a story that he has read – a story offered up by someone else – to a story that he is a co-creator of as he imagines it coming alive in his classroom. This creative process is captured in two short phrases: "It is not "mine" yet. But it could be." This sense of personal ownership of a text is echoed in many of the discussions I have had with teachers over the years and in fact, reflects some of Fred's comments from his discussion with me about choosing texts. At one point, he opens up into an eloquent reflection on "why it's so important that we put the right pieces of literature in kids' hands." He is very pointed in establishing how important it is that we be

very clear about why we are choosing a certain text and actually enters into a type of fictional dialogue about this process:

> when you ask new teachers or even people who've been teaching for a while, who've just never given it a thought, like I always think what are you going to accomplish with this short story? Well, we're going to read it. No, no, but what is this short story serving? Like, what are going to do with this one? What are you going to teach them with this story? Well, we're going to read it. No, I understand that, but is there some reason why you've chosen this piece of literature? Because it's a bang-up job of teaching the symbol, right? Like I can get to the kids, or this is a great story for pulling out relevant quotations and so I use this to, like, teach them quotation integration, or is this a story that lends itself to a really good tight body paragraph?

Fred's approach to selecting literature is at once deeply personal – almost spiritual – and extremely pragmatic. It is only in reconciling these two dimensions that Fred seems at peace with a work of literature for his classes.

Sally

I think I would probably not teach this story, as it didn't really resonate with me and too much was left unsaid. It's not a terrible story, but it just didn't connect for me in a lot of ways. I could teach it, but I wouldn't be really convincing. However, you know that I have thing about short stories and often don't really

like them. Because I get so impatient reading them, I'm not good at choosing good ones for class.

Sally actually emailed me again, not long after sending this, to ask if she needed to write more. This response was in stark contrast to her very detailed discussion with me, where, as with her email response and those written by both Barry and Fred, her personal connection with the story plays a determining role in her decision. Every sentence in her response speaks to her own connection – or in this case, lack of connection – with the story and this supported what she expressed in her discussion, where she states unequivocally "I really do believe that you can't teach something well unless you like it." She recognizes that this is "a controversial thing, and lots of people disagree [believing that] you learn to teach something well. And I'm, like, deep down, what I feel is, stuff that I don't like? I don't teach well." In her subsequent discussion of this Sally brings it back to the performative aspect of the job,

> Like, I'm trying to do a good job, but I can feel that it's… it's not a convincing performance. It's not a convincing… the kids know, and they're, like, they feel that staleness and, as much as you try to fake it, which sometimes you have to…Like, that's the reality. They're so quick to pick up insincerity. They're like little hound dogs about that. … they know, they see through so much. Which is really, really nice, actually, it's one of my favorite things about them, is that it forces you to be so sincere. But you also have to put so much of your, like, own person on the line all the time, in

> English. Which I don't think you'd have to do in biology. I don't think you'd have to do it. Like, you'd have to bring personality, but it's not like you're talking about, whatever, like, they want to know… like, whatever we talk about… what do we talk about lately? Being in love. They want to know what it's like to be in love. And you're, like, oh brother. And it's like when I'm getting ready to teach Hamlet, I just feel this, like, little mischievous sense of joy. I love teaching Hamlet. I love teaching Macbeth. And even though those are like the ones that everybody's like, oh, I've taught them so much, we need to switch it up, any one of them I can… I feel that sense with.

Sally has identified two distinct facets involved in choosing literature. A literary text can become a space that opens up the most intimate levels of discourse for students, but it can also be something that we attach to our identities as teachers. Sally's joy in teaching *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* is tied to her previously stated sense that these are plays that she likes and thus she knows that she can teach well. These works become signifiers of both her relationship with her students – where discourse about the most important ideas can play out – but also of her status and effectiveness as a teacher.

Larissa

I apologize for not replying promptly as I promised. Yet, finally I got to read the story. I am unsure if I like it enough to teach it. I found the images uncompelling to start with: a bloody fish and guts is not my idea of an exciting short story, even

if it is a kind of a flash fiction. I have no problem with the subject matter - adultery, but I don't really see any profound point the text conveys. It does not challenge me to think deeper than the superficial concern of getting the plot. It is neither surprising nor challenging enough to trigger big questions.

I might use it in conjunction with another text - probably at the 20-1 level. There is a short story I used to teach, cannot remember the title, but will email it later. It is about two brothers going salmon fishing. The ending is ironic as one of the brothers gets 'hooked' by the bait and is ripped apart trying to get the hook out -- blood and gore to the brim. I would be interested in the allusion - the fish - and how the two stories manipulate the biblical meanings to elicit audience's response to the moral issues the stories bring up. There is another story by Umberto Eco (How to Travel With a Salmon and Other Essays), which is overtly political. So, it may be a short 'fish' unit on symbolism, allusion, and irony that I might teach.

I also see some use of it when teaching Camus' The Outsider. The connection is mostly the attitude of the narrator to his lover, Martha, as well as the grotesque and absurd elements.

I don't know if this helps you in any way, but these are some of my most immediate thoughts. If you need me to go 'deeper' into analyzing my response, please let me know, and I will spend more time with the story.

Larissa echoes the previous respondents in indicating that how much a teacher “likes” a story plays a role in their decision whether or not to teach it. As with her two previous responses, Larissa immediately begins to frame this story with her own teaching context, imagining several possible ways that she could utilize the story.

Bob

Bob begins his email by apologizing for his inability to access the Change Leadership clip, in his typically good natured and self-effacing manner, before delving into the story:

Meanwhile, regarding the story "It's Beginning to Hurt" by James Lasdun, I am of two minds about teaching it. The subject matter--middle-aged man goes to funeral of former mistress and forgets salmon--is perhaps a bit of a stretch for Gr. 11 students, maybe not for Gr. 12s.

The beauty of the story is its brevity and its saying so much while saying so little. The students might be engaged by the notion of lying, of living two lives, of opportunity missed, of the fact that Mr. Byar's three years with Marie are more memorable than anything else (so memorable that he cannot remember much else, let alone a salmon). I can see that students might actually like the story because of the oddity of detail (the visceral description of the gutting of the fish and then of the stock room).

What is the attitude of the writer to Mr. Byar? I'm not sure that I could say. Is he indeed a "bloody fool"? I'm almost inclined to agree.
So students might not be initially intrigued by the wishy-washy angst of a middle-aged man, but the structure of the story is very intriguing. I could see lots of questions being raised in an open-ended kind of way.
I think after teaching it I would say either "I'm a bloody genius" or, aptly enough, "I'm a bloody fool". There would be no half-way measures or half-hearted responses.
There you are. This I could do.

Bob indicates that he has mixed feelings about the story, and briefly ponders two possible grade level placements. Despite his ambivalence he seems generally intrigued by the story and his comments suggest that he does imagine himself teaching it and actually imagines a situation “after teaching it.”

Part Three: The Progressive Moment

Chapter Nine: Additional Discussion Prompts

The rest of the prompts were more traditional questions which I tried to weave into the flow of the discussion. In some cases, the participants anticipated and addressed the questions before I ever brought them up, and sometimes the conversation seemed to naturally flow towards them. When neither of these happened, I simply asked the teachers the questions directly. The next two questions came directly from my reading of Mark Bracher's *Radical Pedagogy* and, in particular, his chapter on "Self-Analysis For Teachers" and this serves as a return and grounding back into the regressive moment, but also anticipates the analytic moment in this study which will be framed in a Lacanian context.

1) **In as much detail as possible, please describe the most positive experience in your teaching career?**

Mike

Mike recalled getting an email from a former student coinciding with the publication of Yann Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil*. Mike remembers the student as one

> who I taught *Life of Pi* to, and it was a student who I had dismissed as being someone who I had never connected with. You know, one of those kids who I probably wouldn't have remembered her name, you know she probably would never have passed through my mind again and she wrote me this huge long email talking about how that was the only text that she had ever connected with in school and that it made her a reader that somehow or another, whatever I did with that text made her a reader and she was so excited to read *Beatrice and Virgil* because of Yann Martel and her experience with *Life of Pi* and it was one of those things that hit at just the right moment where, you know, you start to fade a bit and I got that email and it was . . .

Mike goes on to talk a little bit more about how important it is to get emails like that affirm that he made a difference in a student's life. He characterizes these as "emails that say "You made a difference in my life," that say you did something that a kid remembers from my class and I've never had a kid email me back and

say I got this mark in English in university because of you, but I don’t think that would even make me feel all that great.” Here we see that for Mike a positive moment actually serves to reaffirm his sense of himself as a teacher and why what he does is important beyond the narrow realm of test scores, where he does not receive this kind of affirmation.

Barry

Barry mentions two distinct moments that reflect different dimensions of his role as a teacher and both are very recent, perhaps reflecting his comment that “there are positives every day.” The first is an experience he had marking student work only the day before, not a task that many – and certainly not the participants in this study – would inherently connect to something positive. He recalls that the assignment he was grading was unique because he had “approached it in a very different way than [he] normally would” and he goes on to describe the experience:

> I sat down and the first ten that I mark were, like, between high eighties and a hundred. It’s, like, they got it. They totally got it. And I’m walking around feeling like, okay, we did some teaching here, right? And the kids are moving and they can do this and we can move this on to other stuff. And then I marked the rest, the other twenty, and they were kinda, you know, they were everywhere from, I had a couple good ones, but it just the top ones, the top of the pile, just happened to be the good ones, and then it,

> yeah, and I had one kid that failed it, you know, and so, but before I went on to those next twenty, those first ten, was…

What we see here is Barry reveling in his students' success, but also getting affirmation that the work he did – "we did some teaching" – had made a difference to these students. He notes that "that's not a very sexy moment, but, I mean, it happened" and he also talks about "those moments when I get a kid who comes and takes five minutes after school, you know, to talk to me and you just tell him a couple of things and they go, okay, yeah, I get it, and then they actually do, like they can actually prove it in something. Those are great moments." This leads to a very specific, and again, very recent, remembrance:

> I had a kid last week that is, he's an interesting kid, he's very smart, but he's kind of got a lot of bravado. He challenges teachers a lot. His marks are, not surprising, not great because he doesn't put a lot of time in it, but they could be, and he sort of quit coming to a lot of classes so the school's kind of, gave him an ultimatum to ultimately get his crap together or go to the learning store because that was it. And I sort of wrote a brief but somewhat impassioned plea to my AP saying, look, this kid needs to be here and we need him in class and he's potentially one of our brightest kids. And, um, you know, he's not without his problems, but I don't think going and doing distance learning is gonna help this kid any. so I wrote a letter, just to the AP, just kinda a brief email and, for whatever reason, he felt when he was talking to this kid, to

> read that letter to him because he said, you should know what your teachers say about you and a lot of them really believe in you, and so, uh, I guess, whatever, something in that conversation kinda turned it around for him. And then he said, yeah, well, [my teacher's] really great and I like his class and I don't really wanna not be in that class and so, for whatever reason, he decided that he was gonna, you know, play by the rules and show up and do what he can do, which, you know, we'll see where that goes. But, again, it's another great moment, right?

It is indeed a great moment as it allows a glimpse into the complex realm of recognition for an English teacher. Here, Barry is able to step outside of his role as a classroom teacher to consider the whole student, but in doing so, he also gets affirmation of the work he does as a classroom teacher. Barry would have been no help to this student if he had not done his job well enough that the student was able to articulate that he wanted to be back in the classroom. This also is one of those rare moments where there is tangible recognition by a supervisor of the emotional dimension of Barry's teaching role. When that assistant principal reads Barry's email to the student it not only serves the practical end of helping a student in need, but it also affirms how good work in the classroom has a legacy that goes beyond the classroom.

Fred

Fred's immediate reaction parallels Barry's in that he thinks about the most recent moments rather than taking inventory on his career: "Sure, but I'm thinking of stuff that happened today or yesterday, right?" He then relates this anecdote:

> Uh, this girl named Lori, who really struggles, I said to her, actually we were doing a scene analysis, and she was working really hard and she was talking to herself as she… and then she'd write down some stuff, and I said, oh my God, is it ever fun to watch you think. And it was like I had just told her that she had won… every… like she just thought, like that was maybe the best moment that has ever happened to her in school so far, and it was calculated like that, but I think for the first time ever she felt a little bit smart.

Interestingly, Fred, who spoke so eloquently about the importance of choosing a text with a specific purpose in mind, brings this moment back to that aspect of his professional life:

> So, I guess that's it, right? I guess the care and attention which we treat a piece of literature with, is often reflective of the care and attention of what we treat our kids with, and how they will reciprocate with us. . . . And I'm not saying… by no means am I saying, like, every day, something happens it's magic time, but I do think there are moments that I'm like, super proud of myself …

> but almost always there are moments where I'm super proud of my kids. And, it's impossible not to think about them and get weepy… And, a lot of those times had nothing to do with me. It was in that moment of stand back and wind 'em up, right? Or just when they display a kindness to each other.

Fred is able to use this specific, recent moment as a touchstone to connect him with the larger core of his teaching, and it is clear that it has both an emotional and a humanitarian base. Fred is moved by what his students can do both as students of English and as human beings, and literature is the conduit for these moments.

Sally

Unlike the other three participants to this point, Sally does not think of a specific moment, but rather an amalgam of moments :

> My favourite moment . . . always has to do with the students feeling really successful about something we've done and having a good time together and having that truly generous relationship that you have with so many students. And having that… like, you know, if your personal life is ever rough and you come to school, and it's, like, so nice to just be with them? Or outside of the classroom is stressful but inside, with them, like, you have to be a hundred percent focused on them, because there's thirty of them.

> And they are so kind and so good to each other, and so good to me, like, every day. They are so kind.

Sally echoes Fred's last comment regarding the kindness that students show to each other, clearly reflecting the sense that an English classroom can readily – even daily – be transformed into a space where both students and teachers deal not only with what it means to read good literature, but also what it means to be good.

Larissa

Larissa's moment reflects both an episode of acknowledgment and a recognition that her uniqueness is not only appreciated, but appreciated in the long term. Larissa immediately thought of a very specific moment, but unlike Mike, Barry or Fred her moment was not from the immediate past:

> Oh, I definitely have a moment like that. It's back in [my home country] which is strange . . . and I ended up having to phone Canada but at that time, my parents did not have a connection from their home apartment so I had to go to the general post office and I had to put an order through a telephonist and wait and they connected and whatnot. Well, the girl who was working at that telephone service was one of my former students and the words that she said were, I still remember what you told us about this particular plot. I said, "You do?" Oh yes, and she went on a little tirade about it and how that had impacted her and I said, but why?

> She said, you said something so profound that I forgot today, but it was profound at the moment.

This is a small moment that reminds us of how those equally small moments can live in the hearts and minds of our students long after we have forgotten them. This can be both a blessing and a course as our greatest and our inevitable failings are all immortalized in deeply personal ways. Larissa's short anecdote serve as a reminder of how high the personal stakes are when we enter into a classroom and how those stakes remain high long after a classroom experience has ended.

Bob

Bob is the first of the participants to articulate one of the reasons why this question is more challenging than it appears on the surface. As he notes, "When things go well I don't go home and write it down which maybe I should;" but conversely, and this is a prelude to the next question, when things go badly, those moments tend to live more powerfully. Bob is the most experienced of the teachers in this part of the study, so he has many more moments to consider, so it is perhaps not surprising that his first response is to consider a more general sense of what makes a moment positive. He mentions thinking about classes that "just, ironically, give me permission to be myself as much as I give them permission to be themselves" and he expands on this by returning to our previous discussion about the idea of teacher as performer, noting that there are

> roles we play as students and as teachers and it's always tough in the classroom when students have a fairly limited notion of what a

teacher is. You tell us what we need to know and you read me however, but it's sort of confined in a narrow notion and we can do the same to students, sometime we want them to stay in a fairly limited role as well, so my best times in the classroom are when both of those stereotypical roles break down a little, where I almost have the freedom, when I have the freedom to be much more impromptu, where I can improvise at will . . . I can't really think of an example, but what I'm thinking of, I'm thinking of an AP class that I had seven or eight years ago and they had that ability to – it was a smaller class – which I think is nice because they get to know you, you get to know them and so there would be that moment when they'd be really engaged in something but they'd want to try a performance of a scene or *Pride and Prejudice* or whatever it might be and even though it wasn't exactly on my radar to be able to say "Yeah we can do that Yeah sure" and to see their excitement level go up, so if I could recall a special moment it is when there is that really interesting exchange of energies and emotion and intelligences, so it's not just me guiding or it's not just them answering my questions although certainly that happens a lot of the time, but it is that when it seems like a mutual enterprise that we're working together towards. Clearly, I have more responsibility for a number of reasons, I get paid for it and

> it's my job, but when students start taking that on, it's really quite special . . .

Bob compares these moments where "you can break the boundaries" to those that occur in what he terms "difficult" classes. In these classes, rather than seeing rigid teacher and student roles evaporate – or at least become less consciously enforced – Bob sees these roles as being further entrenched:

> I find myself going to that safe stereotype of the authority figure – this is the way it is da-da-da-da-da – and it always grieves me because I can just feel my sense of humour going out the door. It just does, because I'm working so hard just to keep them on task – I hate to use that phrase "on task" – just trying to keep something happening without a total breakdown and it always is just really unfortunate . . .

2) In as much detail as possible, please describe the most negative experience in your teaching career?

Mike

This question was both simple and problematic for Mike – and me – as it immediately brought Mike back to a moment that we shared earlier in both of our careers, where we felt at odds with a particular administrative viewpoint. I actually ended up moving on to another position – at least partially in response to this situation – while Mike remained. Naturally, Mike does not feel the need to elaborate on details I already know, but he reflects on beginning the subsequent

year after I left the school: "I walked in at the beginning of the school year and I was made to feel like I had to start at square one in my teaching career and that threw me for a huge loop and it was because (Laughter) I intended to do research based work, but it wasn't something that was accepted at the time . . ."

The laughter itself is indication of a shared joke and there are, literally, years worth of stories that could spill out from this one sentence. Rather than surface all of those shared memories, I ask Mike to reflect on how he moved past this situation and his response was intriguing:

> I don't know, I just did. I mean, in some ways I fell into the trap of just doing what was expected of me and, you know, I'm pretty good at playing the game and I'm pretty good at being happy playing the game, though I'm much happier if I can really stand behind the work that I'm doing, but if I need to for a certain amount of time, play the game, I can do it pretty well.

This adds a different dimension to some of the previous discussions with all of the participants about the roles we take and the performances we give as teachers. Mike further elaborates on this by relating a recent experience he had dealing with exactly this topic:

> You know, I was just leading a discussion with some student teachers last week and you know, we were talking about really wanting to push the envelope and being yourself as a teacher and really being doing the work that they're learning in university and

> of course I had to give the caveat that when you are student teaching you have to be the teacher that your you know that your mentor teacher or when your doing your preservice teaching what they call it now, your mentor teacher you have to do the work be the teacher that your mentor teacher wants you to be just to get through, which is sad, but true and I think I was good at that, you know I was good at being that and when for my continuing contract I was the teacher that I needed to be.

This pragmatic use of artifice to serve the greater good – or at least one's own immediate and long term interest – reflects back to Mike's reflection on the first video clip, where he talked about sometimes needing to take on a certain role in order to achieve our ends as a teacher. Here, Mike has expanded this by suggesting and, indeed, instructing a future generation of teachers that you sometimes need to act a certain way in order to ensure that you will have opportunities to be the teacher you want to be. Ironically, Mike is suggesting that you may have to be "fake" in order to be authentic.

Barry

Barry notes that the downsides of the profession are just as prevalent as those great moments that he reflected on: "I got lots of those, too. I mean, honestly, I can look at the last week and find heaven and hell, and I can look at any week and do the same, right?" Interestingly, while Barry's positive moments stem directly from his classroom experiences, his negative moments are broader

in scope and reflect his recent move into a leadership role. In this excerpt, he begins by listing some of the more standard concerns a teacher might experience, before narrowing his focus.

> I'll be honest with you, the things that bother me probably the most, I mean, I kinda expect kids to be gnarly from time to time. I expect parents to usually phone you up when they got a complaint. They usually don't phone you up and go, hey, man, my kid is happy in your class. I mean, occasionally you see them in the mall, they give you one of those, but it doesn't really happen all that much. I expect, again, you should put the administrators, I'm gonna hear from them when something goes wrong, generally speaking, that's kinda the way things are, so I kinda expect that. But I think probably the moments that leave me the lowest is when I, when I see my colleagues calling it in. You know? Um, because it sort of says that they have settled for a pretty mediocre standard and perhaps it's just a personal choice, perhaps where they are in their career, I mean there's all sorts of things with all sorts of conditions going on in someone's life at any given time. I mean, I'm certainly not going to judge on that, but I honestly think that it takes twelve years of teaching to get a kid over the finish line, and it starts in, you know, thirteen I guess, in starts in kindergarten. And when I see teachers that aren't putting into it what I'm putting into it, yeah, it bugs me. I mean, it really does.

Barry's concern is almost certainly a reflection of his recent move into a leadership position where he has had to become both more aware and more personally accountable for the decisions that other teachers make, but he also sees this as affecting his own work as a classroom teacher, when students come into his class lacking the kinds of preparation he feels they should have had.

Fred

Fred is the only one who steers this question about negativity back to an area that was overwhelmingly referenced as a negative in the first part of this study: marking. He does not, however, focus on the time factor or on some of the relational problems with grading student work, but rather the sheer isolation involved in the process. He calls this "the big, grand paradox" noting how for "half the day" one is

> surrounded by people and compassion and kindness and instruction and interesting thoughts and that it is the singularly most lonely job as you sit at a table with headphones on, not listening to music, but just listening to silence, as you read number 97 of 121 shitty Macbeth papers. It is the worst job on the face of the earth, and just the juxtaposition probably makes it worse. . . .Like all day, you surround yourself with that, and then you go home and spend five hours doing the exact opposite. And yet, trying to infuse something of what happened during the day into a kid's paper, so

> that a kid, when he or she reads your comments, knows that it's you, and know that you're whispering to them.

Fred is making the compelling point that even though the actual process of marking a paper is isolating, the relationship playing out in that paper never leaves us and Fred reflects on how he actually engages in conversation while marking "And I talk the entire time… like, I am a mad person while I'm marking. Right? And I'm aware of that fact, like, I talk to them the entire time. No, no, no Jeff… what are you doing? . . .Claire don't be upset . . ."

Fred notes that this relational quality can be reciprocated when the papers are returned and he recalls a student saying "I love it when you put my name down, because I know that it's you." This is yet another complex dimension of our teaching lives and it illustrates how perhaps the most time consuming aspect of our jobs – reflecting on and grading student work – is also deeply personal and has the impact to affect relationships in both the short and long term. This means that we when we sit down to mark a paper, we are engaging in a process that is not only time-consuming, but fraught with emotional danger.

Sally

Sally is unequivocal in her response. Like Barry and Fred before her, she does not locate a specific negative moment, but rather focuses on a specific aspect of her job that she perceives as negative. Sally centers her discussion on the role of administrators. She begins by saying, "I find that administrators, for a great majority of the time that I have worked with them, are, um, aggressive, not able to

hear what I'm saying, and I almost have nothing to do with them." When she does have to have interactions with her administrators, she is disappointed with the experience:

> I regularly feel that they have no idea what I do, on a day-to-day basis. I regularly feel that they model a leadership style that is from fifty years ago, and that does not work for me at all, and I regularly feel that I'm in a catch-22. That they ask me… and this is not just one administrator, this is not necessarily just one school, and this is not every administrator that I've had, and I've had some wonderful ones. But I feel strongly that they want you to say what they want to hear, and that they accuse you of being phony if you do.

Sally ultimately bring this down to two distinct factors: 1) " [T]he number one thing that has happened to me is that I have sometimes felt a little bit bullied by administrators" and 2) " I have felt that they have no clue about what I'm doing."

Sally also talks at some length about the hierarchy that often is implicit in administrator/teacher relationships. She reflects on this as if talking to an administrator,

> I actually think of you as having a job and me as having a job, and that you're job isn't more important than mine. Which doesn't go over well. Like, I've never actually said that to someone, but, I'm, like, I don't feel any sense that you're superior to me as a human

> being. And that I feel that they often feel exceedingly superior to me as a human being, and that's just nonsense

Sally's concerns about the role of administrators in her life reflect some of the same concerns that were raised in part one of this study; but here, Sally's concerns seem deeply personal. When considered in the context of her comments about her clearly inspired experiences working with students and colleagues, it is clear that it is this personal and professional hierarchy – and the lack of empathy that it engenders on both sides – that Sally finds so dispiriting and ultimately, unproductive.

Larissa

Larissa's reflection about a negative moment is more in line with what I might have anticipated considering the emphasis she places on her own autonomy and the importance she ascribes to text selection. She recounts an experience that revolved around teaching what might be termed controversial texts (Yukio Mishima's *The Sound of Waves* and Bonnie Burnard's "Crush".):

> I got a letter from a parent which was slightly just shoved under my door. And the student felt extremely uncomfortable that particular class, because I read the letter and he was accusing me of teaching pornography. So I talked to the then-department head and I wrote a letter and I felt good teaching those parents. Not teaching, educating. Because I just went on, I do, I still keep that letter. To this day. So I basically explained why I'm teaching it

> and what context I'm using it, how that is helping me explain and juxtapose precisely what this teacher was dealing with, cultural sensitivity but opening the minds of our students to the possibility of other cultures also being right and maybe even better in representing what our culture represents in that particular way. And see the value in both just by comparing them. So I would say that was not a negative moment because, as I said, I felt cocky, I shouldn't have felt that way, but I did feel good educating the parents.

I asked Larissa how she felt when that letter was slipped under her door and she was very clear:

> I was annoyed. Again, it was fairly early into my career here in Canada. Um, this would never happen, would have never happened in [her home country]. Now, things have changed there as well. But parents were not intruding on teachers' jobs. They were not telling us what to teach, how to teach, when to teach. Um, where to teach. Um, teachers' decisions were not questioned.

Larissa bristles at the idea that someone would presume to enter into her pedagogical decision making process while lacking her considerable expertise and qualifications. Interestingly, despite these feelings, she also felt a certain kind of validation in being able to clearly articulate the rationale for her decision. As English teachers we are constantly engaged in a range of complex decisions and

while there is, presumably, a rationale for each of these decisions; how often are we afforded either the time or the audience to clearly articulate why we do what we do?

Bob

As mentioned previously, Bob has the longest career as a teacher and unlike his reflection on a positive moment, that began as a general amalgam of positive moments before moving to a more specific instance, in response to this question, Bob selects a very recent moment. He relates a detailed anecdote about a recent experience with a particularly trying class and how he worked with his principal to address the situation. Interestingly, his anecdote while certainly reflective of the kinds of frustrations one can feel with a typically rambunctious group, the instance he points to – when his principal came into the class to observe and, ultimately, talk to the kids – is not presented in a negative light. In fact, it is infused with drama and humor as he tells a highly entertaining story about his principal visiting his class, ostensibly to “lay down the law” but with some mutual confusion as to who is going to start the process. He notes that the current state of the situation is actually rather optimistic:

> So this is apropos of a bad class, as opposed to the good class that I mentioned earlier, where you seem to be in a common enterprise and there really seems to be a sense working together towards something, but this class was really like they were going in about twenty different directions and I’m, I mean talk about herding cats,

> but it was worse than that, however, since that I've done a new seating plan and I'm using the new FM system to make sure my voice is louder, since that time, some of the students who are the leaders have actually attempted to lead more positively. It's sort of like they've realized that yeah I shouldn't be so goofy. And I've actually – what's nice about it is – although there's always going to be a bit of a wild dynamic, more of them are a little more focused, and I said before that when a class really stresses me out my sense of humor leaves but with this class my sense of humour has stayed. I can make fun of them or make fun with them whatever the case may be

The overriding sense I had as I listened to this experience was not negativity. In fact, I laughed out loud in several instances, but I realize now that the underlying issues that prompted Bob to frame this as a negative experience – loss of control, frustration, having to admit weakness to an administrator – were all clearly present, but it was his reframing of the narrative from a negative to a positive that changed the experience. One thing I wonder about is what role I had to play in that transformation. Was the fact that Bob was telling his story to an understanding ear – a colleague who has "been there" – affecting the shape of the story. How different would this story be if it was told to someone outside of the profession or, indeed, an administrator?

The next two questions are very practical and pragmatic in their nature, but they speak not only to what has changed from past to present, but also force us to

confront the prospect of change in the future , which is the overarching aim of this project. The question about professional development may

3) **Has your classroom practice changed since you started teaching? In what ways and what prompted these changes?**

Mike

In response to this question, Mike considers his own experience of becoming a teacher:

> I was brought into the fold, I was given a binder of material to use in the classroom which now, goes against everything I believe in teaching which and it also goes against the advice I give new teachers which is to be yourself and taking someone else's material and just doing it, now sometimes you have to do a bit of that for survival, but I did, I did that, for survival I did use material that wasn't mine and thankfully I was able to do it for not a very long period of time and I have lots of material that for some reason I've never thrown out that binder that I've never used. I've never touched it and yet I still feel that I should keep it. But, I don't know why.

This idea of holding on to something that he has ultimately rejected and could not imagine using, perhaps reflects not only how pragmatic we have to be in our teaching lives – one just never knows when something might be useful – but also

how difficult it is to shed even the physical trappings of what it means to teach. That binder represents Mike's induction into the profession and even though he rejects what is in it, it still represents a part of the self that he embraced – even if begrudgingly – while becoming a teacher.

He continues,

> But yeah, my practice has absolutely changed. My appreciation of what I need to do and in the role that I'm in now I'm helping teachers to understand that it's not about the tasks that are given, it's about the curriculum and the objectives which is something that I think my mindset changed and the work that we did together I think that my mindset changed in that a little bit, you know when you look at your marks book that's not what the course is about, right ? and that's not what the students should necessarily be about, although that's the number that's going to be pumped out in the end.

The profound differences that Mike has experienced have revolved around assessment and now he is in a position where he is able to work with young teachers around these very same issues.

> I'm also working with a teacher who is dealing with a very different group of students in the same course as somebody else, so it's the exact same course but two different teachers dealing with very different situations and one of them is a new teacher and she

> feels the pressure to have the same amount of tasks and same type of tasks as the other teacher and trying to help her to understand that curriculum can be interpreted differently and that your assessment of the kids has to link to the curriculum not to the tasks. So she felt really she had to go back to these tasks to make sure that every kid who walked through the door had these; and so in her situation, I had to drop a kid, because of a new registration, into her class and she's thinking like I need to get this kid to do all of these tasks that I'd done from now, from September up until now, and the nature of this kid is if, she gave those tasks to him, she'd lose him. So, helping her to understand that as long as you can assess him on the curriculum when we get to the end and the mark that you give him is something you'd stand behind, the tasks are meaningless, because the chances are that even if he does do them, he's just going to rattle them off and it's not going to be his best work anyway.

Barry

As with Mike, Barry also uses assessment practices to frame his change as a teacher from the beginning of his career. He reflects on the obvious change that comes with aging – "I mean, obviously, I mean, I'm not thirty any more, I'm forty-six, right? So it's a different world. I think my relationship with kids is more like a father than a nutty uncle, you know? Because, you know, I got a kid in grade 11, right?" – but also notes "my teaching changed an awful lot last year

because of the assessment processes and policies that existed at the school." Barry became a department head in a school that was embarking on fairly ambitious assessment reform, and while Barry certainly had a good working knowledge of some of the key tenets of assessment, the formal actualization of some of this knowledge was a proverbial eye-opener.

> I think last year I sort of walked in and thought I was doing a lot of things and, again, I think ignorance was bliss. Somehow this year I think I sort of figured out I wasn't really doing a lot of things that were expected of me. No one ever called me on it in a bad way or anything, but I just realized, like, oh, I'm supposed to do… oh, that's not how I've been doing that. And, again, it was a big change. It was a lot of stuff. So, I mean, this year, I've been trying a lot to do things, especially with more, you know, learning, you know, assessment for learning stuff that's a lot more focused, you know?

Making these changes necessitates a change in practice, but they also require a change in perception even as we look at our own sense of our efficacy as teachers.

> That's different. Again, even doing learning checks in a different way than I'm doing before. But like I said, the depressing part is finding out, yeah, they didn't learn that. And, uh, and, you know, you gotta make choices. I mean, are you going to stop and make sure that everybody gets the key concepts? Or are you going to go

> and do *Hamlet*? Because you need a month to do *Hamlet*. And that's becoming a choice that . . .maybe I'm approaching that differently than I would have approached it. . . . I think I was probably more literature-driven five years ago, like, we're going to do this and we're going to do this… And here's what we're going to do with it, than I am sort of skill mastery now. Um, so, you know, it did change some things around.

Fred

Fred is an anomaly in that he notes how much things have changed in his teaching circumstance, but he ultimately sees himself as not being as effective now as he once was: " I think lots have changed that would make me a better teacher. I do think I was a better teacher in my first five or six years." He reflects on this perhaps surprising statement and then affirms it:

> Um, yeah. I think I was a better teacher. I think I was probably my best in my first five or six years. But, having said that, so many things have changed, right, in terms of, same sort of thing with you, right? Assessment, or, yeah, I mean we laughed the other day, because both of us signed in 2000, we both signed our names to a department head letter that went to [Alberta Education] absolutely denouncing the work…

Here, Fred is referring to our initial response to some of the proposed curricular changes that came into place approximately five or six years into our careers and

how our perspectives then – what we felt we had to defend – reflect very different perspectives than those we hold now. Things have changed and so have we. Fred, like Mike and Barry, also mentions assessment and brings it back – and here echoes his response to the previous question about negative moments in teaching – to the marking process, a very practical face of assessment. He recalls, "I look at things that I kept from kids where I had marked it where I really have marked it…Where it really was three checkmarks on a page and 34 out of 50… better. And what did that mean? " Here Fred is considering some of the same changes in assessment that Mike and Barry alluded to – questioning not only how but why we give certain kinds of feedback – but he also brings the discussion back to the overarching problem of time, noting

> I used to, like, be able to whip through papers, and I would absolutely no problem, I had no problem doing five hours a day with the marking and good marking, and completely devoted and… but I don't have that any more. I don't know where it dissipated, and so I always feel a bit fraudulent a lot of the time now, because I don't have to do the work that I used to, and if I am teaching things new I don't think I have it the same way that I used to, I don't have the same intimacy with. Yeah, no… I don't know.

Sally

In response to this question, Sally makes an interesting distinction noting that her practice has changed "So much. But my personality hasn't." In response to what specifically has changed, Sally responds

> I'm much better at preparing. I'm much better at preparing… you know what I do? I mean, I can show you a couple, but I make a unit now instead of lesson plans that I do much more of going backwards. Begin with the end in mind and go backwards. That's Stephen Covey stuff. I do much better at just knowing what they need to do for that diploma at the end.

Sally, like the previous three respondents, frames the change around assessment, but she is the first to bring up the presence of the diploma exam. She notes, in particular, how having been involved in grading large scale assessments (Alberta Diploma Examinations are worth fifty percent of a student's grade twelve mark in academic courses) has affected her and she attributes a certain degree of accuracy to her engagement with that process:

> I'm pretty good on my report cards for marking, like, I'm pretty accurate with my marks. Like, reasonable. Lots to learn, but, whatever. And so then I come back to class and I feel very confident that I know what to do. And, as a junior high teacher, nothing would have been better for me than to go and observe for a day of diploma marking. That would have been the best PD I could have done in teaching Grade 7 L.A. And so, um, I think that

> was really… what's changed for me is also preparing for, like, a month at a time rather than a day at a time. Preparing as a chunk. Preparing a whole unit and then, even especially in following years, I know, okay, re-read this, flip through this, make sure I know what's going on, but I know confidently within myself that that unit is good to go. And I know what activities are following upon the next and I, like, change them and fiddle with them and whatever, but I'm, like, we're going to have engaging opening discussion questions on that kind of level a from Cathy Nunlee, those really big, broad ones. I know the kids will have enough choice that they have some control over their own learning. I know that I've done enough work to prepare, that my work is hitting all their, hitting all the curriculum expectations, more or less.

Larissa

Larissa is the only one who suggests that she has not changed as a teacher:

> No, I wouldn't say I am a different teacher. I would say that being allowed to teach TOK, starting to teach TOK, what was latent became obvious and explicit now. Because I don't think my thinking has changed that much. Um, it was a different learning curve for me when I came from Bulgaria that I had to figure out what the rules of the game are. So that, to some extent, shaped me

> into a teacher that I was not necessarily or, no, it's not teacher, the human being to some extent was shaped in a way that I didn't necessarily, that I wasn't necessarily, as an educator, but the TOK course reminded me that this is how I think and that this is what I used to do in [my home country] and I think that's probably, if I'm talking about a change it's more like reversal, going back to things that I used to do. And then for some reason abandoned. Maybe it was adaptation that maybe it was assimilation, whatever the case is.

Interestingly, Larissa really does frame her discussion around assessment practices, as well, but she doesn't ever use that word. She reflects on her early teaching experiences:

> In [my home country] it was just, I didn't really care whether they learned or not, it was interesting for me to talk… I think, some things I completely abandoned because they're just not applicable to this context. Other things I've revamped significantly and right now, if you're asking me about strategies, I don't really have any. .. Well, there is a toolbox, right, you carry pretty much because I've done it for so long. It almost becomes natural for certain things. I know that they're strategies from the point of view if someone comes to my classroom and observes me, oh, you're using this check this, check this, check this.

Bob

Again, this question has a different dynamic for Bob because he has not only taught for a number of years, but he has taught in two distinctly different contexts:

> The first fifteen years that I taught were primarily at the university or college level and, of course, when I started teaching as a graduate student the models I had – I had two models – and they were very similar: the lecture model and the kind of controlled seminar model it's not that far removed from the lecture model. So I will admit that the first fifteen years that I was teaching at the U of A or Camrose Community Colleges as it was then or Grant MacEwan or AVC, I will admit that I was largely lecture oriented, that was the way I understood it. I won't say I lost that, I still do that. I don't do as much as I used to because I know that high school students need, well, it's a different scenario.

Bob also notes a change that he saw in his own approach:

> When I first started teaching I was a pretty shy guy and I still am pretty shy in many ways, but about five or six years in when I was teaching down in Camrose I started getting into drama and that changed my practices. I mean I think it was always there to some degree, but I started realizing that being a sort of a performer in a good sense, not something that violates who you are but making

> yourself a little louder or a little broader or a little funnier or whatever the case may be was absolutely good. And maybe if you've got some skills in reading or whatever they might be than you use them as opposed to here's the serious stuff of the and let's just methodically go through the themes of the text blah, blah uhm, which was kind of my university model especially late in my career. . . .So I sort of realized that being bigger and bolder and brighter served my purposes better and it was good for them to see that and I also realized that you don't need to do it every day and frankly if you can do a performance once or twice a month as it were where you're a little wilder and a little crazier than one would be then that helps the kids to see a range of your behaviors and that – you never know – they may remember your really dull days, but they may also remember those other times when you're more on your game and there is give and take etcetera so that practice has changed just in terms of my confidence with the class. I'm more at ease, I can improvise a little faster than I used to. I'm not walking in with copious notes like I used to. I'd walk into class and I'd want to cover this and this and this uh, I'm still capable of doing that and I'm still always aware that it won't happen well, it will happen to some degree but it literally won't happen the way I thought . . .

Interestingly, Bob also brings the discussion back to assessment:

Sometimes it is just prosaic to say here are some study questions , do some of them, and we'll collectively do some of them together. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not so good, but I do do that still and certainly having and technical changes have certainly changed my practice as well although I'm still a bit of a ludite uhm, but in some ways, I bet if I saw myself teaching when – If I were to watch myself teaching thirty five years ago there would be certain elements that would be the same, I think.

4) **Have you ever had a professional development experience that has changed something substantial in your professional practice and/or your perspective on teaching? Please describe the nature of this change.**

Mike

Mike does not identify any one professional learning experience as being formative, but rather points to his own growth and development as a leader:

No, just being a leader in a school was one of the biggest, was probably the biggest, I shouldn't say being a leader in a school. Leadership in general in terms of taking on leadership roles, whether that means presenting at conferences or it means, because embedded in that is the learning that had to be done to become the leader, right? So that, and the work that had to be done and so I think that's the bigger piece of that of how did you get to that point to become a leader, you know having to do that work and even having to accept yourself as an expert, I think that's

> the hard thing to do for teachers is accept yourself as an expert, . . .but I think it goes right back to when we talked about teachers coming right out of university with this knowledge . . . it's something that I'd like to see change in the way that we deal with new teachers is that we look at more of a partnership than a mentorship model where, uhm, teachers coming out of university have as much to give as teachers who have been in the profession for years and we need to respect that and appreciate it more because we'd all become better teachers if we looked at it that way.

Barry

Barry is careful not to frame his answer in strictly yes or no terms, but rather explains his own approach about professional learning, which is clearly at odds with the whole concept of targeted professional development.

> I think it's like anything, you know, like, I'm one of those kinds that kind of learns things out of the corner of my eye, right? Like, I'm the sort of person that, if I go to something, let's say a teachers' convention or I go to some speaker or see some guru or something like that, a lot of times I'm sort of listening to them talk and I'm going, yeah, okay, I heard that, yeah, okay, I read that book too. You know, I'm sort of going through that, but then, kinda out of the corner of my eye, I go, you know, that's funny, what if we tried this. So, I mean, I think I, you know, I tend to

> walk away from things with inspirations to try things that didn't necessarily come from the person there.

What Barry is speaking to is an inherently creative process that occurs during professional learning that may or may not be directly linked to the intent of the professional learning experience. Barry sees himself as taking ownership of the professional learning process by at first dismissing the source – "okay, I read that book too" – before reformulating and/or creating an idea – "an inspiration" – that he can transform into action in his own teaching and learning context. Considering this process also brings Barry back to his own learning experiences:

> You know, it was something, maybe it made me think and reflect it, and it's funny, I mean, as a learner, I think I've always been that way. Like, I think of university and what I remember from high school, you know, most of that was a blur, you know, I remember that here we are, and we're sitting there and learning something and it's like., I sort of go, you know what? That's interesting, I got an idea for a story, I'm going to take that home and write about that. And that, that tends to be the way I respond to anything that is, um, anything that is, uh, presented to me in a presentational form. So, so again, a lot of times, if you said to me, was it a great conference, or whatever, I'd probably say, aw, it was okay, but I got something out of it, but that's highly personal, right? Like, just because, my synapses and all of a sudden somebody was, you

> know, said something and, you know, it's sort of a serendipitous kind of thing.

This whole idea of learning being serendipitous or self-directed is not typically the way that we think of – or frame – our professional learning experiences and yet, it does seem to be the way that we are increasingly being asked to frame our won teaching practices.

Barry also speaks at some length about how change can be an important driver for him in his professional practice:

> I think change is good, whether it's choosing a new location or having a new set of players come in to a building Um, I mean, I'm like everybody. Look, I'm happy with my stuff, it works perfectly, it doesn't need to be fixed. You know, I've been doing this for fifteen years, why should I change now? But on the other hand, I think, I think when somebody comes into a building, and that could be anything, it could be a new teacher, it could be a principal, it could be a department head, anybody, and they've got a sincere belief in trying something new, I'm willing to try it, you know? And I'm willing to, you know, I'm going to get my fingers on it and put my own spin on it, but, you know, to me, that's kind of a challenge. So, I mean, and this is going to sound dumb because I know a lot of people don't respond this way, but when things come down, like, even like district initiatives and things like

> that, my first question, my first response is usually, okay, what's this. You know, I'm a little bit skeptical. But my second response is, like, okay, well, there's gotta be something in here of value. I mean, that isn't being created by people who wanna destroy education and teaching kids, right? Like, somebody thinks there's some value in this, so what could I find from here? What could I take from here and turn it into something I could use. And, you know, sometimes I've taken things and I've tried them and it's like, it didn't work so well.

Fred

Fred actually picks up on this same idea of serendipitous learning that Barry reflected upon. He initially tries to think of formal professional learning experiences, before he reformulates the idea of professional learning for himself :

> Okay, here's the deal. I get tons when I'm with people who are interested in teaching and really like literature and I can sit and have those… and that is incredibly formative for my teaching practice? Right? Even to make me think. Like a Jan class? I don't know how much, like, direct impact it has on the class. But I know it makes me better. And it would be nothing I could ever write up for a professional development, like a professional growth plan, right? I know what makes me better. And sometimes, you know, like, Bill and I, I mean, whenever we talk about anything,

> we always go, yeah, I guess it always goes back to Lacan, right? Like, you have one kind of those courses…And that becomes kind of almost like a touchstone…

Here, Fred is referencing a common experience that we – and a number of other teachers we know – have shared. We recently took a course in Lacanian Psycho-Analysis and popular culture and Fred pinpoints two distinct areas of professional growth that emerge from such experiences. One has to do with the power of something that makes us better, even though it may not have direct relevance to our teaching lives. The implication, though , is that our sense of self – that me that becomes better – is still the me that walks into the classroom. I may never mention Lacan in a classroom, but it still will inform my practice in some way. Similarly, Fred notes the almost subliminal sense of bonding that can occur among colleagues when we experience a profound learning experience, providing a frame of reference moving forward as teachers and colleagues.

Fred does, ultimately, come back to one more traditional form of profesional development, citing a one day workshop by a noted brain researcher, and here, in keeping with what Barry reflected on, it was actualizing this professional learning experience that actually made it come alive for him. He cites this one specific instance and then almost in the same breath, comes back to how sparse his opportunities for English Language Arts professional learning have been:

> … the one great, great, great, Kathy Nunley Brain thing, and it was profoundly interesting, and she was so engaging, I thought, you know, it made me want to change my practice. But the questions that I had at the end of her session, like, how does this look for an English classroom, I mean, I went out and doggedly tried some of her stuff, and I still, at the end of it, I still had the same kind of questions… I didn't know how to put it into practice. Right? And that's it. I don't think I've ever had like a really… I think short of beer with you or some sloppy, drunk conversation about *V for Vendetta* with a whole bunch of people who are engaged and smart, I've never had any really good English PD. Never. Not once.

Sally

Unlike the previous respondents, Sally has no trouble finding a specific experience that shaped her, but interestingly, she almost immediately moves from that specific conference to more collaborative, "home grown" experiences:

> Absolutely. The AP conferences, were the best PD I've ever had tied with when, as a department, we sit down and agree to work on a unit together and make something up. So at [her former school], that was when we did our units on short film. We looked at so many short films. And some, usually what happened with… when we did our short film unit, it was one of the best PD's I've ever

> been a part of. Somebody would go home and watch the DVD and just immediately eliminate the ones that were totally inappropriate for school. And then we would get together, away from school, in a relaxed environment where there weren't a million other distractions, and we would watch and talk about and argue strongly for and against what a film should be used for, what kind of lessons would work best with it, and because it was a short film, we could get through four or five in a day and assign people to work on a couple and, like, I can show you some of these, they're great. And come up with a really decent lesson on short film, and then we put a binder full together and then anybody who wanted to use short film, either throughout the year or as a way to teach film terms, or as a supplement to a theme, or as a unit unto itself, it was put together. It was good to go. We all knew more or less what was in there and how to make it work for us. And it was completely accessible to everyone who had been a part of that development process. That was fantastic. . . . [S]o much PD that I attend that isn't subject specific, is just irritating for me.

For Sally, there are two dimensions of really powerful professional learning: expertise and collaboration. She neatly marries the two by noting that for her, what she needs to experience truly profound professional growth are "the real experty experts who truly know their stuff, like truly better than anybody that I know and than the people that know me better than I know… I know exactly what

we need to do to make it work for ourselves and to make it useful and practical and helpful. You know? That was the best."

Larissa

Like Sally, Larissa is able to zero in on a very specific experience: "definitely the professional learning experience I would talk about is the curriculum review meeting in Cardiff Theory of Knowledge: She then goes on to list some of the reasons why this was so profound and she starts in an interesting place:

> First of all, because I approached it with a sense of honour. I was honoured that I was invited. Even though I had to apply and didn't make it the first time, I made it the second time and it was important, um, I met all of the big people in this area and they're all fascinating people, but my ultimate change was that I saw the entire program, the entire IB program, with different eyes.

What made this experience powerful for Larissa was this change that came from seeing things through "different eyes" but the experience – despite the honor she associates with it – was a "disappointment"

> If we, on paper, say we are doing this but we are not following up with meaningful, um, policies, I mean, the hypocrisy I think was the shock. Probably. And as I said, I'm very biased, maybe, too. But just the fact that you had chief examiners, all of the chief examiners were there and you had a room full of white, male,

> about forty, forty-five-ish, the oldest one was probably fifty-ish, men, Oxford or Cambridge educated, most of them from Britain, just told me all.
>
> They had two women, one, and both of them were kind of for colour there. One was Oxford educated Dutch living in Peru, and they have her because she is a Spanish speaker, and the other one is an India woman who is currently teaching in, and she just doesn't care whether they listen to her or not. (laughs) But that's what, that's probably was what impressed me the most because I was not disappointed in the people that I met, it was wonderful, it's just that I realized that I have built that ivory tower.

Larissa makes no reference to how this professional learning experience has affected her classroom teaching,

Bob

Bob is very blunt, if apologetic, in his appraisal of his professional learning experiences throughout his career:

> I hate to say this, but I don't think I have had any. I don't think there has ever been – I had the phrase in my head a moment ago – oh my goodness this is the eureka moment where everything I do will change. I've been to PD where I've said Oh, normal reading circles, literature circles that sounds like a really good idea, let's try that and you try it and think, I don't know uh, it's working for

> some kids it's not working for others. Clearly there is more to it than what I figured and will I keep doing this or not maybe hmm and other things like that or keeping reading journals you know so I like trying things and so if I went to the Edmonton public Greater Edmonton North district Convention and I'd hear some ideas and I'd say I'll try that and I'd try it and say yes or no. . . But no, I've never had that eureka moment . . .

Conclusion: The Progressive Moment

In Chapter five of *What is Curriculum Theory?*, Pinar explores the progressive moment and grounds this discussion – and his title "The Evaporation of the Ego" – in psychoanalytic theory. While the term "ego" has many colloquial connotations, for Sigmund Freud, the ego was essentially a regulator between the pleasure seeking id and our sense of morality or conscience, the super-ego. On its face, calling for the "evaporation of the ego" wouldn't seem to be much of a positive, but for Pinar, the progressive stage of currere calls for us to look "toward what is not yet the case, what is not yet present" (p.36), essentially, imagining the future. In order to imagine this future and thus, he suggests, make the future "become the present" (p.126) it is necessary to "dissolve" (p.126) everything that stops us from moving forward. Pinar sees the key to this process as being both thematic and stylistic. That is, we not only need to change what we are communicating, but we also must change the way we communicate.

In this stage of the study, I have moved away from the question and response dichotomy that framed the Regressive stage into a discursive process

that – while still involving questions and answers - was also sparked by two mediums – film and fiction – that were designed to invoke a new state of being in participants as prelude to– and part of –the discussions they were involved in. Pinar, similarly, posits the use of fiction and poetry as ways of creating a dreamlike or hallucinatory state that will allow us to obliterate the realities of the present and imagine a better future. As Pinar states, in a sentence that not only elucidates the progressive phase of currere, but also Pinar's devotion to critical theory: "[t]heory so understood becomes a passage out of the knotted present . . . " (p.127). He then follows with what might be his clearest expression thus far, of how he reconciles his approach to curricular theory with actual change at the school level:

> Through remembrance of the past and fantasies of the future, I am suggesting, we educators might write our way out of positions of "gracious submission." Not in one fell swoop, not without resistance (both inner and outer). But creating passages out of the present is possible. We know that. That is why we believe in education; we see how powerfully schooling crushes it, and yet, still, there *is* education, despite the schools. There is God, despite the church, justice despite the government, and love despite the family. We educators must prepare for a future when the school is returned to us and we can teach, not manipulate for test scores. (p.129)

In this opening section of the chapter, “Dream, Thoughts and Fantasy,” Pinar is trying to make the case that in order to imagine the future, we necessarily need to imagine our way out of the present. Throughout this section, Pinar makes several references to computers in the classroom, but it is not until the next section that he directly addresses the issue at some length. In the second section of this chapter, “Let Them Eat Data,” Pinar explores the issue of computers in the classroom, drawing heavily on the work of C.A. Bowers, from whom he also borrows his section title. Pinar generally agrees with much of Bowers’ skepticism regarding the use of computers in the classroom, and again emerges as a teacher advocate when he scorns those “politicians who spend enormous sums on computerizing the schools while neglecting teachers’ work conditions, among them salary, class size and scheduling” (p.133). Pinar considers the obsession with technology as a part of the “nightmare that is present,” (p. 134) a phrase he invokes frequently as a signifier of our current educational situation. Pinar is not entirely pessimistic, however, when it comes to the prospect of computers in the classroom, noting that “[w]hile the introduction of computers into classrooms and the provision of access to the Internet will not, in themselves, raise test scores (let alone simplify the lived complexities of education), there are educational possibilities associated with these developments that portend a culturally different future.” (p. 135) One manifestation of these educational possibilities is hypertext and this is the title of the next, and final, section of the chapter.

In the discussions that emerge in this progressive moment we see participants both responding to and becoming texts. Essentially, they become

hyper-texts, with each remembered moment or conceptual expression representing a link to the past, present and future. In doing so they both expand, and explode, some of the identity structures that were revealed in the regressive moment. In responding to the initial video prompt, participants are invited to enter into the space of a Grade Ten English teacher and in doing so, they both become, and distance themselves from him. In doing so they become a microcosm of the very foundation of identity: they affirm what they are and they distance themselves from what they are not. They also raise some profound questions about authenticity and performance. All of the participants explored – in diverse ways – what it means to be authentic in a classroom context. If there was an over-arching theme to emerge it was that to be authentic meant being "you" while also being engaged in the moment. A pre-packaged approach to instruction – a formulaic approach to teaching – had the potential to translate into a formulaic approach to learning. All participants seemed uncomfortable with the idea of teaching or learning as a formulaic construction, but they also recognized the inevitable tension that emerged in any teaching circumstance. We may not want to be seen – or see ourselves – as putting on an act, but most participants recognized that – to varying degrees – to teach means to perform. Can we perform the role of teacher without losing ourselves in the role? Or is the role of teacher subsumed in and expressed through our larger sense of who we are? This is further complicated by the fact that the very nature of our discipline –which is framed around these six strands of human experience: reading, writing, viewing, listening, speaking and representing – involves teaching students how to

understand texts and express that understanding. If we are forever constructing ourselves and negotiating between our private and performative (pedagogic) spaces, we are also dictating the terms in which our students engage in that same process. To do so means that we are entering into a creative space both for and with our students and yet, it is not simply our shared space, but a space with parameters defined by a host of external sources. In the discussions about the most positive moments in the participants' teaching lives, every discussion was framed by teacher student relationships stemming from a classroom context and every one of these reflections represented some kind of affirmation of the work that the participants saw themselves as doing. Conversely, when participants reflected on the negative moments, these were always situated in the other: relationships with administration, daunting marking loads, or perceptions of other teachers, to name the three dominant categories that emerged.

In the final moments of Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, Leonard Shelby offers the following reflection: "We all need mirrors to remind ourselves who we are. I am no different." Nor are we, as English teachers, different, in that in order to embrace the future we need to be willing to stare unflinchingly into the mirror our past and present affords; but we perhaps, also have to recognize that we are constructing what we see in that mirror. In the regressive moment, I used the reflections of 56 high school English teachers to explore and expose the position of the high school English teacher in the past and the present. In that moment I pointed to the limiting super-structures that frame our professional lives, but also to the ongoing tensions that are a part of becoming and being an English teacher.

While there is no question that we are bound by sometimes shamelessly short-sighted institutional frameworks and the ever tightening time constraints they engender, we would be naïve and, I believe, disingenuous, were we not to face up to our own complicity in our subjugation.

Whenever I meet another English teacher, be it professionally or personally, I am struck by how the conversation, wherever it may have begun, invariably turns not to our passion for our students and the literature we work with daily, but our daunting workload. In the Regressive moment the participants lay bare some of the particular features of this workload – with a particular emphasis on marking – and its impact on their personal and professional lives. The trauma created by the pervasive time dilemma that frames our lives is evident, but when something becomes that closely attached to our identity structures, I have to wonder if we also find some level of comfort in this aspect of our teacher identities. There is a very real sense, upon meeting another English teacher – regardless of the specific features of his or her background – that you are meeting someone that "gets it," in that they understand the specific demands of what you do in a way that colleagues from other disciplines might not. I would like to suggest that this comfort is a false one, because in embracing this affirmation from colleagues in similar professional situations – a very natural reaction – we actually end up entrenching what I would term the "martyr" mentality. If we spend our careers defining ourselves through our workload, do we in some subconscious ways cling to that identity out of familiarity, thus inhibiting our attempts at meaningful change?

I think we do, and I think that the way we cling to this martyr mentality prevents us from engaging fully in the necessarily "complicated conversation" that will actually lead to meaningful change. I have been involved in so many formal and informal meetings with my colleagues where the overriding sentiment was simply this: If they (Administration, the school board, the province) would only wake up and inject more money into the system or the school or the department, then our lives would surely be better. As should be clear from my lengthy introduction, I cannot fault the underlying premise for this way of thinking: we are overworked and our schools are under-funded. I fear, however, that if we continue to adapt what is essentially a submissive position – waiting for someone else to rescue us from the crisis – we only exacerbate the problem. After all, these problems we face are not new – although some of the particular challenges may have intensified – and this waiting around for the cavalry to arrive, even if it is in the guise of raging against the machine, is clearly not working. While we content ourselves to "fight" – as many a colleague has termed it – for marking time, for reasonable class sizes etc. We may be doing long term damage to our goals by focusing all of our energy outward, when really, the only thing within our power to change is ourselves. If we continue as we have, focusing our energies on what has to this point been an ineffectual fight against forces external to our profession we are really only stripping ourselves of the autonomy we claim to desire, by failing to look meaningfully at our own practice and promote the change within that may prompt the larger structural changes we seek.

Part Four: The Analytic Moment

Chapter 10: Introduction

Meeting Places

During my last year as a high school department head, I held an English department meeting on a particular afternoon. In fact, I called (inflicted?) such meetings approximately twice a month. Topics for discussion veered from the mind-numbing, bureaucratic “administrivia” that is so much a part of the corporate culture that seems to pervade all areas of today’s educational landscape,

to the truly engaging and enlightened professional and personal discourse that is just as much our professional joy as it is our professional obligation.

I have spent many years in roles of pseudo-authority, and I have called many a meeting and I have never ceased to be amazed at the subtle and not so subtle shifts in the nature of the discourse throughout any one meeting. Personalities, subject matter and, although I wish this were not always so, my role as a "leader" in these meetings all ebb and flow, defying my ability to describe, in any meaningful way, what an English Department Meeting "is". If there is a common thread, however, it is this: every official department meeting is prelude to another meeting or meetings that occurs in the immediate aftermath of the end of the official business. This involves everything from a meeting that continues past our 3:30 "dismissal", with people leaving as their lives dictate, to hallway discussions outside of the meeting room, to discussions over beers in often seedy surroundings (usually the furthest removed imaginatively from the sterility of the school walls).

It is at these non-meetings that real – and I use the word in all its colloquial and Lacanian splendor – discussion takes place, and so it was with this particular meeting I refer to: A relatively brief meeting comes to an end. A few people leave, but most of the participants stay. It is two days before spring break. The forecast calls for snow on the following morning, and the effects of a long and often harrowing school year, and an almost equally long and not much less harrowing winter is writ large in the ashen pallor and red-rimmed eyes of the teachers in the room. The meeting involved the particularly contentious issue of

assessment reform and focused on perhaps the cultural touchstone of assessment issues: Should teachers use zeros in their evaluative practice? Nonetheless, the discussion remained civil and not particularly contentious and in the meeting after the meeting, the topic veered – as it always does in some way, whether overtly or covertly – into a discussion of what it means to teach – and perhaps more importantly, for the teachers in the room, what it means to teach English. If we consider how all six of the participants in the second part of this study located their own change in practice from the beginning of their career in some kind of discussion about assessment, it would seem that most had taken part in similar meetings to the one I described.

This is, of course, an area of no small intrigue for me, as this study and the focus of my graduate work these past few years involves delving into the murky waters of English teacher identity formation (and perhaps even, subjugation). One of the reasons these post- meeting meetings are so common is because of the very human pleasure in realizing that we are not alone; that the frustrations and fears that have kept you up at night and made you snap at your significant other in response to an innocuous comment or drive too aggressively on the way home, are not just symptoms of your unique neuroses. Much of this gathering involved just this kind of affirmation, featuring many a nodding head while one of us held forth on a specific area of concern and then, I brought this up: the crystalline image of the phone in your classroom with the message light flashing. This seems an innocuous enough image in this day and age. We all have phones – probably multiple phones – and we all receive and return messages. Why is it, however,

that a message waiting on a telephone in the rooms of my English teaching colleagues invokes a feeling of dread? To a person, this was the consensus and I have since brought this up to other teachers who affirmed and elaborated on the experience of checking a message left at the school. Some described physical symptoms – a racing heart, a dropping stomach – others, the imaginative gyrations of considering what it could be – a missed deadline, an angry parent etc. – but they all described that same trauma, but no one could articulate its cause. The teachers I spoke to had not suffered an inordinate number of bad experiences and are, to the contrary, professionals who excel – and see themselves as successful – in all aspects of their profession. And yet, the sense of tension – of inadequacy – that pervaded much of our departmental discussion is dishearteningly palpable and the reasons behind it are multi-faceted and often inscrutable. I see this image of the flashing phone message as being representative of those things that are neither a part of our official duties and role as a teacher, nor part of the way that we conceive of ourselves. Instead, this represents a netherland between the larger superstructures that frame our teaching lives – what Lacan would call the Symbolic – the way we imagine ourselves – the Imaginary register – and that which is unnamed and unnamable, but still a palpable presence in our lives – the Lacanian Real.

Now, I have explored this dynamic that exists between these three registers – usually without naming them – amongst English teachers throughout the early stages of my graduate career, and in both the Regressive and Progressive stages of this study we are offered some profound insights into the joys and

challenges of the profession. In using Pinar's currere as the overarching framework for this study and as I move from the progressive to the analytic moment, my goal is to achieve the "loosening throughout" that Pinar invokes, in reminding us that "[e[tymologically, ana means "up, throughout"; lysis means a loosening." (p. 36) Pinar (2006) equates this to phenomenological bracketing whereby "one's distantiation from past and future functions to create a subjective spaces of freedom in the present." (p. 36) I would like to explore how the psychoanalytic realm – particularly through Lacan's reimagining of Freud –can inform and inspire a creative act that can help us create this space. In doing so, we must necessarily expand our understanding of what it means to engage in analysis.

Pinar envisions the Regressive moment as being about uncovering the self in true psychoanalytic fashion, as prelude to the futuring of the Progressive moment, but I would like to suggest here that what the Analytic moment reminds us of is that we have never left the psycho-analytic realm (indeed, can we ever?) and that what we have actually engaged with thus far is a psychoanalytic act that mirrors the three registers invoked by Jacques Lacan: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. It is beyond the scope of both this paper and my expertise to offer much beyond a superficial introduction to Lacanian psycho-analysis, but this conceptual frame can allow us to understand what has come before and set the stage for the synthetic moment of currere. What would like to do is offer a brief overview of each of the three registers and to explain how I see them functioning within this study.

The Symbolic is perhaps the most intuitive of the registers in that we can easily recognize that we are subjects that are part of larger organizing structures. Jacques Allain Miller (1998) – one of the translators of Lacan's seminars – refers to the Symbolic as "the determining order of the subject, and its effects are radical: the subject, in Lacan's sense, is himself an effect of the symbolic" (p.279). When we consider what our participants have offered us in this study, we see them as both being placed within and functions of the signifiers that hold them in place. Consider how we position ourselves within the symbolic hierarchy of our schools. What does it mean to be a teacher or a student or an administrator? Mark Bracher (2006) reminds us that

> We are always operating with an eye to enacting and being recognized for identity-bearing concepts such as 'teacher,' 'student,' 'mother,' 'lover,' 'American,' and so on, as well as attributes such as 'intelligent' rather than 'stupid,' 'fair' rather than 'unfair,' and 'honest' rather than 'dishonest.' (p. 18)

These are the types of master signifiers that Lacan sees as the symbols that "in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him . . ." (Lacan, 1998, 42)

By contrast, but also implicated in the Symbolic, the Imaginary is that coherent sense of self that we are constantly constructing and constantly affirming. Miller (1998) refers to the Imaginary as "the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined" (p. 279).

If the colloquial term “imaginary” connotes a dismissing of that which is not real, we must remove it from our lexicon in this context, for the Imaginary is the very “real” way that we organize our sense of self and our very existence. It is the imaginary register that frames our lives and becomes the means by which we orchestrate our thoughts and actions.

The Real is again, a term that forces us to remove ourselves from the preconceptions of what it means to be “real,” for the Lacanian Real cannot be captured in the realm of cold, hard – or even describable – fact. The Real by its very nature, resists representation such that even naming it symbolizes it and sends it tumbling back into the symbolic and/or imaginary registers. Miller (1998) describes it as “that before which the imaginary falters, that over which the symbolic stumbles” (p.280) and in this slight phrase in which he connects these three registers, Miller allows us to glimpse the power of The Real. It is only by prompting and eruption of the real that we can free ourselves to truly understand the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The Real is "the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic" (p. 80).

Much of what is to follow is informed by my reading of Todd McGowan’s (2007) text *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* in which he re-imagines Lacanian film theory, after offering a succinct dismissal of what was previously considered Lacanian film theory; a theory that he considers to have opened itself up to attacks “not because of its over-reliance on purely psychoanalytic concepts, but because of its deviation from these concepts” (p. 5). McGowan’s goal is “a

return to Lacanian concepts themselves in the analysis of the cinema – and with this a renewal of the endeavor to theorize the filmic experience." (p. 5) I have used film as a perturbing medium in the Progressive stage and the participants have responded by lingering on the camera's gaze. All participants questioned – in some manner – how the camera was affecting what was playing out in its grasp, particularly in regard to the first clip showing an actual teacher teaching his grade ten English classroom, but also extending into the quasi-fictional world of *The Class*. This led many of the participants into profound meditations on the seemingly contradictory concepts of authenticity and performance in their teaching lives.

It was my hope in selecting these pieces of film that I would be able to use McGowan's revitalized concept of a Lacanian film theory to locate the imaginary and symbolic orders within the realm of English teaching, but also make manifest the eruption of the Real. I entered into this experiment with the premise that the dispiriting hold of the Imaginary and the Symbolic on our profession is apparent in both the joy and despair of our roles as teachers. The tension between these two orders becomes endless and hopeless, precisely because we have too often failed to, if not embrace, at least prompt, a necessary eruption of the Real. We come close – the discussion of the looming Real of the phone message is an example – but ultimately, we scurry back to the symbolic order into the cloistered realm of what it means to be "teacher." The Real exists in the space between the words written and spoken by the participants: it is present in its absence. What is said, however, further entrenches us in the imaginary and symbolic orders.

My hope was that the film medium could offer a break from the signifiers that hold us in place, by invoking an eruption of the Real. McGowan articulates it more clearly and more eloquently that I could when he writes:

> The real marks a point of failure, not just of the subject's look but also of ideology's explanatory power. That is to say, the real traumatizes not just the subject that encounters it, but also the big Other as well. The hold the symbolic authority has over subjects depends on the avoidance of the traumatic real that exposes the imposture of all authority. When the subject experiences the traumatic real, it recognizes symbolic authority's failure to account for everything. This is the key to the political power of the gaze. Though the encounter with the gaze traumatizes the subject, it also provides the basis for the subject's freedom – freedom from the constraints of the big Other. (p. 16)

Here in the analytic moment of currere, I find myself in a position of wishing to transform what has been surfaced regarding the unique identity structures of English language arts teachers, into effective action that will move us beyond our position of what Pinar calls "gracious submission." That is, to move into the synthetical realm, but to do so without invoking the Real would likely leave us in a position of just replicating the existing symbolic order. In the Progressive moment I explored my participants' responses to seven discrete – yet interrelated - discussion prompts; three of those prompts were texts and four were specific questions. There was actually one last question that I asked all

participants and it forced them to directly reflect on the subject of the study itself: English teacher identity.

In the section that follows I would like to use this "final" question as a way of analyzing – in Lacanian terms - what has come before, but also as a way of prefiguring the Synthetic moment that will conclude this experiment with Pinar's currere. In exploring the participants' responses to the final question, we will see a reflection on what has come before in both the regressive and progressive moments, and a clear unveiling of both the imaginary and the symbolic orders framing each participant's professional life. We will also see glimmers of the Real.

Part Four: The Analytic Moment

Chapter Eleven: The Final Question

I have framed this study as an exploration of English Language Arts Teacher Professional Identity. Do you have any observations about the nature of your own professional identity? What sustains it? What threatens it? To what degree is it tied to your personal identity? Etc. Please feel free to discuss any aspect of your professional identity that you find thought-provoking.

Mike

Mike reflects back on his initial interview for a teaching position with his board, and recalls,

> I immediately said to the person interviewing me that I did not consider myself a subject specialist, I considered myself a generalist, a student specialist, and I stood behind that knowing that I probably wrote the book of my future that I would end up in a junior high and never get out of a junior high because that was the thought, right, that to be a high school English teacher you had to be a subject specialist, you had to be somebody who knew the subject well and somehow, I ended up landing in a high school and I never looked back, but maybe it was because of that statement.

From the outset of his career, Mike has consciously constructed himself as a teacher who is not a subject specialist, and in his last sentence he clearly sees this imaginative construct as existing within a symbolic order where being "a teacher" is more important than being "an English teacher." This leads to a reflection on Mike's own sense of himself as a teacher. He is ultimately unsure about his status as an English teacher:

> [S]o it's an interesting one, whether or not I even define myself as an English teacher at all even when I was looking at leadership opportunities, I'm not sure that I – I mean I always knew that English wasn't necessarily where I wanted to do it, you know where I wanted to do the work even though I love teaching English and I would go back to it in a second, but I don't believe that I'm necessarily someone who is necessarily an expert to the point – an expert in the subject area without the slant of student . . . I guess there's a . . . it's a bit of a stupid statement to say that you can be an English teacher without the slant of student, but you know what I mean . . . and I think it's why the leadership piece was a good fit for me you know it pulled me in a different direction, so I'm not sure if I would define myself as a . . .if my identity would be defined as an English teacher or if you looked at my English teacher identity – because I'm an English teacher I therefore have an identity it would probably be defined by the fact that – that fact that I see myself as the anti-English teacher (laughter)

Mike's laughter here belies how serious this last statement is. Throughout his discussion with me, this concept of being the "anti-English" teacher comes through very pervasively. Mike is deeply concerned with the concept of authenticity in the classroom, but he also allows for at least the possibility that it is acceptable to be inauthentic if one is serving a noble end. This emerges when he reflects on the teacher's motivations for certain idiosyncratic phrasings in the first clip, in his own reflections on his classroom practice in facilitating student discussion and his admission of how, in his professional life, he is good at "playing the game."

Throughout the discussion, Mike continually shows himself as being very adept at reconciling the imaginary and symbolic orders, and in the discussion there are few moments when he is confronted with a collision between the two. Even in reference to his most negative moment he is able to affirm his own sense of self, without challenging the symbolic order. There is a slight waver when he allows that he "fell into the trap of just doing what was expected of me" but ultimately, he notes "I'm pretty good at playing the game and I'm pretty good at being happy playing the game, though I'm much happier if I can really stand behind the work that I'm doing, but if I need to for a certain amount of time, play the game, I can do it pretty well." Here Mike is able to affirm his role in the established order, even while he affirms his sense of self.

This seeming contradiction in the realm of authenticity would seem to hold the potential to invoke an eruption of the Real, where the subject is unable to reconcile – or even name – the complex web of emotions and realizations that

emerges, but this does not happen. Interestingly though, it is in his response to the clip from *The Class* that Mike actually reflects upon his own experience as a university student where he was unable to reconcile his larger concept of what Science was with his own construction of himself as a student. This, ultimately, is what we could consider to be an eruption of the Real, where Mike's broadened understanding could no longer fit into either the imaginary or symbolic realm. It was ultimately this moment that lead him to move from a career in Science to one in Education and – despite his rejection of the term – English teaching.

Barry

Barry recognizes, immediately, how multi-faceted this question is:

> I don't have one answer, I have several. . . . I think there's Mr. _____, who's the character that I play when I teach and then there's Barry who, you know, is a different entity at school. I think it's weird, though, about English teacher identity because I think there's how you see yourself, it's how you see yourself amongst your peers, particularly English-teaching peers, it's how you're seen by other people. I mean, and I think you're always at play with those things.

Barry expands on this idea of the distinction between how we see ourselves and how we are seen by others, including colleagues in other disciplines who may not fully realize what it is we do. He mentions hearing things such as "'Well, you guys have an extra point five marking time, and you know, all you guys do is run

movies anyway, you know, or, I mean how hard can it be to teach English?' Which, you know, is just kind of dismissive venting," but despite this, when he hears it, he says, "It bugs me. And I feel that that's a part of my identity." Barry notes that, like any stereotype, there is often a grain of truth to these criticisms and that, in itself, can be grating:

> I think the other part, too, is it was frustrating, you know, when you get accused of those things and it bugs you and then you see colleagues playing right into the stereotypes, right? I mean, again, you know, you can pick any stereotype but, I mean, you know, it's like… There's somebody living it, right?

Barry goes on to discuss some of the pressures that have come along with moving into his new leadership role and how challenging he finds not only the responsibility, but the isolation of having a leadership role that might not be fully understood by anyone in the building. He reflects on having an assistant principal the previous year who was a former English teacher and how different that was from his current situation:

> I've got a great AP (assistant principal) this year, I've got no problems with him at all, and we get along really well. But that's not his background, English. And, and, you know, he's willing to say, "You know what? You're the English professional. You know what you're doing. I'm trusting you, you know, as long as we get this and this and this done, I trust you." And I appreciate

> having the trust, but I don't have the communication. And that's something that I really do feel that I don't have anyone in the building to talk about English teaching with, other than other English teachers. And, of course, we have those conversations, but when you're someone's supervisor and you're talking, there's always that sense that it's evaluative, right?

Despite these reservations, Barry is quick to affirm just how privileged he feels to be able to teach and, specifically, to teach English:

> . [L]ook, I chose to teach English. I mean, I went in there pretty much knowing what I was going to get into. I have not been terribly surprised by anything that I've encountered in fifteen years. I mean, you never know, there's always those little moments, but I pretty much knew what the job was going to be. I pretty much figured I was going to like the job and, to be honest with you, I'd say, as I was telling my kids today, like, if I won a lottery tomorrow, I'd be back in here tomorrow. I'd probably have a nicer suit, you know, and, you know, probably a heck of a nicer car, and the TV I said I had now would look like a postage stamp. (laughs) But, um, I like what I do. I mean, I love what I do. I enjoy it. I, I enjoy it. And I, so what do I enjoy about it? I mean, I guess that's the core. I, you know what? I enjoy spreading the gospel of English, you know? I enjoy partly being a literary promoter but, more, more particularly, I like the idea that I think

> it's one of the few classes where you actually can help kids think. And communicate. And you know, I'm not trying to cast any aspersions on math but, like, you talk to any math teacher, they're so curriculum-driven and they are so focused on did you get this unit? Did you get this unit? And science in the same way and, to some extent, social studies. Although social studies has changed a little bit. Um, but I still think English is the one where you can say, look, this is a person's thoughts on paper.

In his reflections on English teacher identity, Barry is able to situate English within the larger structure of the other school subjects and this becomes both a part of his understanding of the symbolic order he exists in, but it also allows him to establish his imaginary construct of what it means to be an English teacher. He firmly grounds his sense of who he is as a teacher in both his passion for – and the larger social need for– a subject that helps "kids think." Like Mike before him, Barry has no difficulty reconciling his sense of who he is, with larger social perceptions of what an English teacher is. He clearly sees himself outside of the stereotypical mold of "the English teacher," although he recognizes the glimmer of truth that might exist in even the moist shallow of stereotypes. Like Mike – who sees himself as "the anti-English teacher," Barry can define himself in relation to what he is not.

Barry – again, like Mike – does not approach an eruption of the Real in this reflection or in any of the parts of the discussion except again, during what came forth during his reflection on the film clip from *The Class*. Barry is also

very concerned with the significance of authenticity and like Mike before him, he relates an experience from his university experience that collapses the symbolic and the imaginary for him. He relates how bitter he felt about being asked to write authentically about himself as a burgeoning young English teacher, but in a situation where he would be graded. He essentially wrote the reflection book that the instructor wanted and subsequently received a great mark, but had essentially subverted the super structure of grades and reconstructed himself as a student, and ultimately, as a teacher.

Fred

Fred's response is interesting in that he makes a clear differentiation between teaching English and teaching another subject, but he also clearly notes a distinction between himself and other English teachers:

> Well, I think that in the teaching profession and, again, maybe this is unfair because I've never been a math teacher, science teacher, I would say that in English the curriculum is you. Every choice that you make in an English classroom speaks of you. And so that's why it's really hard sometimes to, well, it's just hard sometimes. Like, every move that you make is yours, right? Or, somehow, related to you. And so, there's nothing of quadratic equations in a math teacher. They are always trying to find new ways to make that interesting. But there is everything in *Harold and Maude* for me, for those kids at that moment. And I think, well, but don't

> think that's necessarily the case for all English teachers, right? Like, I mean, there's a lot of people out there who are teaching *Lord of the Flies* for the 32nd year, and they're doing… they might be doing a good job, they might be doing a crappy job…But they're teaching *Lord of the Flies* for the 32nd time, right?

The two distinctions Fred is making seem to be determined by a sense of ownership. The English curriculum, in its very nature, demands creation. There is no "do this and then do this" and this begins with the choice of literature which is entirely the teacher's own. This separates ELA from other core subjects. Fred also notes, however, a division within our ranks that has to do with ownership – and really, communal ownership – of a text. Are you teaching a text because it speaks to you and your students in a profound and hopefully, instructive manner? Or are you just teaching what you have always taught because you have always taught it? He uses this concept to comment even more specifically on his identity as an English teacher and how this connects to his own personal identity:

> I've never understood the notion of the teacher persona entirely. Though again, and I can watch it happen all the time, right? And I'm always kind of like horrified when I hear not, like, unprofessionally, but when you overhear a kid talking about someone that you really like as being a bad teacher. Because you think, really? . . . How can that be? They're really nice. They make excellent cupcakes.

Fred's cupcake comment is a self-effacing referent to how natural it is to blur the line between our personal and professional selves and Fred sees even this recognition as being tied to his sense of self:

> And so I always find that, and those moments happen all the time, right? Like, and I've often thought that. . . it's a significant part of me because of my people who I count amongst my friends, they're all really good teachers. I don't have any friends who are middling teachers. So, it has to bleed into my personal life, right?

In regard to how his professional self reflects his personal self, Fred expresses some uncertainty:

> So, yeah, for me personally, what you see is sort of what you get. For the most part. Maybe some sort of hyper-realized portion of me, because… but yeah and no, right? Because I'm not extroverted and I'm not inherently funny or witty or anything, it is a bit of a show. Sure, it's the show. But in many ways, the best parts of me are on display in the classroom? My kids often know more about what's going on in my life than my colleagues. How about that?

Of all the participants, Fred is perhaps the most direct in exploring that distinction between the person one is and the person one creates in the classroom. As with the previous two participants, however, Fred is able to be the person he is within the larger constructs of the school and society as a whole. He comes close to

delving into the realm of the Real when he mentions being slightly surprised to hear that someone he likes may not be thought of as a good teacher. It is, however, as with the previous participants, the film clip of *The Class* that brings Fred into contact with a moment in a classroom that might allow for the eruption of the Real. Fred refers to the "notion of revealing oneself. . . . Nakedly." and what then can happen "[w]hen the kids see you as not that, some sort of instrument of the man or the establishment." Fred recognizes these moments – where the established order of teacher and student break down, but where you are forced to confront your own construction of self – as simultaneously "great" and "scary."

Sally

Earlier in our discussion, in reference to the first video clip, Sally made reference to the fact that there is no one type of English teacher and she returns to this concept in response to this question:

> I think the fact that everybody is so different is really interesting, but I think that some things we have to have in common is a tremendous amount of bravery to explore the human condition on levels that no one else does, and to really deal with those life-shaking, life-meaning, life experience kind of questions that no one else does in teaching, maybe, except for drama and art again, same thing. But I think you have to do it on a level that's, uh, kind of amazing. I think English teachers are, like, they had a huge impact

> on my personal life when I was growing up, that they were just the right kind of people for me. You know? And I think that I feel a tremendous honour and privilege to have that impact on so many of my kids. Not that I'm, like, ooooh changing their world or whatever, but…

Sally is cautious about appearing too grandiose in her own estimation of her impact by laughing off the idea of "changing their world" but I affirm this sense by saying, simply "But you are" leading to this response:

> But I do have kids come back and talk to me about what they learned and what that was like, and how they remembered it and how they thought about this, and how it changed… and I think, like, my most important role is kind of to teach them to be critical thinkers about their world and what they believe and who they're listening to and it's easy to say, oh, we have a no-bully policy at our school, but how are you actually going to deal with it? And as I struggle with those same issues, and, you know, I think that in terms of an identity, I think it's, I think it is performative, but it's also sincere at the same time. I think it's a balance of passion and determination. I think that it's, um, it's a negotiation, this identity. Because it's gotta move around all the time.

Sally goes even further in exploring how the concept of who we are is continually shifting, both within and as a result of our role as English teacher:

Like, the minute I sort of get set in something and I think, I know how to do it, I realize I'm wrong or something like that. And I think it's this constant ambiguity about your role, like, are you a parent in this moment? Are you a counselor in this moment? Are you a teacher? Are you an English teacher or are you a psychology teacher, or are you… like, I think there's this tremendous fluidity and ambiguity in the role of being an English teacher. That you are expected to be… and, I mean, outside of the classroom, you're expected to be a statistician, a business person, an accountant…Data analyst thing, and I don't have any idea about some of that. Or having expertise in things like, you know, human relations. Like, it all comes with the territory, but it's something that they don't necessarily train you for, and that we don't talk about a lot, because we don't have a lot of opportunities to talk about those kinds of things because we're really busy trying to hang in there. And get through stuff that's really meaningful. And that, like, almost there should be an English teacher summer camp where there's no agenda, and we all just head out to the mountains and hang out for a week and really, bravely, honestly own up to what we struggle with, and what we… and the other thing is to be really slow to give each other answers. Like, it's pretty easy for someone to say, oh, just do this. And that's not going to work for us, because we're all weird, right? Like, we're all unusual people.

This exploration of the idiosyncratic nature of individual English teachers has run through Sally's narrative and this was a thread that first surfaced in reaction to the film clip from *The Class*. For Sally, to be an English teacher is to be unique, and therefore our imaginary construction of self can never fail to fit into the existing symbolic order of what it means to teach English. In her response to the clip from *The Class*, she recognizes the enormous emotional stakes that are involved in what she is witnessing on the screen. She sees the potential for this teacher to be "crushed" by delving into such potentially inflammatory topics as "shame," and interestingly enough, this leads Sally to reflect on "how much of teaching is a performance" and it is in this fleeting moment that Sally allows us a glimpse of The Real. She suggests that when we teach we "are sincerely, but, truly, acting out a role, and that you know how to act" and in doing so she reminds us of the symbolic register – of what it means to teach and to be a teacher – but also of the imaginary register – in the construction of that unique teaching persona. She further clarifies that this process is can sometimes be "the best thing, because when everything else is falling apart, you can at least act like a teacher and things work." It is in that nebulous phrase – "falling apart" – that we glimpse – but cannot quite name The Real – before retreating back to the re-established imaginary and symbolic orders engendered in "act like a teacher." Like the three participants before her, it is only the viewing of the fictional film clip that threatens to erupt The Real.

Larissa

Larissa is unequivocal in not defining herself as an English teacher and she even questions the appellation "teacher":

> No, I don't see myself as an English teacher. Um, I often don't think of myself as a teacher. I think I make a distinction between educator and a teacher. I don't know whether I can articulate what exactly that distinction constitutes right now. I think I have to ponder it. . . .But emotionally, I do see a distinction between teacher and educator.

I follow this up by asking this question: "Do you see a distinction between you as educator and you as a person?" and she responds, "Mmmm, yes. And I have to say I didn't see it before. I started seeing it because of the context, of the school context." I clarify that she means her current school context, which she affirms and there is a noticeable second of tension where we both recognize – and I, in fact, laugh at this recognition – that we have both taught in this context, so there is much being said even when we are not saying anything. Larissa returns this acknowledgment with her own laughter when I ask her if she'd care to expand on her experience in the school context:

> To elaborate? (laughs) Um, well, I think it comes from the distrust in expertise. I think what is undermined is with all kinds of new pedagogies, that certainty maybe, how certain it is, it's, you know, we can measure it, but probably never a hundred percent. But there was something that you were certain you could claim as your

> expertise. But now it is not valued. We have shifted to metaphors that ultimately do not emphasize expertise and specialization. They emphasize skills, management skills. And I've never seen education as a business. So from that point of view, looking at hierarchies and existing structures of power, um, teachers have lost something essential to, I would say, generally their identity as providers, creators and, um, sharers of knowledge. Because we have been put in a situation where we, it's demanded almost daily, that we refocus teaching to management.

The effect of this refocusing, for Larissa, is that "we are producing people who are proud of being ignorant." As a point of clarification, I ask if she is referring to teacher or students and she responds "Both." She makes a distinct point of mentioning the dangers inherent in "producing administrators who feel proud of their ignorance" and this comment leads to the following reflection:

> From my point of view, it is to be certain in your values as educator to know what the big picture is and the big picture in this case is, yeah, do we want thinking people? Do we want open-minded people? Do we want people who are willing to take risks? Do we want creative people? Well, we cannot create them by telling them that technology is the only way. We cannot create them by not allowing them to be creative in a profound sense, because little tweaking of a powerpoint using blue versus red doesn't really help. You know, until we challenge our students,

> and that's what we are not allowed to do very often, because we cannot fail them. Well, how are they going to learn if failure is not an option? It's much better to let them fail and have safety net, to re-bounce than to just tell them that they're okay. Which is not true.

In response, I bring up the idea of sports – and it is important to realize that the school we are sitting in, and the school we have both taught together in, is acclaimed for both its academic and athletic legacy – and how unfathomable it would be to play sports where failure is not an option.

> But take the coaching metaphor, which is one of the strongly promoted metaphors nowadays, you know, teachers are coaches. Well, there is something dictatorial in a coach. . . . And I don't think the analogy is, because we were talking about analogies, I don't think the analogy is actually accurate. Coaching and teaching. Um, and one of the points where it's not accurate is that the coach does not have, in the long run, the same responsibilities as a gatekeeper of humanity as does an educator. A coach usually is something that you do extracurricular, you do it for pleasure, you do it for fun, you do it for whatever reasons you have. But teachers in the classroom are gatekeepers of humanity. They have to ensure, and you were talking about that, what we foresee to be our humanity in the next twenty, fifty years… We've planted the seeds for that to grow. So, are we harbingers of change? I don't

> know. I think we are more gatekeepers right now.No, I don't know. I'm not pessimistic, I just, I'm not sure that currently we have policies that are acknowledging the fact that kids need actually to be slowed down rather than pressed for pace. And, again, failure is one big missing component of the equation. And take that out, psychologically we are not preparing them for life, if that's the ultimate goal of education, right? In the cliché form. We are not. Because life is not a pleasant trip. And we go back to censorship. Not allowing them to talk about literature that deals with the dark aspects of humanity. How are they going to learn if they are all self-righteous? All the time. And believe that their beliefs are self-righteous and correct and everybody has to follow? But do we have the safe environment we're talking about that? I'm not so sure.

I ask Larissa about the idea that the English classroom may perhaps become that space, which she tentatively agrees with, before qualifying her statement:

> But, see, the thing is, how can we guarantee that more English teachers or social studies teachers or even biology teachers, I think all teachers, ultimately, even PhysEd. teachers, um, are doing that job? And not just doing the job. Because I think it requires more than dedication to come to the classroom, prep your classes, and it requires not necessarily the friendliness with students where you, you know, form these personal relationships…It requires, I would

> say, a philosophical approach to education and teaching and how many teachers are willing to go there and make that part of their daily life? I don't know. . .

When I press her to answer her own question, she ultimately responds "Not too many." She further notes that "I think a lot are discouraged." And when I ask her whether this reflects a failure of the system or the individual, she responds

> I would say both. We, from my point of view, we do have systemic failures. I, there is no doubt. Just the whole business model of education I think is a systemic failure, but that's a personal opinion. Uh, but I also think that, um, I don't know. It's interesting with the younger teachers how they see the job. Where does the job start and where does it end, and what are the risks of doing that job? Um, I think in some of the older teachers that I've met here, . . . we led the conversations that we're leading now. They were more for our personal fulfillment than about teaching students. But here, I've seen a lot of, a lot of older teachers who are really concerned about the students. They're concerned about them in the sense that they feel they are sculpting or shaping humanity, it is a very fragile and extremely responsible thing to do.

She initially acknowledges that this is quite a different metaphor to use than that of gatekeeper, but then brings these two metaphors back together:

It is [different]. In a way. But if you have that feeling that you're shaping humanity, you're sort of careful and that makes you an even more careful gatekeeper. Doesn't it? . . . If you deal with fragile material, you will put more place, more, more, uh, more wariness and more, I would guess, preventions maybe to, not protect it, but to make sure that it comes out whole. So that will make you more vigilant gatekeeper if you have that understanding. But if we are switching it to let's manage students, right? Rather than shape students. If we're changing it to, here is another object in your classroom. Yes, we talk about student-centered education, we talk about educating the whole person, but we don't touch the big questions that need to be touched. And they need to be thinking about. Because they will be making the solutions. We're creating the problems. They'll have to face the problems. They will face other problems, but they will also have to come up with the new solutions. So I don't believe that a managerial model is helpful for that. And, yeah, the metaphors change, I guess, depending on where you want the emphasis to be placed, and I guess that's fair to say about all the other metaphors that we have, you know, comparing teaching to coaching… Comparing it to facilitating, to comparing it to conducting, to comparing it to, um, I don't know, what else do we have there? Hmmm, oh, well, inspiration would be a nice one. Martin Luther King?

Larissa's series of reflections on the concept of teacher identity is a perceptive exploration of how, as English educators, we are trapped in the symbolic order. She explores not only how our systemic structures fail us, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, how we can be trapped by the very language we impose on the educational enterprise. Even the words "teacher" and "educator" immerse us in the symbolic order and ultimately, we become trapped in metaphor. The language itself – whether we refer to ourselves as "gatekeepers" or "coaches" – becomes the controlling order of our discourse about what it means to be a teacher. Larissa, perhaps more than any of the other participants – and at least partially because of her ability to think, speak and teach in other languages – is aware of the power of language and thus we see her most actively fighting this control. She rejects the label of English teacher, but she is also the participant who moves most readily and most transparently into a creative mode that sees her affirming her construction of herself as an educator. Her ruminations on her perceived role as "shaping humanity" reveal just how high the stakes are for her in affirming her imaginative construction of self, and as with the previous participants we can look back at her reaction to the film clip from *The Class* to achieve a glimpse of the Real.

Unlike the other participants, however, and this is very in keeping with her conception of herself as a "shaper" and "gatekeeper" of humanity, Larissa does not situate an eruption of The Real within her own practice, so much as she sees it as part of her role to spur that eruption in her students. When she reflects on the teacher in *The Class* clip, she likes that he "challenge[s] the students" putting

them “in situations where they do not feel comfortable.” In those moments where students are uncomfortable – and we see this play out in the discussion of shame in the clip – the symbolic and imaginary collapse as students are forced to move beyond the comfort of the organizing structures of their world and their internal construction of self. She sees the questions that the teacher poses to the students as being designed “to challenge and maybe to shock them and to some extent to turn the mirror towards the students so they can reflect.” This is, in essence, a microcosm of what an eruption of the Real can provide both for our students and ourselves.

Bob

It is important to note here, that Bob’s previous role with Alberta Learning brought him into close contact with a very wide range of English teachers for short bursts of time over exam marking sessions. He has been in contact with more English teachers than most typical English teachers. Bob is able to narrow his response down to one discrete facet, before opening up to a broader discussion:

> One thing . . . and I think there is no English teacher who would say otherwise. You need to love literature. You need to really enjoy the books, the literature , that you’re teaching. Obviously not everything, as we’re somewhat prescribed but uhm, I think you need that devotion to that subject area because if you aren’t passionate . . . I think, so to me that ‘s an essential ingredient. You

> need to be passionate even if you are teaching *Lord of the Flies* for the twenty-fifth time or whatever it might be that book still engages you or maybe something new, something obviously engages you . That I think is a prerequisite and I think you, as an English teacher, you like to see kids get both intellectually engaged with something like the ideas or the themes or whatever it might be, not only in terms of their ability to talk about it, think about it, but also their ability to write about it or to produce some kind of text that reveals that kind of understanding . . .

Here, Bob is echoing previous comments made by Fred – who not surprisingly teaches in the same school as Bob – about the importance of choosing literature and also reflects how important passion was to the participants in Part One of the study. This leads to a discussion of his own sense of himself as an educator, where he also echoes an earlier comment by Barry that English teachers tend to be more readers than writers:

> The funny thing is myself as an English teacher, what I tend to talk about is myself as a reader. I'm thinking, I'm really talking about myself as a reader more than a writer rather than as a teacher which makes me somewhat . . . I mean I see people who are teachers and I go, boy they are real teachers – they really . . . and I think where I differ from some really good teachers is really good teachers know better than I do how students learn and they craft their lessons to help the students learn. I'm not so sure I do that . I

mean, I think I try to charm students to go in the direction I want them to go. Whether my practice is in fact the best practice – a strategy for them to get where they want to I hate to say but I really think it is where I fall down. I don't always sit down and go, ok, I need to get them engaged, I need them to see the connection between this text and themselves, I need to have – and there 's all sorts of things that I see other teachers do and I go, "Oh man, that's so good" It's just so good and I see why that would work and I just don't think of doing . . .

So anyway what I think English teacher identity is, I'm not sure. And I mean, I've seen English teachers where I think were – at a certain level, were just teachers – that that love of reading that love of being a reader or writer has sort of died and I mean, that's the rigours of high school teaching . . . . It can wear you out. And I can see after twenty-five thirty years of teaching it can seem – you just can't work up the juice – they can't work it up anymore and if they're teaching the same old thing, it's not surprising that they start teaching by rote, which is unfortunate , but yeah, I don't know and I don't know if English teachers are different than other teachers because you'd like to think that you know, when we did our Speak Out session at our school, one thing of the several that the kids said was that they liked and respected in their teachers they liked a sense of humour , but their teacher didn't have to be

> funny . . . and then they also liked teachers who were masters of their subject. Really know their subject. That it's not like the teacher just learned it the night before and can't go off the page, the lesson plan and just sort of talk about the issue in different ways and so that was the kind of thing I liked to hear because that's what I think I bring to bear. That I know literature. I may not always know the best way to get it across to kids, but I can be flexible . . .

In this wide ranging reflection on what it means to be an English teacher and what it means to be a good English teacher, Bob surfaces what appears to be a contradiction. For him, a good teacher "know[s] better than [he] do[es] how students learn and they craft their lessons to help the students learn" and thus, they are able to be very deliberate in their instruction. He also, though, notes how important it is for students that teachers be "masters of their subject," not, as might be expected, so that they can rule with the proverbial iron fist, but rather because it allows for greater flexibility. This is a powerful example of how the Symbolic and the Imaginary can co-exist as the discourse of the master – the scope and sequence of signifiers, the pillars of the symbolic register, that would denote mastery of a subject – become the key to an autonomous construction of oneself as a teacher. If one has a strong enough grasp of whatever it is that makes one a master, one is free to construct oneself as one sees fit. This would seem to be a potentially potent venue for an eruption of the Real, yet again, as with all of the participants, it is only in the response to the film clip that Bob is able to

envision this eruption occurring and it is when he keys in on a pivotal moment in the scene when a student effectively calls the teacher on his level of authenticity. Bob paraphrases the student as saying "Are you really interested in what we have to say? I don't think you are. I think you are just performing . . ." It is in this moment in the film – and in our discourse, where there is a collapse of both how the teacher is perceived – the symbolic – and how he perceives himself – and in recognizing this, Bob also experiences it, but it is only in the nether realm of film that this encounter takes place, not only for Bob, but for all the participants.

Part Four: The Analytic Moment

Chapter Twelve: Conclusion

Consider that in the Progressive moment, when the six participants were asked about the most positive moment in their careers, they all held up either specific or general examples that showed students experiencing specific kinds of personal and academic success and this success could quite directly be linked back to work that they did as teachers. This correlates with the question in the Regressive moment where participants were asked to describe the most rewarding aspect of their jobs as English teachers and 95% of the participants answered with direct reference to their relationship to their students. In direct contrast to these reflections on positive and rewarding moments – all located within the immediate nexus of the classroom teacher – the six teachers in the Progressive moment all held up examples that were more closely related to other external aspects of their teaching lives – specifically, administrators, colleagues and marking load – rather than to their own practice as educators. Not surprisingly, in the Regressive moment, when teachers were asked to name the most difficult aspects of their jobs, they overwhelmingly cited either the lack of time – this manifested in a number of different ways, but the marking load was the dominant factor – or other external factors.

What is most compelling about this is that we see a very clear separation between the Imaginary – all of those stories that affirm each participant's sense of themselves as teachers who live through their students' successes – and the Symbolic – all of those systemic structures and linguistic signifiers – administrators, other teachers, marking – that organize their worlds. Of course, Lacan might remind us that this is a false dichotomy – in this case spurred by my

relatively pointed – or at least, directional– questions; we may wish to keep these two realms distinct and separate – as these participants clearly do – but in the very attempt to do so we subsume the symbolic into our imaginary field. The Imaginary is our understanding of ourself as a unified whole; in the context of the study it involves what it means to teach, in general, and to teach English, in particular.

Anthony Giddens(1991) provides us with a useful way to consider how this interplay between the Imaginary and the Symbolic affects our identity constructs

> A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor – important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a certain narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self. As Charles Taylor puts it, "In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going." (Giddens, p. 54)

What this means, however, is that we may be entrenching those symbolic constructs in our imaginary register even though they are those things that we are actively fighting against. The narrative of who I am as an English teacher – the imaginary register – must grow broad enough to incorporate even those things

that would seem to negate my agency and efficacy as a teacher. The administrator who does not understand me, becomes as much a part of the structure of who I am – even if it is only to help define what I am not – as my passion for my students. So too, does the marking load that strips me of my health and life-balance, and the colleagues who provide counter-parts to my own sense of self.

While I endeavoured to create both an atmosphere of, and opportunity for, honest engagement within both the Regressive and Progressive moments of the study, I am unable to escape the fact that I – as study director, provocateur, interviewer – am a part of the Symbolic order. As a "friend," "colleague," "leader," or "consultant," I am a part of the organizing constructs of the participants' lives and actively being subsumed into their imaginary register. This is inevitable, but also limiting. There are limits to what someone will say into a recorder. There are limits to what people will say to a person who they must continue living their life with once the discussion is over. The Analytic moment is an opportunity to move beyond these limitations.

I access the medium of film, not only because there is an existing body of scholarship regarding Lacanian film analysis, but also because film – in the very presence of the camera – invokes our awareness of ourselves as performers in the eyes of others both within and beyond the classroom. What film also opens up, however, is the potential for the fictive dimension – already invoked by the futuring in the progressive moment – a dimension that we, through our roles as teachers of literature are intimately familiar with. Can we create ourselves in a way that allows us to go beyond what we can say about ourselves and, thus,

transcend the boundaries of the existing order? This is, essentially, what we see playing out in all six of the participant's discussions. When they directly discuss what the concept of English teacher identity means to them, they – to varying degrees – recognize the super structures of the symbolic order – including the administrative hierarchy in schools and the dictates of organizational metaphors that frame their lives – but they are largely able to incorporate even those things they rail against into their imaginative construction of self. This functions extremely well as a coping mechanism, but does little to resist or change the framing structures of our lives.

The participants' reactions to the one film clip that was a created work displays how a literary work may create a space where The Real is made manifest and both the symbolic and the imaginary registers fail. As McGowan (2007) puts it, reflecting on the films that form the core of his book, "While watching these films, we encounter an object that is either not enough or too much for the subject (and for us as spectators). And in the process, we see that the object that promises to complete the subject actually derails any sense of completion in the subject. (p. 204) This is exactly what I believe happened to each of my participants as they watch the clip from *The Class*. At the heart of this clip, is a discussion of shame, and Anthony Giddens (1991) reminds us that

> [s]hame bears directly on self-identity because it is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography. It originates as early as guilt, since it is stimulated by experiences in which feelings of

> inadequacy or humiliation are provoked – feelings that long antedate the mastery of differentiated language. Some have argued that while guilt is a private-anxiety state, shame is a public one. (p. 65)

While it would be too much to suggest that the participants are channeling a moment of shame in their reflections on the film clip, they are using this filmic representation of the concept of shame as a way of loosening the hold that both the symbolic and the imaginary registers have on their sense of self. In doing so, they make a step towards shattering the most elemental concepts of the symbolic order. As McGowan notes "The traumatic encounter reveals the nonsensical status of our master signifier." (p. 17)

I began this section with an anecdote drawn from my own school experience, detailing my very real concerns with the state of mind (and body) of my colleagues. This exploration of the Analytic moment through a Lacanian (and film) lens has not so much been an attempt to explicate the specifics of my concerns, but rather to move boldly on towards a solution. I believe that the medium of film can hold the key to a revolutionary act. As Todd McGowan (2007) writes in his introduction: "Film's ability to facilitate an encounter with the real represents a threat to the power of ideology." (p. 17)

I have the distinct sense that my colleagues in the English teaching profession and I have been trapped in an ideological nightmare of our own making. We decry the emotional and physical tolls of our profession, while reveling in the many joys it brings. We secretly embrace the roles of teacher as

sage, as performer, as martyr etc. but we fail to embrace the possibility that our salvation lies not in the retreat into or from these roles, but in the conflict and explosion that exists when they come together. It is here that McGowan sees the possibility of film:

> This possibility involves bringing the cinematic depiction of an experience of desire (where the gaze is absent) and an experience of fantasy (where the gaze is a distorting presence) into the same film and sustaining a separation between them in order to reveal what occurs when they collide. In the moment of collision or intersection, these films produce a direct experience of the gaze: as spectators, we encounter an object that does not fit within the filmic field of representation and yet by that very fact indicates our involvement in that field. The direct experience of the gaze collapses the distance between subject and object, and it thereby forces spectators to experience themselves as directly implicated in what they see." (p. 163)

I would like to suggest the seemingly contradictory notion that our truth may lie in a fiction; that our real may exist in artifice. If it is impossible to exist as teacher and as person, and impossible not to as well, perhaps the only answer is to remove ourselves through the camera's lens. McGowan, in the final page of his book, offers the following:

> The nothingness of the object is at once our own nothingness as well. The gaze is nothing but our presence in what we are looking

> at, but we are nothing but this gaze. We are, that is to say, a distortion in Being. The direct encounter with the gaze exposes us as this distortion and uproots every other form of identity to which we cling. It marks a genuine existential turn in the cinema, made possible by films that present us with divided cinematic experience. These films accomplish the impossible and demand that we follow them in doing so. (p. 210)

In his original paper on the concept of currere, Pinar (1975) envisions the Analytical moment as a "detachment from experience" (1975, p. 11) and by [b]racketing what is, what was, what can be, one is loosened from it, potentially more free of it, hence more free to freely choose the present and the future" (p.11). I have utilized both the film medium and the Lacanian registers to take Pinar up on his invitation to "utilize non-educationist interpretive systems to generate data" (p.11) and he envisions the true power of these analytical lenses to emerge after we have taken them off. He advises us to "Note the view visible through these lenses. Once taken off, look at these interpretations. How plausible? How complete? What clearer light do they focus on the present?" (p.11)

I engaged in this thought experiment not to suggest that the Analytic moment necessarily needs to involve either Lacan or film, but to suggest that some marriage of the psycho-analytic process and a creative medium can move us beyond simply recording where we have been and where we are, towards a Synthetic moment that allows us to actualize the change we claim to seek. As English teachers, we live in a world framed by created texts of our choosing and

we use these to inspire our students to enter into their own creative acts. When my participants entered into the process of viewing this film clip, they were able to access dimensions of themselves that would not emerge even in the most far-reaching and intimate conversations, within the context of the study. We would always be held captive by our own imaginary registers – how we envision ourselves and the necessary constructs that we create to maintain that identity structure – and the symbolic register that we also co-construct in our discourse. As we move into the Synthetical moment that in engaging in currere I have been moving the consideration of curriculum – what it means to be a teacher of English Language Arts – into a complicated autobiographical conversation. Pinar (2004) reminds us that Currere is

> an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action – as a private and public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere. Curriculum theory asks you as a prospective or practicing teacher, to consider your position as engaged with yourself and your students and colleagues in the construction of the public sphere, a public sphere not yet born, a future that cannot be discerned in, or even thought from, the present. So conceived, the classroom becomes simultaneously a civic square and a room of one's own. (2004, p.37-38)

The analysis that preceded this moment, signals both a return to myself as an English teacher and a prelude to the revolutionary act that engendered in the

coming Synthetical moment.

Part Five: The Synthetical Moment

Chapter 13: The Canaries in the Coal Mine

The Synthetical moment is the last step in what Pinar (2004) refers to as "an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action – as a private- and-public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere." (p. 37) He also reminds us that the etymological or base *syn* means together, while *tithenia* means "to place" and here at the end of this long exploration, I intend to bring together the various aspects of this study and also, place us firmly in the present as I grapple with the

fundamental question for all educational research: so what? Given all that has come before – the regressive, progressive, and analytic moments – and the "time –travelling" – through past, present and future – that these moments entail, we are left here in this moment. You are here, in this moment, reading this paper and in relatively short-order you will put down this paper and you will be changed or you will not. You will act on this change, or you will not.

At the end of Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, Leonard realizes that his condition has made him a prime target for manipulation by an unscrupulous police officer calling himself Teddy. Teddy has been using Leonard to take care of his own problems by convincing Leonard to kill the wrong man in the mistaken belief that he is avenging his wife's death. In one of the brief moments of lucidity that his condition allows, Leonard listens while Teddy tells him everything. Teddy is confident that it will not matter, as Leonard will forget it all in a moment, anyway. This time, however, Leonard takes advantage of his own situation and in the moments before he loses all memory of what teddy has told him, Leonard uses his notes to set up Teddy so that when Leonard loses these memories and begins anew his search for his wife's killer, it will be Teddy that he seeks. Leonard's situation is instructive for us as English teachers in that like Leonard, we are in an extremely vulnerable position because of circumstances beyond our control; but like Leonard, we need to find a way to take control of our situation, and become agents of change rather than passive observers.

When I first began thinking about how identity structures impact our professional practice, I was at least partially motivated by the most pragmatic

reasons: my "job" – whatever that specific job may have been at any given time – has always involved working with and understanding my fellow English teachers. If I had a better means of understanding both my own motivations and those of my colleagues, it stood to reason that I would be paving the way to more efficient and productive collaborative processes that would help teachers and students alike as they engaged in the complicated conversation engendered by the English Language Arts curriculum. While I denied it in the opening pages, I was still at least partly optimistic that what would emerge from this study was a neat and tidy paradigm that could be both useful in framing future discourse and relatively easy to explain to others. That possibility, I suppose, still exists. I could look at the quantitative data derived from part one of this study and draw some conclusions that are not without some level of support. If I were to take only the dominant – or at least, most frequent – answers to each of the six questions that formed the survey proper in the Regressive moment, I may conclude that an English teacher is: 1) Motivated to teach by passion, be it passion for language, literature or relationships. 2) Constricted by the time constraints inherent in the profession. 3) Inspired by their ability to connect with their students. 4) Actively choosing literature for their classes that speaks to student needs as well as personal preferences. 5) Inspired by teachers – their own teachers in all levels of their school careers, but particularly their high school and university teachers; their own relatives who were themselves teachers; or their colleagues – to be the teachers that they are. 6) Aware of the necessity of assuming many different roles

within their professional context, but particularly drawn to the roles of mentor and writing instructor.

Indeed, there are no participants in this study who would not recognize at least a part of themselves in this description, and I would expect that I could quite confidently extend that to the vast majority of my colleagues currently teaching high school English. These are aspects of our professional biographies that present consistently enough that we can reasonably assume that they inform our identity structures in some way.

I think it would be at least disingenuous – and at worst actively deceptive – to present these statistical means as representing a discrete concept of an English teacher identity model. What they might do, however, is provide us with a form of cultural touchstone. A touchstone is "a hard stone used to determine, by the streak left on it when rubbed by a piece of gold, whether the metal is pure gold, and if not, the degree to which it contains an alloy." (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams, 1993) The 19th century poet and scholar Matthew Arnold coined the use of this term within a literary context. He believed that one could judge the literary merit of a work of literature by "rubbing" it against short, but exemplary passages from writers like Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. I don't necessarily agree with Arnold's contention that this is a valid way to judge literature, nor do I think that we could simply “rub” these characteristics against a person employed to teach English to see if that person meets the standard of being a “real English teacher.” What they might do, however, is rather than leave a

truth-telling mark, create a spark that leads to a more profound discussion of what it means to be an English teacher.

In general, I think we have not done enough as professional English educators to enter into this discussion, and clearly articulate the ideals and values that are central to our professional identity. While there have been some inspiring attempts to define the ideals at the heart of English teaching on national, provincial and state – most notably through the National Council of Teachers of English and their ongoing commitment to establishing position statements (http://www.ncte.org/positions) – we have not done a particularly good job of defining who we are within our school departments and considering our pivotal role in informing the educational discourse in all subject areas within an English speaking education system In his book *Assessing Student Performance: Exploring the Purpose and Limits of Testing* (1993), Grant Wiggins suggests that every learning institution should develop what he calls an Assessment Bill of Rights. While I may not necessarily agree with the Americanized title, nor do I think we should confine this process to the realm of assessment, I think developing a department generated set of guidelines that helped define who we are and what we value would be a powerful step towards taking back some of the power to teach that has been systematically stripped away by our time deficit. Even the process of arriving at such a common framework could help open up dialogue and understanding within the profession by encouraging teachers to literally and figuratively open their classroom doors, inviting not only scrutiny, but celebration. This would also allow us to redefine what passes for professional

development by embracing models of growth and development that push us beyond our intellectual and emotional comfort zones, towards new and inspiring ideas of what it means to be an English teacher.

These cursory conclusions, however, are nothing truly new and I have been exploring the process of developing beliefs and values statements and department guidelines, since I took my first English Department Head job in 1998. What drew me to this topic of research, in fact, was not the desire to affirm the work that I have already done as an educator, but rather to better understand the complicated conversations that have emerged when engaged in these processes. It was close to four years ago when I first began to create the building blocks of what would become this study and my objectives at that time, seemed quite clear to me. In the introduction to this paper, I provided a glimpse of my location of inquiry and outlined the process that led me to pursue an exploration of English teacher identity.

In essence, it amounted to this: In my time as an English teacher, I have come into contact with a vast number of fellow English teachers and while no two of these teachers were much alike, they typically seemed to share some of the same profound joys and the same crushing lows and yet, their reactions to such things as assessment, school policies, even perspectives on students, tended to vary widely, often stirring up very profound emotions. I wanted to know why someone who loves literature and students every bit as much as I do could have such profoundly different conceptions about the many things that frame our professional lives, and I was convinced that it all came down to how we saw

ourselves as teachers; that is, it all came down to our awareness of our professional identity structures. When I thought about what I really wanted to learn about this topic, I devised two questions that formed the backbone of this study: 1) What are the factors that influence the construction of a High School English Language Arts teacher's professional identity? 2) How do English teachers' perceptions of their teaching lives – including, particularly, their relationships with students and colleagues, and their approach to preparation, instruction and assessment – reveal identity constructs and needs?

I believe the first part of the study – the Regressive moment in currere – adequately addresses that first question and surfaces both quantitative and qualitative data that allow for reflection on what it means to become an English teacher. Throughout that section and in my conclusion I identify and comment on some of the highest frequency responses and consider the relational aspects of some of the large themes that emerge, but I was – and am as noted above – reluctant to transform this complex data into broad generalizations. Even in the genesis of this project, I saw that section as a prelude; one that could provide a foundation for further study by myself and other researchers, but also as a way of framing the more intimate discourse that would follow in the second stage of the study and that I explored in the Progressive and Analytic moments of Currere. It was this second section that I saw as the heart of the study; an opportunity to go beyond an explanation of what an English teacher does, to consider why an English teacher does . . . anything. Again, when I first envisioned the interview stage of the study and when I first considered using Pinar's concept of currere to

frame the larger study, I perceived the Synthetical moment as essentially a conclusion where I brought together the data and generated some conclusions about how certain aspects of one's identity construction impacts one's approach to the prosaic matters of what it means to teach English (loosely framed as the beginning, middle and end of this process): preparation, instruction and assessment.

This seemed a simple enough process to wrap my head around, but an interesting thing happened in the time between conceiving this project and beginning the study proper: my job description changed and with it, my worldview, and this radically changed the way I envisioned the Synthetical moment. I began a new role as an English Language Arts consultant and this meant leaving the relatively cloistered world that is an individual school setting – even if the school was enormous, as mine was – to embrace a the larger context of my district and beyond. In these past two years, I have broadened my experience working with English Language Arts teachers within and beyond my district and as near as I can estimate, given my work as a consultant and ongoing contacts I have through Diploma exam marking and my work at conferences, such as the English Language Arts Council Annual Conference, I have probably been in contact with between 400 – 450 English Language Arts teachers these past two years. This has naturally broadened my perspective and enhanced – and complicated – the questions that have emerged as I engaged with my research data. During this same period of time, however, I also had my contact with teachers outside of my subject discipline, expand a hundredfold. In the past two

years, I have visited many English Language Arts classrooms and teachers, but on any given day you would be just as likely to see me sitting on a floor with a kindergarten class, discussing Understanding by Design with a K-9 school or contemplating the realm of 21st Century Literacy with an entire high school staff, to name just three examples of my diverse work. The last example, in fact, has been an important dimension of all of my work these past two years. In my district, all of our teachers are committed to an Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) project that revolves around student engagement and 21st Century Literacy. From my first day on the job as an ELA consultant I have been continually asked to provide staff in-servicing on the nebulous concept of 21st Century Literacy and this has simultaneously forced me to construct my own understanding of the concept, even while I have been exposed to a range of other interpretations.

As I have engaged in this process, some common concepts have emerged that have helped me make sense of the concept, but I have also realized that because of my background as a high school English language arts teacher I am uniquely suited to take on the challenges of what it means to be a learner and a leader in the 21st Century. What I see teachers struggling with - across grade level divisions and subject areas – are the very things that every English Language Arts teacher I know would recognize as a part of our daily toil (and daily joy). On February 15, 2008 the National Council of Teachers of English adapted the following definition of 21st Century Literacy ((http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentdefinition):

> Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities and social trajectories of individuals and groups. Twenty-first century readers and writers need to 1)Develop proficiency with the tools of technology 2) Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally 3)Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes 4)Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information 5) Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts 6)Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

This is but one of a multitude of definitions of 21st Century Literacy that litter the educational landscape here in the second decade of the 21st Century, but most would share a philosophic base with the NCTE statement, even if there might be some variations in particulars. For many teachers that I have come in

contact with across divisions and subject specialties, the idea of engaging with – much less teaching students to be proficient in – even the six basic tenets of 21st Century Literacy listed above, is daunting and stress inducing, but most importantly, requires a reconfiguring of their teaching framework. It stands to reason that a teacher who sees herself as a teacher of Physical Education or Biology or Kindergarten may not have seen an engagement with these tenets of 21st century literacy as being a part of the profession. A high school English teacher, however, with the possible exception of an engagement with the tools of technology, would likely see all the salient aspects of these literacies clearly articulated in the curriculum documents that frame our professional lives. The three curricular frameworks that frame our understanding of English Language Arts in the province of Alberta are the Alberta Program of Studies – which every student engages within the public, and most private, school systems , as well as the "advanced" programs many of our high schools subscribe to through the International Baccalaureate Organization and the Advanced Placement Program. Each of these frameworks, both explicitly and implicitly, reflect the basic tenets of critical literacy and global citizenship that are at the heart of all definitions of 21st Century Literacy.

The teachers in my study all engage on a daily basis with one or more of these frameworks, and I would like to suggest that through their professional lives and through an understanding of their identity structures, we can better understand the plight of all teachers as we move into a future that we are unable to even anticipate. I would like to further suggest that there are five distinct aspects that

have emerged from this study that posit us as the quintessential representatives of the 21st Century dilemma for educators. Thus, the Synthetical Moment here unites not only the high school English teachers in this study with the larger body of their colleagues throughout the province and beyond, but also with the larger mass of educators grappling with what it means to teach in a world where change is measured in weeks – and even days – rather than years and decades.

1) **Our curriculum has put us always in the midst.** To look at the Alberta program of Studies for English Language Arts is to engage with a document of virtually unlimited possibilities. This is a source of profound autonomy, but also potential frustration, and one of the things that every English teacher needs to reconcile his or her self to early in a career, is the fact that there is no lesson, unit or year plan that can adequately encompass all the potential dimensions of the program of studies. While many a frustrated student – and even an occasional colleague – has lamented to the typical English teacher's willingness to embrace shades of grey, rather than black and white, if there is one thing that we are seeing consistently in all aspects of life in the 21st century is a blurring of boundaries. The 21st Century is a liminal zone where traditional modes of discourse are continually changing and being reinvented. The English Language Arts classroom is ground zero for students as they learn how to navigate in a boundary optional world and this means that we need to be comfortable in chaos.

2) **We are cross-curricular by nature and our subject area is infused in all others, as well as all aspects of life.** Continuing the discussion of blurred

boundaries, English Language Arts in an English speaking system, is the one course that runs through all other courses. As the lines between school subjects continue to blur, the current move towards more authentic modes of learning and assessment has us consider how to re-imagine learning in settings and contexts far beyond the traditional school walls.

3) **We are relational by nature.** The cornerstone of all aspects of our complex role as English educators is communication – "Only Connect!" as E.M. Forster (1910) once wrote – and this was, indeed, one of the dominant ideas to emerge from the first part of the study. The roots of empathy – which are perhaps themselves the roots to all meaningful thoughts and emotions – run deeply through our curriculum documents where we are charged with helping students not only to become better communicators, but to raise their levels of metacognitive awareness so that they can continue to broaden and deepen their relationships.

4) **Creativity is everything.** If creativity was once the domain of the artist, and it was perhaps acceptable to say "I'm not creative" a creative dimension is now infused in virtually every aspect of our professional lives. Part of being in the midst – in a world where black and white are often difficult to even identify – is that there is increasing pressure to create and to help students find their way to being text creators.

5) **Time is changing**. We live in a world where the very concept of time is changing as we are increasingly finding new ways to spend our time, even in the

service of saving time. How do you inspire a love of literature – or even teach a student to be a stronger reader – in a world where there are so many different things to do than read a book? This is the 21st century dilemma and we are at the forefront.

Each of these five aspects of our professional lives as English educators is increasingly becoming part of the domain of all of our teachers, as all subject areas and students as young as kindergarten are being asked to embrace the basic tenets of 21st Century Literacy in all aspects of their lives.

In this sense, I would like to suggest that our high school English teachers represent the proverbial canaries in the coal mine for Education in the 21st century. The now common phrase is described in this excerpt from WiseGeek.com http://www.wisegeek.com:

> Life for an actual canary in a coal mine could be described in three words: short, but meaningful. Early coal mines did not feature ventilation systems, so miners would routinely bring a caged canary into new coal seams. Canaries are especially sensitive to methane and carbon monoxide, which made them ideal for detecting any dangerous gas build-ups. As long as the canary in a coal mine kept singing, the miners knew their air supply was safe. A dead canary in a coal mine signaled an immediate evacuation.

If the analogy seems extreme – with connotations of danger and ultimately, death – I do not think that it is without merit. Our intimate engagement with the five

areas outlined above situate us as accurate barometers of the undeniable pressures that are being brought to bear on all educators in our increasingly complex world. Although I wish it were not so, there are too many of our friends and colleagues who have paid dearly – both emotionally and physically – for their years of service as English educators. If we learn nothing from their experiences, then educators in all disciplines are likely to follow in their footsteps, but I do not think this is inevitable.

If the idea that English Language Arts teachers being uniquely positioned to be canaries in the coal mine would seem to portend only disaster, I would like to balance the equation somewhat, by suggesting that we are also uniquely positioned to be agents of change. If there is a mistake we have made in considering educational change in general – and English educational change in particular – it is that we have often framed discussions of change around one word: adaptation. I was in my first years as an English teacher when our latest incarnation of our provincial Program of Studies came into existence and I was struck, even then, by how the framing discourse was of adapting – slightly – what we as ELA teachers were already doing, rather than prompting us to make substantial changes in our professional practice. I would like to suggest that any meaningful change in the future will require that we change the verb from adapt to create; a change that I believe we are uniquely suited to embrace, because the even the basic process of bringing our written curriculum to life requires a creative act.

By now, many educators likely have at least a passing acquaintance with Sir Ken Robinson, the author of *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (2010) who has become a “rock star” in education circles largely thanks to his inspiring Ted Talks that went viral on You Tube and the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts animations of his talks that have captivated many a captive staff group. In “Changing Educational Paradigms” (2010) here’s what Ken Robinson had to say about the many reform movements that dot our educational landscape:

> So the challenge, for me, is not to reform education, but to transform it into something else. I think we have to come to a different set of assumptions. … We’re not fundamentally changing the underlying assumptions of the system, which have to do with intelligence, ability, economic purpose, and what people need. We still educate people from the outside in. We figure out what the country needs and we try to get them to conform with it, rather than seeing what drives people forward and building an education system around a model of personhood.
>
> When we went to school, we were kept there with a story which was if you worked hard and did well and got a college degree, you would have job. Our kids don’t believe that. And they’re right not too, by the way. You’re better off having a degree than not, but it’s not a guarantee anymore. And particularly not if the route to it

> marginalizes most the things you think are important about yourself. (p 11)

What I think Robinson is pointing to is a fundamental mind shift that has to occur before we can truly embrace any substantive change in the field of English education or the larger whole of Education. He speaks of the stories that frame our students' school experiences and the importance of reimagining that story "around a model of personhood." I would like to suggest that before we can rewrite that story for our students, we necessarily need to rewrite it for ourselves as English educators.

As noted earlier in this chapter, I began this study by building around two guiding questions: While I think that each of these questions was worth exploring, and both of the data sets generated by this study provide some compelling starting points, but I can see now – nearing the end of my own journey as researcher – that even in the way I constructed these questions was evidence of being trapped in a largely informational paradigm. I began this study operating on the assumption that I wanted to know something as a result of my research and while this was, and is, of course, true, what I wanted was not information about my colleagues, so much as a better understanding of how to invite my colleagues into a transformative discourse. My third research question – How does an understanding of and engagement with our identity constructs allow us to be agents of change in education? – is perhaps, ultimately, my only one as the other two are largely both informed by and contributors to this third question. At the

end of *What is Curriculum Theory?*, Pinar (2004) clarifies his notion of the "complicated conversation" as including not only public debate, but also solitary study and the work we do in "classrooms as civic squares." (p. 256) He goes even further in quoting Christopher Lasch writing in the context of journalism – and using his words to define curriculum as complicated conversation:

> We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our own ideas about the world to the test of public controversy. Information, usually seen as the precondition of debate, is better understood as its byproduct. When we get into arguments that focus and fully engage our attention, we become avid seekers of relevant information. Otherwise we take in information passively- if we take it in at all. (p. 256)

I see now that when I first began considering how a subject-specific identity structure might affect our professional practice, I was too often – to borrow Lasch's words – taking in information passively. I was operating on the assumption that if I could see how and why someone had constructed his or her subject-specific identity then there might be an opportunity for meaningful change; but the fundamental flaw in this logic was in considering my role as largely one of witness rather than as provocateur. Our challenge as English educators is not to uncover – or even understand – our identity constructs, so much as it is to create a space and process for continual engagement with – to

borrow Lacan's terminology – the imaginary and symbolic bonds that hold us in place, even while we strive to move forward.

The data generated by the two main components of this study offers a rich source of information about who we are as high school English teachers, but in framing this information in the larger conversation of currere, I am able to move beyond recording who we are to considering what we can be. As Kanu and Glor (2006) in "Currere to the Rescue" remind us

> Through currere, the chains can be examined and a weak spot can be found to break the constraints on the engagement of teaching as phronesis in a knowledge society. Some say that any act of remembering is a fictional re-creation. Grumet, for example, asserts that text revealed through the autobiographical method never completely coincides with the experience it signifies. Interpretation is a "'revelatory enterprise . . . Imitations, half-truths, contradictions, and distractions hover around every tale we tell' (Grumet, cited in Cole &Knowles, 2000, p. 44). In light of this assertion, we posit that one should not be concerned about remembering correctly, or having more questions than answers, the key is the path or journey one takes and what is discovered. To look at the world and marvel at one's place in it, we must be encouraged to use our imaginations, but not only so that our imaginations of the future seek to find some sort of satisfaction for

> ourselves. . . . Our identities can be more than just what others have given us to make sense of their realities. (19-20)

Teaching English Language Arts at the high school level is both a privilege and a sacrifice, and both of these aspects rely on one fundamental truth: Teaching English is a creative act. Any creative act requires us to both give and receive. It is “an exchange of gifts” – to quote the late poet Alden Nowlan – and currere has become the site of this exchange. This experiment with currere – initially presented as “merely” a way of framing the research study – has ultimately become just as important as the collected data itself. It provides a mechanism of ongoing discussion and creation that can transform our lives. My hope is that this study can provide the impetus for further research that can inform our understanding and creation of unique teacher identities that allow us the opportunity to continually regenerate, celebrate and inspire the complicated conversations that are necessary for a better education system and a better world.

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Appendix One: Initial Email

It is my intention to send out each email personally rather than one block email. Here is a template for my email greeting, followed by my more formal letter.

Hi (Name):

(Depending on my familiarity with the participant, I would include a brief personal introduction)

As you may or may not recall, I am currently working on my Masters in Secondary Education and my focus area is on English Language Arts (No big surprise!) with a focus on how English Language Arts teachers develop their professional identities.

I have designed a two- part study that involves an initial open- ended survey (8 questions) and I will follow up with personal interviews or more detailed written responses with willing participants.

I'm hoping that you would be willing to take part in the initial survey and then consider whether you would be interested in further participation. I have attached the complete survey for you to take a look at and I have put the complete survey on Survey Monkey. If you are interested you can click the link below and begin the survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=C_2fXL2l_2fvtXU4n6a3UoQ27w_3d_3d

You can also respond directly to this email if you would like or, if you feel more comfortable with a hard copy, I would be happy to send you survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope. I have also attached an informed consent letter, which offers a more detailed overview of the study. This letter is a part of the online survey and you can simply click a box indicating consent.

I realize that there is never really a down time for a busy teacher and I appreciate that you may not have time to take part. If that is the case, I truly appreciate that you took the time to read the email and no response is necessary.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would prefer to respond by traditional email or post, please feel free to contact me at my work email (brent.mckeown@epsb.ca), my home email (bmckeown@shaw.ca) or by phone at home (780-424-0042).

Take Care and thanks again for even considering taking part,

Brent

APPENDIX TWO: Informed Consent

April 1, 2010

Dear Potential Participant:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project, An Exploration of Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Identity Formation in High School English Teachers, that aims to explore some of the factors that influence our construction of our professional selves as high school English Language Arts teachers. I begin from the premise that as a profession we too often fail to consider the role that our subject specialties play in informing both our sense of who we are as teachers and the specifics of our professional practice. My hope is that by gaining a better sense of how we marry our personal and professional identities we would open up doors to better professional dialogue, more effective professional learning and continually evolving professional practice.

My study design is quite simple. For part one of the study, I have devised a ten question open-ended survey. I plan to approach approximately seventy-five to one hundred high school English Language Arts teachers who have had at least one experience marking English 30-1 Diploma examinations. My hope is that by narrowing the field to those with this particular experience with large scale assessment, we will established at least a semblance of a common base of experience and a common vocabulary. I'm certainly under no illusions that everyone I approach will have either the time or the interest to complete the study, but my hope is that enough participants would step forward to allow me to see some focus areas emerge.

Once the initial data collection and analysis has been completed, I will contact some of those participants who have expressed a willingness to participate in a more detailed interview process (or more detailed written response) and invite them to sit for an interview (or more detailed written response) constructed around the initial data collection. My hope is that these interviews will yield a breadth and depth that brings greater meaning to the initial survey data.

If you chose to participate in the first part of the study, you are free to choose from a number of different ways of responding to the survey. I have put the complete survey on Survey Monkey. If you click on this link it will take you directly to the survey and you can begin.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=C_2fXL2l_2fvtXU4n6a3UoQ27w_3d_3d

You can also respond directly to me by email (bmckeown@shaw.ca) if you would like or, if you feel more comfortable with a hard copy, I would be happy to send you survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Results of the study will be written and presented as my Masters thesis within the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. They may also be presented at academic and professional conferences and may appear in academic and professional journals. Publications and presentations may include direct quotations from participants, but no names of participants, schools or districts will be used. Any identifying information will be omitted whenever results are made public. Your privacy, anonymity and confidentiality is of paramount importance to me. I have completed the ethics training mandated by the Department of Secondary Education and the study will comply with The University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants. For further information regarding these standards you can see http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/gfcpolicymanual/policymanualsection66.cfm. All data will be secured and accessed only by me and my research supervisor, Dr. Ingrid Johnston. If I were to employ a transcriber to turn interviews into print documents, that transcriber would sign a confidentiality agreement and be bound by the same ethical standards outlined above.

You will be able to opt out of the study at any point up until one month after the data has been collected simply by contacting me. Should you chose to partake in part two of the study, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript of your interview for you to review for inaccuracies before any of the data is used. Please note that the location and time of any interviews will be arranged with each participant to provide comfort, convenience and confidentiality.

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

Thank you again for considering taking part and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

If you are willing to participate in the study,

Brent McKeown

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Work Phone: 780-970-5227

Cell Phone: 780-918-3699

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