Toward a Badiou-Inspired Eventful English Language Arts Curriculum: A Refractive Autoethnography

by

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Abstract

The purpose of my autoethnographic study is to understand more fully how my experience of educational events and their emerging truths impact my identity and my curricular and pedagogical approaches as a seasoned English Language Arts teacher. My dissertation addresses the following research questions:

- In what ways does my experience of "educational events" impact my English Language Arts teacher identity, curriculum, and pedagogy?
- What implications do my experiences of teaching eventfully have for English Language Arts teaching practice and curriculum in neoliberal times?

In order to address these questions, I consider French philosopher Alain Badiou's theorization of the "Event." I articulate what I call a *refractively eventful encounter* as a contribution living within the traditions of Badiou's event theory, curriculum studies, and English Language Arts curriculum. Specifically, I refractively interpret stories, memories, and artifacts from my experiences of taking four doctoral courses, in addition to my teaching of two novels, Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* and Janne Teller's *Nothing,* in an urban high school in Alberta. My autoethnographic interpretation of these experiences helps me articulate the ways in which neoliberal culture deeply inscribes itself into my being and how I attempt to resist such commitments. I explore the possibility of inviting students and teachers to re-cognize, or come to know again, commitments of their own. In my findings and conclusion chapters, I discuss key implications of eventful teaching in neoliberal times, namely: what it means to be a humilitant critical pedagogue and the implications of refraction for curriculum, pedagogy, and autoethnography.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by ©Robert Piazza, 2023. The research project, of which this thesis is part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project: Toward a Badiou-Inspired Eventful English Language Arts Curriculum: A Refractive Autoethnography No. #Pro00122494, July 19, 2022.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife Maureen and to our two incredible sons, Harrison and Oliver. Everything I do is for you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking my Ph.D. supervisor, Claudia Eppert. The educational journey I have been on began in your class and over the years, you have provided the guidance and support I needed along my eventful travels. Your faith in my abilities provided much needed confidence and a willingness to take leaps of faith of my own, from presenting at my first academic conference, to writing and presenting alongside you at others. I remain in awe of your dedication to your craft, the attention to detail with which you read my (many!) drafts, and the patience, compassion and grace you continue to show me as I near the finish line. For all this and so much more, I thank you. My cup runneth over.

Arriving at this moment would not have been possible without the additional support of Professors Kent den Heyer and Diane Conrad. Your insights and contributions as part of my doctoral committee have provided me with a wellspring of guidance and thoughtful provocations, always pushing me to dig deeper into areas of complexity I had not conceived were possible. To have been able to work so closely with you has been such a privilege and has exemplified the meaning of mentorship. I can only hope to be able to one day return the favor and pay it forward.

To my colleagues at work and at school who continue to reach out and provide words of encouragement, much needed moments of levity, and innumerable hours of conversation about how we might educate *educationally*, I offer my unending gratitude. I have been spoiled with the richness our relationships have brought to bear on my thinking, writing, teaching, and living. I also wish to acknowledge the support of the principals I have worked with and the school board I work for. I have been so fortunate to have received financial support as well as the flexibility to be able to pursue my studies, present at conferences, and take risks in my teaching.

Finally, no amount of writing can capture the love and support I have received from my family. To my parents, thank you for instilling in me the importance of an education, even if it took me a few detours to get there. To my grandparents, thank you for the sacrifices you made to provide us with a better life; we're the fruits of your labour. To Maureen, my incredible wife and life partner, this dissertation is as much yours as it is mine. Whenever I felt lost and wanted to give up, you were there, cheering me on, pushing me to continue, and working harder than anyone I know to give me the ability, time, and space, to get this dissertation done. You have always inspired me to be a better version of the person I am, and you continue to inspire me. I don't know where I'd be, or who I'd be without you. I just know that I am where I am and who I am because of you. I love you.

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Introduction

Looking Back, Walking Forward: A Note to the Reader

What you are about to read is a deeply personal work that tells the story of my educational journey. Although my work does not unfold as a narrative per se, it encompasses an opportunity to retrace the often-jagged path I travelled throughout my life to-date. As a student, I had given up on school and school had given up on me. I was kicked out of school and went groveling back to it after realizing how much I needed education in my life. Because of my complicated relationship to schooling and education, I feel I am more attuned to my students' fraught relationships with school: for the last eleven years, I have worked as an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at a high school in Alberta for students who are perceived as being at-risk.

My students carry with them much of the same baggage I carried and, in some cases, still carry. In conceptualizing teaching as a highly personal endeavor, I often share my stories of being a student and teacher in this dissertation in order to help me demystify education and learning with my students. Working towards this aim can invite my students to understand that the process of education is messy and chaotic, and that school often works to exacerbate the anxieties that arise when students are immersed in experiences of failure. I also share these stories in order to teach my students that going to school is different from receiving an education and these two concepts – schooling and education – are often forces that can work against each other. I have found, informally, through my interactions and conversations with my students, that they are drawn to my stories; in sharing these moments of my life, they begin to better understand their own lives and educational journeys. I share personal stories of teaching and learning in my dissertation in the hopes that they will also resonate with you, dear reader.

As such, I have chosen autoethnography as the research method for my dissertation. In autoethnography, the researcher reflects on, analyzes, and interprets stories of their lived experiences in ways that provide insight into cultural practices, such as teaching (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Personal stories often appeared in my work as a doctoral student whether for in-class conversations, final papers, or academic conference presentations. I feel this choice fulfills two purposes. First, these stories help me grapple with the complexities of highly theoretical academic thinking. Relating the work of philosopher Alain Badiou (1937-) to my practical reality has helped me understand abstract concepts and their "real world" applications. Second, my stories help me synthesize these theories and communicate my thinking to various audiences: colleagues, teachers, students, and scholars.

Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) describes the autoethnographer as someone who "places the self within a social context" (p. 9). Mitchell and Weber (1999) show how memory works toward this autoethnographic dyad of self and culture when they write that the narrative "I" invokes not only an authorial self, but also represents "a speaking 'on behalf of' [many others], a speaking for and about" (pp. 59-60) in order to comment on the "social context" (p. 60) or elements such as "race, class, [and] gender" (p. 60). This speaking "on behalf" should not be construed as a self-appointed or elected official with the specific intent of airing grievances or advocacy – in other words, who am I to speak on behalf of others or to claim *my* experience as *the* experience? Rather, in coming to my research, a reader might be compelled to remember, too, and, in remembering, embark on a similar process of investigating a self, located within, and, located by, various "social constraints" (Reed-Danahay, p. 9). In my view, I am not speaking on

behalf of any other individuals, but on behalf of a self (me) who has been "shaped and situated" by the culture(s) in which I have been immersed (Mitchell & Weber, p. 194).

In this dissertation, as in real life, I weave together short narrative anecdotes, vignettes, what I call *living* or *haunting* memory moments, and personal refractions (in lieu of personal reflections – I discuss this distinction below), in order to help contextualize and render accessible the complex ideas I grapple with: English Language Arts teacher identity, pedagogy, and curriculum. I define living and haunting memories as the residue of an experience that has stuck with me and occupies my thoughts even though the specific details of the experience may have faded away. More specifically, a haunting memory is one that continues to cause consternation within me, such as unresolved feelings or wonderings about the hows and whys of a particular moment in time. In contrast, a living memory might be understood as a lesson learned that I continue to apply to my life. These memories are neither good nor bad; instead, they inform my personal and professional identity as they "linger with passionate questions" within me (McKerracher et al., 2016, p. 104). In this way, my memories might be considered part of the stories that make up my life, stories that "act as repositories for significant socio-cultural and historical knowledge" offering an opportunity for "an effective pedagogical praxis to embody agency towards more just and equitable schools and societies" (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 119).

My intent in drawing upon my memories of educational experiences should not be interpreted as a nostalgic project. I am not offering stories from my past in order to suggest a return to an idyllic time or as a shield to protect myself from present and future realities. Mitchell and Weber (1999) suggest that memory work can be more than a retelling of experiences: if we can "[work] back through the past [we might] better

understand [ourselves] in the present" (p. 6). The act of remembering with a view to investigating the remembrance more deeply, along with writing what is remembered, invites a "re-playing" of the experience with a view to "[re-shaping] the present and future" understandings of myself and my world (p. 29). Mitchell and Weber (1999) also acknowledge that while certain memories might not be "earth-shattering" from the outside looking in, an analysis of even fleeting moments may reveal "surprising things" and can be shocking, or "empowering and liberating" (p. 40). Seeking to articulate and understand the memories evoked by my research helps me to "construct a different 'gaze' on [myself] and [my actions]" (p. 40). In another sense, and perhaps aligned with how Badiou understands "being" some-one as an intersection of particular (and changeable) coordinates (see, for example den Heyer, 2010b), memory work helps me locate myself within a cultural "mainstream position" with a view to understanding how I came to that place (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 52). In this sense, and as I mentioned briefly above, I frame these moments of recollection and analysis as refractions, and not reflections. In my second chapter, I discuss the rationale for this distinction in more detail.

Throughout this dissertation, I will use words such as *change*, *transformation*, *awareness*, and *re-cognition*. Often, when I use the words transformation and change, the problem is not with the terms themselves so much as with my reading of these terms as the desire I had to more explicitly have my students become someone they were not already; in particular, I desired them to become me, people who echoed my beliefs and values. In this context, these words connote a more explicitly manipulative process of affecting my students' subjectivity. When I use these particular words in this dissertation, I do so to illustrate my misguided attempts to produce eventful encounters for my students. I especially deploy these as verbs (I wanted to change or transform) and nouns

(I sought a transformation or a change) in my discussions of teaching the novel *Ishmael*. It was in the process of analyzing my teaching of that novel that I came to understand the complexities of teaching to change and transform, understood as wanting to change or transform others according to my particular desired outcome, rather than inviting students into processes where they might want to change themselves. Furthermore, it is only in hindsight (or what Badiou might call "truthsight") that manipulative urges in my desires to have my students change and transform became apparent. Because of the temporal tension that exists between teaching and a later re-cognition, it is important to understand the recursive nature of the truth-process vis-à-vis the language I use to articulate these truths.

To contrast the words change and transform, and through a Badiouian lens, I prefer to use awareness and re-cognize. This is not to say that Badiou's event is not transformative. Rushing Daniel (2016) suggests that the experience of an event "transforms the world in which it has been co-evoked" (p. 261). Hallward (2003) clarifies the eventful implications as "[promising] the radical transformation of our conception of things, a thorough revaluation of the world, or of intuition, or of history" (p. xxiv). Badiou (2007) himself argues that "the all-powerfulness of a truth is merely that of changing what is" (p. 343). In sum, the truth process instigated by an eventful encounter has the capacity to change and transform; what this capacity portends is the possibility of attempting to control the particularities of these changes. In my view – and in my application of these terms – I attempt to point to a more internalized process of subjectification, whose trajectory is determined by the student-subject. When a student comes into awareness or re-cognition, I am suggesting an alternative way of seeing and understanding. Conversely, in my discussions of my attempts to change and transform

my students, I focus more on my overreach with respect to the trajectories of these potential subjective becomings. This re-cognition of my teaching is *apropos* to den Heyer's (2015) call to use the future anterior in navigating one's truth process.

Drawing upon the writings of Alain Badiou as my theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing my experiences necessitates a conversation between various interpretations of what was true, what is true, and what will be true. As I will discuss more fully in my dissertation, for Badiou (2001), the truth-process occurs after a moment of shattering. Following this "event," the subject attempts to re-cognize, or come to know again, a self that is in relation to a hitherto unknown truth. The truth-process unfolds simultaneously forward and backwards: each day brings the potential for insight about the past. I am continually learning and re-evaluating my past experiences through the lens of an ever-emerging truth-perspective. As den Heyer (2015) writes, "the proper verb tense" that ought to be deployed in making sense of one's truth process is "neither the present nor the past, but rather the future anterior" (p.15). This tens(e)ion is significant to my work (and your reading of it) as I work through how my understanding*s* of truth have continued to evolve, over time, because the longer I pursue what "will have been true" the very question of what was once considered true itself becomes interrogated (p. 15). Consequently, there exists within this dissertation a distinction between what was true in the past and what is true for me in the present that must be made when I discuss my teaching aims and intentions. Furthermore, I also need to consider what might be true for me in the future. Speaking now, I can say that my aims are to invite my students to encounter a *refractive educational event*: my term for a Badiouian event and ensuing truth process within the context of my ELA teaching and my own experiences as a doctoral student. Though I will discuss Badiou's theoretical framework more deeply in

Chapter 2, I wish to make a brief connection here. The refractive educational event is akin to a re-cognition of one's self within (and outside of) a given *situation* – Badiou's term for the status quo "present moment" prior to and at the time of what he describes as an eventful encounter. For Badiou, an eventful encounter instigates a truth process through which the present situation is no longer tenable and the subject endeavors – through a fidelity to this truth process – to re-cognize, or know again, who they are and the world around them.

Throughout my dissertation, I use bolded headings and italics to signal a digression from "social science prose" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 743) to more personal writing; these moments will be used at various intervals throughout. Social science prose has been described as "anonymous" writing; in autoethnography, social scientists might opt for more visibility and relatability in their writing: "authors become 'I', readers become 'you'" (p.742). I also provide dates of my eventful encounters and my teaching experiences in order to help readers know when these moments transpired. Sometimes these moments will appear at the beginning of a chapter in order to offer a narrative introduction to the themes or ideas of a particular section. I use headings to indicate whether this digression is a narrative, personal refraction, or memory.

Chapter One

(Re)Beginning to Articulate My Self Anew

Since my dissertation aims to address the question of how my experience of educational events has impacted my identity, and my understanding of English Language Arts pedagogy and curriculum, I begin with a story from the first day of my first class as a doctoral student. It is a story of feeling humbled and overwhelmed, but also one of growth and learning. It is both a living and a haunting memory – I learned so much on that particular day and there is so much with which I continue to grapple. I end this first anecdote in the present moment, refracting on where I am now, and where I am hoping my dissertation work will take me. I have learned to embrace the mess and the chaos of trying to respond to my research questions. I am learning to lean into my education in order to understand more fully how it might make me a better person and a better teacher. I do so in hopes of my work finding resonance with you too.

Living & Haunting Memory, September 2014

It is the first day of class, in my first of many required courses on the road to completing my doctoral studies. Professor Eppert has just asked us to make nameplates out of construction paper and to draw something that represents some aspect of who we are. Using a marker, I print 'Robert' as neatly as I can, and think of something to draw. Professor Eppert asks us to share our theoretical framework with the class. I don't understand what this means, so I bide my time. What I haven't yet realized is that I am enrolled in a course for students normally in their second year of doctoral coursework; my more experienced classmates immediately begin sharing the names of scholars I had never heard of before – names such as Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze. The names Levinas, Badiou, Heidegger and Aoki appear, alongside Bourdieu, Noddings, and

Derrida. My heartbeat quickens as I realize that I do not recognize any of the names on the whiteboard. I've made a huge mistake. I shouldn't be here.

I am an intruder. An imposter. It is only a matter of time before everyone figures this out.

I pretend to look into my bag so I can avoid making eye contact with anyone – a trick I perfected as a high school student. I have flashbacks to my college days, where I "earned" marks such as 3 in physics (out of a hundred) and a 1 in social studies (also out of a hundred).

I reach for my phone and text my wife Maureen.

"I think I've made a huge mistake"

I see the text bubbles indicating she is typing her response.

"What do you mean?" she rapidly responds.

My fingers feel too fat to accurately hit the tiny keys on my iPhone. Thank God for autocorrect. I manage to write back, "I don't know any of these names on the board. Everyone else is fluent. I'm out of my league here."

As though she is typing her reply before I even hit send, Maureen says, "don't quit. You'll be fine."

I sit there, for the rest of the class, as Professor Eppert speaks to us about the rest of the course, wondering how I will ever be able to finish my degree.

Three and a half years later, I write these exact words you are reading. These ones too. And these. I smile as I think about what my committee will say when they get to this part. I have learned so much since undertaking my dissertation work. I can pronounce the names of many more theorists than I previously could, although I still feel very much out of my depth when it comes to discussing any of them. I can say, however, that I am still learning. I am still learning about Badiou and about autoethnography. I am still learning

about pedagogy and curriculum. I cannot say that I am an expert on any of these thinkers and subjects. In fact, the more I read and write, the more I discover there is a seemingly infinite amount of reading and writing left to do before I even feel qualified to be called an amateur.

I still feel like an intruder. I still feel like an imposter. I still feel like any day now, maybe after someone reads this dissertation, I will be discovered and asked to leave. I know, as I engage in this process, I will always fear my same fears in the pit of my being. And when I run to my wife wanting to abandon this endeavor, as I have many times already, she will remind me as she always does: “Don’t quit. You’ll be fine.”

The Teacher I No Longer Want to Be

I have been trying to understand why I am doing this: Teaching. Studying. Thinking. Writing. What is it that has led me down this path? It is easy, perhaps, to spout platitudes about how teaching chose me, or how I was called to the profession, but that feels insufficient…boring…trite.

Living Memory, Junior High School English Class, 1995

Here’s a memory about the word trite. The first time I encountered the word was in my Junior High English class. I had written an assignment – I don’t remember what exactly; I think a response to the novel Catcher in the Rye *or* To Kill a Mockingbird*, perhaps. My teacher, Mr. Yorke*[1]*, commented that my word choice in a certain passage was trite – I had described a character as being nice. I asked him, what the word trite meant. I don’t remember his exact response, but I remember wanting to avoid being trite from then on. I don’t know why that moment had such an impact on me. But I come back*

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[1] Name changed for ethical consideration.

to that interaction with Mr. Yorke at least once a month. I don't really remember much about his class – it was rather unremarkable, pedagogically speaking – all the assignments were a blur, and no "teaching moments" stand out for me, really. What I do remember about that class, and about Mr. Yorke, were the stories of his life that he would share: being arrested for civil disobedience; standing by helplessly as his students were being drafted into the Vietnam War. These were the moments that stuck with me, yet even these moments escape clarity of recall. What I remember most, and what I revisit often, are my feelings when I heard these stories. I felt something in those moments, and I understand now that those stories were the education I was receiving. Through those stories, Mr. Yorke was teaching me what it means to be human, and how we might live in a world fraught with anxiety. With those stories, Mr. Yorke's class transcended the banal, the cliché. The trite.

As a grade twelve English Language Arts teacher in Edmonton, Alberta, I spent the early part of my teaching career doing my best to help my students pass what is known here as the ELA Diploma Exam – an end of year standardized examination that was worth fifty percent of a student's overall course grade, and is now worth thirty percent. I am not from Alberta. A Montréal native, I never experienced the pressures of high stakes testing as a student, or as a teacher. When I began teaching in Alberta, I did not know or understand the implications and pressures of having to teach these "diploma courses." I remember being given ready-made unit course-packs by my department head – a gesture I so genuinely was thankful for – all the teaching materials, lesson plans, and essay templates were included. We all taught the same novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, by Khaled Hosseini, and taught the same film, *Gran Torino*, directed by Clint Eastwood. We did the same three poems too ("Sonnet 71" by William Shakespeare; "Love, we must

part now: do not let it be" by Philip Larkin; and, "What Lips My Lips Have Kissed, and Where, and Why" by Edna St. Vincent Millay), and all used the same episode of A&E's television series, *Intervention*, as the text for the personal response unit. A few rogue teachers taught their own texts – yet they were perceived as dissidents by some, not to be admired, only admonished for not toeing the company line. The teacher read any prose or poetry aloud and films were viewed in class. My teaching consisted mostly of walking the students through *my* interpretations of these texts, having them take notes, and providing them fill-in-the-blank templates for their essays. I spent much time doing reading comprehension exams. I agonized over why exam results were always so low.

To put this into context, I work at an urban school for students who are in their fourth or fifth year of high school. These are students who have "done their time" in their community schools and have chosen to either upgrade their marks or to earn credits toward attaining a high school diploma. These students' ages range between 18-20 years old. In Alberta, education is free until the age of 20; therefore, many of our students are under pressure to complete their upgrading before the clock runs out. Added to this pressure is the fact that a substantial proportion of our student population struggle with significant gaps in their learning due to myriad reasons: personal and/or family issues, poverty, learning disabilities, being new to Canada, and anxiety. These issues often result in poor attendance, reading and writing far below grade level, and overall attrition in class size over the course of a semester. My school also has large numbers of Indigenous students whose relationships to schools and education is often fraught and complicated. For these reasons, among others, our student population is considered at-risk. This is how my school context was explained to me even before I began working there – through

teacher friends I had made, and even during the interview for the job I eventually accepted and still hold today.

In my view, as soon as we collectively understood our students to be at-risk, we wanted to teach in a way that would mitigate this inherent riskiness, namely, teaching a more rote approach to the English Language Arts curriculum. I agreed to teach in this way because I needed my students to be successful; the ultimate indicator of their success was how they did on their diploma exams. Furthermore, my success as a teacher – and my identity as a successful teacher – was entwined with how my students did on those exams. And despite all I did – the reading to them, offering much interpretation and analysis of literature for them – despite all the efforts, the results were invariably the same semester after semester: our students often did not do very well on their exams and we lagged behind the other schools in our district and province. And semester after semester, I felt like a failure.

I confess that I am writing this dissertation to save myself. I have often grown weary of teaching. It sometimes seems to me that my teaching is nothing more than creating a series of hoops for students to jump through so that I can give them a grade and send them on their way. Often, I feel my teaching practice is nothing more than helping students get through their government issued standardized exam with a passing grade. I have lofty ideals about what teaching should be, but the weight and pressure of getting students through "the test" inevitably compresses those lofty ideals into little fantasies I can stow away in the recesses of my mind, avoiding any pangs of guilt as I betray what I believe teaching ought to be. Those pangs are constant reminders that once again I am guilty of teaching that is banal. Cliché. Trite. Since I embarked on this journey to

understand why I teach, I continually remind myself of the teacher I no longer want to be. I am trying to become something else. I want to imagine teaching *otherwise*.

The Problem: Educating Educationally in Neoliberal Times

I begin this section by briefly explicating what is meant by an *educational* education. Educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2010) suggests there are three functions of education: qualification, socialization, and subjectification (p. 19). The first function, qualification, amounts to “providing [students] with the knowledge, skills, and understandings…that allow them to ‘do something’” (pp. 19-20). This function of education as a form of “training” is well-suited to state-funded education, according to Biesta, especially as this education contributes to “economic development and growth” (p. 20). In my experiences of teaching, this function of education appears closely aligned with work-ready and career pathway programs designed as a school-to-work pipeline. However, the qualification function also manifests in how students are placed in various classes; for example, I begin my ELA 30-1 classes by framing the course as the necessary pre-requisite for earning acceptance into a bachelor degree program first and foremost – the artistic and critical thinking benefits of the course are often secondary to this primary motivator for students (and staff).

The second function of education, what Biesta (2010) terms socialization, refers to “the many ways in which, through education, we become part of particular social, cultural and political ‘orders’” (p. 20). Such socialization occurs through overt desires to transmit “particular norms and values, in relation to the continuation of particular cultural or religious traditions” and also less overtly, as in the “hidden curriculum” (p. 20). As I will discuss in the literature review section of this dissertation, the English Language Arts

and the study of literature in particular have often been used for such socialization purposes.

The educational function of education – what Biesta (2010) refers to as subjectification – allows for "the process of becoming a subject" (p. 21). In my view, this function of education resonates with Badiou's (2001) notion of event and truth-process, which I will discuss more fully later in the next chapter; Biesta (2010) writes that subjectification:

> is precisely *not* about the insertion of "newcomers" into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders, ways of being in which the individual is not simply a "specimen" of a more encompassing order. (p. 21)

In the above quote, I hear similarities to the ways a fidelity to a Badiouian truth process works to name and re-order the encompassing order. I also recognize a likeness to the way Badiou's event and truth process invites the specimen of an individual – or what Badiou (2007) refers to as the human animal (p. xiii) – to (be)come into subjectivity or being.

Biesta (2010) suggests that these three functions of education are not mutually exclusive; rather, each is a necessary dimension of education (p. 22). Furthermore, he suggests that these sometimes-overlapping functions help us determine the *rationale* for education (p. 22). What sometimes occurs, according to Biesta, is that the educational dimension – or subjectification function – of education is overlooked, to which he responds, "any education worthy of its name should *always* contribute to processes of subjectification" (p. 21). In order to help me address this question of the educational, it is important for me to locate education – and my dissertation – within the current socio-political situation of neoliberalism (Klein, 2015; Papastephanou, 2010).

In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. Climate,* Naomi Klein (2015) describes how, in perceiving a threat to their greed and "limitless pursuit of profit" (p. 38), groups of business institutions banded together with government to fight for a variety of interventions such as "tax cuts, free trade deals, for auctioning off of core state assets from phones to energy to water – the package known in most of the world as 'neoliberalism'" (p. 39).

Within a neoliberal context, the concept of education connotes a fiscal element and is regarded at odds with ethical citizenship oriented toward social justice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In this sense, education loses its "educational" qualities and instead predominantly becomes an exercise of schooling or what Biesta (2010) terms qualification and socialization. Rather than recognizing education as the possibility of freedom and equality, the neoliberal interpretation is seen by many as working to uphold or accelerate existing injustices for economic gain. Corporate interests and the increasing privatization of public and governmental spheres can also work toward silencing collective voice (Pinar, 2012; Smith, 2000). In his Buddhist interpretation of history in the West, David Loy (2002) argues that self-actualization is commonly achieved through personal branding via aligning oneself with mass corporate interests that appear to represent a unique self. Following Biesta (2010), teachers implementing the *Alberta English Language Arts Program of Studies* (Alberta Learning, 2003) might willingly (or unwillingly) socialize students into the pre-existing neoliberal social order under the guise of a different kind of "critical thinking," one that is not critical at all but is instead reflective of and acquiescent to what the State desires. This kind of critical thinking is one wherein dominant or hegemonic modes of thinking are left unexamined, where – knowingly or not – neoliberal thought and being becomes reproduced. In my view, the

very nature of the Alberta diploma exams reinforces neoliberal notions of competitiveness, self-determination, and education as subservient to Market logic: exam results quantify knowledge rendering the minds of thousands of students into a network of metrics that rank, sort, and profile students into particular life paths, in addition to ensuring province-wide standards of teaching and learning. In my view, the exam becomes the final attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff; although the wheat is prized, the chaff is used as the fodder necessary to feed livestock. It all seems very efficient. Looking back at my teaching, through my post-eventful lens, I find myself complicit in neoliberal socialization.

In the *Alberta English Language Arts Program of Studies* (2003), cultural values are implicated in the students' learning. A curriculum and pedagogy oriented toward an "educational" education might lead to the critique and rupture of status quo cultural values, especially in "today's neoliberal climate where schooling's aim seems to be producing disciplined and docile economic bodies ready to be cogs in the world economy" (Tuschling & Engemann, as cited in Joldersma, 2014, p. 3).

One of the many ways the State works to socialize and qualify its citizens into the social order is through the standardization mechanisms it enforces, such as high-stakes testing (Biesta, 2010; Pinar, 2012). To paraphrase den Heyer (2015), these exams become a means of accounting that effectively render obsolete and undesirable knowledge not recognized, approved, or desired by the State. In Alberta, these exams are known as Diploma exams, administered at the end of Grade 12. These exams also exist at the elementary and Junior High levels and are called Provincial Achievement Exams, though parents have the option of exempting their children from having to write those. Such

exemptions are not possible with the Grade 12 diplomas and are required for post-secondary application requirements.

In his writing on desire in education, David Lewkowich (2012) wonders whether we might wring “an education” from the uncertainty that arises out of the schooling/learning binary: “I believe we can. I believe we should,” he responds (p. 76). Lewkowich elaborates: “the meaning of education is best construed not as a product or commodity, but instead as a struggle between learning and ignorance, knowing and not knowing” (p. 76). From a psychoanalytic perspective, ignorance and knowledge are not mutually exclusive, but act as a “shadow side” of each other (den Heyer & Conrad, 2011, p. 9). Since, according to den Heyer and Conrad, “we actively choose – indeed, have a passion for – our ignorance” there is a desire to ignore “that which challenges our cherished values or ideals” or that which “implicates us” as participants in social inequality (p. 9). Such ignorance is cultivated in schools and other institutions as they provide both knowledge content and “emotional resistance to unknowing as well” (p. 9). In this sense, as den Heyer and Conrad argue, education is the inheritance of an entwined knowledge and ignorance that actively resists the risk of coming undone.

Schooling that is predicated on such commodification of knowledge and ignorance of ignorance plays a significant role in stultifying any hope that students might feel (see for example: Biesta, 2010, 2014; den Heyer & Conrad, 2011; Eppert, 2008; Freire, 2005; Grumet, 2006; Pinar, 2012; and Smith, 2000, among others). In my teaching experience, this kind of schooling similarly invites a tension or suffering for teachers. How are we, as teachers, to recover from the trajectory of meaningless schooling, teaching and learning? How might I think education in a way that aims to recover what Biesta and Säfström (2011) call an *educational education*, by which they mean an

education that encompasses “an ethics of subjectivity, a politics of emancipation and an aesthetics of freedom” (p. 542)? Through this lens, education might be considered eventful within a Badiouian framework as emancipation is described as the subject speaking “in a way that is neither repetition nor self-affirmation but brings something new into the world” (p. 542). I interpret this newness to be the subject’s process of articulating the truth emergent from an eventful encounter, with the subject finding themselves called to a “responsible response” to what and who is other (p. 542). In other words, is it possible to conceive of an educational encounter that recognizes and values the uniqueness of my students, affords them the agency to articulate something new, and begins with an axiom of equality in spite of perceived risk? *I believe we can. I believe we should.* If such a conception is possible, I must understand how my teaching “[closed] down education rather than opening it up to [these] wider possibilities” (p. 542). My experience of events is precisely what allows me to discern that I taught (and sometimes continue to teach) against – and in spite of – educational aims.

My interest in the tension I believe exists between empty “schooling” and a meaningful “education” is that, for a long time, I have been offering my students the former while claiming to practice the latter. It was not until I experienced my educational events and ensuing truth-process that I realized I had been duping both my students and myself. As such, this dissertation is a response to Biesta and Säfström’s (2011) “Manifesto for Education.”

Biesta and Säfström’s (2011) Manifesto aims for “dissensus,” or “interruption” of the current state of education with “an element that is radically new,” and through which “subjectivity ‘comes into the world’” (p. 541). In my view, my curricular and pedagogical orientation, as situated within my sense of personal and professional identity,

is one that attempts to intervene on business-as-usual curriculum delivery – what Aoki (1991) might term teaching solely in the world of the "curriculum-as-plan" (p. 7). I will build on these notions of pedagogical interruption and the lived and planned curriculum worlds; however, I wish to state here that this dissertation attempts to better understand why I have arrived at these curricular and pedagogical aims, and how I attempt to align my teaching practice with these aims.

Coming to a Research Question: On Educational Events

This dissertation work is my attempt to articulate myself anew as a High School English Language Arts teacher as a result of eventful impacts on my identity and teaching. In my second chapter – my theoretical framework – I will more fully explore how my doctoral coursework experiences helped me arrive at my research questions and desires with the context of a fuller introduction to the scholarship of Badiou. However, here I wish to state that the research questions that drive my work are:

- In what ways did my experiences of "educational events" impact my English Language Arts teacher identity, curriculum, and pedagogy?
- What implications do my experiences of teaching eventfully have for high school English Language Arts teaching practice and curriculum in neoliberal times?

The term autoethnography is itself a portmanteau of autobiography + ethnography: My first question addresses the autobiographical nature of my work and the second question points me toward situating my self – and the implications of my teaching – within the sociocultural neoliberal situation.

Summary: An Eventful Reckoning with Truth

In this chapter, I have introduced the problem my research seeks to address, and the questions that guide my work. I have very briefly introduced my theoretical framework and how it acts as a lens through which I can analyze and discuss my research. In the next chapter, I will offer a discussion of the theoretical framework that undergirds my entire project, namely: Alain Badiou's (2001, 2007) theory of event and ensuing truth process. In order to help me discuss Badiou's theories, I will supplement the next chapter with my stories of undertaking graduate coursework with Professor Claudia Eppert and Professor Kent den Heyer; it was during these courses that I experienced two key educational events, and these stories will allow me to better delve into what it means to have experienced an educational event and to pursue its ensuing truth process.

Chapter Two

Badiou and Educational Events: A Theoretical Framework

I took two classes with Professor Eppert: EDSE 610 (Advanced Research Seminar) in the fall of 2014 and EDSE 501 (Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Contemplative Pedagogies for a More Compassionate, Just, and Sustainable World) during the winter 2015 term. The courses I took with Professor den Heyer were EDSE 504 (Curriculum Inquiry) during summer 2015 and EDSE 501 (Research in Curriculum Reform, Citizenship, and Social Education) in the winter of 2016[2]. Though I consider my experiences in these courses to be two separate eventful encounters, they might – through the lens of the autho/ethnographical dyad – be considered as two dimensions of a singular event. However, in order to help me distinguish between the two, I will consider them to be separate events.

As previously mentioned, by "events" I mean an encounter experienced by a subject through which a truth-process might be instigated. This event constitutes a rupture in what would have been considered a set of taken-for-granted "truths" that a subject understands about themselves and the world around them. When I discuss an "educational event" I refer to eventful encounters that occur within the context of an educational or classroom setting. The use of "educational" also signals my earlier discussion of Biesta's (2010) educational dimension of education: subjectification. Badiou (2001, 2007) offers a pathway to explore how the event and its ensuing truth process demands the individual construct a new sense of the personal and the social. It is in the personal and social re-imagining that I believe the curricular and pedagogical

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[2] For a fuller timeline of my eventful course work experiences and novel unit teaching, see Appendix A.

resides; my understanding of the world and my identity each shape how I interpret an English Language Arts Program of Studies. In this chapter, I discuss Badiou's theory of event with a view to providing a framework though which I can interpret, analyze, and understand my educational events and ensuing truth-process.

Raised and educated in France, Alain Badiou (1937-) cites[3] two seminal events that compelled him to develop his philosophical theories: The war in Algeria that began in 1955 (and his activist protests of that war) and the May 1968 Marxist uprisings that took place in France. A third experience – his work with striking Belgian miners in the 1960s – revealed to him how it is possible to "reorganize the entire social life of a country" (para. 15). Tracing these eventful experiences alongside his rumination about his parents, love, God, and his intellectual inspirations, Badiou outlines how his philosophy predominantly concerns itself with the aim of "[transforming] the truth in such a way that it obeys the equalitarian maxim" (para. 16), in other words, on the side of "equality" (para. 15). Badiou elaborates on this equality when he states that in his view, a philosophy of truth is one that, "searches for the formal conditions, the possibility for each and every one to inhabit his [sic] name…and recognized by all as the one who inhabits his [sic] name, who, by right of this…is the equal of anyone else" (para. 40).

Following an introduction to Badouian concepts, I offer my interpretation of Badiou's theories with a view to providing the foundational theoretical knowledge and key terminology I rely on throughout this dissertation. I work through these key ideas both for the scholar well versed in Badiouian thought and for those who are not familiar with his work. I then review the ways in which Badiou's work has been taken up in

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[3] I draw from a short philosophical autobiography Badiou wrote detailing nine stories from his life and their implications for his philosophy. Read his piece here: https://www.lacan.com/symptom9_articles/badiou19.html

educational research. There have been scholars in this field who have identified Badiou as helpful in offering new and rich insights for education and I detail their findings as well as put their research into conversation with mine in order to address how this dissertation speaks to areas as yet unexplored. After establishing Badiou's theory of event and scholarship on his work, I take a moment to describe what I am calling a refractive educational encounter as part of my contribution to educational scholarship in the field of high school English Language Arts education. I do so here, rather than my Findings chapter (Chapter 7) in order to contextualize my usage of refractive terminology throughout my dissertation. I do discuss deeper implications of refraction in my Findings and Conclusion chapters. As I relate these experiences of being a student in doctoral courses, I offer a Badiouian eventful analysis in order to provide the reader with a more personal exemplar of a Badiouian event whose implications inform this dissertation entirely.

Becoming More than the One I Thought I Was

What might it mean to experience an event that completely shatters everything you know to be true about yourself and the world around you? The answer to this question is the primary concern of French philosopher and scholar, Alain Badiou (2001, 2003, 2007), as he theorizes how and why taken-for-granted truths are always subject to evolve, in unexpected ways at unexpected times. As a fledgling graduate student, I came to know of Badiou's work through my studies in Professor den Heyer's courses. At the time, I was leaning toward studying the concept of humility through the theoretical lenses of twentieth century philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995) and Thich Nhat Hanh's (1926-2022) thought on "engaged Buddhism" both of which I encountered in Professor Eppert's classes prior to my course work with Professor den Heyer. At first, I attempted

to map out the ways in which, in my view, this theoretical triad: Badiou, Levinas and Nhat Hanh, bore more in common than they were different. However, as time progressed and my studies deepened, Badiou's theory of event and ensuing truth process spoke more to the heart of the work I was undertaking. In this next section, I highlight and discuss the key concepts I rely on throughout my dissertation in order to provide the reader with the foundational theoretical Badiouian knowledge needed in understanding my research. I follow this explication with the stories of my eventful experiences as a graduate student with a view to contextualizing these key theoretical elements.

Thinking the Situation

The event itself is fleeting; understanding how the event shapes identity and worldview requires hard work and *fidelity* to what the event will have meant via a truth process – one must "Keep Going!" Badiou urges (2001, p. 52). My events – the realizations I had regarding my identity and teaching – occurred years ago and within relatively short time spans – a few weeks for each course; however, I am still in the midst of trying to articulate my evolving understanding of these experiences. This work has been challenging and I often must compel myself to remain faithful in my pursuit of these emerging truths. In this next section, I describe Badiou's notion of event in more theoretical detail.

For Alain Badiou (2001, 2003, 2007), the event is a rupture and this is why his theoretical framework is most apt for my dissertation. Badiou's writings offer me a lens through which to refract on, interpret, and understand, how the "truths" about my identity, curriculum, and pedagogy became ruptured and subsequently reconstituted. In this section, I will offer a brief overview of my theoretical framework. Badiou uses the term *event* to theorize the nature and impact of existential shattering. Badiou also uses

mathematical set theory to show how in any given *situation* – his term for an assumed stable reality – however fixed it may appear, an *event* may arise followed by a *truth procedure*. Before I can discuss his notion of event and truth-process, it is necessary to understand what is meant by the term *situation* as is it precisely one's situation that the event comes to shatter.

A situation can be described as the existing composition of "opinions [and] situated knowledges" in which a potential subject is enmeshed (Badiou, 2001, p. 67). This situation can be considered as a particular configuration or permutation of coordinates which taken as a whole constitute what we might consider our reality: my social world, my political world, my personal life, etc. For each of these realities I am in possession of a set of opinions and knowledges that govern my understanding of how these worlds function and my relationship and role within them. These opinions and knowledges also extend to an understanding of the self.

For Badiou (2007), "the one *is not*" (p. 23, emphasis in original). In other words, there is no one self or one world insomuch as what we understand as a self or world is merely a particular arrangement or assemblage of multiple variables that present themselves as such. The multiples that form this assemblage exist alongside multitudes of other multiples that are not accounted for in a given arrangement; the "whole" of the arranged multiples that we come to understand as *the* self or world is what Badiou terms "a situation" (p. 24). A situation is "any presented multiplicity" (p. 24). Therefore, the self or world can be understood as a structure consisting of a particular assemblage of multiples that presents itself as a singular "one" or what Badiou terms "the regime of its count-as-one" (p. 24). Badiou reminds us "every situation is structured" (p. 24) implying that any *particular* self or world "is a result" (p. 24) that signals the existence of

multiples "anterior to the one" (p. 24) from whose domain a situation or structure is constructed. In my view, this regime or ruling situation reads as connotatively neutral; the situation is simply the name of a given assemblage. Out of the realm of possibilities – the potential permutations of multiples – a fixed set through which we can realize reality is this given presentation or structure.

Badiou's Event

Badiou contends that within this situation, an event may occur that arises from the void and that is able to punch a hole in this structured presentation. At this point, language fails to capture the event, and the potentiality of a truth procedure emerges, wherein a fidelity to the emerging discovery of this truth must be adhered to, lest evil arise. What this truth procedure does is work to restructure the situation into a different permutation of multiples (i.e. those available multiples not part of the existing situation), and into a different structured presentation. A problem, in my view, occurs because the presented situation appears as a one-and-only and in doing so, renders itself illusive and, subsequently, elusive. Badiou (2001) describes the event as both "situated" within and "supplementary" to a given situation (p. 68). There may arise a moment – an eventful encounter – that can shatter the ways in which these worlds (or one of these worlds in particular) is constituted. I can have lived my life when all of a sudden (cliché intended), I fall in love and in so doing, my entire world is upended.

In the case of love – one of Badiou's potentially eventful dimensions (alongside art, science, and politics) – the potential subject, prior to falling in love, has lived their life according to how things have always been understood to be true. However, at the moment of falling in love, an encounter occurring within a given situation, the subject's sense of opinions and knowledges about themselves and their world become shattered;

this moment of falling in love is at once unpredictable and fleeting and brings with it an element of risk, or what Badiou describes as a "hazardous, unpredictable supplement" (p. 67). The risk or hazard concerns the shattered subject response to the ethical entanglement of the event itself: the truth process. The subject falling in love faces a choice in whether they will faithfully pursue this call to living in-love, or not. What this means for the newfound lover is the possibility of having to both (re)discover what it means to live as a some-one in love and having to navigate and articulate the truth of being in love, necessitating a re-evaluation of their pre-eventful opinions and knowledges of what it means to live and be, post-event. Badiou frames this post-eventful navigation as "fidelity" and describes it as "a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself" (p. 67). What emerges from this investigation is two-fold, in my view: first, is a re-ordering or naming of the pre-eventful situation through the lens of the event itself, and second, is a process of articulating what this event will continue to mean going forward.

This two-fold investigation is what Badiou (2001) terms "truth," through which the subject composes themselves anew, "bit by bit," throughout this ever-unfolding process (p. 67). The implication here is that for every given situation or plenitude, there exists a void; and as in mathematical set theory, which Badiou uses as foundational to his theory of event, this void (or empty set) connotes an as-yet unnamed or discovered – *yet possible* – alternative permutation or configuration of the existing situation. The reason the event is shattering is because it calls into question the very stability of the subject's current situational coordinates; for this reason, Badiou argues that the event is supplemental to the situation while being situated within it. Falling in love is an encounter from within my understanding of self and world and yet is an encounter in

excess of that pre-eventful understanding. It is this excess – from the void of my situation – that invites me to reconsider and to reconfigure these understandings albeit from an eventfully truthful perspective. It is this truth that “punches a ‘hole’ in knowledges” and is “heterogenous to them” (p. 70). Badiou develops this notion further, stating:

> the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks that sort of portable encyclopedia from which opinions, communications, and sociality draw their meaning. (p. 70)

With reference to set theory, a set is comprised of a fixed set of numbers that act as a solution to a particular problem. Included in every set theory solution, however, is what is known as the empty or null set. In other words, each solution must include the possibility that there exists another way of understanding that very same problem.

For Badiou, the event is akin to discovering this new answer; the problem that this new answer – or truth – addresses is the very question of ontology, or, the ways in which we understand and (re)configure our reality. When a new solution emerges, the entire set must be reconfigured. Another way of framing this complex notion is that the event is what compels us to realize that the truths we had about our reality were insufficient; these insufficient truths must be cast aside to make room for new understanding about our world and ourselves. I quote den Heyer (2010b) in order to assist me further in describing Badiou’s event:

> Badiou links his interpretation of an “event” to (one of his teachers) Lacan’s “void”: at its most basic description, an event is an encounter with that which defies our symbolic apprehension. This encounter renders insufficient the “opinions” that previously provided the taken-for-granted coordinates of our daily

lives: a disturbance that creates the possibility of a truth-process that implicates us in that "which cannot be calculated, predicted or managed." (p. 153)

In my view, and reading den Heyer (2010b) together with Badiou's (2001) theory, Badiou suggests that after an eventful encounter, I am refracted away from what I thought to be true about my situational coordinates and configuration within them; I embark on a truth-process in order to revisit my pre-eventful knowledges to articulate my post-eventful permutation as I come into a re-cognition of my self and world. More plainly, and as I discuss later in this chapter, my experience of events in my graduate courses I took rendered insufficient the opinions I had about the relationships between myself, the world around me, and the role of curriculum and pedagogy in my classroom.

It is due to my post-eventful experiences – namely, my truth-procedure, which this dissertation serves to explicate – that I was able to even conceive of my dissertation inquiry. Had it not been for my eventful encounters, there would be no before and after, no re-cognition or re-articulation of myself, and no evolution in how I understand my teaching then, and now. The possibility of discovering a self I did not know was possible is crucial if I am to work against the neoliberal and authoritarian urges thwarting my aims to invite my students to experience an educational event of their own. The post-eventful self I am re-cognizing is aware of these urges that dwell in me and through my autoethnographic study, I might understand how these counter-educational desires became so inscribed, and how I might *educate* in spite of them.

Badiou's (2001) conceptions of what he calls the "evils" that might emerge after an event will help me analyze and discuss my pedagogical missteps. van Kessel (2016) agrees that an understanding of Badiou's theory of evil is essential for both students and teachers. Badiou speaks not about evil in the sense of the "forces of darkness," but

instead as the ways that power and opinions might be used to harm and oppress others. In the original French, Badiou refers to this evil as *le mal*, which can be interpreted more as bad or harmful instead of Evil in a grander sense. Badiou (2001) explores three separate manifestations of evil, calling them *simulacrum* or *terror, betrayal,* and *disaster.* In the section that follows, I show how Badiou's theories have been taken up in scholarly literature in the field of education and why his work is well suited to my research.

Toward an "Educational Event': A Truth that Punches a Hole in Knowledge

Badiou himself has written very little on the subject of education, save for one essay (Badiou, 2005); however, Badiou has notably written, "the only education is an education by *truths*" (as cited in Peters, 2010, p. x). As Badiou has offered few explicit commentaries on education, I defer to Michael Peters's foreword in den Heyer's (2010a) edited collection of essays on Badiou and education.

Peters (2010) offers three substantial citations from A. J. Bartlett's (2006) own work on the role of education in light of Badiou's "education by truths." For Bartlett "education is that which makes the necessary arrangements for the manifestation of truths which are not opinions and which signify therefore the possibility for some other, new (political, etc.) configuration" (as cited in Peters, 2010, p. xi). Furthermore, Bartlett adds that in reading the current socio-political climate through a Badiouian lens, it is possible to recognize that the "state system of education for which our democracies are responsible is without truth, without thought, and thus cannot operate other than as either 'oppressive or perverted' or indeed as both" (as cited in Peters, 2010, p. xi).

Bartlett's (2006) thoughts are closely aligned to the research questions that drive my scholarly work, and the questions that drive my desire to understand my truth-process and the ways in which my students might likewise be implicated. An encounter with the

event brings forth a “truthful” re-articulation of a self, a new way of knowing a self that was already there. In this sense, the seized subject, that is the subject who has experienced an eventful encounter, enters into a re-cognition of their self and their surroundings; an awareness brought into being at the moment of eventful rupture. As I stated in the preface of this dissertation, my teaching is aimed at instigating such an eventful rupturing. I do this in order to invite the possibility of bringing my students into an awareness of their given situation and following this, an opportunity for a truth process to emerge. Through this emergent truth process, my hope is for students to re-cognize the ways in which their subjectivity has been immersed in – and configured by – neoliberalism. This focus on neoliberalism as the dominant configuring force stems from my own realizations following my own truth-process.

In my experience, it was after my eventful encounters in Professor Eppert’s classes that I came to understand my own self as being implicated within a neoliberal situation. My eventful encounter is what allowed me to see this truth, though that path has also been fraught. Regardless of the post-eventful tensions of my own truth-process, I felt an urgency to invite the possibility of a similar realization for my students. It is this desire for what I call a refractive break that supersedes a desire for transforming or changing my students. I will further explicate and develop the idea of the refractive encounter in the next section of this chapter. For now, my use of refractive might be understood as an encounter that breaks one’s knowing out of the status quo (or what Badiou terms the *situation* – more on the next page) and toward the pursuit of truth (the event’s ensuing truth-process). I elaborate on this truthful break below.

The idealistic notion of teachers wanting to *change even a single life* is not an aim to be taken lightly – we must be cognizant of how our students might be affected in light

of our teaching, and whether or not we cause harm. This desire for an eventful effect on students is what Biesta (2014) describes as the "beautiful risk" of education is that in aiming for the possibility of an eventful encounter "anything can happen, anything can arrive" (p. 23). However, only when we take that risk, might "the event of subjectivity [has] a chance to occur" (p. 23). This is a risk I am continuously willing to take. But what does it mean, from a Badiouian framework, to take this risk in a high school English Language Arts context? Badiou's theory of event and truth process help me answer these questions of teaching and truth-procedures within such an environment.

As I discussed at the start of this chapter, Badiou conceptualizes his event as an encounter with a void that pierces the knowledge that has shaped an individual's identity and worldview. Marianna Papastephanou (2010) helps to articulate Badiou's distinction between truth and knowledge when she writes:

> Truth is unknown not because it escapes knowledge, but because it shatters it: for Badiou, who follows Lacan on this (Hewlett, 2004, p. 343), there is "no knowledge of truth," for "truth makes a hole in knowledge" (Badiou, 1999, p. 80). All in all, knowledge connotes automation, transmission and repetition, whereas truth is interruption, break and risky decision. (p. 142)

A truth punches a hole in knowledge. A truth is heterogeneous to knowledge, but it is also the sole "known" source of new knowledge. A truth procedure ensues, where the shattered individual works toward discovering and understanding the implications of the event. Here, I wish to further explicate what is meant by my use of the term *refractive* throughout my dissertation, as it is inspired by Badiou's (2001) notion of truth as a breaking into (and out of) a given situation's configuration.

Badiou and Education

What makes Badiou suitable to the field of education? den Heyer has written extensively on Badiou's implications for education (see den Heyer 2005, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2015). In this section, I provide a brief literature review of scholarship that takes up Badiou's concepts in the context of education.

Badiou's notion of "ethical fidelity" is central to Daniel Castner's (2015) analysis of early childhood teachers' challenge to "uphold a democratic idea" while "challenging a dominant discourse" (p. 31-32). Castner finds that "stories of teachers' truth processes evoked 'from the event, which compels us to decide a new way of being' (Badiou, 2001) are a representation of professional excellence that is yet to be explored, recognized, or attended to" within educational scholarship (pp. 33-34). Castner's work speaks to how Badiou's theory of event is apt for helping us understand the particular experiences of teachers while acknowledging the fact that his work is not widely applied in this manner.

My own research seeks to address this gap by offering a Badiouian interpretation of my educational experiences, especially as I address the possibilities for teaching within a neoliberal situation. den Heyer (2010b) cites Badiou's ethics' "affirmative thrust" and potential for the invention of "the possibility of new possibilities" (p. 152) as what makes his work attractive to educational thought. Castner (2015) builds on this generative nature of Badiou's theory, writing, "such affirmative inventions proceed when a becoming subject is faithful to an event that inspires an *immanent break* and allows us to 'become more than the situation we are'" (p. 46). In this sense, my dissertation articulates the struggles and successes of such an endeavor via a first-hand Badiouian analysis of pedagogical and curricular engagements in English Language Arts classroom in the hopes of instigating an eventful encounter.

What implications does Badiou have for eventful pedagogy? Pantazis (2012)

supports the case for thinking education through Badiou, writing that without such an eventful approach, “pedagogical theory becomes impoverished and as a result becomes merely a design of the didactic practice” (p. 641). I agree with Pantazis in believing that we need to more deeply understand the theoretical underpinnings of curriculum and pedagogy rather than continuing to amass a new set of teaching “how-to” manuals. Furthermore, Pantazis suggests that although an eventful encounter cannot be conjured out of thin air at any given time, educators can teach in a way whereby they “create the preconditions of such encounters” (p. 654). For me, this distinction between conjuring and creating preconditions is precisely what my dissertation explores in that my experiences of teaching toward an eventful encounter began as the former and currently reside in the latter; I detail these approaches more fully in Chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation and discuss the implications of my eventful teaching in Chapter 7.

After my experiences in Professors Eppert and den Heyer’s classes, I was compelled to have my students encounter their own educational events in my classroom. How I came to desire this is discussed later in this chapter. Stemming from this desire arises the question of whether I was successful in my endeavor – and this is where I disagree with Pantazis (2012) and his claim that “the skillful teacher will know” if a student has encountered an event (p. 655). In my experience of teaching – and perhaps this is unique to my context – students are sometimes hesitant to share their vulnerabilities, to which experiencing the shattering of an eventful encounter might surely belong. In other cases, students might overstate how a text affected them, to curry favor from their teacher. I might never know whether a student of mine has truly experienced an event, however, such a study could be the subject of future post-doctoral studies.

Pantazis (2012) concludes his article by providing guidelines for teachers interested in arranging their teaching to increase the likelihood of an eventful encounter. While he does recommend organizing trips to “museums, theatres, [and] music concerts,” he does not discuss whether the act of reading might also be a “site” that could “provide stimuli” for the possibility of the event (p. 656). In fact, there is scant research on English Language Arts curriculum and pedagogy through a Badiouian lens. A Google Scholar search of “Badiou and English Language Arts” yielded 44 results. A number of these results were actually studies grounded in Levinas but had mentioned Badiou briefly (see, for example: Choo, 2021) or made passing mention of Badiou with no further discussion of his theories (Peterman and Skrlac Lo, 2021). Two of these were my own publications – an abstract for a conference presentation I was to give but did not due to the pandemic in 2020, and another is a paper I co-authored with Professor den Heyer and published in 2021. In another, a Master’s thesis exploring critical pedagogy through teaching film in a secondary English Language Arts classroom, Badiou appears but only on one page (Divelbiss, 2014). Other results were related to fields outside of English Language Arts, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), for example (Chesky, 2013). Many of the remaining results mirrored this type of limited engagement between Badiou and English Language Arts. To this end, my work seeks to address the scarcity of Badiouian inspired research in the English Language Arts domain.

Other scholars do take up Badiou’s theories in relation to discussion of late-capitalism’s influence on the field of education (Cho & Lewis, 2005). While Cho and Lewis acknowledge that the typical sociopolitical examples offered for what constitutes an event are dramatic macro events (e.g., the October Revolution, or, Einstein’s Theory of Relativity), they also suggest that the event’s shattering might be more “subtle” or

"subjective" but nevertheless "profound" (para. 25). For Cho and Lewis, the size of the event (be it macro or micro) bears no influence on its impact; the eventful encounter remains profound because it still engenders a "difference in our relation to our unconscious fantasy, thus opening up a new field of possibilities" (para. 25). However, and in keeping with what I will describe later as a reflective curricular encounter, Cho and Lewis argue, "what must be guarded against is the premature closing of these events" (para. 25). In my view, Badiou's eventful breaking and rupturing yielding a possibility of becoming "something more" aptly describes my smaller-scale experience of events and truth-procedure, and articulates my aims in teaching.

The legitimacy of a smaller scale event is instrumental for my work and here I draw upon Vizeau (2010) who arrives at similar conclusions regarding the "size" of an event in his Master's thesis. Arguing against conceiving the event as a "large-scale" occurrence, Vizeau shows how set theory allows for "smaller-scale" situations that are just as apt for eventful encounters (p. 60-61). Therefore, an encounter with a homeless person, or, a classroom setting, contains equally viable situations (compared to a large-scale political revolution) through which an event might arise: "from the ontological perspective, there is no privileged point where one must begin" (p. 61). Both Cho and Lewis (2005) and Vizeau's (2010) acknowledgement of the viability of a "micro" event offers support for my claim that being a student in a graduate course – while not an earth shattering experience for the world at large – is sufficient to be considered eventful for me, and following this, that an English Language Arts classroom might offer the same for the students I teach.

Building on Cho and Lewis's (2005) Badiouian linkages between late-capitalism and education, I wondered if there exists research offering a Badiouian critique of

neoliberalism, in particular. In my searches for such critiques conducted via Google Scholar and other databases (different from my aforementioned search of Badiou in relation to the field of English Language Arts), a number of relevant results emerged. Of note is Eckstrand's (2019) critique of how Badiou's theory of event-as-revolutionary is inadequate to address neoliberalism as a system to be overthrown. Eckstrand suggests that the linear and "forceful push for one's truth which eliminates all grey areas can allow for a dynamic system to co-opt or adapt to one's tactics" with neoliberalism being the implied dynamic system (p. 71). Furthermore, the linear and absolutist nature of Badiou's notion of truth – in spite of Badiou's belief such a truth is sufficient in vanquishing a "massive and elaborate system" – is "true only if the system is not resilient" and resilience is certainly a characteristic of neoliberalism (pp. 71-72). In response to Eckstrand's critique of Badiou, I am reminded once again about the scale upon which an event might be considered. In his article, Eckstrand relies on examples of macro-events in his reading of a Badiouian event; while I do concede that the possibilities of such a macro-event occurring today that might lead to neoliberalism's decline appears minimal (for example, the January 6th riots in the US, or the global Covid-19 pandemic do not appear, as yet, to have slowed neoliberalism's spread), my work concerns the possibilities of a micro-scale event, to which Eckstrand does not speak. It is for this reason my work concerns itself with eventful possibilities on a smaller scale. Furthermore, it is my hope that this research also offers eventful contributions to a different kind of system, that of education or schooling. Although he suggests that Badiou's theory of event, in its current form, is not strong enough, Eckstrand contends that his "analysis should not encourage inaction" (p. 76). Elaborating on this point, Eckstrand offers systems theory as a way to complexify and make more "robust" a Badiouian truth process that seeks to dismantle

neoliberalism's own robust and resilient system that adapts to the myriad threats seeking to undermine it (p. 80). What Eckstrand means by this is that an effective approach to push back and overturn neoliberal dominance must be "organized yet decentralized…grassroots, collaborative, and adept at bringing people together without imposing one specific order one everyone" (p. 80). I cannot help but recognize education as a space suitable to such an approach, with educators containing the potential to be the grassroots, decentralized, collaborative, and unifying force Eckstrand refers to. Of course, education as a system is far from socio-politically unified, however, education and educators deal in subjectivity and perhaps this is where Eckstrand's call for a particular resistance is viable. Through eventful teaching, in my view, I might be able to help others (my students, those who read my research, etc.) recognize their neoliberal subjectivity. In this way, an eventful truth, occurring frequently enough addresses Eckstrand's conclusion: that what is required is more than "a great idea, but thinking about how to relate the beings created by one's idea to each other, such that the truth is [the world's] organic whole" (p. 82). And, so what do we make of neoliberal subjectivity? I address this more specifically in the next chapter; however, I wish to take a moment here to explore how Badiou's theory has been taken up in the context of neoliberal subjectivity.

How might Badiou help us understand neoliberal subjectivity, and what does his theory offer by way of creating a pathway to reconfigure how an individual is subjectified? Daniel Hartley (2019) writes, "the philosophy of Alain Badiou offers a rich new perspective on the nature of neoliberal subjectivity" (p. 9). Hartley offers a Badiouian framing of neoliberalism as a "worldlessness" that has "replaced the logic of the world, excluding the majority of humanity from visibility (potential or actual)" (p. 9). In Hartley's reading of Badiou, "a world is a logic of appearance in which all are entitled

to a name…naming signifies the possibility of an inscription into a political process" through which revolution becomes possible (p. 9). For Hartley, neoliberalism-via-Badiou becomes, "a fundamentally counter-revolutionary subjective project" intent on circumventing its decline. In this sense, neoliberalism aims for and "relies" on its capacity to separate a person's "body" from its eventful potential (p. 11). Without this potential, a person remains confined within the matrix of their situational coordinates unable to be seized, shattered, or engaged in a truth process (these terms will be discussed more fully later in this chapter). Hartley's work renews my sense of urgency to teach in a way that resists such neoliberal subjectivity and his reading of neoliberalism through a Badiouian lens clarifies the ways in which a neoliberal subject is constructed, so to speak. In better understanding this construct – and why the neoliberal requires this particular subjectification, I can be more purposeful in my pedagogical and curricular engagements in my classroom.

Turning to Badiou in the classroom, I draw upon Cathryn van Kessel's (2016) work wherein she and her students framed Social Studies education through a Badiouian lens. van Kessel argues that Badiou's philosophy is cogent to thinking educationally. She maintains that Badiou's conceptualization of Evil provides a framework through which her students might contemplate its complexities in the context of Social Studies education. A key difference between my intentions with Badiou's work and those of other scholars who have applied his work is to whom his theories are being applied; in this dissertation my focus is not on other students or other educators – I am the becoming subject being studied. For example, in the context of my research, my students are not engaging in Badiou's theories directly, rather, I deploy his work as a lens through which I contemplate and better understand my experiences as a graduate student and to inform

my pedagogical and curricular approaches. In this sense, my students engage in Badiou's theories more indirectly via the readings and tasks they are assigned.

My reluctance in mirroring van Kessel's (2016) intent to "directly engage with Badiou's philosophy with students" arises from the potential of tainting the possibility of an eventful encounter (p. 62). More specifically, I mean that in contrast to van Kessel, I am not teaching my students *about* Badiou's theory explicitly. Instead, I am directly engaging Badiou's philosophy with myself as I articulate the eventful truth I strive to remain faithful to. Secondly I am applying Badiou's theory to my curricular and pedagogical engagements; his work is a lens through which I attempt to understand my teaching aims and practice and not something my students discuss directly (for example, we do not talk about Badiou's evils or speak about Badiouian events and truth processes in my class). In troubling the danger of engaging with terms such as truth and fidelity, Wiebe and Snowber (2011) caution that a certain care is needed when "invoking a word like truth" as our "sense-making" is interminably subjected to our "material knowing" (p. 101). These authors interpret and extend den Heyer's scholarship on Badiou to the world of poetics. From this lens, they argue the privileging of "a heady, sharp-minded, capital truth" by "empiricist conceptions of knowledge" is exactly the kind of knowledge that is shattered by an encounter with the event (p. 101). They advocate a more embodied and less rational approach to truth and warn educators to be "vigilant regarding the potential dangers of making too much sense (the inevitable distortions and betrayals of desire), while simultaneously not denying the affirmative of sensuality" (p. 101). My takeaways from their work are that we must caution against didactic approaches to instigating an event and to temper our expectations regarding when and how an event might manifest itself in a classroom setting, if at all. It is for these reasons that I approach student

engagement with literature as a viable space for an event to occur because, as I will discuss in the next chapter, reading has the potential to affect a reader beyond the acquisition of empirical knowledge.

Finally, what these scholars whose research on Badiou and the field of education bring to bear for my research is a necessity for a certain humility and rigorous self-critique to mitigate the trappings of (conscious or unconscious) neoliberal self-interest; den Heyer and Conrad (2011) underscore the humility inherent in truth processes when they write that our aims or “commitments” do not belong to us entirely and “possibly [contribute] to the problem [we] seek to alleviate” (p. 12). They also suggest, like Pantazis (2012), that while it is improbable to “plan” or “schedule” an event, “organizing curriculum for a truth to break through” may open the probability of such an encounter (p. 13). The conclusions these scholars draw from Badiou’s work again reinforce my research endeavors and informed the processes through which I analyzed my data and the findings that emerged. I discuss my data analysis more fully in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Next, I offer further context for thinking about refraction in relation to the event, followed by a discussion of my eventful experiences as a graduate student.

Toward a Refractively Eventful Encounter

First, I offer two excerpts from the Alberta’s Secondary English Language Arts Program of Studies (2003):

> Excerpt 1: By studying Canadian literature, students are able to ***reflect*** on ideas and experiences of citizenship from Canadian perspectives. The study of Canadian literature helps students to develop respect for cultural diversity and common values. The study of Canadian literature helps students to develop respect for cultural diversity and ***common*** values. (p. 1, emphasis added)

> Excerpt 2: The study of literature allows students to experience, ***vicariously***, persons, places, times and events that may be far removed from their day-to-day experiences. Literature invites students to ***reflect*** on the significance of cultural values and the fundamentals of human existence; to ***think*** about and discuss essential, universal themes; and to grapple with the intricacies of the human condition. The study of literature provides students with the opportunity to develop self-understanding. They imagine the worlds that literature presents and understand and empathize with the characters that literature creates. (p. 1, emphasis added)

In both excerpts the word "reflect" appears. The Latin origins of this word (*re* + *flectere*, to bend again) suggests a doubling back or a regression (Harper, 2016). In a program of study designed to create "responsible, contributing citizens and lifelong learners while experiencing success and fulfillment in life," (Alberta Learning, 2003, p.1), there also exists a program that might be used to render students static in the face of a neoliberal state or social order (Smith, 2000; Biesta, 2008). Read through the lens of reflection, this might be a program that uses literature in a manner whereby students might only experience the world "vicariously" (Alberta Learning, 2003, p.1) through the texts as selected by their teachers or where an efferent reading stance (Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995, 2005) is promoted over a kind of reading that recognizes the agency of the reader.

I worry that these types of vicarious encounters might foreclose on what is alternatively knowable about the world and others in it. In her TED talk *The Danger of a Single Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) suggests that there is a world of complexity beyond the single stories we sometimes encounter, especially stories about

marginalized and minority people, places, and cultures. I worry a reflective curricular encounter might only concern itself with these “single stories” in a way that works toward the qualification and socialization functions of schools.

In my view, we might consider the suggestion that “students will [*refract*] cultural values and perspectives” (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 1). The Latin root of refract (*frangere*) suggests a breaking or fracturing, rather than a bending (Harper, 2016); for a Badiouian truth-process to occur there must be a break such that space for an emergent truth is made available. For Badiou (2001), it is the event that creates this potentially generative space.

I use refraction here similar to Biesta’s (2010) consideration of a pedagogy of interruption: an interruption of “our satisfaction with status quo practices, experienced as a pull that things ought to be different” (p. 9). I do not wish to think interruption as a stopping, but rather as breaking away from a given trajectory or set of coordinates; Badiou’s event does not interrupt or halt the world so much as interrupt taken-for-granted knowledge and opinions, allowing the possibility of truths to emerge. As such, interruption is not static, it is vital.

In my view, the refractory break or interruption of the status quo might open up the space for the student to experience and act on their imagined probable, possible, and preferable futures (den Heyer, 2009; Hutchison, 1996). In other words, the refractive curricular encounter with literature is one open to possibility and is attuned to the educational; the point of inflection, or break, is the event that initiates such a process. It is this refractive encounter that my teaching is aimed at, my attempts of which I discuss more fully in Chapters 5 and 6.

I envision a refractory curriculum encounter that might shock learners in instances where education has lost its educational nature, where the focus is too focused on the socialization and qualification functions of education (Biesta, 2008) or where educational spaces "contribute to the reproduction of existing inequalities" (p. 198). In my encounter with educational events, I am coming to know again a personal and professional self already contained within me as a possible trajectory.

In this next section, I more fully detail my eventful encounters in my coursework with Professor Eppert and Professor den Heyer, with a view to offering a Badiouian analysis of how those encounters impacted me and my teaching. These stories act as the bedrock for this dissertation, helping me discern between my teaching before and after these events. These events affected different facets of my given situation: Through my experiences in Professor Eppert's classes, I came into an awareness of my societal subjectivity and the need for humility in self and world whereas in Professor den Heyer's classes, it was the image of my teacherly self that was shattered, thus re-cognizing the pedagogical humility I required. In both courses, the event gave rise to mirror images of my situatedness within my given societal and educational configurations and, in so doing, shattered those constitutions; what followed in the years since has been my dual truth process of re-cognizing each of these linked "selves" and how they are interrelated. Furthermore, this dissertation is a material trace of my evolving understanding of how these events have and continue to have an impact on how I live and how (and why) I teach.

Two Eventful Courses

In the courses I took with Professor Eppert (in 2014 and 2015) and Professor den

Heyer (in 2015 and 2016), I experienced the feeling of having a hole punched in the knowledge and opinions I had about myself, how I live in the world, the world itself, and my teaching. These courses acted as mirrors through which I was able to see myself refracted along two dimensions. First, with the classes I took with Professor Eppert, I came into an awareness of my sociological situation and through this re-cognition, a sense of ethical responsibility for the well-being of others and the planet emerged, and the relationship of this awareness to the concept of humility. Second, through my coursework with Professor den Heyer, I began to realize the ways in which I was complicit in teaching towards and perpetuating neoliberal values in my classroom and within my teacherly self. One of the assignments Professor Eppert asked the EDSE 610 students to complete was a weekly written response to the assigned readings. I wish to offer excerpts from two of these weekly reflections (I refer to these as reflections, and not refractions, as per the term used by Professor Eppert in her assignment description); the first is dated September 25, 2014 and the second is from October first. What strikes me about these reflections is the extent to which I was already being shaken by the readings I encountered. The first excerpt was responding to readings by Boler (1999), Behar (1997), Pinar (1988), and Smith (1999). The second excerpt was responding to readings by Ruitenberg (2011), Eppert (2000 and 2011), and Laub (1992)[4]. These reflections were written less than a month into the course and already I can see traces of what I can now describe as my eventful encounter:

Weekly Reflection Excerpt 1, September 25, 2014

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[4] See Appendix B for bibliographical information related to the readings I respond to and reference in weekly reflection excerpts 1 and 2.

Is the self I project the same self that resides within? Is my "self" made up of what I say and do and how people know me, or, is my "self" all that is not said, not known by others? Today, I made an effort to deal with the issue of race in my ELL classroom in a way that was more uncomfortable for me. I acknowledged my "whiteness" in relation to my students' "otherness." A student brought to my attention that I am not as white as I think I am and we, as a class, began to discuss "how white is Mr. Piazza" in relation to the privilege I've experienced because of it. Prior to these readings and my "moment of unmasking," I don't think I would have had the courage to put my privilege at the forefront of class discussion, as I thought it would distance me from the students I'm trying to connect to. I don't know how today's discussion affected the relationships I have with my students, but it was a vulnerable moment for me and I'm proud of it – it was a moment or an instance, or perhaps even the budding of authenticity, of my authentic self. I'm also proud of the student who had the courage to question my claim to "whiteness" – I've created a space where my students can perhaps take risks and question teacher assumptions.

Smith writes that "to find yourself you have to lose yourself" and he also quotes Song-chol: "your enemy is your teacher." I have often told my students that growth only comes after a period of discomfort. How hypocritical of me then, after all these years, seeking to avoid discomfort at the expense of growth. To paraphrase Confucius, if I do not engage in transformative practices, how can I be effective at transforming others? This is my current adversity. The fear of discomfort. Lethargy. Complacence. Who am I? What kind of educator am I? What kind of scholar am I? Husband? Father? Friend? Where and how do those

selves intersect? Or do they stack up as layers? Am I all these things always at the same time? The past two weeks have perhaps been the most stressful I've ever experienced and each one of the aforementioned "selves" have been shaken to the (common?) core. As ever, I am reading and thinking and discussing. I hope I'm evolving and not devolving. Either way I am beginning to transform. I am changing. I am learning from this discomfort: How to be vulnerable; how to be authentic; how to find my/self. I am terrified. I am excited.

Looking back at this excerpt now, I am struck by how introspectively critical I was. I understood, on some level, that I had to change my self to avoid the hypocrisy of trying to change my students. I can also see that I did possess an inherent vision of teaching as transformative; however, I do not get the sense that the transformation I was aiming for was politically motivated. Instead, I was attempting to transform the relational space of my classroom, in order to make room or "space" for students to take a more active role in the class and wherein my authority and identity as "teacher" is open to interrogation. In the concluding part of that excerpt, the focus is less on my students, and more on how I was being implicated and "transformed" by those readings. From a Badiouian perspective, I see evidence of my shattering and the beginnings of attempting to know myself anew.

Weekly Reflection Excerpt 2, October 1, 2014:

Every week I am overwhelmed by what I don't know. Each word, each sentence, each paragraph becomes a source of illumination for me. Also frustration. I often find myself frustrated at the readings – challenged but also left feeling like there is no possible way that I can know everything, though it feels like there is an expectation that I can. I'm not sure where this expectation comes

from. It is from sheer strength of will I get through some of these readings and make sense of them. Now as I write this, I wonder about how my own students feel, the ELL kids who struggle to read and understand what I ask them to read. Do they feel as I do now? In the spirit of this week's readings, I wonder if I am creating a space safe enough [for students] to feel and voice their frustrations and struggles with their schoolwork. Do I seek to allow my classroom "guests" to "change the space into which [they] are received?" Or, do I cause more harm in my attempts to elevate the other into my own space?

The readings this week allowed me to reflect on my teaching practice, but also on my text choices. The last reading[5]*, especially, is pushing me to rethink the way I teach [the film]* Hotel Rwanda*, [and the novels]* Speak*, and* A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Or why I teach them at all. Does the way I teach these texts serve to create a space for me to listen to my students, or, does my treatment of these texts intrude or "trespass" on their witnessing of trauma? I have many students who have experienced the genocides, rapes, and abuses detailed in those texts.*

I agree that we must be "empty" in order to co-exist with the other. We need to – I need to – empty ourselves of all our assumptions about what is right and approach the other not from a space of "I", but from a space of "we." Like [Thich Nhat] Hanh's poem, we need to understand that we are part of antithetical – sometimes-paradoxical – polarities; our attempt to "be" then, becomes an assertion of power over one of those polarities and by extension, over the other. We cease to co-exist in a hospitable, empathetic space, and instead commit an act

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[5] This would be the Laub (1992) reading.

of violence. We commit the "81st blow" and through that we annihilate all – the speaker, the space, the story, the listening, the connection.

Ok – so how do I do this in my classroom? Maybe I start by not referring to it as my classroom?

Looking back at both entries from my weekly reading reflections reminds me not only of the intellectual challenge of EDSE 610 but of the emotional angst I felt too. As a student at that time, the readings did not solely exist within the theoretical realm; my teaching practice was implicated by these texts and I felt compelled to respond. I see how quite early on, I attempted to adjust my teaching and how doing so was not an easy task. However, I can say that although I did attempt to rethink my pedagogy, these attempts were relatively minor, compared to how my teaching aims were impacted after my experiences in Professor den Heyer's classes. What I see here is a desire to rethink the relational components of my classroom; how might my teaching and text selection affect my students, rather than attempting to teach in order to produce a particular eventful outcome. I recognize both the fear and exhilaration of this undertaking: the excitement of what might be possible and the fear of wandering into uncharted educational territory. When I say that I experienced an educational event all those years ago, these reading response excerpts offer affirmation of this claim: I might not have been able to articulate exactly what I was experiencing at the time, but my descriptions of the discomfort I felt then permit me to make this assertion today. Not only was I interrogating my teaching practice, the questions and wonderings I explore in those excerpts bear witness to how I was questioning the very core of my being.

I feel that my experiences in Professor Eppert's classes instigated an event that continues to be more socio-political in nature; by socio-political I mean that the emerging

truth process from her courses has influenced how I think about myself and the role I play in participating in and shaping the world around me and how that evolving understanding impacts my teaching. Although my experiences in her classes have also shaped my pedagogical and curricular choices – for example, having my students read some of the same selections we read in her courses (detailed in Chapters 5 and 6) – I would argue these curricular and pedagogical choices were/are extensions of my evolving socio-political identity and value system that I feel my students might benefit from engaging with.

My experiences in Professor den Heyer's classes were also socio-political but only to the extent that they instigated a truth process orbiting around my teacherly self as a political subject. In other words, Professor Eppert's courses shaped the curriculum and values of my teaching – specifically the literature I select for my students and the spaces I try to create for them; in her class, humility emerged as central component in helping me understand the potential for a different kind of relationality. Professor den Heyer's courses shaped the pedagogical choices in addition to providing the theoretical lens (Badiou) through which I am analyzing the continuing ramifications and emerging truths resulting from my educationally eventful encounter with both my professors and their courses. Finally, both these courses brought into my awareness the notion of neoliberalism as a sociopolitical entity embedded within selves and also as a lens through which to understand what I consider to be my failings as an educator intent on teaching toward an undoing of neoliberalism.

Here, I offer a memory from my first course with Professor Eppert, EDSE 610. This memory centers on what she called a geotext assignment; the assignment invited me to consider the relationships between myself, my research, and the world around me. It

was this assignment (the creation of a tangible artifact in addition to a whole class presentation) that I identify as the more concrete trace of my internal re-cognition, or my truthful beginning, authorized by my eventful re-beginning (den Heyer, 2015, p. 16).

Living Memory, September 2014: Professor Eppert's Class and the Geotext Assignment

I'm not an artsy-fartsy cut-and-paste kind of guy. I never enjoyed art class beyond the fact that it was academic downtime and I could goof off. So, when Prof. Eppert reviewed the geotext assignment we had to complete as part of the course, which involved multimodal approaches to sharing my learning with the class, I might have died a little inside. And, the exemplars she passed around looked good. Too good. Professional-artist-level good. This is not a slight on her assignment; rather it is my reaction to any invitation to participate in any kind of arts and crafts activity. My research was about increasing the amount of time student-teachers spend during their practicum; during my undergrad at McGill, I partook in a pilot project that had us in classrooms for an entire semester. It was fantastic and that's what I wanted to research for my Ed.D. The geotext assignment wasn't due for a while yet, so I had time to figure something out.

I'm about halfway through the course and something is different. It's as though these philosophers are speaking to me. To something within me I wasn't aware of before. You know that feeling of trying on a shirt that you loved but had shrunk in the dryer? Like, you really want it to fit but now it's too small, too tight. Try as you might, the shirt isn't comfortable or flattering anymore and you have to say goodbye. Put a different shirt on. One that fits better. One that suits you. All of a sudden, my desire to research student-teacher practicums became that ill-fitting shirt. Too tight around my neck and torso, almost like a straightjacket I had to get out of and get as far away from as possible. I was

becoming more than the one I thought I was. A movement into subjective excess.

All of the readings and discussions during this course were working on my being, in some way compelling me – and not really by choice, but by compulsion – to deeper and more complicated engagement with not only being a doctoral student, but where I wanted to focus my "studenting," as it were. I didn't realize the extent of this desire until I completed my geotext assignment and adjoining PowerPoint presentation. Looking back at these documents now, I no longer see the person I was when I began the course. Instead, those assignments act as the material trace of my first educational event. It is through this course and this assignment especially that I began to re-articulate my research interests and I stumbled upon what I then called "an ethic of relational humility." This ethic was inspired by the work of Nel Noddings (2010), David G. Smith (2006), and Paolo Freire (2000).

Although I hadn't yet encountered Alain Badiou, this course and assignment drew me toward a more philosophical approach to being a grad student. The last slide of my PowerPoint presentation indicated the authors I would need to read: more Noddings, Emmanuel Levinas's concept of alterity and otherness, more Smith and Freire; and I had a burgeoning interest in Eastern wisdom traditions. It was through this course that I began to understand myself as part of a larger whole and how there exists an ethical responsibility to the well-being of that whole. Out of my understanding of this new (to me) responsibility emerged the role of humility as foundational to any ethical relationship. If this course initiated my first educational event, it was the second course I took with Prof. Eppert (EDSE 501 during the Winter 2015 term) that more fully activated it. I remember during my presentation that I had spoken the words "ethic of relational

humility[6]" and Prof. Eppert asked if that term was my own. I responded that it was and her reaction and the reaction of the students in the class made it seem that I had chosen the right shirt. I felt good in it and people seemed to think so as well.

Toward the end of my first year as a graduate student, I had applied for two significant changes to my program. The first was (on the advice of Prof. Greg Thomas who taught me EDSE 620), to pursue a Ph.D. instead of an Ed.D. The second was a change in doctoral supervisor; Prof. Eppert agreed to take me on as a grad student.

What became clear to me as I engaged in readings and class discussions in Professor Eppert's classes was that our world is submerged in catastrophe (colonial, environmental, spiritual, etc.), and that much of humanity, in our anthropocentric arrogance, has cut itself off from its ethical responsibilities. Though I cannot say for sure, I do believe it was in these classes that I became familiar with anthropocentrism – at least as a pejorative. What also emerged from this shattering was a deep sense of complicity in such destructive arrogance and a more nuanced understanding of how seemingly insignificant choices carried with them ripple effects for colonization, of self, others, and the planet. As we dove into the readings for the course (Abram, 1996; Bauman, 2007; Eppert, 2011; Macy, 2007; Smith, 2000, among others; see Appendix B for a complete listing of the EDSE 610 course readings), I found myself constantly applying the ideas contained within these texts to my own lived experiences. This mode of literary and curricular engagement is what I defaulted to primarily to help me grapple with the complexity of these texts however, the process also led to feelings of anguish, guilt, and

[6] Briefly, an ethic of relational humility was a framework for understanding humility as central to relationships between humans, non-humans, and the planet. In the context of climate disaster, I argued such a relational ethic was essential to repairing the existing damage and mitigating further harm. I also believed such an ethic ought to inform relationships between teachers and students with a view to modeling the kinds of relationships students ought to have with each other and with the natural world.

shame due to the overwhelming sense that I was directly involved in shaping the world in this way. Badiou (2001) emphasizes the importance of subjectivity as an essential outcome of experiencing an event since a subject is what *becomes* of the seized "human animal" (p. 46). I was experiencing what Badiou might describe as feeling "seized and bewildered…befuddled and displaced" (p. 45) through my engagement with these texts; in other words, I was in the midst of experiencing an event. In Professor Eppert's Mindfulness class (EDSE 501), I was especially struck by David Loy's (2002) *A Buddhist History of the West* and how the book, in conjunction with other readings and classroom conversations, helped me to understand my Badiouian given situation both personally and societally; such an understanding reveals my being "in excess" of myself wherein "the uncertain course of fidelity passes through [me]" and "transfixes" and "inscribes" the beginnings of a truth process I continue to work through. For Badiou, this event would mark the moment that the "some-one" who "was not in a position to know that he [sic] was capable of this co-belonging to a situation and to the hazardous course of a truth" re-cognizes and enters into "the composition of a subject" (p. 46).

Reading Response Assignment, March 7, 2015,

> *Attachment. The more I read, the more I feel that this is the root of our collective – and individual – malaise, or dis-ease. As Loy states in his Introduction, and as we have been discussing in class, greed, ill-will, and delusion are what contribute to our suffering, our* dukkha*. In my own interpretation of the course readings and what I am learning of Buddhism, our various attachments are the conduits to these social and individual ailments. As I have written before, our Western notions of commercialism and materialism are attempts to ground ourselves in reality; the accumulation of material wealth acts as a sign of our existence. The*

> *house I live in is a representation of me in this world. Even if I am not in my home, my home is still there, taking up space, proclaiming that I AM HERE. I EXIST. I AM REAL. My personality and individuality manifest themselves through my clothing, an extension of my identity and sense of self – or so we're told/sold. My closet is full of shirts, shoes, pants, ties; material items that represent me-ness. And this is somehow still not enough. I still need that pair of brown loafers to feel complete. Not just any loafers, a specific brand and style too. I know, rationally, that I do not need them, but the ego is irrational – it knows not of rationing, of saying "I have enough, or, I am enough." Instead, its appetite is voracious and its thirst unquenchable.*

Imagine a child with their hands stuck in the cookie jar. Like the child, I had been (naively, perhaps) simply taking what I wanted with nary a concern for others. The child is hungry, the child takes a cookie. I need a car, I buy a luxury SUV. But when mom or dad turn the corner and catch the child in the act, it is the look on the parent's face and the words they speak – an accusatory, "what do you think you're doing? – signaling to the child that they have transgressed. Professor Eppert's classes and the readings she assigned acted on me *in loco parentis* revealing my own sociopolitical transgressions. I felt so small and helpless in those moments. Like the child, I was faced with two choices: I could attempt to justify my choices, or, I could accept responsibility. Or, as Badiou writes, I was implicated by the "ethic of a truth" where he advises: "do all you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you" (p. 47). I veered toward persevering and accepting this responsibility. Looking back, I think this is why I became fixated on the concept of humility as a restorative salve to both my personal feelings of guilt and as

an antithesis of the human arrogance I was learning so much about. To wit, my final paper for the first course I took with Professor Eppert was a treatise entitled "Relational Humility: A Work in Progress." In that paper, I developed a four-fold relational humility framework with a view to helping me understand the relational dynamics at play classroom settings with a view to offering this framework for "the betterment of our world," as I wrote in my conclusion. Reading through that paper now, however, I notice that I was still stuck on neoliberal notions of student success; I had written that this framework might help students attend classes more regularly and help students perceived as at-risk. While these are noble intentions, I feel they do not yet point to the structural logics that more deeply permeate our socio-political reality.

From a Badiouian perspective, it was this course that began refracting my knowledge and opinions away from my given situation and instigated a truth-process for me. At the time, this truth-process manifested itself as a desire to act on my newfound ethical responsibility to the human and non-human other and, as a teacher, this desire to act turned my attention my classroom teaching. I came to experience an urgency in this regard likely due to the sense of urgency that the course readings were articulating – we only have so much time to change our ways before we reach a point of (educational and planetary) no return! In spite of my burgeoning interest in relational humility, it is here that I began to conceive as a teacher-led desire to transform others, not realizing the inherent problematics associated with my attachment to this desire. In a reading reflection written during my second course with Professor Eppert, I can see where I was beginning to make more explicit connections between my cumulative coursework engagement in Eppert and den Heyer's classes, and my specific teaching context:

Reading Reflection, March 15, 2015:

> *I have come to recognize that perhaps our Western model of education is creating a crisis of learning for our large Indigenous and non-Western student population, especially in the Humanities courses that can be so damaging and dismissive of alternative ways of being and knowing in the world.*

Though I could identify this crisis, I did not yet know exactly how to invite my students to come into a similar shattering experience akin to what I had experienced. It was only after my experiences in Professor den Heyer's class that a clearer pedagogical and curricular approach (a material trace of my truth-process) came into view. One of the reasons I think I struggled to adjust my teaching practice after my experiences in Professor Eppert's classes was because – in my view – though shattering in a Badiouian sense, those courses resonated with me in a more theoretical and philosophical manner. What I mean by this is that what became affected was my knowledge of how the world functioned and the human cause/effect relationship to that, for better and for worse. What hadn't yet been "punched" was my knowledge of what it meant to teach towards having my students experience these same realizations that I had. The seeds of my pedagogical and curricular turn were planted, however, it would be the Badiouian language I would encounter later that would catalyze their blossoming into a more generative approach. Initially, I thought the solution was to have my students read about and discuss these issues in class, albeit not yet in an eventful way. I understood the aim of my teaching; I was struggling to grasp the means of getting there.

I wish to end this section with a discussion of my final weekly reading response, dated March 26, 2015, written at the end of my second course with Professor Eppert. In it, I diverted from the assigned task of focusing on a particular set of readings and instead offered a reflection (what I would now call a refraction) on my truth-process up to that

point (that point being having taken two courses with Professor Eppert but only one with Professor den Heyer – my second course with him would be forthcoming). Because this response touched on a variety of topics, I prefer to highlight and discuss key quotes rather than providing the whole piece here. The response begins with my desire to "re-envision education." I described school as "a Western, Eurocentric institution that privileges a capitalistic and entrepreneurial (read: self-serving and competitive) spirit over learning as a holistic, interdependent and spiritual (not religious) experience." I railed against the "tokenistic lip service" paid to intercultural approaches to education in service of really offering up "a rather homogenized and patriarchally hegemonic worldview of education." There is no world in which I can imagine myself describing schools in this way prior to having started my doctoral courses. One of the initiatives I was involved in at my school at that time was the creation of a hybrid course combining ELA 30 and Aboriginal Studies 30. Writing about the aims of this course in my reflection, I noted that that our goal was "to recognize that there are different ways of knowing and being in the world" with a view to recognizing how this hybrid course might "offer an alternative to the destructive nature of our current thinking and being in the world. We can shift to thinking and being *with* the world" (emphasis in original). The course never ended up running due to administrative reasons.[7]

I concluded the reflection by stating how my coursework has "profoundly changed – and continues to change – me" and I also state how these experiences reconfigured how "I see the world now." I also now recognize my inability to articulate a

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[7] Typically, when a new course is offered, we count on our registration and administration team to help promote and recommend the new offering to students. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons (time, busy-ness, perhaps a lack of understanding about the nature of the course) we did not have "enough" students to justify the fiscal cost of assigning a teacher for a class size that would be considered a revenue loss for the school's budget.

clearer pedagogical pathway for applying this vision of education not only in my own classroom, but in a more widespread manner. I wrote: “How do we get from the self-congratulatory academic circles down to the K-12 classrooms and beyond?” My critique of academic circles here likely stemmed from the frustration that arose from my inability to manifest the curricular and pedagogical changes in my teaching in order to bring about the “transformation” I desired at the time.

In this “rant/reflection” as I called it, I can feel the urgency and desperation I was feeling regarding the desire (at that time) to transform my students and the world. I would have just finished teaching the novel *Ishmael* for the first time; however, it does not figure into this response. Looking back to how far along my truth-process was at the time of writing that final reading response at the end of March 2015, I would say that my coursework in Professor Eppert’s two classes instilled in me a specific aim for my teaching and it was my final course with Professor den Heyer that acted as the final push I needed to refract me towards the teacher I am today as I encountered the language I required to articulate the truth process that began in EDSE 610 with Professor Eppert.

Toward an Eventful Re-cognition: My Experience of Being a Student in Professor den Heyer’s Classes

The opening lines of my final term paper for EDSE 504 (Summer 2015) in Professor den Heyer’s class begin thusly, “this paper is a wrestling to re-cognize my ontological assumptions, and how these assumptions direct me to explore a preferable future for teaching as imagined by a becoming-subject (den Heyer, 2009a)” (Piazza, term paper, 2015). In that summer class, Badiou was not on the reading list. I came to know some of his work through Professor den Heyer’s lectures. I include the above excerpt because in it I see how Badiou-via-den Heyer already began to seize me. I could no

longer understand the world without seeing it through the Badiouian lens. To wit, I began to read Badiou's (2001) work even after the course had finished. In an email dated November 4th, 2015, I wrote to Professor den Heyer indicating that I was reading Badiou's (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* and that "the exposure to Badiou [that] summer [had] really resonated with me."

It is hard to describe the impact this exposure to Professor den Heyer's course and to Badiou had on me. Through my experiences in his courses, my conceptions of curriculum and pedagogy became relegated to the category of what Badiou (2001) calls "opinions" which he describes as "representations without truth, the anarchic debris of circulating knowledge" (p. 50). What I hitherto understood about what it meant to teach no longer held *true* following my eventful experiences in Professor den Heyer's classes. I remember a particularly shattering moment during my reading of Westheimer and Kaine's (2004) article about the justice-oriented citizen. In that article, Westheimer and Kaine suggest that donating money to the poor, or organizing a food drive, though helpful, are inadequate for achieving a more just society. Instead, the justice-oriented citizen investigates why poverty exist in the first place and seeks to address the structural causes of injustice rather than more simplistic Band-Aid solutions. Upon reading that article, my mind was blown. I became transfixed by the notion that my teaching was not justice-oriented and that my pedagogical and curricular efforts were insignificant in this light. I felt the need to *do something* about this gap between my teaching aims and practice.

What I can say now is that after learning about Badiou, everything just made sense. Though I initially attempted to work with three scholars in shaping my theoretical framework (Levinas, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Badiou), it is telling that Badiou is the last

theory standing.[8] During the 2015 summer course with Professor den Heyer, however, I had not yet turned this theoretical re-cognition towards my pedagogical self. Badiou's event theory also offered me a pedagogical possibility: how might I instigate such an eventful encounter for my students in order to bring into their awareness their contribution to climate disaster and a reimagining of how they might resolve to create a more compassionate and environmentally friendly world?

In other words, Badiou's event theory is what I felt I needed in order to have my students encounter my emerging truths stemming from my experiences in Professor Eppert's courses. In Professor Eppert's classes, I was exposed to issues of ecological injustice, continental and Eastern philosophies, and critiques of consumerist and materialist culture in Western society. In those courses, I also learned, to quote from her EDSE 610 course outline, that "scholarship is not something 'separate' from society, but rather is intimately interwoven with it" (p. 2). As obvious as this last fact seems to me now, it was quite novel to me then; those courses are what led me to recognize this gap in my teaching. Up to that point, I can confidently (and now, ashamedly) say that the primary aim of my teaching was to help my students succeed on their standardized final exams. However, during and after those courses, it became necessary for me to contemplate teaching otherwise.

The missing link between these truths, and the eventful possibilities for my students was a unit I could teach in my ELA course. I had decided to use the readings in Eppert's course in order to begin raising these issues for my students. My hopes at the time were not Badiouian in nature – I hadn't encountered him yet – rather, I figured that

[8] The choice to remain with Badiou is not a rejection or slight on Levinas or Thich Nhat Hanh, as they continue to live within me

if my students read some of the same articles I had, they might realize the ways in which they contributed and were implicated by the aforementioned issues. But I was still wondering which novels I might incorporate.

It was during the 2015 summer course with Professor den Heyer that mentioned his teaching of the novel *Ishmael* in high school, a novel I had previously read. That summer, in addition to reading Badiou, I re-read the novel and began planning out my *Ishmael* unit for my students. I detail the inception and teaching of this unit more fully in chapter 5 of this dissertation. The experience of reading this novel a second time, after having been a student in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes was shocking and profound. In Chapter 3, I describe in vivid detail this experience of re-reading *Ishmael*. Discussing this experience in the context of my literature review allows me to examine how I felt, and the personal and pedagogical implications, in a way that brings to bear the research reviewed in that chapter, especially as I explore the eventful possibilities of reading literature.

In my view, Professor den Heyer's courses helped me re-cognize the educational possibilities of my classroom teaching in a way that centers a more ethical and justice-oriented citizen – the kind of citizen that Professor Eppert's classes compelled me to become as well. The central thrust of Professor den Heyer's class was the study of curriculum and its relationship to the kinds of subjectivity and ideology that schools (re)produce. His course outline for EDSE 504[9] (see Appendix C for a truncated version)

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[9] EDSE 504 is a curriculum course that follows from EDSE 503, its companion curriculum course. Because I was enrolled in a Master's program at the University of Alberta, I was exempt from having to take EDSE 503 due to that program offering an equivalent course. When I took the EDSE 503 equivalent (EDU 503, Foundations of Curriculum, in the fall of 2010), it was an asynchronous online class where readings were assigned and the assignments were weekly postings to an online discussion forum. I was not engaged by that course at all, and struggled to complete it successfully. My final paper explored Quebec's secondary

outlined a series of questions. Two examples of these questions are: “In what ways does both a program of studies and curriculum as a lived text reflect particular ideological frames and what evidence exists that it does?” and “What role do schools and curriculum play in what we come to believe what we do about human nature, learning, loving, relationships, the Nation-state, and wise living?” Following engagement with Badiou’s theory of event, the following question was posed on one of our assignments: “In what ways might we arrange the forms of knowledge (e.g. disciplines or subjects) to encourage our (teacher-student) possible encounters with an event-truth procedure?” Whereas I stated earlier that Professor Eppert and den Heyer’s classes acted as mirrors wherein I re-cognized a refracted image of myself, their courses also acted as complimentary images of each other, with Eppert’s classes inspiring existential questioning and the content of my teaching aims, and den Heyer’s class instigating a pedagogical and curricular refraction.

Professor den Heyer’s course also awoke within me the need to be more attuned to how my pre-eventful pedagogical and curricular approaches likely foreclosed on the subjectification dimension of education. As I read and thought about the assigned articles, it became apparent to me that my teaching methods (and the hidden curriculum these methods produced) were inadequate for bringing about the kind of educational event I sought to invite for my students to experience, especially in the context of an ELA course that culminated in a state-wide standardized exam accounting for half a student’s course grade. It was in the summer course that I took with den Heyer that I first encountered Biesta and Safstrom’s (2011) notion of an educational education, alongside Davis and

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ELA program of studies and once I completed that course, I did not really think about curriculum again until my doctoral studies.

Sumara's (2000) work on the fractal nature of knowledge and knowing. In this course, we also read: Bowers (2010); Britzman (1986); Greene (1986); Grumet (2006); Ranciere (1991); Smith (2000); and Tuck (2009), among others (for the full reading list, see Appendix D).

In the final paper I wrote for EDSE 504, I built on the theory of relational humility I first articulated in Professor Eppert's class. These authors moved me to reconsider how I might "shape the classroom space" in a way that "offers the possibility of re-reading and reframing Western ways of being and knowing" (cited from my EDSE 504 final paper). The references page for my final paper reads as an amalgam of authors read in both professors' courses. I invoke Macy and Johnstone's (2012) "great unravelling" (p. 16); building on this invocation, I wrote about how I envisioned my future classrooms as a space where my students and I could discuss the consequences of "the West's humanistically self-ish ontology…: economic decline, resource depletion, climate change, social division and war, and mass extinction of species" (cited from my EDSE final paper). Although there is no explicit mention of Badiou in this final paper, I was already attempting to conceptualize ways of offering "a humble invitation to an event" and to "the possibilities of a truth-process occurring" for my reader and by extension, my future students.

By the end of my second course with Professor den Heyer (EDSE 501 in the winter of 2016), my writing took on a more explicitly political tone and I began to consider to the implications of a curriculum encounter that might point students toward addressing State-influenced structural issues within and outside of education. My writing in that paper delineates a need to address structural influences on education more fully. I turn my gaze towards the classroom as a space for students to encounter an event with

more explicit discussion of *my desired outcome* for a truth process that might arise. My final paper for EDSE 501 (the second course I took with Professor den Heyer) begins as follows:

Excerpt from EDSE 501 Final Paper, Winter 2016

When we do not engage with irrational representations of the Imaginary, we move toward stupefaction. This same stupefaction occurs when neoliberal and corporate interests begin to manufacture illusive ideals for our purchase and consumption, and, our education. Curriculum becomes stripped of its complexity and, in educational parlance, becomes 'covered' in a way that conceals or shields the very worlds we are meant to explore. In this sophist-oriented conception of education, a One Truth imposed by the symbolic father-as-State protects its own interests and power. In limiting the opportunities for students to encounter the irrational, the State circumvents the conditions necessary for a truth process to occur. With this truth process denied, hegemonic Grand Narratives are downloaded onto students, blinding them to alternative understandings and storyings of the worlds they inhabit. How might curricular encounters of an irrational kind create spaces for students as becoming-subjects to come to a more critical understanding of themselves and of their world?

Everything old is new again and, in this introductory paragraph, I see a rough sketch of what my dissertation explores. I see the content I had encountered in Professor Eppert's courses merged with the resultant outcome of being a student in Professor den Heyer's classes. In the context of my writing, an irrational curricular encounter connotes what I now call a refractively eventful encounter (I make this connection later in that paper); still, I recognize my initial attempts at linking pedagogy, curriculum, and Badiou

to the structures of our neoliberal and materialist situation. I would have been teaching *Ishmael* at the time of writing this paper and in Chapters 5 and 7, I discuss more fully the implications of my urgent desire for instigating an event of a particular kind, for me and for my students especially during my teaching of this novel.

Much of my work in Professor den Heyer's classes can be considered an act of fidelity to the truth process initiated in Professor Eppert's classes. My assignments for den Heyer continued to work through my theories on the role of humility, and what it has to offer within educational spaces. What den Heyer had done for me was to apply Badiou's central theory (event and truth-process) into a teacher-friendly question, namely: how might we use the subject to help students interpret their social world? It was this question (as a more accessible version of the assignment question cited in the above paragraph) *and* his mention of the novel *Ishmael* that sparked in me a vision for how I might finally get my students to learn everything that Professor Eppert's classes had taught me. A second factor also emerged that gave me the courage to enact this vision as the Ministry of Education had decided to decrease the weighting of the Grade 12 diploma exams to 30% instead of 50% In an email dated September 4th, 2015, I wrote to Professor den Heyer stating that "I did grow quite a bit in the three short weeks we were together" during that summer course. I continued:

> In fact, your course (and the shift in diploma weightings) has lead [sic] me to change the way I am teaching my 30-1 ELA course at Centre High; I am trying to use the subject to help students interpret their social world for the probable, possible, and preferable future. I am really hoping to move beyond the qualification and socialization aspects of education.

Beyond adding some of Eppert's course readings, the change I introduced was the

novel *Ishmael* in order to induce the possibility of an eventful encounter for my students, as I will more fully explore in Chapter 5. Another impact of my experience in Professor Eppert's and den Heyer's courses is that I became more aware of the ethical nature of my teaching aims. By this I mean that I understood that my teaching ought to have aims rooted in bringing my students to recognize their ethical responsibilities as citizens of the world living in relation to human and non-human others. To wit, and inspired by Professor den Heyer's use of throughline questioning as a means of structuring one's curriculum, the following preamble and three questions appeared on my course outline, dated September, 2015 (see Appendix E):

> This English 30-1 course will provide us with an opportunity to examine and explore the multiplicity of stories about ourselves and our world. The essential questions that will guide this inquiry are: 1) What does it mean to be human in the 21st Century? 2) What are our ethical responsibilities to each other and to our planet? 3) What role do/will you play in shaping the world?

Looking at the questions now, I can see how they can be interpreted as potentially eventful questions. The first question invites the possibility to recognize the very question of one's being. The second invites the possibility of recognizing one's ethical responsibilities toward their fellow humans and to the planet itself, implicitly addressing the question of climate change. These first two questions act as the basis of the event's seizure – at least I hoped they would, especially after engaging with the readings and the novel *Ishmael*. It was these two questions that would potentially raise the issue of neoliberalism, our materialistic pursuits of happiness, and climate change, among other things. The final question represents the truth process and one's fidelity to it; the future tense of "will" brings to bear a sense of ethical responsibility for being in and with the

world. It was this same sense of responsibility that emerged for me through my graduate studies and what, ultimately, I wished to impart to my students through their studies with me.

In this next section, I wish to take a moment to offer a refractive assessment of the various re-cognitions my truth process has led to. I jarringly insert this personal refraction because like the event that cannot be calculated, predicted or managed these thoughts jarringly appear as I immerse myself in my research, and stubbornly, they refuse to leave. I am disheartened, in a way, because this stubborn refusal feels like a shattering anew. Like a wriggling worm on the hook that pierced it, I am once again pierced by the emerging truth I am struggling to articulate years after the event punched a hole through the "me" I always thought I was but am now coming to re-cognize differently. I am also heartened, in the sense of the French word *coeur,* meaning heart, and the root of the word courage – and am, therefore, encouraged to keep going! This assessment emerges from my discussion and analysis of my educational events as described in this chapter; I believe it is worth describing the "taken for granted coordinates of [my daily life]" (den Heyer, 2010a, p. 2) that I understood as myself prior to these events in order to more fully show how my truth process has refracted away from the some-one I once was. I italicize this next section in order to show a self still in process and still processing my experiences in Professor Eppert's and den Heyer's courses.

A Refraction on my Experience of Educational Events, April 15, 2019

Before undertaking my doctoral studies, I did not know what neoliberalism was. I knew what social justice was, and I understood racism was wrong, as was sexism, homophobia, and misogyny. I also didn't understand colonialism and had never heard of Residential Schools or the 60s Scoop. I grew up having recited excerpts of Martin Luther

King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in grade five, six, seven, and beyond. My mother had a laminated copy of Norman Rockwell's painting "The Golden Rule" in her office and I (thought I) understood equality. I went to Loyola High School, a private Jesuit school for boys, where volunteering – part of our Christian Service Program – was required to graduate. Because of these things, I saw myself on the outside of homophobia, racism, misogyny, etc. And, as someone on the outside, I could remove myself from being complicit in these forms of oppression. Knowing about the existence of oppression and knowing oppression was wrong was enough to grant myself immunity from being labeled a racist, a homophobe, a misogynist. For example, I could rap along to my favorite songs and use the N-word or the F-word (not fuck, but the one used to disparage gay people), even in public, as long as the public was white and (to my knowledge) straight. I know this example might seem oversimplified, but I feel it exemplifies the tacit ways that power structures maintain themselves through privilege – a privilege I was not able to identify as such then, because that's simply how (in my lack of understanding) things were.

Because I never [knowingly] experienced colonialism or [knowingly] encountered an Indigenous person[10]*, these concepts and people did not exist. This last fact is a great shame of mine. How could I not have learned about these issues? I am a private high school, private college, McGill University educated, Master's degree certified teacher of High School English Language Arts. I feel such simmering anger and resentment that it*

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[10] Prior to teaching at my current school, I cannot say I knowingly taught an Indigenous student. Even after starting at this school in 2010, I was slow to understand that Indigenous people and cultures were so prevalent in Canada and abroad. My conception of "Indigenous people" was sadly limited to the historical accounts I had learned in grade 9, or to Indigenous tribes in Australia, for example. I cannot overstate the shame I feel towards this fact of my ignorance and I am eternally thankful to my Indigenous students and colleagues for providing me with myriad opportunities to rectify this gross blind-spot in my education.

took until I was thirty-four years old and enrolled as a doctoral student to finally begin to grasp these realities. My Master's degree capping project heavily cited Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for Christ's sake. Where the hell was I? Who was the I inhabiting this body known as Robert Piazza? How could I have moved through fourteen years of secondary and post-secondary education and not understood privilege or settler-colonialism in Canada!? And to say what of my teaching during those years?*

And, so yes, after learning about globalization (as a pejorative), neoliberalism, and privilege from Professors Eppert and den Heyer, of course I would be compelled by a sense of responsibility to revise my teaching practice. Prof. den Heyer taught me that privilege makes you stupid and it is incumbent on the privileged to be allies (whether that is what he meant is up for debate, however, it is what I absorbed). And I set off to save my students, to emancipate them from the clutches of neoliberalism! Of globalization! Of the pursuit of material happiness and consumerism! I had to free them from the tyranny of privilege concerning race! And class! And gender! And sexual orientation! And religion! I would name the social symbolic order for them! I would emphatically read Peggy McIntosh's "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack[11]!" I would teach them about humility! I would subvert the educational machine from the inside-out! "Who cares about diploma exams?" I exhorted, "they're not a measure of real learning!" I admire my zeal. I was unhinged.

Looking back at those (not so distant) years, I realize why, I think, I was so hungry for inducing personal and social change and transformation in my students: I saw myself in them. Here was my chance at righting the perceived wrongs of my schooling. In

[11] Available at https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf

changing the students they were, I could retroactively transform the student I was. And so, I attempted to fix those mistakes. Authoritatively. My students did not have a choice. Each student was an opportunity to really make a difference in this world, to absolve them (and me) of a claim to ignorance and to burden them with the responsibility of informed choice. "Now that you know, what will you do?" is an oft-repeated question I pose(d) to my students, adding the rejoinder, "when confronted with injustice, will you choose action, or will you be complicit?" This is what I did, in response to what I "knew then" and believed was the appropriate action.

A Need for Research about Eventful Teaching in English Language Arts Education

While Badiou's ideas have been discussed in the context of social studies, and philosophy of education, I have yet to fully discuss them within the context of high school English Language Arts education. I thus introduce the Badiouian educational event within the context of my teaching practices in this domain as a contribution to educational scholarship in this field. In my view, Badiou's notion of event offers a novel lens through which to examine both my pedagogy and the eventful possibilities for the ELA curriculum. Furthermore, Badiou's lack of in-depth analysis of the realm of education offers a unique opportunity for my research to speak to this gap.

In this chapter, I have explored how Badiou and my eventful experiences help me investigate the *why* of my teaching practice. I have attempted to trace the origins of my own educational events as I experienced them in my course work with Professors Eppert and den Heyer. I showed how Professor Eppert's courses instilled in me a need to invite my students to encounter texts that might seize them with a view to understanding their role in climate change, and more generally, the reality of what I now understand to be our neoliberal situation. My coursework with Professor den Heyer helped me re-cognize that

the medium is also the message and one's pedagogical approach also affects the eventful possibilities of teaching.

The sum of these eventful experiences in my two graduate courses have led to where I am now: completing a dissertation that seeks to help me understand both the necessity and methodology of inviting my students to experience their own eventful refractive encounters in my English Language Arts classes, encounters that will hopefully help them re-cognize how the current situation is untenable both environmentally and socio-politically. In order to develop this rationale, the next chapter will offer a review of neoliberalism in the context of curriculum studies, of educational literature in English Language Arts curriculum and pedagogy; and, a discussion of teacher identity. This literature review connects the existing literature to the aims of my study and serves to identify the gaps in the existing literature to which my study speaks.

Chapter Three

Neoliberalism, ELA Education, and Curriculum: A Literature Review

Introduction

I begin this literature review with a quote from Maxine Greene (1986) who provides a touchstone for the themes I will be exploring. In this passage, Greene contemplates the possibilities for teaching as something other than the dissemination of knowledge in service of schooling geared towards exam preparation and career training:

> [As] teachers learning along with those we try to *provoke* to learn, we may be able to inspire hitherto unheard voices. We may be able to *empower* people to rediscover their own memories and *articulate* them in the presence of others, whose space they can share. *Such a project demands the capacity to unveil and disclose*. It demands the exercise of *imagination*, enlivened by *works of art*, by situations of speaking and making. Perhaps we can at last devise *reflective* communities in the interstices of colleges and schools. Perhaps we can invent ways of freeing people to feel and express indignation, to *break through* the opaqueness, to refuse the silences. We need to teach in such a way as to arouse passion now and then; we need a new camaraderie, a new en masse. These are dark and shadowed times, and we need to live them, standing before one another, open to the world. (Greene, 1986, p. 441, emphasis mine)

Greene helps me articulate a model of curriculum and pedagogy that I aspire to enact in my classroom. This excerpt appears in the final paragraph of an essay Greene (1986) wrote about the need for a critical pedagogy that would provide a "more humane, more just, and more democratic alternative" to education than was available to North

Americans at the time of her writing (p. 427). Although Greene wrote these words over thirty years ago, the need for such an educational alternative in the midst of "dark and shadowed times" is increasingly relevant in the dominant neoliberal worldview and policies of today.

I do wish to offer some insight into how the following literature review is written. In the context of an autoethnographic study and, as Cooper and Lilyea (2022) suggest, the writers voice tends to be more "overtly included" as compared to more social science-based research writing (p. 198). Since the "base unit of analysis" is me, "the author and the researcher," I write the literature review from this perspective (p. 198). I take up the articles, books, and chapters that resonated most with me, that inform me about the literature pertaining to my research, and that help me address the gaps in the existing literature my research speaks to. In this way, my literature review might feel less like a traditional literature review and more like the rest of this dissertation – citations from texts and a more personal analysis and discussion of their implications for my work and for me, alongside some interwoven narrative/memory pieces. Furthermore, because the central thrust of my research is the process through which I have come into an awareness or recognition of various concepts (for example, neoliberalism, curriculum as a field of study), I include some background information about these concepts in order to help me better understand them, and – with autoethnography in mind – in order to contextualize my self and my experiences within them.

As I analyze the evolution of my pedagogy wherein I attempted to move my practice from neoliberal teaching to more democratic and eventful aims, perhaps I might be able to invite others who read my work to experience something similar. In this sense, and in relation to my questions, I dedicate this chapter to discussing the key concepts of

neoliberalism, *critical pedagogy, curriculum theorizing, specifically, English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum,* and *teacher identity*. I will begin by discussing the sociopolitical *situation* in which I find myself, namely, neoliberalism. I will then introduce scholarship on how curriculum theory and its reconceptualization continue to endeavor to respond to the dehumanizing effects of neoliberal interventions in education. I will also draw attention to the field of critical pedagogy as a frame for my teaching aims and practices, and discuss how Badiou's (2001) theories offer fruitful readings of critical pedagogy. Following this discussion, I will review relevant scholarship in English Language Arts and literary engagement as a site of potential for encountering an educational event. I will read and discuss these sociopolitical and educational fields of scholarship through Badiou's notion of event.

The Sociopolitical Situation: A Review of Neoliberal Osmosis

> There is nothing apart from situations. Ontology, if it exists, is *a* situation. (Badiou, 2007, p. 25)

Haunting Memory, June 2006

I hand the cashier my credit card and once the payment goes through, he asks, "Would you like the receipt in the bag?" I respond in the affirmative, and he hands my purchase over to me: a second pair of Prada loafers. These ones are brown. I am now someone who owns more than a pair of Prada shoes. I am amounting to something in my life. I am becoming someone.

I firmly grip the handles of my shopping bag and I inhale the "new bag smell." The smell of the bag and the shoes inside trigger the release of endorphins and everything around me looks a bit glossier, a bit shinier, a bit happier. Because of these

shoes, I am a bit better. I think back to the first time I bought a pair of Prada loafers – my black ones. Those ones were almost seven hundred dollars. They didn't fit my feet very well and the sales rep at Holt Renfrew said he could try to stretch them out for me. I remember putting them on: me, a broke student with a credit card, blending in with the moneyed crowd. Sitting in the store with thousands of dollars' worth of shoes around me. Being offered water – sparkling or flat, sir? – while I wait to be waited on. Feeling powerful. Feeling successful. Feeling like the world was mine and with these shoes, I could now walk proudly. Will that be cash or credit, sir? Credit – for the air miles – but also for the lack of cash. I kept that part to myself.

That memory of my first pair fades as I exhale carbon dioxide and euphoria into my new shoe bag. Now I have a Prada loafer for every occasion. Those same feelings of power and success and self-worth flood my heart and my soul as they did the first time.

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I am wearing my new shoes out with my friends. It's a warm summer night and we're on a patio on Montréal's Rue St. Laurent, drinking to excess. My friends haven't commented on my new shoes. I drunkenly take one shoe off and place it on the table. I pontificate about the magnificence of the craftsmanship and the suppleness of the leather. I beckon them to place their fingers on the stitching in case they doubt my claims. I shout that the styling of this shoe is so classic it will not go out of style – O! How expensive! O! What an investment! I am a perversion of Jesus on the Mount, working to make myself large and my people feel small in my presence and in the presence of my shoes. I offer these shoes not as Jesus offered fish and loaves to feed the hungry but to feed my desire for power and status. I am feeding off of my friends' humiliation and weakness. I am saving myself.

I am haunted by how I acted with my friends. The first time I thought about my actions that night was the next morning, hung-over and full of regret. Regret for what I said to my friends and regret for how I debased myself so publicly. I have not apologized, nor do I think my friends would even remember what transpired – not that I have asked them. Despite these feelings of disappointment, I did not stop obsessing over designer clothing or even questioning my compulsion for expensive things. I even admit today that my regrets – then – had more to do with drinking too much and making an ass of myself than of the content of my asinine comments. Accruing expensive things is what I was supposed to be doing. Buying nice clothes, driving a nice car, living in a nice house – this was the "be all end all." During high school, my friends and I would imagine our future steeped in riches. Going to school was the pathway to achieving these things.

This school-to-materialism pipeline was especially reinforced by a poster I remember seeing: it was captioned "Justification for a Higher Education" and the image was of a beautiful sprawling oceanside mansion, and in the foreground, a five-car garage with a Ferrari, a Porsche, a Mercedes, a Corvette, and one other luxury automobile. Google the caption and see for yourself. The recent version features a helicopter and super-yacht too. How obscene. I would have been in elementary school; when I showed my mom the poster, she ordered one for me (through Scholastic, no less) and it went up in my room. It also went up in my mind, inscribing itself within me. Although I remember my shoe story vividly, the memory of this poster is neither living nor haunting. I remembered this poster only as I wrote my memory of the loafers; both these now-entwined memories surface, especially as I am steeped in readings about neoliberalism and its weaving into the fabric of my life and the world around me. As I will discuss in the next section, as many have noted, our current situation (in a Badiouian sense) would

be termed neoliberal and neoconservative, rooted in a Euro-American imperialist tradition (see Loy, 2002; Smith 2000, 2009).

My Neoliberal Situation: A Fly in a Bottle, Immersed in Water

The author David Foster Wallace (2005) helps illustrate the problem of an unquestionable and invisible situation:

> There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys, how's the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

Like the young fish, it is possible to become so immersed in a situation so as to lack an awareness of it. My water was and is neoliberalism. I say, “was and is” because although I have become aware of the concept of neoliberalism and how it operates in the world, I am still investigating how it operates – clandestinely – within me.

Philosopher Heesoon Bai (2001) opens her wonderful article, “Challenge for Education: Learning to Value the World Intrinsically” with the following remarks:

> In a celebrated passage in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein states his view of philosophy: “What is your aim of philosophy? – To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.” Although his remark was directed specifically at philosophers whom he likened to trapped flies in their metaphysical fly-bottles, it can apply to humanity in general insofar as we are linguistic-conceptual creatures who live by ontological “pictures” of what the world is like and what we are like, all the while assuming these pictures to be the reality itself. This unconsciousness happens because we have internalized – that is, reified– these pictures through having been socialized into particular historical, sociocultural, intellectual,

religious, and other personal and institutional contexts of situatedness. (p. 4)

Before I can attempt to shew the fly (me) out of its bottle (my conceptions of teacher identity, curriculum, and pedagogy), I need to understand the nature of the bottle itself. Where does it end, where does it begin; where might there be an opening to fly out of? If, as Bai (2001) suggests, these ontological pictures have been internalized, it is very likely that they have been rendered invisible; there is an *image* of a world that has been drawn around us beyond our recognition of it as such. If an autoethnography of my educational events helps me understand that I trapped myself within the bottle of empty or neoliberal teacher identity and pedagogy, my research might contribute to helping others recognize the same. In this next section, I provide an overview of neoliberalism including its history and its continued manifestations. After this overview, I discuss the more specific implications of neoliberalism for education.

McChesney's (1999) writing on neoliberalism was helpful in my understanding of what it is and its implications. According to McChesney, neoliberalism has been described as "the defining political economic paradigm of our time" (p. 7). McChesney maintains that this paradigm allows for a small group of "private interests" to "control as much as possible of social life" in the pursuit of profit maximization (p. 7). A significant consequence of neoliberalism, according to McChesney is the stripping of all that is democratic from democracy, leaving a "depoliticized citizenry marked by apathy and cynicism" (p. 7). Elsewhere, he writes, "neoliberalism is the immediate and foremost enemy of genuine participatory democracy, not just in the United States but across the planet, and will be for the foreseeable future" (p. 11). Operating under the guise of democracy, neoliberalism aims to mask its control of social and political life using the language of the "free market" (p. 7; see also Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Chomsky, 1999;

Harvey, 2005; Smith, 2014). While these authors each discuss the notion of neoliberalism, I was drawn to Boas and Gans-Morse (2009) as they explore how neoliberalism, as a term, is deployed in academic scholarship, and, the ways in which it often purposefully, in their view, is avoided.

Boas and Gans-Morse (2009) describe how those aligned with a neoliberal version of free-market capitalism rarely apply the term neoliberalism; however, it has come to constitute a pejorative connotation widely used by critics of laissez-faire approaches to market rule. Boas and Gans-Morse note that although it is "not a bad word" *per se,* "virtually *no one* identifies as a neoliberal" in spite of scholars applying this term to those they seek to identify as enactors of such policies (p. 140). The question must be asked here, then, what to make of this "asymmetrical" deployment of the term neoliberalism (p. 140). This finding is relevant to my inquiry in a fascinating way. If neoliberals seldom identify as such and if, when the term is used, its connotations are negative, then what emerges for me is a system intent in rendering itself as covert as possible – not in practice, but in name. The covert operation of neoliberalism, in this sense, might lead to a particular kind of subjectivity, one that is engaged in neoliberal practice yet not fully aware of this truth. This key finding of their work was revelatory, in this sense, for my own understanding of my neoliberal subjectivity; regarding neoliberal subjectivity in education research, my work addresses a lack of scholarship that speaks to what teaching might offer for rendering neoliberal subjectivity less covert.

A key curriculum theorist who infuses his writing with rich and varied sociopolitical histories is David Smith (2000, 2009, 20013, 20014). In his writings, he provides an overview of the history of neoliberalism that bears upon my autoethnographic inquiry into educational events especially in the context of my English

Language Arts teaching. Over a series of insightful articles, Smith traces the origins of neoliberalism to its Euro-American and Protestant roots. For Smith, the logic that would eventually give rise to today's globalization, with neoliberalism and neoconservatism as its economic and political arms – began when the papacy enacted reforms that recognized the State as "a new eschatological dispensation of heaven now being on earth as a political reality" (Smith, 2000, p. 7; see also Loy, 2002). This dispensation, Smith argues, in addition to individualism and self-determination's newfound virtuousness during the times of the Renaissance and Protestant reformation, offer the lineage for its progeny: globalization, neoliberalism, and, neoconservatism. Over time, accumulation – of wealth, material, land, capital, etc. – "became a sign of divine favor and moral superiority" with "poverty a mark of personal weakness and lack of self-discipline" (p. 7).

Understanding the ways economic and political policies grew out of, and continue to be entwined with, the creation of a literal heaven-on-earth, helps me understand the allure of the materialistic and capitalistic world. My Prada shoes call out to me as Jesus did so many times: In me, you will be saved! This is the prophecy of profit: it is easier for a rich man to enter heaven than it is for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle; however, the rich man can simply buy his way in, along with a bigger needle for his camel. It becomes the domain of the rich man to demand access to heaven and finance his ability to do so. Neoliberal historian David Harvey (2005) might suggest that the wealthy class' desire to circumvent any type of restriction, in the name of personal freedom, is a hallmark of neoliberalism. At the policy level, entrenching such freedoms (albeit, not for all) is fundamental to how neoliberalism operates.

Although globalization and market logic have been around for hundreds of years (Smith, 2002, p. 22), neoliberalism as philosophy and policy congealed through the work

of theorists Fredrich Hayek (1899-1992) and Milton Friedman (1912-2006) and was enacted by Ronald Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (Smith, 2014) and Deng Xiaoping in China (Harvey, 2005). Moreover, a neoliberal ruling class, as antithetical to a genuine democracy, might also be traced back to economist Friedrich Hayek, as Smith (2014) notes: "Hayek believed in leadership by elites and that the gifted few should be entitled to special privileges…democracy is a problem for those Hayek called the 'Originals'" (p. 22).

Smith (2014) describes this "deliberate but hidden" operation as "hypocrisy" (p. 23). Elsewhere Smith suggests, "the dominating [neoliberal] logic of freedom…is in fact a non-freedom operating in the name of freedom" (2009, p. 98). Following this notion, and understood as situated within a Protestant ethic of self-determination, it is no wonder that so many (myself included) accept Market freedom as human freedom. Since market success and power (i.e. profit) depends on the exploitation of others, so too has our conceptualization of freedom moved away from human interconnectedness. This neoliberal notion of freedom is relevant for my autoethnographic study of English Language Arts teaching. Through an analysis of my experiences of teaching, I share my findings about how teaching ought to invite students to reconsider the very notion of freedom and to determine, as Harvey (2005) describes, whether the "good freedoms" have in fact "been lost" (p. 37). The novel *Ishmael*, whose central focus is in many ways about captivity, can be helpful in that regard (the teaching of which I discuss in Chapter 5).

As part of my literature review of neoliberalism, I sought to explore neoliberalism in the context of curriculum studies. I searched google scholar and this yielded a vast number of results. I found that many articles discussed neoliberalism and curriculum

outside of a Canadian and American context (often in non-Western nations); others did so within the field of citizenship education and other still looked at higher education. Including the term “secondary” narrowed down the field considerably as did including “English Language Arts” in my search. Considering the vastness of these results, I narrowed my search to authors who addressed neoliberalism more generally (in order to help me understand it as a system) and to those who took up neoliberalism in the context of secondary curriculum studies. In what follows, I discuss how many articles and chapters that are relevant to this dissertation offer insights into the particularities of my work. I will outline their key points and how they bear upon my autoethnographic inquiry into my educational events.

First, I was drawn to Lucinda McKnight’s (2016) discussion of neoliberalism in the context of secondary English Language Arts teacher identity. She explored how images or “figurative ideals” of teaching are “discursively created by a neoliberal educational regime” with the ideal figure of the neoliberal teacher as “phallic” (pp. 473-474). This regime is understood as “common sense” or ideologically “neutral” and is devoid of a language that would invite questioning dominant perspectives or the ability to “imagine alternatives” (p. 475). McKnight suggests education is still largely colonized by Ralph Tyler’s (1947) instrumentalist curriculum rationale. She further suggests that data, surveillance, and accountability imply that there is never enough growth, and that “teachers are [therefore] not phallic enough” to perform the figure of a “masculinist warrior hero…[who] acts out [in teaching] the competitive bravado of business, of the trading floor, of the boardroom…in schools” (p. 477). At issue here for me is not so much that these figures exist, but how these images of ideal teachers and teaching become inscribed or woven into the fabric of both a social imaginary and an individual’s

imaginary. This inscription or weaving occurs in a way that mistakes one of a possible multitude of images for the only possible image of what it means to be a teacher.

This move from *a* one to *the* one – from a multitude of possibilities to a single truth imposed onto all – falls under the purview of what Archer (2008) calls "the pernicious reach of neoliberalism" (as cited in Passy, 2013, p. 1072). I was drawn to Passy's research because she too explores how neoliberal reforms in education contribute to shaping not only teacher identity but pedagogy too. Her findings are relevant in the context of my autoethnographic inquiry because I am interested in how my own teacher identity, pedagogy, and curricular engagements were and continue to be implicated by neoliberalism. Passy describes this perniciousness as the way the discourses of neoliberalism "are absorbed into the psyche" (p. 1072). What has been absorbed into my psyche? Education as a means to richly rewarding ends? At all (human and environmental) costs? Surely, I would not permit myself to be willingly neoliberal in my aims and practices? However, having been steeped in the tea of neoliberalism, I fear these neoliberal discourses have penetrated me such that the ideological "concentrations" inside of me are "more nearly equal" to those on the outside as per the process of osmosis (Osmosis: The process of gradual or unconscious assimilation of ideas, knowledge, influences, etc. [Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2019]). In Chapter 7, I discuss more fully the relationship between neoliberalism and my teaching practice.

In my view, the outcome of neoliberal osmosis is similar to the effects of what Mitchell and Weber (1999) term a "cumulative cultural text" (p. 166). I reference Mitchell and Weber as relevant to my inquiry because they suggest that a cumulative cultural text is informed by "knowledge and images embedded in popular culture that might be taken as common ground regardless if people agree or not on its value or

significance" and that people "insert" themselves into these texts when identifying, for example, what it means to be a good teacher (p. 164). In this sense, they argue that the definition of being a good teacher is quite literally media-ted by the image(s) of teaching perpetuated in popular culture. I wish to add that not only do people insert themselves into these texts, these texts insert themselves into people. Although Mitchell and Weber focus on popular culture as the author of these texts, our cumulative institutional (schools, government, religion, etc.) texts also mediate desire with the same disregard for personal interest. Acting on these desires while unaware of their origins often serves the interest of the institutions, for better or worse. Mitchell and Weber's notion of self and world as text is relevant to my autoethnographic research especially because the stories of my experiences as a student and teacher become the text I analyze and interpret with a view to grasping the deeper meaning of those stories and memories I share. I explore how an autoethnographic study might achieve grasping this deeper meaning in Chapter 4; for now I will say that autoethnography leads me to better understand culture writ large by recognizing the way culture is writ small, within myself.

While not explicitly addressing neoliberalism per se, educational psychoanalytical scholar Deborah Britzman (1986) describes a teacher's institutional biography and how it can, "if unexamined, propel the cultural reproduction of authoritarian teaching [and cultural] practices" (p. 443). Her writing is relevant to my work because I wish to frame neoliberalism as the cumulative sociopolitical text that I have been reproducing and that, through examination, I might actively resist. In this sense, the unconscious needs to be made conscious and in my opinion, Badiou's (2001) theory of a post-eventful truth process can achieve this requirement as what the event brings to light is the unrecognized implications of the subject's relationship to a taken-for-granted situation. I am reckoning

with the awareness that I have been institutionalized, an awareness that was not apparent to me, especially as a teacher relatively new to the profession – I had only been teaching for six years when I began my doctoral studies; I wonder how many other teachers there are, similarly institutionalized and unaware, teaching in Alberta, let alone the rest of the world?

Neoliberalism has especially wrought particular consequences for education and educators, although education has also been its handmaiden. According to Smith (2000), education long served as a space for the "production of elites" to ensure the reproduction of the social order, along with "the training of the masses to serve the machineries" of bureaucracy (p. 10). The domain of education, post-World War II through the 1970s, came to be understood as a way for "social advancement," and became a commodity to be purchased; again, evidence of the social hierarchy as analogous to proximity to the divine – the dispensation continues (p. 11). How can you claim to be divine when such ascendency to divinity depends on a "silenced relationship to the Other (other peoples, cultures, groups, gods)" (p. 11)? My digression aside, the commodification of education continues today as various groups, such as the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) literally and figuratively invest in curriculum development on a multi-national scale (Smith, 2000, p. 13) as their mantra of creating "human capital" educational models infuses schools and the teaching profession with waves of "paranoia and uncertainty" while engendering the "complete collapse of any older virtue of learning being valued for learning's sake" (p. 13). Paramount to the value of education is how much it "serves" and values the Market (p. 13). What can be educational about education when institutions of education have inherited "blindness to such issues as the environment and human rights" (Smith, 2000, p. 13)? Smith's comments here are cogent

for my autoethnographic research as I am investigating the extent to which a teacher might resist serving neoliberalism.

Returning to Wallace (2005) and Bai (2001), and read through the lens of Badiou (2001), a human subject's picture or image of the world exists as a *seemingly* fixed structure but is in actuality only a permutation of multiple other potential permutations, able to be reconfigured into a different "version," given certain events. In the chapter that precedes this one, my stories of being a student describe the current ontological image or fly-bottle I find myself attempting to re/image/ine or fly out of. At stake for me is not only the awareness that other permutations of a situation are possible, but how my process of rearticulating my *self* has been continually thwarted by the forces of neoliberalism and how this re-articulation has to be negotiated within a hegemony of existing neoliberal desires and educational circumstances.

In other words, awareness of neoliberalism is not enough. I must also become aware of how it is deeply inscribed in me and in the very fabric of our sociopolitical and educational situation; so deep, in fact, as to continue to operate covertly in spite of my aims to act (and teach) against it. If I am not able to overwrite these neoliberal inscriptions within my being and elsewhere, I wonder if I may as well quit teaching. However, I cannot wait to be "free and clear" before teaching toward an event, since it may not ever be possible to completely separate myself from neoliberalism. Here is where I believe humility might play an essential role in mitigating the possibility of neoliberalism undermining my teaching aims. In Chapter 7, I elaborate on the relationship between humility and teaching in the context of a neoliberal situation.

Finally, I wonder, how the curriculum field has – or has not – responded to neoliberal investments in the West. To help me respond to these questions, I turn to a

group of curriculum theorists known as the Reconceptualists and their response(s) to the situation of neoliberalism. Here, I turn to Pinar (2012), who writes that "informed by theory in the humanities, arts, and interpretive social sciences, curriculum theory is the scholarly effort to understand the curriculum" (p. 1). Engagement with curriculum should take the form of a "complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2012, p.181). Pinar moves beyond conversations as mere "chit chat" (Aoki, in Pinar, 2012, p. 189). Curriculum conversations are also more than "a simple exchange of messages or only the transmission of information" (p. 189). According to Pinar (2012), curriculum as conversation is complicated as it demands "true human presence" and is a "matter of attunement" (p. 190, see also Pinar, 2011). This complicated conversation is also a form of communication described as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed (Carey, as cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 1).

Curriculum, as a field, has not always explicitly concerned itself with understanding the intersections of education, politics, and subjectification; instead, the early movements of curriculum reform [1920-1980] primarily concerned themselves with "incremental improvement" of the "practice" of curriculum and not its theoretical underpinnings (Pinar, 2004, p. 15). *Curriculum development* was the dominant paradigm prior to this movement; development, in this sense, refers more to "the real world where teachers and principals deal with day-to-day problems" of teaching practice, testing, and the measurement of learning (Berman, 1995, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 15). Curriculum scholars began to understand this "ahistorical and atheoretical" approach to curriculum theory as limiting "the horizon" of the field (pp. 14-15). This vision of curriculum *development* began to evolve in a complicated manner.

In the traditional curriculum field, the term curriculum subsumed its adjacent noun – development – pointing to a broadening of the horizon. However, Pinar (2004) suggests that despite addressing curriculum inquiry, "[Schubert's] major synoptic [curriculum] text of the 1980s" entitled *Curriculum*, still lacked a clearly mapped articulation of what was to emerge in curriculum scholarship, namely, an inquiry into "the relations *among* the school subjects, and their relationships to noninstitutionalized elements such as race and gender" (p. 16). At the same time, there emerged declarations of this traditional curriculum field as "moribund" (Schwab, 1970, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 193), as "in crisis" (Reid, 1978, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 204), and "arrested" (Pinar, 1979, as cited in Pinar 2004, p. 231). Recognizing the instrumentalist view of the curriculum field, Pinar and other curriculum scholars, sought to reassess and resuscitate curriculum theory from the grips of the reaper. According to Pinar (2004), the *1975 ASCD Yearbook (Schools in Search of Meaning)* was a response by curriculum scholars acknowledging the need to be "aware of the role that schooling played in maintaining the status quo of the working and ruling classes" (p. 211).

In the ASCD yearbook (1975), authors advocated continued interrogation around those who truly benefitted from the current systems of schooling, and who the decision-makers were. Central for the work of some Reconceptualist scholars was recovering (or perhaps uncovering) the figure of the human as the subject of education. For Huebner (1975), this meant recognizing that school "is but a manifestation of public life" and that educators should "seek a more just public world" lest the alternative arise: satisfaction with "the existing social order [wherein teachers become] the silent majority who embrace conservatism" (as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 214). Pinar makes explicit the "central theory" that curriculum be understood as a "political text" (p. 221). He underscores

curriculum's political agency by quoting Donald Bateman's prescient axiom, that "the curriculum of domination is political; subtly or blatantly, by commission or omission, it teaches racism, sexism, classism" (as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 222). As I am a product of the sum total of the curricular experiences I have absorbed, it follows that my sense of self can be read as a political text, one that my autoethnographic research reads as such, and as a result, offers insights into how we might invite our students to see themselves in a similar fashion. In many ways, this invitation to students has been addressed, however, through the work and theory of critical pedagogy. I wish to discuss, in the next section, the nature of critical pedagogy and to then read critical pedagogy scholarship through the lens of Badiou's (2001) theoretical framework of event.

A Critical Pedagogue with Authoritarian Urges

Tracing its roots in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Kincheloe (2004) describes the numerous scholars who influenced and shaped critical pedagogy, ranging from W. E. B. Du Bois, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Michael Apple, Ira Shor, Roger I. Simon, bell hooks, Deborah Britzman, and Patti Lather, among others. Although some of these scholars predate the formal advent of critical pedagogy, and each scholar offers a particular critical perspective (race, gender, psychoanalysis, etc.), Kincheloe charts a through line to identify their common critical aims, writing that "To understand the malevolent workings of power…critique the blinders of Eurocentrism…to discern a global system of inequity supported by diverse forms of hegemony and violence…[to] address the needs of victims of oppression and the suffering they must endure" (p. 50).

It is to these aims that my teaching aspires. However, I have come to realize that my teaching practices have often stood in opposition to these aims. I was, and perhaps

still am in some ways, an authoritarian critical pedagogue, as intimated by Ross' (2018) critique of critical pedagogy that I will address shortly.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines authoritarianism as "the enforcement or advocacy of strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom" and the "lack of concern for the wishes and opinions of others." When I suggest that I am an authoritarian critical pedagogue, it is not a claim that critical pedagogy is aligned with authoritarianism. If I had to choose a verb to characterize the central aim of critical pedagogy, it would be *to change*, although not all critical pedagogues prefer this term (Eppert, 2013, for example, writes about social or environmental transformation). In many cases, however, the word change appears throughout the writing of those who identify themselves as critical pedagogues or who engage in critical teaching in order to instigate a change in the hegemonic sociopolitical and cultural power structures that privilege some and oppress others (for examples, see: Apple, 2013; Ellsworth, 1989; Giroux, 2007; Kincheloe, 2004; Rossatto, 2006; Shor, 1980, 1992; Wink, 2011). Though change in this context connotes social change, I had (mis)understood change and transformation as a call to change and transform my students, a critical distinction I discuss further in Chapter 7.

Among the many changes a critical pedagogue might consider, my concern is in addressing neoliberalism and how it relies on education as an institution in order to maintain itself. According to critical pedagogy scholars, today's power structures mainly serve the interests of neoliberals and neoconservatives who use the institutions at their disposal (government, prisons, schools, etc.) to both maintain and reproduce their social, political, economic, and cultural dominance over those who might threaten it (see: Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Shor, 1992). What has emerged from

my research on my experiences of teaching (Chapters 5 and 6) is an insight into how teachers may or may not contribute to reinforcing this dominance, something I elaborate on in Chapter 7.

Teaching in alignment with the aims of critical pedagogy is not without risk to the educator who attempts to do so. Such a literal undertaking – an attempt to wrest power from the higher-ups – is described as being “insubordinate” and “radical” (Steinberg, 2007, p. ix), “dangerous” (Giroux, 2007, p. 1), and “revolutionary” (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 161). Noted critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (2007) suggests that the dangerous, radical, and revolutionary thrust of critical pedagogy stems from its central task of “educating students to become critical agents who actively question…come to terms with their own power as critical agents…[and cultivate] a healthy skepticism about power” (p. 1). In my view, the risky implications of being a critical pedagogue confer a cost of engaging in such endeavors (being reprimanded or losing one’s job, for example), a cost that educators may feel outweighs the benefits of teaching in alignment with such aims. Furthermore, and in relation to my nascent affiliation with critical pedagogy, the desires to change or transform also carry with them some risk, especially considering Badiou’s (2001) notion of the militant figure produced by an eventful encounter. In this sense, and what I discuss more fully later in this chapter and in Chapter 7, lived experience has taught me that there exists a need to temper my militancy when considering change as a pedagogical or curricular aim and more critically, what I understood as the subject to be changed. It is for this reason, although I initially desired to change and transform my students, I prefer to situate my teaching aims within a more Badiouian notion of awareness or re-cognition. Although Badiou (2001, 2007) does discuss the transformative nature of his event, I focus on awareness and re-

cognition in order to help me create a perimeter or boundary that seeks to protect my students against potentially over-zealous militancy on my part. A theorist whose work bears upon my autoethnographic study of my two events in my doctoral courses that started me on the road to rethink my teacher identity and student-centric transformative teaching aims is E. Wayne Ross (2018).

Ross (2018) helped me understand my educational events, that seemed to thread upon my shattering realization that I am a neoliberal subject, and that therefore I am challenged to teach in ways that resist this truth. Furthermore, this understanding beckoned the shattering realization that that the way I started teaching for social change was insufficient. Ross identifies power dynamics as central to the failings of critical pedagogy and its (according to Ross) inherent desire for change or transformation; however, he places these problems squarely in the hands of critical pedagogues themselves. Although Ross writes from the perspective of social studies education, his critiques of critical pedagogy lend themselves to English Language Arts teaching and warrant discussion here. Ross describes the “educational messiah complex” that transforms critical educators into “priests” or “evangelists” seeking to “mediate the everyday lives” (p. 376) of their congregants, so to speak.

Ross (2018) names the enemies of critical pedagogy as inclusive of its practitioners, who knowingly or not, often “exempt” themselves from critiquing its/their own “underlying assumptions, pronouncements, clichés, and received wisdom” (p. 371). Ross attempts to return critical pedagogy to its more radical and “dangerous” roots by thinking how critical educators might invite students to re-cognize a sense of agency in the world (p. 385). Such a focus on activism – that is, helping students become active – rescues critical pedagogy from its potential toward priestly and transformative

meandering; Ross argues that absent a teleological mission, students "create themselves on the basis of their own self-interpretations" (p. 386). What I understand from Ross's critique is that the teleos of such activism ought to be imagined by the students, and not prescribed by the critical pedagogue; furthermore, the educator ought to permit a student's right to refuse such activism without penalty or sanction. In sum, the problem isn't that critical pedagogy advocates social change; rather, that the minutia (and absolute requirement) of such change can potentially be dictated by the critical pedagogue. Ross concludes by reminding critical educators to eschew any messianic tendencies they might have, and to have faith, instead, on students' abilities to "speak for themselves" (p. 387). Of course, the critical pedagogy field is not unified in its philosophy and practice. McLaren and Kincheloe's (2007) edited volume, *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now* acts as an assessment of, and, speaks to the many convergences and divergences between practitioners in the field. In her preface to this volume, Steinberg (2007) embraces the tensions in the field, writing, "[we] don't need to agree with one another, rather, [we] need to passionately engage in the radical fire of discursive disagreement" (p. x). Elsewhere in this volume, there are calls for a critical pedagogy that is more critical (Macedo, 2007); more politically engaged (Martin, 2007); and, more decolonizing (Grande, 2007).

As I think through the implications of critical pedagogy for my teacher identity and ELA pedagogy, and for my insight into myself as bearing the ethical responsibility to address world crisis, I realize that simply having these student-centered transformative aims is insufficient. I have learned that the pedagogical trajectory these aims might produce warrant further investigation (see Chapter 7). What is heartening in this regard, and cogent to my dissertation, is there is no single way of "doing" critical pedagogy; my

contribution to research on critical pedagogy is to offer an autoethnographic account (read: insider's account) of what I understood and experienced as critical pedagogy's potential limitations and its generative nature as enacted through a Badiouian theory of event in a High School English Language Arts classroom.

Literature and the English Language Arts Classroom

Having introduced neoliberalism, curriculum theory, and critical pedagogy, I now turn to a brief literature review on English Language Arts; my teaching is in this subject area and my educational events compel me to reimagine what is possible in an English Language Arts classroom. First, in this section I will provide a brief history of English Language Arts curriculum because it was important for me, in my autoethnographic study, to more fully understand the history and culture of what it means to teach this subject. I then explore the relationship between neoliberalism and English language arts curriculum and instruction. In that section, I question how neoliberalism bears upon the ELA curriculum. Through my educational events, I began not only to question the potential neoliberal implications of my pedagogical approaches to teaching but also the ELA curriculum itself.

A (Very) Brief History of the English Language Arts

The English Language Arts, as a course of study, emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, with most of the emphasis being on the separate instruction of spelling, grammar, literary history, reading, and the like (Applebee & Purves, 1992). Though they did feature literary works, they primarily served as exemplars of proper form and structure, and less for their aesthetic values (Applebee & Purves, 1992). The use of literary works did evolve and, in eighteenth-century England, was seen as "a vital instrument [for social values'] deeper entrenchment and dissemination" (Eagleton, 2008,

p. 15). In America, literature was also deployed toward socializing ends (Eppert, 2008; Willinsky, 1998). Texts were selected based on their “ethical value” and aesthetic beauty (Applebee & Purves, 1992, p. 727). Furthermore, these ethics were often grounded in puritanical morals, a prime example of which was *The New England Primer*, which “dominated” elementary schools for close to 100 years (p. 727).

As literary texts were understood to possess a “power to do good,” they also “earned the power to do evil” (Applebee & Purves, 1992, p. 727). According to Applebee and Purves (1992), debates raged about whether novels or plays were too dangerous to be taught in classrooms; Horace Mann argued, “novels should not be taught because they appealed to emotions rather than to reason” (as cited in Applebee & Purves, 1992, p. 727). These ethical and moral concerns, along with a view to the myriad ways literature offered opportunity for the study of “classics” and literary “appreciation,” eventually ensured that English Language Arts “had a place” in schools across North America (pp. 726-727). As English became a predominant course of study, the question of English Language Arts curriculum emerged.

According to Applebee and Purves (1992), among English Language Arts’ first iterations was the notion that the curriculum should be one of “experience” wherein “the ideal curriculum consists of well-selected experiences” (p. 733). However, the pressures exerted on secondary English students from college entrance requirements were enough to spark protest from English teachers, and in the midst of these protestations, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), held its first meeting in 1911, in Chicago (NCTE, 2018). On its website, the NCTE’s mission statement is to “promote the development of literacy, the use of language to construct personal and public worlds and to achieve full participation in society, through the learning and teaching of English and

the related arts and sciences of language" (NCTE, 2018). Here too, are echoes of the socialization, qualification, and educational dimensions of education. I wonder, what tensions might exist when the personal and public worlds students construct express a desire to overthrow or dismantle the society they are expected to fully participate in?

Literary engagement also acts as a site of resistance to hegemonic narratives that are variously reproduced culturally and institutionally (Eppert, 2008; Maginess, 2019; Willinsky, 1998b). Willinsky (1998b) suggests that literary theory remedies, to some extent, the "risk" of being acted on by "unstated theories that govern the unfolding of the school day" (p. 249). This counter-hegemonic resistance is sometimes critiqued as "imposing another, more up to date hegemony" (Maginess, 2019, p. 141). Römhild (2019) and Felski (2008) would agree with this idea; Römhild (2019) suggests that this imposition stems from an "academic mistrust" of student responses to literature (p. 51). To the above question and to the counter-hegemonic critique, literary theorist Terry Eagleton (2008) offers further insight.

Eagleton (2008) suggests that, as an end unto itself, literary theory and criticism "has helped, wittingly or not, to sustain and reinforce [the] assumptions" of the political system it attempts to critique (p. 171). In my view, he argues that, in English-speaking schools, literary criticism is a matter of discourse mastery; what matters is less the content of one's ideas or interpretations, but that you proficiently "manipulate a particular language in acceptable ways" (p. 175). If schooling's ultimate aim is qualification and socialization, or what Eagleton calls becoming "certificated," such certification is contingent on being able to "speak this particular language" rather than "what you personally think or believe" (p. 175). Eagleton claims that the entire project of studying literature – with or without literary theory – is an exercise in reproducing and maintaining

colonizing interests: “Literary studies, in other words, are a question of the signifier, not of the signified” (p. 175). In my view – and following Eagleton’s claim, critical pedagogy’s revolutionary bent, insofar as it is language and discourse based, becomes diminished, as it must occur in the master’s language and discourse – the acquisition and mastery of which is, itself, a colonizing act.

It is funny, how, for the longest time, when my students would ask out of frustration why ELA 30-1 was necessary for all bachelor degree program entrance, I would respond, “because it demonstrates your ability to think deeply and to contemplate the ambiguities of the human condition.” Perhaps. You must do so, at a standard of excellence, in the English Language. But I digress. However, while making his claim, Eagleton (2008) suggests that literary criticism may be rescued; he argues that what matters is not the method of criticism but the motivation for engaging with a text in the first place (p. 183). According to Eagleton, starting from the “strategic” approach, the rhetoric of literary criticism becomes akin to “discourse theory” or “cultural studies,” wherein it can then “contribute to making us all better people” (p. 183). This approach also broadens what is considered literature or literary and, in so doing, is better suited to a critique of dominant cultural discourse that might lead to “the production of one’s own” discourse (p. 185).

Thinking the English Language Arts Through Badiou

In coming to Badiou after my exposure to his work in den Heyer’s course and also after reading Eppert (2008) on Levinas and literature education, I became interested in what Badiou might offer English Language Arts. What Eagleton (2008) shares with Badiou (2001) is a belief in the limitation of language’s capacity to re-articulate subjectivity that stands on the outside of a dominant cultural discourse. For Eagleton,

acknowledging the way foreign languages, dialects, or registers are excluded and marginalized in North American schools is to "recognize in the sharpest way that critical discourse is power. To be on the inside of discourse itself is to be blind to this power" (p. 177). In this sense, being on the inside is parallel to speaking the language of opinions and knowledge interior to the pre-eventful situation. Eagleton suggests that dominant discourse has the power to "police" language, writing, and determines what is considered literature, and therefore, worthy of study (p. 177). The parallel to Badiou's discussion of the implications of language would be the codification of opinions and knowledge into laws, or common sense that regulate and maintain a situation. From this standpoint, just as in Eagleton's discourse theory, that which was "thinkable" but previously "constrained by the [dominant] language itself" might be articulated in a new way, breaking with the dominant discourse (Badiou, 2001).

Finally, the truth-procedure can be considered the endeavor to (re)articulate what was previously believed to be unbelievable. In this sense, I am not promoting any particular literary theory *per se*; instead, I will approach reading from the standpoint that it might invite an encounter with an event, and through the ensuing truth-procedure, rupture the dominant discourse of signs, opinions, and knowledge in the name of the subject's capacity to articulate a truth to power. In my teaching of novels, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, I offer as data the ways in which I invite my students to read with a view to instigating a refractively eventful encounter that might likewise rupture the dominant neoliberal discourse. In my findings (Chapter 7), I will offer an analysis of the various approaches to reading novels my students experienced in my classes.

The tension between power and knowledge and the aims of teaching is a contemporary concern (Apple, 2013) but not a novel one. In W. D. Lewis's (1912) article

entitled "The Aim of the English Course" in the inaugural issue of NCTE's *The English*, he laments: "Have we [English teachers] aimed at the wrong thing? Whatever may be our theory as to the reason for teaching literature, we have, consciously or unconsciously, taught for knowledge rather than for power" (p. 11). Lewis blames this error on many of the same problems I hear English teachers complain about today. He decries the deference to a literary canon instead of books that appeal to students' interests. Lewis identifies teachers' proclivities toward the over-analysis and "dissection" of literature that denies students the joy of reading for pleasure (p. 11); Kelly Gallagher (2009) has termed this notion "readicide: the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (p. 2). Lewis (1912) links this practice of joyless literary engagement as a means of preparing students for college entrance requirements and exams, much in the same way I hear – and feel – the pressure to teach to the test. Although the Alberta Diploma exams are now only worth thirty percent of a student's overall course grade, I write this dissertation against the backdrop of political change in Alberta; in our provincial election in Spring 2019, the United Conservative Party (UCP) ran – and won – on an education platform that sought to raise the value of the diploma exam back to fifty percent, its weighting prior to the reduction to thirty percent by the New Democratic Party, over four years ago[12] (UCP, 2019, p. 58). As I wrote earlier, this is the same party that is seeking to whitewash the current curriculum by removing references to residential schools.

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[12] This weighting adjustment never materialized, however. Currently, as of June 2022, the diploma exams are weighted at 10%, reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this reduction is considered temporary and there is no indication what the weighting of the exams will be at the start of the 2022-2023 school year.

Returning to Lewis (1912), it is with pained humor that I read his assessment of English teaching. These and other issues that plagued English teaching then, continue unabated today: universities blame secondary teachers for ill-prepared students; over-crowded classrooms; English-language learners; too much marking; students who discard essay feedback without reading it, not enough time, and so on. Richard Smith, writing in the same journal as Lewis in 1985, cites Lewis's article to comment on the "'contemporary' crisis in literacy" (p. 22). This crisis is neither contemporary nor even temporary; it feels ever-present and unlikely to change. I am pessimistic. If the profession of English teachers has not been able to adequately address these issues over the last hundred-plus years, why should I expect it to now or in the future? However pessimistic I might be, I do see an opportunity for English Language Arts teaching, and literary engagement. In her presidential address at the NCTE's annual conference, Carol Jago (2011) opines, "reading literature offers ballast to a Gradegrinding, facts based education" (p. 338).

In spite of the difficulties arising from helping my students with their knowledge of English, I do believe that reading can still invite the possibility to interrogate and complicate the notion of power in and through an encounter with an educational event. In the sections that follow, I wish to offer an overview of Alberta's English Language Arts Program of Study. My purpose in doing so is to discuss the aims of this curriculum document and why the English Language Arts classroom acts as an ideal site for my research on the educational event.

The Alberta high school English Language Arts curriculum documents guide my teaching practice. Given my desire to explore how curricular understandings influence my teaching, I will not comment on the pedagogical specifics of this curriculum

document. My interest is not in advancing a particular dogmatic pedagogical approach; I, therefore, delineate along this line and will limit my commentary to the pages of this curriculum document where curricular aims are expressed. I will discuss these aims through the lens of the educational function of education (Biesta, 2010) and then show how reading (and an analysis of its material traces) may be suitable to achieving these aims.

The Alberta English Language Arts Program of Study

In Alberta, high school English Language Arts (ELA) is divided into two streams: the “dash two” courses – ELA 10-2, 20-2, and 30-2 – and the “dash one” courses – ELA 10-1, 20-1, and 30-1. Although these streams share some curricular outcomes, the dash one stream is considered the more “literary” sequence of the two and its grade 12 iteration (ELA 30-1) is the required pre-requisite for any student wishing to pursue a Bachelor degree, if not any program at post-secondary institutions in Alberta (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 6). The achievement standards in the dash two stream are lower than in dash one and students experience a less complex engagement with literary texts (pp. 6-7). I have taught courses in both sequences of the ELA program; the bulk of my teaching experience resides in teaching ELA 30-1.

The introductory pages of the Alberta English Language Arts Program of Study suggests an orientation toward Biesta’s (2010) three functions of schools: qualification, socialization, and subjectification, with a particular focus on the role of literature in achieving these aims. This program suggests, “an appreciation of literature and an ability to use language effectively enhance students’ opportunities to become responsible, contributing citizens and lifelong learners while experiencing success and fulfillment in life” (2003, p. 1). This course of study is designed to contribute to students’ preparation

for "post-secondary studies or the workplace" (p. 1). To this end, students will acquire, through engagement with this program of study, "employability skills" needed for them to "stay in and progress in the world of work" (p. 1). When reading, as per Alberta Learning, students will "grapple with the intricacies of the human condition" and will "develop self-understanding" (p. 1). While the notions of citizenship and employability speak to the qualification and socialization aims, the question of what it means to be human and to develop self-understanding addresses the possibilities of an educational education, or what Biesta (2010) calls "subjectification" (p. 4). I see this educational quality present when it is suggested that the study of literary works will "develop [students'] own creative and cognitive abilities" (p. 1). The critical thinking skills students develop through this course of study allow them to "make sense of and bring order to their world…examine new experiences and knowledge…[and]…become more consciously aware of their own thinking and learning processes to gain greater control of these processes" (p. 2). Finally, Alberta Learning suggests that "when responding to literature personally, critically, and creatively, students reflect upon the human condition and develop and refine their understandings of themselves as human beings" (p. 4). I wish here to complicate these aims and effects of the English Language Arts program of study.

One of the aims of my teaching since my educational events and particularly through critical pedagogy is to trouble this notion of developing students' *own* thinking. Following my earlier discussions of neoliberal osmosis and the inherently political nature of schooling, I realized in the course of my eventful truth process that the self I thought I was did not manifest prior to a particular situation, in the Badiouian sense. My thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions were, in many ways, conditioned by my social condition. As

I discuss in Chapter 7, I wonder to what extent my students' thinking – or mine still – are wholly under the domain of the individual. In other words, and as I put it to my students, "How do the thoughts you think come to think themselves?" Furthermore, if students are to *examine* an experience or knowledge, from what (or whose) perspective(s) should they examine?

I believe (alongside others, see den Heyer, 2008 for example) teachers and students should become more consciously aware of their thinking – and through a critical pedagogy lens – we must come to an awareness of how such thinking is produced and/or "media-ated" (den Heyer, 2010a, p. 1). In my view, this critical awareness is what might open the educational dimension of education wherein a subject may gain more autonomy or agency – power – over their becoming, in contrast to becoming a subject whose articulation of subjectivity is a teleological project of the State. My feeling is that through reading an educational event might be instigated.

My interest lies in whether it is possible to teach toward subjectification aims and how my experience with the educational event informs my teaching of literature with my students. To help me frame what I mean by teaching literature, I turn to the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1995), whose pioneering scholarship in the area of reading and literary pedagogy informs many of the values of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Alberta English Language Arts Program of Study, and my teaching practice.

Rosenblatt and Transactional Reading. A question often heard when discussing literature in my ELA 30-1 classroom is: "But what does this mean, Mr. Piazza, can you please tell us the answer?" How do I respond to this question, as an English Language Arts teacher? When asking my students to read and discuss a text, am I to provide them with the answers to what it is supposed to mean? Do I provide them with multiple-choice

questions to ascertain that they "get" the texts? If I do provide them with my interpretation of a text and on an exam or an essay they parrot my own responses, is this evidence that they have learned, or have been educated? These are some of the questions that provoke me to contemplate my teaching practice and the possibilities it might open or close for my students.

Haunting Memory, Fall 2012. *Good afternoon, class. Today we are going to read this poem together and then I'll put the notes on the board for what it means. Remember that these are the notes that you'll have to memorize so that when we do our poetry test next week, you will be ready for those questions. If you do this right, it should be easy for you to get 100% on that poetry test and that will help boost your marks. Why are we here? Because we need to get our marks up so you can get to post-secondary. How do we get our marks up? Copy the notes, memorize them, and use that information on the test. Once we do this poem, we will complete the second poem and those notes, and we'll end with the third and final poem of the term. Ah – I see there is a question, go ahead. "Will we have to read a different poem and then interpret it on our own?" Good question. No, you will not have to. We're reading these three poems and I'll provide you with what all the symbols and metaphors mean. You still have to know the definitions of different poetic devices – similes, metaphors, personification, and others, but for these poems, I'll tell you how each poet uses these devices and what they mean.*

Prior to my educational events, I considered my role as an English teacher to be that of Chief Interpreter of Text for my students. Through a didactic approach, I would read most, if not all texts aloud in class, offering my insights and interpretations for my students to note down and subsequently reproduce on their quizzes and essays. After my experiences in doctoral course work, I do not believe I should be the sole source of

answers for my students. In fact, I now often try to withhold my personal interpretations of a text in the hopes that my students will discover what a text might mean. This choice to withhold a/the "correct" interpretation is especially precarious as my students prepare to write the diploma exam; these grades are used to apply to post-secondary institutions and this course is required for entrance into any bachelor degree program in Alberta. So, what do I do? How am I to teach literature in light of this tension? Louise Rosenblatt's (1995, 2005) concept of aesthetic reading and reading as a transaction will assist me in exploring possible responses to my questions.

Louise Rosenblatt (1904-2005) is considered an influential scholar in the field of literary theory, specifically reader response theory (Connell, 2008; Hogue Smith, 2017; Rejan, 2017; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016; Wilhelm, 2013). She is cited as one of the first scholars to challenge the New Criticism school of literary theory, one that "advocated precise, technical, objective analysis of a text as a way to legitimate literary studies within the scientific arena of newly emerging fields in social and natural sciences" (Connell, 2008, p. 106). Instead, Rosenblatt sought to include the reader as integral to discovering possible meanings of a particular text (Connell, 2008; Hogue Smith, 2017). For these reasons, I focus on Rosenblatt's theories of literary exploration for the purposes of my study. Her emphasis on the role of the literary reader helps me articulate the link between the study of literature, the process of subjectification, and the educational event. Building on Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995, 2005) theory of literary engagement, I offer a discussion of what is meant by teaching literature, reading transactionally, and the possibilities of such literary engagements for the educational event.

Rosenblatt's Efferent and Aesthetic Reading Stance. I began the previous section by ruminating on the questions that provoke my further thought on what it means to be a teacher of literature. Rosenblatt (1995) suggests the "teacher's task" is to "foster interactions – or, more precisely, transactions – between individual readers and individual literary texts" (p. 26). For Rosenblatt (1994, 1995, 2005), the transactional nature of this exchange is rooted in a metaphor that this is an "organic" relationship, very much alive, as in an "ecological view of human beings in a reciprocal relation with the natural environment" (1995, p. 26). Rather than reading to dissect and extract meaning, Rosenblatt suggests that meaning is constructed through this vitally charged "to-and-fro spiral" between reader and text (p. 26). Rosenblatt (1994, 1995, 2005) also distinguishes between two reading stances: efferent and aesthetic. The nature of the meaning that emerges depends on the stance adopted by the reader.

In distinguishing between an *efferent stance* and an *aesthetic stance*, Rosenblatt (1994, 1995, 2005) situates the construction of meaning in the latter, whereas the former resides in a reading-as-extraction process, as when I read a list of ingredients to ascertain whether it contains any allergens (1995, pp. 32-33). Reading from an aesthetic stance depends on the reader's ability and readiness, according to Rosenblatt (1994, 1995, 2005); meaning is not something to be imposed on from above. This notion of allowing readers to engage with a text and to construct meaning on their terms is especially pertinent to my experiences in teaching literature, as I will discuss in Chapter 7. John Willinsky (1990) argues that the on-the-reader's-terms mode of reading marks a transition from Rosenblatt's earlier conception of reading as "exploration of human relations" versus a narrower, "private" experience (p. 101). In so doing, Willinsky claims that the "political" dimension had "slipped from Rosenblatt's shoulders" (p. 104).

Although she diverged from her earlier political inclinations, Willinsky suggests that other literary critics, such as feminist critics, continue to weave the political implications of literary engagement into Rosenblatt's later work. I wish to situate myself within this group of scholars who see the personal and political imperative in literary engagement. In my view, this imperative arises in Rosenblatt's conception of reading as a transaction.

Rosenblatt (2005) writes, "every reading act is an event;" it is through this event – in the transaction between reader and text – that meaning "comes into being" (p. 7). She develops this idea through the notion of an aesthetic reading transaction beyond mere decoding squiggles on a page. Engaged in the event of reading, the reader "pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him [sic]…*in aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he [sic] is living through during his [sic] relationship with that particular text*" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 25, emphasis in original). In these aesthetic transactions, the text transcends itself and becomes what Rosenblatt (1994) calls a "poem." Her use of the word poem is not meant to signal a literal piece of poetry; rather, she deploys that word to represent a text as a literary work of art. She chooses the term poem because, in her view, a poem is the most distilled version of any literary form; what is a novel but an extended poem, she argues (1994, p. 12). Furthermore, Rosenblatt's poem also signals a text's transcendence from mere object to an event; the poem is something that "comes into being" through a transactional reading event (p. 14). The poem is, according to Rosenblatt (1994), "an event in the life of the reader" (p. 16).

Reading Rosenblatt Through Badiou: Toward Eventful Readings

I am not equating Rosenblatt's reading event with Badiou's notion of event, although they do share a similar quality, namely, a movement in excess of its sum parts.

For Rosenblatt, the parts would be the reader and the text, and when the reading event occurs through the transaction, it is the poem that arises. It is worth quoting her description of the poem-as-event here in full:

> The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his [sic] past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he [sic] marshals his [sic] resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he [sic] sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his [sic] life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him [sic] as a human being. (1994, p. 12)

In my view, it is this poetic-eventful nexus between reader and text that offers the potential for the educational event to follow. For Badiou (2007), the possible domains for an event encounter are politics, science, love, and art (p. 16). If, as Rosenblatt suggests, the reading event is where the text transcends itself and becomes art, it is precisely here, through engagement with literary art, that a Badiouian event might be instigated. Therefore, while Rosenblatt's event is not the same as Badiou's, it might be thought of as its precursor, or condition for the Badiouian event. Following Rosenblatt's theorization of reading, and my attempt to link her theory to Badiou's theory of event, I do believe that reading in the context of an English Language Arts class can act as a site for a student to experience an educational event, and is pertinent to my study. I wish to elaborate, in the next sections, on the importance of a "balanced" literary experience, the relationship between the reading event and the educational event, and finally, how reading *eventfully* invites a critical interrogation of the reader.

Toward a Balanced Literary Experience

The challenge for teachers is helping students achieve "increasingly balanced literary experiences" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 33). In my view, a balanced literary experience is one that achieves a two-fold result. First, the student may enter into commonly accepted – and plausible – interpretations of a text; and second, the student may autonomously work to construct personal meaning from this literary transaction. Part of this transaction addresses the pressing questions Rosenblatt (1995) attributes to young readers who wish to discover what it means to be in relation with the world, with their peers, and with themselves (p. 81).

Thinking about how I might offer a balanced literary experience is helpful for me as I try to answer the question of how to teach. As I understand it, I should not solely disseminate answers amongst my students, nor should I be completely absent from their interpretive work. I might offer them opportunities for autonomous literary transactions, intervening when their hypotheses stray too far away from plausibility – no, *Hamlet* is not about an impending zombie apocalypse.

In seeking to discover answers to their existential questions, reading literature may evoke in students "the insight [they crave] into the *possibilities* that life offers, the roles *perhaps* open to [them], [and] the *situations* in which [they] might find [themselves]" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 82, emphasis mine). I highlight these words as they suggest openness to an as-yet unnamed future that lies in wait for students, a future whose existence might only emerge through an encounter with an educational event via literary engagement. Reading through a Badiouian lens, coming to a new awareness of one's situation, is what an event may bring to bear: an individual's situated reality predisposed to being shattered in the face of the event. These possibilities may only

remain possible if the teacher resists their didactic urges. To re-cognize, to come to know again, perhaps in a new way, one's current reality, might be a moment of shattering. Such re-cognition of a given situation also connotes a revelation of something paradoxically hidden in plain sight: of course, we see the world around us yet we might not be aware of its failings or the way it fails you or me; or, in the way social structures privilege me over others.

Rosenblatt (1995) writes that the artful experience of reading works of literature is an emancipatory activity that may "reveal weaknesses in the contemporary world or that [may create] a vision of greater fulfillment of human values" (p. 161). Further reinforcing the potential arising from literary engagement, Rosenblatt writes, "literature offers an important source of awareness of possible alternatives" (p. 185) for living outside the constraints of social, familial, or religious norms and dictates. In thinking of literary engagement as the catalyst for the educational event, I wish to again highlight the words Rosenblatt uses to describe what might follow the reading of literature. In the quotations I have used in this paragraph thus far, we see the words *reveal, vision,* and *awareness*. In my view, these terms connote a way of seeing something, be it the world, or oneself, as if for the first time.

Rita Felski (2008), informed by the writings of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas asks, "what does it mean to recognize oneself in a book" (p. 23)? She responds by saying that the reader feels "addressed, summoned, called to account" and she sees "traces of [herself] in the pages…something I did not see before" (p. 23). In contrast to a practice of reflecting inward, the recognition that occurs when reading invites readers to "see themselves differently by gazing outward" (p. 23). In gazing outward and into literature, the reader subsequently turns that critical gaze inward. This reaction might occur when

the reader reads a novel whose characters are engaged in "soul-searching" and which "encourages its readers to engage in similar acts of self-scrutiny" (p. 25). Felski defines recognition in this sense as "cognitive insight, a moment of knowing or knowing again" (p. 29). She also adds that this "jolt of recognition" a reader might experience "assumes a self-critical rather than consoling form" (p. 41). In thinking the text-as-mirror, Felski acknowledges the potential for narcissism; however, she argues that one's mirrored reflection often can be unappealing, unflattering, or even horrific. If reading contains an eventful probability – and it might not always – its value is to "force us – in often unforgiving ways – to confront our failings and blind spots rather than shoring up self-esteem" (p. 48). From a Badiouian perspective, I link this self-critique to the truth-process instigated by eventful literary engagement. As I argue, reading as a Badiouian event is an encounter with the void that does not wait for a response as it shatters or shocks the reader. Truth – that which constitutes the subjectification dimension of education – arises when the subject chooses to be faithful to the conditions initiated by the event: that the known situation is insufficient, and a truth-process must ensue in pursuit of articulating what the event will come to mean. Here, I wish to indulge in a digression about literature's potential to shock and shatter.

The Eventful-Shock Therapy of Re-Reading *Ishmael:* A Precarious Pedagogical Dilemma. Felski (2008) distinguishes between shock as scandalous content and shock as the more "qualitative impact" of a literary encounter (p. 113). Felski writes that shock:

> denotes a sudden collision, an abrupt, even violent encounter; the essence of shock is to be jarring…it is fueled by an essential element of surprise…Even if we anticipate what is to come, such as the dramatization of a familiar myth, we still

> find ourselves smacking up against the unimaginable, the dreaded and dreadful, the too-horrible-for-words. (p. 113)

Felski continues, writing:

> Smashing into our psyche like a blunt instrument, [shock] can wreak havoc on our usual ways of ordering and understanding the world. Our sense of equilibrium is destroyed; we are left at sea, dazed and confused, fumbling and confused, unable to piece together a coherent response…And while its immediate effects may quickly dissipate, the after-shocks can reverberate in the psyche for some time; the suddenness of the initial impact is succeeded by an extended, delayed, or belated array of psychic and somatic reactions. (p. 113)

In my view, Felski (2008) offers a stunningly accurate account of my experience of encountering an event. Although Felski's work is informed by Levinas' theory of alterity, her discussion of shock remains apt for helping me understand a Badiouian eventful encounter. Whether it was during classes with professors Eppert or den Heyer, at home with the readings they assigned, or in returning to the Quinn's (1992) novel *Ishmael*, the sum total of those experiences left me feeling in such a state of shock – precisely the right amount of shock I needed for my truth process to be instigated. Just as in *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* where Goldilocks found the temperature of Baby Bear's porridge just right, there is an optimal level of shock, according to Felski. Not enough shock, and reader is not provoked; if the reader is too shocked, a text might "trigger intense waves of revulsion or indignation" that leads to "walking out" or a refusal to continue reading (p. 130). However, an appropriately calibrated shock-effect might lead the reader to encounter an event. This question of "how much shock" has pedagogical implications that I wish to explore.

Although I have lived in my body and experienced the world for four decades, my experience of reading *Ishmael* a second time after den Heyer's course profoundly changed the way I see myself and the world around me. Thinking about my reading stance, I would argue I read the novel eventfully. In the novel, the human narrator encounters a teacher – a gorilla named Ishmael who communicates telepathically. Each time Ishmael spoke and questioned the narrator; it was as if I was being addressed. The novel was questioning me, and the hegemony at work within me. Thus began my journey of personal shattering. The "me" that I see after reading the novel, is not the same as the "me" I was used to seeing. The image of the "old" me became shattered upon my reading of that novel, and like a mirror after a brick has smashed into it, the remaining shards were innumerable and brought forth the impossibility of reconstituting the self-image I once possessed. What remained were truths I did not know existed but whose entrance into my reality I could no longer ignore. In this way, I wonder if the possibility of an eventful reading stance begets the possibility of self-critique as a dialogue between a refracted or fractured self. If confronted by another, shocking, possibility of being in the world, I might humbly examine how I "am" and to consider a re-articulation of my being.

Refracting and analyzing the experiences of my pre-eventful self from an alternative ontological perspective (gleaned from my engagement with non-Western authors, or the novel *Ishmael*, for example) serves as re-cognizing the tension between my multiples as inherent to my subjective becoming. In my view, this tension is related to either my fidelity to the truth-procedure or succumbing to the evil of betrayal. At stake, then, is my entire project of being, laid bare for you to read, with all my anxieties, doubts, insufficiencies, and moments of humiliation. What I risk in this endeavor is my

significance; I wonder, from a pedagogical standpoint, how I might also invite my students to engage with literature so precariously.

Given my personal experience with teaching *Ishmael*, I wonder if the literature I teach in my classroom might offer my students something similar. Is it shocking enough to instigate an event? Too shocking? It is possible to shock my students and jump-start a truth process? Might I circumvent staid curricular and literary engagements that stultify students and reproduce the teacher's knowledge? I believe I should try. I have been wondering what to call such a curriculum encounter; in the next section, I wish to outline what I term a *refractive curricular encounter* for the English Language Arts classroom.

I am beginning to recognize how my teaching practice has given rise to both reflective and refractive curricular encounters. As my study focuses on how my experience of educational events impacted my sense of identity, I wish to end this literature review by discussing scholarship on identity and teacher identity.

Multiple Identities: My Past, Present, and Future Teacher Self

Since 2010, I have taught in a school in Edmonton that serves a particular demographic of student. Our students are in their fourth or fifth year of high school – in Alberta, high school (grades 10-12) is typically completed in three years, within a community high school setting. Our students, for a variety of reasons, either have not graduated during those three years, or, require upgrading in certain courses for post-secondary admission. Many of our students struggle with mental health issues, personal or familial problems such as physical or familial abuse, and others – like me – were simply not ready for the demands of high school and skipped classes, missed assessments, or generally underperformed academically. Although our students choose to enroll at our school, many of them still struggle personally and academically. Because

our students are between 17-20 years old, there is very little parental involvement at our school. Due to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP), I am not allowed to speak with a student's parent or guardian unless my student has signed a waiver giving me permission to do so. The majority of my dealings, good or bad, are directly with the student. What I have learned, after teaching at this school for many years, is that there are myriad roles I must inhabit to help my students be successful in their studies and beyond. The first of these roles is as the subject matter teacher; I also work with my students to develop what some of my colleagues and I call their "adulting" and "studenting" skills.

Adulting, is the verb from of doing "adult" activities that connote a sense of responsibility. Paying bills, meal planning, or working can be thought of as adulting and connote possession of certain skills required to be a "functioning" adult in our society. These skills might include effective communication (how to write an email to a teacher, for example) or financial literacy (how to budget according to their needs and fiscal reality). Studenting suggests possession of skills required to be academically successful. These are skills such as how to study for English class, how to manage time effectively, how to do English homework, how to meet course-related deadlines, and how to foster academic partnerships with their peers.

As an English Language Arts teacher, I also find myself being the recipient of my students' personal stories. Many times, in my career, a student has deemed me worthy of being "the first person" they have ever told about a traumatic experience. Sometimes my students break down and we walk to the social worker's office together; in many cases, the student requests that I sit in on their first interaction with the social worker because

they "don't know him, but I trust you." Each unique student demands a different version of me, attuned to a particular situational interaction.

Students have also shared their moments of beauty, love, and joy. Students have felt brave enough, in my classroom, to "come out of the closet" or to share who they really are. This is the context of my teaching. At times, it is difficult to reconcile this multitude of roles with the more practical nature of my job, namely, teaching English Language Arts. I am not alone in struggling to live in this tension. At staff meetings, the question is often posed: What kind of school are we? Are we here to help students pass a class and move on or are we here to teach students how to be successful in all aspects of their lives, including their mental health and well-being? In my view, how one answers that question has direct bearing on how one understands his or her role and identity as a teacher.

Haunting Memory or Living Memory? April 10, 2019

There are at least two teachers that live inside me, and these different versions of me often debate what it means to teach, and to teach at my school in particular. We share different views on the role a teacher should play and how our understanding of this role shapes our teaching practice. On the one hand, there is a self – the self that represents my pre-eventful experiences – that believes that his job is to teach his students the skills they need to read and write effectively and to be successful on the diploma exam. When it comes to questions of thinking the classroom as a space to invite the possibility of changing students' lives, this self – a remnant of my pre-eventful self – usually shrugs his shoulders and suggests that possibility lies outside his purview as a teacher. The other self, my post-eventful self, is often at odds with the urges of the former. Here is how this conflict within me manifests itself as a first-person articulation:

I am tired. I have been marking the same set of 130 Gran Torino *essays for the last two weeks. Why the hell did I teach them about moving beyond the five-paragraph essay? Their papers are now twelve pages long instead of the usual five. I've been studying while working full-time since 2010 – first a Master's degree and now a Ph.D. I don't wear a shirt and tie to work anymore, settling instead for t-shirts and the occasional Polo. With two kids at home, there is often some stain I am unaware of until I get to work and it's too late to change. I don't think I would have changed even if I noticed before I left home. On Professional Development days, I sit, arms folded, listening cynically and wishing the day would just end. I am frustrated by my ever-stagnant diploma results and no matter what I try nothing will change. Any creative approach to teaching has been futile and I increasingly think, "I'm just here to give these kids what they need to move on and find a job" or, "I'm not in the business of changing lives" or, "if they can't attend regularly and complete the work on time, too bad, better luck next time."*

This version of me appears often enough and I feel that I need to keep him at bay. If he grows too powerful, he risks subsuming my other self who believes that his role in the classroom resides on the other end of this spectrum. While my more exhausted/fatalistic/instrumentalist self still rears his head every now and then – often when I am reviewing my students' diploma exam results or calculating class averages – my "educational" self is now in control more often. However, the other within me is not vanquished; he dwells within me still.

I do believe that, as a teacher who works with young adults, my job is to balance the myriad roles my students demand from me. If my aim is to teach toward an educational event, then I ought to be present and attuned to the whole student in spite of

how challenging this endeavor may be. Abandoning a student in a moment of personal crisis because it is outside my job description is not the kind of teacher I am comfortable being. I often leave these internal debates wondering: Exactly what kind of teacher am I? In this next section I show how the concepts of identity and teacher identity are discussed in academic literature.

Nesting Dolls and Shape-Shifting: Identity Theory and Teacher Identity. "Identity is no longer an ascribed status or place in an established order," writes Goodson (1998); instead, "identity is an ongoing project, most commonly an ongoing narrative project" (p. 4). Sumara and Davis (1998) draw on Merleau-Ponty and write that "human subjects are doubly-embodied: our bodies are simultaneously physical-biological structures and lived-phenomenological structures" (p. 80). This lived-phenomenological aspect of human subjectivity situates identity as ever in flux and shaped by "ongoing daily experience – our continuous acting in the world" (Sumara & Davis, 1998, p. 80). Denzin (2014) would agree with the idea that identity is constructed always in relation to the subject's environment, writing, "a person is a cultural creation" and these cultural interactions "cut to the inner core of the person's life and leave indelible marks on him or her" (p. 43). Elsewhere, Denzin (2014) cites anthropologist David W. Plath, who remarks that selfhood is shaped by culture and that culture "becomes a window of opportunity for the completing of self-projects" (Plath, 1987, p. 1, as cited in Denzin, 2014, p. 45).

One aspect of this subject-culture relationship is the act of naming. Cultures contain a variety of these names; for each name, there is an assigned set of traits and behaviors, along with culturally negotiated desirability for each name (Burke & Stets, 2009; Denzin, 2014). Examples of these names include "old man, young man, divorced woman, only daughter, only son" (Denzin, 2014, p. 43) and "teacher, student, truck

driver, judge, police officer, and so on" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 21). The significance of these names can only arise through "shared meaning" and often these shared understandings give rise to a hierarchical symbolic social order; the individual identity can be subsumed into the symbolic understanding a particular role connotes, for example, shared understandings of being a criminal versus a police officer or a judge (Burke & Stets, 2009). Sheldon Stryker, a pioneer of identity theory suggests that an individual "has an identity…for each of the roles the person holds in society" (cited in Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 26). How does my role as a teacher shape my identity?

This interplay between teacher role and teacher identity is further complicated as I attempt to negotiate the multiple roles demanded by the overarching role of teacher. Like Russian nesting dolls, I sometimes shed one version of myself to reveal and enact a role required in a given situation. I am a teacher but, at times, my students need me to be a financial advisor, or guidance counselor, or parent figure, however each is mediated by my teacher identity. Burke and Stets (2009) refer to the activity of toggling between identities as "activating" and that we have as many identities "as people we interact with" (p. 131). I work at a school with close to one hundred staff members and I teach approximately 160 students in a given term! As Hallman (2015) suggests, I find myself feeling like a "shape shifter" as I activate between potentially hundreds of roles in a given day (p. 282). Furthermore, the teaching profession is imbued with "cultural myths" that influence teacher and student beliefs about who teachers are supposed to be (Britzman, 1986, p. 442). Along with their "desire to teach," teachers bring their "institutional biographies" or their "cumulative experience of school lives" that subsequently shape their "knowledge of the student's world, of school structure, and of curriculum" (p. 443).

However, Badiou does account for how we might consider the multiple differences we each contain and why these differences are not impediments to eventful possibilities.

Badiou (2001) addresses difference by claiming/beginning with the axiom of all there are, are multiples – we have infinite differences with our own matrix of "self" such that there perhaps is no self, only the multiples we contain. David Smith (2009) takes up critical pedagogue Peter McLaren's critique of the postmodern discourse of differences wherein they both suggest such discourse generates "infinite differentiation, which in turn feeds the market's endless need and pursuit of innovation, difference, newness" (p. 97). In such discourses, "teaching loses all authority" as "opinion, perspective, or situated understanding" render education a "site of management of differences" devoid of "common human values" (p. 97). Badiou (2001) writes, "there are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself. As many, but also, then, *neither more nor less*" (p. 26, emphasis in original). As such, difference becomes less relevant because differences are all we are. It is these differences, perhaps, that unites us as humans. In this sense, Hallward (2003) argues that in spite of these differences, equality is axiomatic for Badiou (p. 44).

Elsewhere, van Kessel (2020) suggests that Badiou's dismissal of difference works to "[emphasize] everyone's equal potential for [eventful] disintegration, and, thus, for processes of becoming" (p. 41). In this light, I do not view Badiou's denial of differences as akin to a misguided blindness to racial, cultural, sexual, or religious identities, for example; rather he suggests the event and its ensuing truth process is possible for all and, in fact, this possibility *for all* must be my starting point when considering my pedagogical and curricular aims in my classroom.

In my view, teaching to invite an eventful encounter through literary engagement is aimed precisely at such an open, pluralistic, and free process of re-cognizing who one is and of coming to articulate the emergent truth through a fidelity to the educational event. Returning to the relationship between Rosenblatt (1995) and Badiou (2001), reading as event transcends the text and becomes art. I decided to frame my teaching around reading as a potential eventful site. Inviting my students into reading with the intention of inducing an eventful possibility, literature as art opens the possibility of an unforgiving recognition of our self – which might include that our "self" is inter-dependent on many other selves – and this recognition, along with the shock or shattering it may enact, might instigate an event and its ensuing truth process.

In my experience of teaching, students also carry institutional biographies. I have seen these biographies at work in three ways. First, many of our students carry with them an institutional biography of failure. Students have shared with me the ways in which not graduating high school "on time" or receiving letters of rejection from post-secondary schools left them feeling dejected, anxious, and incapable of success. Second, many of my students have also shared with me stories of teachers who have marginalized or devalued them. It is not uncommon for a student to tell me that a teacher, at some point, called them stupid, a waste of space, or told them that they would never amount to anything; such awful interactions have shaped my students' understandings of the role of teachers in their lives and I see this understanding of teacher-as-oppressor manifest itself in my classroom. Thirdly, our school has its own institutional biography. My students recall times when the name of our school was often used as a threat in an effort to change their behavior. If you don't get your act together, you'll have to go to *that* school. These

three institutional biographies are my students' nesting dolls along with the other identities and educational myths that reside within them.

Reimagining what I think teaching ought to be is not an instantaneous process. I have suggested over the course of this dissertation – and as I will develop in Chapter 7 – the change in the way I understand curriculum and pedagogy is in direct relation to my educational events. In Chapters 5 and 6, I refract on a variety of personal stories, memories, and teaching experiences, so that I may come to fully understand the nature of the relationship between my educational event and changes in my teacher identity, curriculum, and pedagogy. In this next section, I will discuss what is meant by "experience" within the context of my study and through Pinar's (2011) notion of *currere*.

Badiou & Currere: Finding the Runner Within. Prior to more fully developing my methodology in the next chapter, I wish to draw some connections between Pinar's (2011) notion of *currere* and the role that autobiographical lived experience plays in his conceptualization. I offer these connections here as means of bridging together this chapter and the next one; more specifically, I connect this to my educational events by offering a reading of *currere* through a Badiouian lens in order to demonstrate how my experience of these events have curricular implications.

I want to explore how experience, or lived experience, plays a central role in notions of curriculum as in-dwelling (Aoki, 1991) or as a complicated conversation, and in autoethnography. As mentioned previously, Pinar (2011) offers the verb *currere* as a means of highlighting the "lived experience of curriculum…wherein curriculum is experienced, enacted, and reconstructed" (p. 1). Pinar's notion of currere-as-verb implies a vitality and experiential mode of curriculum; meaning "the running of the course," it

"emphasizes the lived rather than the planned curriculum" (2011, p. 1), following Aoki's (1991) distinction between the two. Pinar (2011) adds that thinking of *currere* in this way invites consideration of curriculum as "action, process, and experience" and not a more static and implemented vision of curriculum, one that invites "stipulation and completion" (p. 1). In my view, a curriculum of stipulated pronouncements or of finite beginnings and endings forecloses on the possibilities – and inherent messiness and chaos – of *currere*.

Although the courses I taught/teach before and after my educational events began/begin and ended/end, "the consequences of study," what I have been framing as Badiou's truth process, "are ongoing, as they are social and subjective as well as intellectual" (Pinar, 2011, p. 1). This concept of *currere* also invites students to consider their "everyday experience" and such consideration contributes to their learning (p. 2). Such complicated conversation with, and "reconstruction" of one's lived experience is precisely what invites understanding; it is this understanding of one's lived experience that "can help us reconstruct our own subjective and social lives" (p. 2). This reconstruction of the self and the social further aligns with Biesta's (2010) subjectification function of school, and the generative possibilities of Badiou's (2001) event and truth process. In my view, Badiou offers a complication of *currere* as well. If *currere* connotes a running of the course, I wonder if an encounter with an event not only affects the course of running, but the course itself – as a fixed track – too.

In extending the metaphor of *currere* to Badiou's event and truth-process, I imagine the act of running to refer to the subject's living or being in the world. By extension, the course or track along which the runner runs would be akin to Badiou's notion of the situation – the world as I understand it. In this context, the event that tears a

hole in the present situation alters the course I run because the course itself has been punctured. In my view, this rupture is not an either/or: the subject re-cognizes *both* self and situation. Badiou (2001) observes that truth compels us to think “the situation ‘according to’ the event” and compels “the subject to *invent* a new way of being and acting in the situation” (pp. 41-42). Truth is therefore a “break” since the event “meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation” (pp. 42-43). In this spirit, the break of the refractive curricular encounter might instigate breaking away from the course I was running on, toward a different trajectory – hence a *refractive* eventful experience; this new trajectory might require a new kind of running and Badiou urges me to “keep going!” even if I am unsure where or how I will get there. In so doing, I find within myself the runner I did not know I already was, running along a newly discovered course.

Summary: Towards A Refractive Autoethnography

I began this chapter with Maxine Greene’s (1986) appeal that we ought to consider alternative conceptions of education that speak to these dark and shadowed times we live in. These are times of neoliberal thought and the increasing standardization of teaching practice. I have also explained what is meant by an educational event. I suggest that an educational event is an encounter that shatters a given constellation of self or world, from which emerges a truth process. This truth process is an endeavor to discover “what the event will have meant” for a becoming subject. This becoming, or process of subjectification, is what makes the event educational.

In my study, I consider the possibility for an educational event arising from what I call a refractive curricular encounter, rooted in Badiou’s event theory, curriculum theorizing, critical pedagogy and autoethnography. I situate the educational event and

refractive curricular encounter in my teaching of high school English Language Arts in Alberta. I turn to reading, as a potential site for inviting an educational event or refractive curricular encounter (though I also explore the eventful possibilities of writing in Chapter 7). Finally, this chapter briefly outlined the ways in which identity theory and teacher identity relate to notions of the educational event and the refractive curricular encounter.

In the next chapter, I outline why autoethnographic research is best suited to my research questions. I begin by exploring the relationship between refraction and autoethnography. I also outline what constitutes my research data and how I collected, analyzed, and interpreted this data. Finally, I consider the limitations of my research project as well as any ethical, validity, and credibility issues that arise in autoethnographic research and how these concerns were addressed.

Chapter Four

Autoethnography as Method/ology: Re-cognizing Culture within the Self

I begin this chapter with a personal refraction and a brief narrative. I weave together my refraction and narrative in order to demonstrate how I came to autoethnography, and, how it offers me an authentic mode of research and writing compared to a more traditional social-science prosaic approach. Doing so helps me "contextualize my project" to help make my "shift in research orientation understandable" for those who read it and for myself (Ellis, 1995, p. 5).

Autoethnography, as a form of life writing, invites "authentic ways of truth telling" and an ability to "face the conditions of [my] own life" in relation to my "beliefs, values, and ideas" (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 120). Coming to autoethnography was a result of my "struggle with the constraints of detached social-science prose" and, of listening to the advice of those familiar with my more authentic writing style (Ellis, 1995, p. 6). Despite often fusing the personal with the "academic" during my coursework assignments and conference presentations, I was under the impression that a Ph.D. dissertation had to be written from a stance of omniscient expertise and in an "authoritative and uninvolved voice" (p. 6). Stripping my writing of emotion and self-doubt proved to be a disheartening undertaking, and my words became mired in jargon-laden gobbledygook. I draw inspiration from noted autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis's (1995) *Final Negotiations*, where she offers a narrative of her experiences in order to provide insight into "attachment, chronic illness, and loss" in her relationship with sociologist Gene Weinstein (p. 3). Resisting the urge to turn "detailed lived experience" into a scientific "abstraction," Ellis shows how autoethnographic writing offers an alternative to depicting people "exclusively as spiritless, empty husks with

programmed, managed, predictable, and patterned emotions" (pp. 8-9). I wish to add my voice and the stories of my experiences to what counts as educational research, not as "an ending" but perhaps as "a way of being in the world" or as an act of "questioning, and even becoming" (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 122).

Refractive Memory, January 2019

I remember a conversation with Professor Eppert, my doctoral supervisor, from back in 2015, as I was putting together a proposal to present a paper at my first academic conference: the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) conference in San Antonio, Texas. I was preparing to write about an ethic of relational humility and her words of wisdom were that I should consider ending the paper with a story of teaching that showcases the ideas I am working through. It was advice I took to heart then, and, is something that has been a part of my academic writing and presenting ever since. And yet, in the first few iterations of my dissertation proposal, such personal story writing never figured into my method. I had grand visions (delusions?) of writing a new conceptual framework for the ages. I was hungry for validation and recognition; I wanted my work to be remembered and to stand in the Pantheon of great thinkers. I wanted to win a dissertation award, believing that doing so was only obtainable through abstract – omniscient – writing. I was arrogantly pursuing fame through writing grandiose ideas about the need for more humility in the world. And this writing, this conceptual framework I was attempting, left no room for my stories of teaching. In losing my stories I got lost in the muck of the work. It wasn't until another conversation, nearly three years after Professor Eppert's advice that the thought of writing my stories into my dissertation emerged.

Embracing a Refractive Autoethnography: Re-articulating What My Experiences Will Have Meant

Tricia Kress (2015) acknowledges that survival in academia hinges on one's ability to conduct "sound research" that is "systematic and clean" and can "make an impact" (p. 177). However, Kress also suggests that a certain vitality lives in research that is aligned with the researcher's "disposition toward life" (p. 177), and that the "dispassionate, objective, systematic pursuit of knowledge is profoundly unnatural" (Bauer, 1994, p. 146 as cited in Kress, p. 177). In my view, autoethnography offers me the opportunity to conduct research that is sound, systematic and impactful while being situated within my stories of lived teaching experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (1992) suggest, "teachers' stories and stories of teachers is a kind of 'research on teaching'…[and] has a great deal to contribute to an understanding of teachers as curriculum makers" (p. 363). Some research applies Alain Badiou's conception of event and truth process to the field of education (see, for example, den Heyer, 2010b; Wiebe & Snowber, 2011). However, there are few studies that attempt to show Badiou's work in action so to speak (see Castner, 2015; van Kessel, 2016, for good examples of these). Castner (2015) includes Badiou's theories in his bricolage to analyze and discuss teachers' stories of truth processes in an elementary school setting; van Kessel's (2016) dissertation explores the significance of Badiou's conceptions of evil through students' experiences in Social Studies education; however, these are not autoethnographies. Not only does autoethnography enable me to research English Language Arts curriculum and pedagogy through my stories of teaching, it also allows me to wrestle with how my post-eventful self re-articulates those experiences as a fidelity to a truth-procedure.

Wolff-Michael Roth (2005) writes of the relative newness (at the time) of autoethnography within the domain of education research, despite its existence as a research strategy in other fields. He offers his book as a "toolkit for educators and researchers" seeking autoethnography as a research method (p. 4). McFadden (2021) notes that authoethnographic dissertations are "uncommon" (p.15) and in my searches (for autoethnography and Badiou) via Google Scholar and the University of Alberta's library system, few results emerged. When I searched the ProQuest Global dissertation database for "autoethnography" AND "Badiou," there were zero results. The autoethnographic studies I did find tended to be articles in journals; what these results had in common were authors who engaged Badiou's theory of event as an overarching framework, however, they often focused on other scholars such as Heidegger and Jung (Brooks, 2018) or Foucault (Lamond, 2018) as the lens through which they analyzed their data. In this sense, my Badiouian autoethnography is distinct in that it offers an in-depth dissertation that not only features Badiou as its theoretical framework (as discussed in Chapter 2) but also relies on Badiou's work in order to analyze and understand the data – i.e. my eventful experiences and ensuing truth process.

If my ultimate trajectory in pursuing doctoral studies is to navigate "the knowledge claims" and cultural inner workings of my students and teacher colleagues in order to invite the possibility of an educationally eventful encounter, Roth (2005) suggests that this aim "requires a better understanding of the autobiography of the individual observer" (p. 8). Examining my stories and personal accounts assists me in externalizing that which I know and have experienced, and that which I did not know I knew. In better understanding the formation of my knowledge claims and the manifestations of neoliberalism within me, I might be able to more deeply teach in a way

that resonates with my students who likely have undergone similar socio-cultural formations. Furthermore, Roth writes that all knowing or understanding of experience is "singular and embodied," yet simultaneously represents collective knowledge and experience because "it constitutes a concrete realization of cultural-historical and sociocultural possibilities" (p. 15). In my view, understanding the production of particular shared socio-cultural experiences – teaching and learning – then situating and investigating myself as produced by a socio-cultural frame is the logical first step: I should know myself, along with all my flaws and prejudices, before I can begin the work of knowing and understanding the shared cultural experience of teaching in today's times. This coming to know myself unfolds along a refractive trajectory. Here I wish to explore the relationship between autoethnography and refraction.

Post-Eventful Refraction: A Thought-Practice Faithful to Truth

In my view, the process of *refraction* is essential to the work of the autoethnographer who works to apprehend – or capture – those lived experiences through manifesting them as written story, memory, anecdote, or vignette. Once manifest, the autoethnographer analyzes what that experience meant, relating it to the larger sociocultural context; at the heart of this process is what the literature on autoethnography describes as reflection (see for example, Denzin, 2014; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Muncey, 2005; Pensoneau-Conway et al., 2017). In addition to reflection, the autoethnographic researcher assumes a stance of reflexivity (Penseneau-Conway, et al., 2017). Reflexivity is "essential to understanding our experiences as socially constructed" with such a view leading to "critical change" (Briggs, 2017, p. 134).

However, and from a Badiouian (2001) framework, it is through what I earlier described (in Chapter 2) as refraction as essential to the work of the eventfully seized autoethnographer. Through refraction, I might be able to arrive at a fuller understanding of the events that I experienced. Rose (2013), writing about reflection, suggests this act "probes below the level of the known and obvious to discover new, elusive ideas and perspectives" (p. 21). Building on Badiou (2001) and den Heyer (2009), *refracting* on one's experience is also future oriented: the event's ensuing truth process might be read as a refraction out of ones pre-eventful situated-ness and towards what that experience "will have meant" for a becoming subject (den Heyer, 2009, p. 442). In other words, the act of an eventful refraction burdens a becoming subject with an as yet unarticulated truth. The temporality of lived experience and the possibility of refractive thinking invites a recursive disposition to understanding and reconfiguration of what my past might have meant in light of potential futures still in process.

In my view, the (traditionally) reflective curricular encounter is characterized by a closed system of thought where the reflector (s/he who holds the mirror) has the potential to dictate the terms of interpretation, understanding, etc., rather than allowing the possibility of eventful unfamiliarity to arise. The act of refracting, is instead a thought process that emerges from the fidelity to the truth-procedure resulting from a refractive curricular encounter. A refractive thought process in this mode is more closely aligned to Badiou's (2001) *thinking* "according to the event" (p. 42). We must think according to the event, and not the situation, because "the event is excluded from the regular laws of the situation" (p. 42). Badiou parenthetically defines thinking as "a practice, a putting to the test" (p. 42), in which one's experience gets tested against the newly invented and emergent truth process.

My use of refraction is indebted to Mitchell and Weber's (1999) work on reflection, wherein they suggest "reflective action" facilitates a study and re-creation of self (p. 8). However, viewed through the lens of Badiou's event theory, reflection alone is insufficient and therefore a refractive action becomes more apt; through refractive action, the re-creation of self relies on a truth that is as-yet unnamed in the subject's situation whereas reflective thought risks remaining tethered to the realm of pre-eventful opinions. Badiou (2001) points to this lack of a "radical break" (in my view connoting a refraction) as resulting in maintaining "the closed particularity" of the existing configuration of the "set" or situation (p. 74). In this sense, my conception of reflection is analogous to Badiou's closed-off situation with no eventful potential; refraction – or a post-eventful refractive trajectory of a truth process – instead attempts to capture the possibility of subjective becoming outside the confines of one's current situation.

This autoethnography is my attempt at refractive action in the hopes that I can understand the past trajectories of my teacher-self in order to break away from these market-oriented iterations of the situationally-configured self known as "Robert Piazza" as a fidelity to my truth process; namely, to teach in such a way that resists an education overly concerned with qualification and socialization while ignoring the possibility of subjectification. My hope is that this work will help me become more capable of inviting the possibility for my students to experience encounters with an educational event. The refractive element of this pedagogical approach is the process of "making both the immediate and distant pasts usable" and bringing to bear the "insight and awareness of the present for the purposes of acting on the future" (p. 8) albeit in such a way as to articulate this awareness from the perspective of the event and not the already-existing situation. Elsewhere, Mitchell and Weber (1999) refer to reflective action as the

"'deliberate act' of assembling, examining, and working back through memory" (p. 46). They also adopt the term "dwelling on" to suggest "a type of analytic approach to memory that distinguishes the impressionistic retrieval of memories from the more analytic or interpretive approaches" central to autoethnography (p. 46). Through Badiou, however, this assembling and examining occur through the lens of a post-eventful truth; in other words, in re-assembling or re-cognizing, it matters from whence the truth is situated. In my Findings chapter, (Chapter 7) I discuss further implications of refraction for autoethnography as a research method/ology.

Autoethnography: Unraveling the Personal/Cultural Dyad

Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (p. 742). Chang (2008) suggests that autoethnography "transcends mere narrations of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (p. 43). Elsewhere, McKerracher and Hasebe-Ludt (2014) write that "as human beings, we live our lives in a shared commons that is cultural, ecological, and digital" and that as teachers, "we are responsible for the education of the young in these commons" (p. 128). For McKerracher and Hasebe-Ludt, life writing brings this responsibility into focus in the ways it allows the writer to "clearly and more deeply understand…and examine the influences we have on others" and vice-versa (p. 128). In my view, and building on this notion of the commons, life writing in an autoethnographic context positions me to "examine and reveal" not only "my relationship with others in this commons" (p. 128) but my relationship to the commons itself; in other words, the influences the neoliberal cultural commons has on me and my teaching. This endeavor is not entirely without risk, however.

Autoethnography does risk becoming a self-indulgent or narcissistic project; Frambach (2015) acknowledges this risk by asking, rhetorically, “who dares be an autoethnographer” (p. 956)? She suggests that autoethnography might also risk the researcher’s fetishization of inadequacy, the literary equivalent of scholars “dressing up in sandwich boards and walking around the university proclaiming their stigma” (p. 957). Frambach does concede that in spite of the inherent risks, autoethnography can “result in new knowledge about the culture in which the individual is situated that can be meaningfully shared with others” (p. 952). I succumbed to these risks at the time of writing my dissertation proposal; all three members of my supervisory committee remarked that I had not explicitly analyzed or interpreted the cultural significance of my stories. As I continue to write and re-write, I now ask myself: in what way might I “unearth cultural knowledge and practices” in my teaching that are difficult to see, “but that shape [my] ways and thoughts not always for the good” (p. 952)? Furthermore, I explore how my learning brings to bear, informs and illuminates socio-cultural knowledge and practices for teaching, something that is addressed more specifically in Chapter 7. Being attuned to these questions is central to the task of my autoethnography.

Ellis et al. (2010) also describe autoethnographic work as “[making] characteristics of culture familiar to insiders and outsiders” through sharing personal experiences (as cited in Hughes et al., 2012, p. 210). I seek for my work to resonate with educators: for teachers of English, and teachers of other subject areas. Throughout this work, I am examining how I might successfully articulate the ways in which neoliberal culture has affected me so profoundly; my work should be of interest to those people similarly aware of its grasp and to those who perceive themselves as on the outside of this culture. This examination follows Strong-Wilson’s (2006) assertion that, “self-study is a

method of examining the self" and furthermore that self-study invites the researcher to better examine and understand, "the construction of the self" (p. 60). As I attempt to dig into the ways neoliberalism operates within me, Strong-Wilson suggests that, "unearthing is a political act of making public" the various "cultural discourses" that act upon me. In this way, as I come to better understand my self-construction, I become better equipped to help others understand their own both through the dissemination of my research and my teaching practice.

Denzin (2014) collects varied definitions for autoethnography and asks whether these are competing interpretations of the method or a reflection of the multi-faceted nature of this complex research approach. In his view, the common thread of autoethnography is the weaving together of the personal and the social or cultural in a way that reveals new textures within the fabric of this relationship. Emerging from the basic premise that "culture and individuals are intricately intertwined" (Chang, 2008, p. 44), autoethnography offers the opportunity to attain a "profound understanding of self and others" (p. 13).

Ellis and Bochner (2000) offer a non-exhaustive list of labels used to describe autoethnographic research's continuum of approaches and style, including, "auto-observation; confessional tales; critical autobiography; evocative narratives; literary tales; lived experience; personal essays; reflexive ethnography; and, self-stories, among many others" (pp. 739-740). In my dissertation, I draw from a variety of these styles, namely: confessional tales, evocative narratives, lived experience, self-stories, and personal essay writing. While it may be overwhelming to keep track of this nomenclature, Ellis and Bochner also offer a three-fold framework for understanding the complexity of these different approaches. Instead of a singular approach to "doing autoethnography," Ellis

and Bochner suggest, “autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto)” (p. 740) and that each “kind” of approach should fall along each of these three axes. These axes are a guideline for whether a work constitutes autoethnography; if the culture/ethno axis is unaddressed, for example, the work would be insufficiently autho*ethno*graphic and would be better termed autobiography. As discussed earlier, the relative absence of the *ethno* from my earlier drafts required more robust discussion for my autoethnography to pass muster.

Throughout this study, I am assessing the impact of the educational events I experienced; however, this self-assessment remains situated within a neoliberal culture of teaching. This exploration is in line with social scientists who begin to view themselves as the phenomenon to be studied (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These social scientists, like me, choose to write, “evocative personal narratives specifically focused on their academic as well as personal lives” (pp. 741-742). Like Strong-Wilson (2006a), Ellis and Bochner (2000) identify the aim of these kinds of studies as a means to “understand a self…in a cultural context” (p. 742).

Following Ellis and Bochner (2000), my study might fall under the umbrella of *reflexive ethnography* whereby the “researcher’s personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study” (p. 740). In this sense, I refract on my stories, narratives, and memories, in order to help me articulate my evolving understandings of my teaching, with a view to also understanding teaching, curriculum and pedagogy as cultural “products.” In other words, how is my pre-eventful teacher-self produced (or institutionalized) through engaging with/in institutions operating amidst neoliberal culture? Chapter 7 offers an insightful response to this question. In this next section, I will detail my research design and data, and, how I collected and analyzed my

data. I will first offer an overview of the particular data I collected, and follow this with a description of how I analyzed and interpreted the data. I will end this section by discussing how I address issues of credibility, verisimilitude, and resonance, alongside the limitations of my study and its ethical considerations.

Data Collection

In spite of the various theorists and philosophies I have encountered over my time as a doctoral student, Badiou remains the primary theoretical thread and allegiance upon which this work and my knowledge may be challenged. Relying on Badiou's scholarship while I continued to collect data has assisted me in beginning to understand and make meaning of my educational experiences within the broader context of education. As I have written previously, Badiou's event theory and truth process' rootedness in the future anterior makes it suitable for my analysis of educational experiences and teaching that are situated in the past, yet whose truths continue to reveal themselves over time.

Given my exploration of my educational events, I narrowed down my data to four educational experiences alongside other relevant life experiences. These experiences predominantly revolved around being a student in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes, and, the experiences of teaching the novels *Ishmael* and *Nothing*. In this sense, much of this data is "personal memory" (Chang, 2008, p. 71). Stories and vignettes from these experiences are woven throughout this dissertation in order to enrich and inform my more theoretical and "academic" discussion. In order to help me remember my experiences as a doctoral student in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes, I reviewed their course outlines, my class notes, reading reflections, and assignments. My class note-taking often combines capturing the factual (what the teacher says) along with my personal reactions or reflections (what I felt in that moment, or a personal connection, for

example). Similarly, during my teaching of *Ishmael*, I emailed colleagues, myself, and wrote whole-class messages via my Google Classroom pages. I lean on these traces of my teaching in order to help me remember, as accurately as possible, what transpired during those times.

As I did not collect any student-generated data, all of the aforementioned includes only data that I initiated. In the case of assigned work, I mean the assigned task itself, and not students' responses or essays. Whiteboard class notes include only writing I have produced, and not exemplars of student work. For the purposes of the next section, I defer to Hewoon Chang's (2008) *Autoethnography as Method,* which offers a clear and concise roadmap for conducting autoethnographic research.

Finally, in Chapters 5 and 6, as I am also interested in the pedagogical nature of the novels *Ishmael* and *Nothing*, I analyze Ishmael's (the teacher/gorilla) pedagogical approach in comparison to Pierre-Anthon's (a character in *Nothing*), through Badiou's theoretical framework. In short, while I believe the teachings of each character are important, the ways those characters attempted to teach others are of significant relevance to my exploration of invitation and the refractive educational event.

What I Do and How I Feel About It: Refractions of My Teaching

Self-observational and self-reflective data are linked. The former is an accounting of the researcher's "actual behaviors, thoughts, and emotions as they occur in natural contexts" (Chang, 2008, p. 90). Furthermore, Rodriguez and Rayve (2002) suggest that self-observation allows for the recognition of behaviors, thoughts, or emotions, that are not always obvious, or that have been "taken-for-granted, habituated, and/or unconscious" or not readily accessible from memory (as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 91).

Self-reflective data builds on the self-observational data and offers the opportunity for "introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are and what you are" (Chang, 2008, p. 95). Using a field journal, the researcher can collect their "private and personal thoughts and feelings pertaining to their research processes" (p. 95). The necessity of such detailed journaling and record keeping of objective (what I did) and subjective (how I felt about what I did) data helps to avoid autoethnographic research becoming an exercise in self-adulation, at the expense of maintaining a critical eye both inward (self) and outward (culture). Maintaining this critical eye helps me to heed Strong-Wilson et al.'s (2013) warning, working to ensure that these acts of remembering are not an exercise in a "retrograde and conservative" form of nostalgia (p. 5). By this I mean a resistance in framing my past experiences through a lens of "homesickness" or "longing" and instead to offer my recollections as, "useful, creative and generative" as they help me refract towards a new and emergent truth (p. 5). It is also for this reason that I deploy the term refraction as it connotes this sense of generativity whereas, in the context of this dissertation, reflection connotes a foreclosing on the potential for an eventful break or rupturing.

I initially kept a journal in order to record observations of my teaching experiences; however, I found this practice to be somewhat redundant. The reason for this redundancy is because I use Google Classroom in order to communicate with my students. Due to the nature of how I communicate with my students my whole-class missives often both recapped the activities of the day alongside my thinking about how the class went, including analyses of why things happened the way they did. Secondly, as I stated earlier, I would also email my collaborative colleagues (for example: teachers in my department, members of my supervisory committee, etc.) and myself my

observations, thoughts, and wonderings about my teaching experiences alongside student reactions and contributions to our classroom conversations. I include excerpts from these entries in order to help me remember what I did, how I felt about it, and the ways in which a particular lesson or activity may have impacted the classes and/or my own thinking. This data helped me to enrich, especially, my stories of teaching the novel *Nothing* in addition to providing the opportunity for me to contrast my pedagogical approach(es) with *Nothing* and *Ishmael*. Furthermore, in recording these observations, I was also able to investigate how my truth process is ever-evolving from the days of being a student in Professor Eppert and Professor den Heyer's classes; how the readings and writing I engaged in during those courses are still (or not any longer) working their way through my understanding of curriculum and pedagogy.

Again, I found that over time, my Google Classroom posting tended to supersede my personal journaling. I believe this is due to the highly personal and reflective nature of how I communicate with my students, often as though they are my peers. These were my journal entries not in name, but in the spirit of self-observational and self-reflective practice (reflection here connoting a thoughtful summary of the classwork completed that day and not, as in this dissertation, connoting my truth process). That being said, in my findings chapter (Chapter 7) I include excerpts from a variety of these self-reflective sources; often, they will point to an immediate impression of how a particular lesson went, or, a rumination on something a student contributed. In other cases, the time between those initial written reflections and my writing *about* those reflections may lead to some refractive insights. Put differently, I will also share some analyses about my initial analyses since the truth process is ever-unfolding, my perspectives sometimes evolve and this evolving truthful re-cognition will be evident in the findings chapter too.

Data Analysis: Reverse Engineering the Self, in the Past, Present, and Future Anterior

Chang (2008) suggests that once an ample amount of data has been collected, the process of analysis and interpretation may begin. She also includes a caveat suggesting that data collection and analysis are not mutually exclusive processes. In other words, there is no discrete division between these two endeavors, they often occur simultaneously, and there is no "quick and easy" strategy for this undertaking. Chang (2008) cites Denzin and Lincoln (1994) who remind us "the processes of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation are neither terminal nor mechanical. They are always emergent, unpredictable, and unfinished" (as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 125). In this spirit of unpredictability, I outline how I undertook the processes of data analysis and interpretation.

Chang (2008) differentiates between data analysis and interpretation. Data analysis, firstly, is the process of "[identifying] the essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships" among the data (Wolcott, 1994, as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 127). In other words, analysis involves describing the data itself without interpreting its significance or attempting to extract deeper meaning from it while identifying what relationships exist – or do not – within the data itself. Interpretation of data, on the other hand, "focuses on finding cultural meanings beyond the data" (Chang, 2008, p. 127). This is where the researcher works to understand what the data means in a personal and culturally wholistic sense. I am reminded of Bausell (2019) who suggests that through interpreting my own stories and experiences, I become able "to re-see and 'see myself seeing' the power relations embedded in my [earlier] teaching life, particularly as it

relates to the humanities" (p. 20); from a Badiouian perspective, the act of re-seeing is akin to a refraction that leads towards my re-cognition, or, re-knowing.

The researcher resides within the context of the personal and the cultural, and it is at this intersection that meaning begins to emerge; Chang (2008) suggests moving beyond analysis and into interpretation compels the researcher to recontextualize the data in a broader cultural framework – in my case, this context would be ELA teacher identity, pedagogy, and curriculum, within a neoliberal situation. As Chang (2008) writes: "In autoethnography, the insider and the outsider converge. Namely, [the researcher] is a generator, collector, and interpreter of data…familiar with the context of data and the context of autoethnographic interpretation" (pp. 127-128). Elsewhere, Chang suggests that researchers might consider themselves people who "excavate meanings from two different contexts and wrestle with contradictions and similarities between them" (p. 128). How might I begin to "see" the ways in which the cultural was written into my persona, especially if these cultural inscriptions were authored surreptitiously? If, as I have argued, eventful reading turns the literary text into a frame through which I self-interpret/critique during the moments of reading, I was able to use my literary engagements, with *Ishmael*, *Nothing*, various course readings, and Badiou's theories, to help me interpret my data.

If the object of inquiry is inseparable from the inquiry process, my data interpretation should be an attempt to reverse engineer the formation of the inquirer. Through Badiou, perhaps this is the ability to name my situation, where an arrangement of multiples had been so normalized, as to become hidden from cognitive view. For example, when I use my/I/mine/own, these words do not overtly account for the elements of neoliberal culture that have provided a knotting of multiples into my being.

Important Issues in Autoethnographic Research

In the final section of this chapter, I will address some of the concerns pertaining to autoethnographic research, and the steps I have taken to ensure the credibility, verisimilitude, and resonance of my research. Denzin (2014) writes that autoethnography is subject to criticism along the lines of reliability, validity, and generalizability. He states that this research method "has been dismissed for not being sufficiently rigorous, theoretical, or analytical" (p. 70) and, as its critics claim, "a single case only tells one story; narrative inquiry is not scientific inquiry" (p. 70). In this next section, I will address how my work speaks to these critiques of autoethnography and how my work mitigates such claims.

Credibility

In autoethnography, the standard of credibility is akin to the standard of reliability in quantitative research (Denzin, 2011). Denzin (2014) defines reliability as "the narrator's credibility as a writer-performer-observer; that is, has an event been correctly remembered and described? (p. 70). Trustworthiness also concerns whether the writer is a "credible observer" and whether the work is "pure fiction or a truthful account" (p. 70). Fiction, here, refers not to the genre of writing (as opposed to non-fiction), but instead that "narrative truth is based on how a story is used, understood, and responded to" (p. 70). Denzin acknowledges that memory is indeed "fallible;" however, there is a difference between a factually accurate memory and a truthful memory (p. 70). Denzin (2014) speaks on behalf of autoethnographers who assert that narrative truth "is based on how the story is used, understood, and responded to" (p. 70), and that "people tell different stories of the same event or experience" (Ellis et al., 2011, as cited in Denzin, 2014, p. 70). In order to address the concern of credibility, I admit that, in some cases, the

facts of a memory or story might be hazy, forgotten, overlooked, ignored, or unconsciously altered, for some reason. However, the stories I have chosen to write about are true as I remember experiencing them. There is also a “double truth,” from a Badiouian lens. There is the truth of the experience as I experienced it then, that is, the truth of a pre-eventful self. There is also the truth of the experience as I re-experience it now, from my post-eventful perspective.

Furthermore – and in hopes of rendering my work more credible – the stories I share are ones of shattering and humbling – I am not seeking to self-aggrandize. I instead am seeking to understand my experiences and how they have impacted me. Through the lens of Badiou’s event and truth-process theories, I am narrating these events from a post-eventful perspective. In seeking to re-cognize what my experiences will have meant, it is in my best interest to provide as faithful an account of these experiences as possible – to discover and re-discover my conscious and unconscious urges and desires – so that I may come to articulate their truth.

Verisimilitude

Questions of validity in autoethnographic research are concerned with the “verisimilitude” of the author’s work (Denzin, 2014, p. 70). The purpose of this verisimilitude is to “evoke a feeling that the experience described is true, coherent, believable, and connects the reader to the writer’s world” (p. 70). As I recount the stories, my aim is that the stories ultimately “ring true” for me and for the reader. When I teach narrative writing to my students, one of the lessons concerns the validity of their stories. *As I read your stories*, I tell them, *your character arc must be logical and believability depends on whether I can follow your logic*. Another lesson is on vivid description. I will tell my students: *In narrative writing, your aim is to move the reader; one of the ways we*

do this is by narrating the experience so vividly, I feel I am right there with you, experiencing your story as you once did. If I am not able to follow my students' logic, or if their story reads as a listing off of facts, I am pulled out of their narrative and the connection between their experience and me is lost. In sharing my stories in my dissertation, I strive to achieve a sense of verisimilitude. I attempt to write in such a way that readers are drawn into and remain connected to my experiences so it feels that they are "right there with me" each time.

Resonance

The notion of generalizability is a tricky one for autoethnographers; it is "determined by how a reader responds to a representation" of the writer's experiences and whether it "speaks" to the reader "as a universal singular" (Denzin, 2014, p. 70). In response to whether autoethnographic work can or even should be generalizable, Denzin (2014) claims that this research method "cannot be judged by traditional positivist criteria" (p. 70). Autoethnography "is not focused on generalization in the traditional sense" (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 215). Instead, generalizability occurs to the extent the writing resonates with the reader who determines "whether findings extend to analogous situations" (p. 215) or when an autoethnographic study "moves others to ethical action" (Denzin, 2014, p. 70). The "first person language and adverbs like 'sometimes'" deployed by autoethnographers, work to "nudge readers to consider the relationship between the 'I' of autoethnography and themselves" (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 215). This nudging invites the reader to "compare their own lived experiences and contexts of interest to those conveyed by the author" (p. 215). As it pertains to my autoethnography, and as I have suggested earlier in the dissertation, my study, as with teaching toward an

educational event, should be considered an invitation[13]. The invitation is extended to you, the reader of this work, to measure my truths against yours and to contemplate or enter into a "complicated conversation" about whether my writing has something to offer you.

Limitations of the Study

This study's scope is limited to the viewpoints and perspectives of my teaching experiences. These experiences and personalized accounts are intended to help me explore my immediate circumstances; however, I hope other readers may benefit from my work. Another potential limitation of my study is that I am not collecting student-centered data that might help me understand the way my teaching actually impacts my students. The reason I exclude such data is that prior to investigating the effects of my teaching on my students, I must first understand why and how it is I teach. Given this focus, collecting student-centered data (interviews, focus groups, etc.) would be outside the scope of my research question. As I have hopefully come to a better understanding of my curricular and pedagogical approaches, I wish to explore the impact of my teaching on my students, as a post-doctoral course of study.

Ethical Considerations

I wish here to briefly outline and discuss the ethical implications and considerations for my research. According to Christians (2011), there are 4 dimensions for ethical consideration in qualitative research: informed consent; deception; privacy and confidentiality; and, accuracy. Given the sources of my data collection – namely that I am drawing upon my own memories, observations and experiences of teaching and learning – my ethical considerations are to exclude the participation of any of my students or

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[13] I elaborate on this notion of invitation more fully in Chapter 7

colleagues. As such, the informed consent required is my own – and I hereby consent to being a subject of this research project. More seriously, there are no other participants in this research, per se; I do recount experiences with others – Professors Eppert and den Heyer most frequently – and I address their inclusion below. Furthermore, the power dynamic inherent to the student-teacher relationship would preclude any inclusion of my students' work, or words, in this project; I would have been required to obtain their consent, and, they might have been discouraged from refusing due to perceived threats of negative repercussion for not supporting my work.[14] In other words, they might have felt obliged to participate so I do not, in their parlance, mark them harder. In this sense, choosing not to have my own students as participants in my research was essential to "[securing] the well being of [my] subjects" (Christians, 2011, p. 66).

This delimitation permits me to use any communications (email, for example) that I initiated, however, to honor the privacy and confidentiality of my students and colleagues, I do not include any responses not authored by me. In cases where I include a reply to an email not initiated by me, for example, I do not include any other content other than my response, with any personal identifiers redacted where necessary. Doing so helps mitigate against students or colleagues who read my work to discern who I am referring to, in spite of using pseudonyms, as even these "are often recognized by insiders" according to Christians (2011, p. 66). Making the choice to exclude student work or communiqués from others (without informed consent) also helps avoid engaging in any deceptive practices.

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[14] I do include two excerpts from student emails I received after our course was completed and they were no longer students at my school; I requested their permission to use these excerpts and they provided written consent. Ethically, there were no potential punitive consequences for their refusal nor reward for their agreement, therefore I included their correspondence in this dissertation.

Although they are not participants in the strictest sense, another ethical consideration might be the potential conflict that Professor Eppert and Professor den Heyer, whose classes instigated my events, are on my doctoral supervisory committee. Although they do figure prominently in my dissertation, my research is not about them or their courses, per se. My research is not concerned with critiquing their effectiveness as professors, nor am I interested in lauding them; they will live in the periphery of my dissertation, acting as curators of the readings I encountered in their classes. My interest is predominantly with my interactions with those readings.

Final Thoughts

I wish to conclude this chapter by referring to an email I received from a student of mine, (used here with their permission). I taught this student during the fall 2018 term and they were enrolled in my ELA 30-1 class. This student was relatively quiet throughout the course. They would speak when spoken to and seldom contributed to class conversations. Twice, during our *Nothing* novel study, my student lingered after class was done and began asking me questions about the characters. What started as a conversation about the novel evolved into discussions about how to live in the world. We talked about Western and non-Western approaches to living a fulfilling life, and we shared our struggles with the demands of consumerist and materialist orientations of success. These conversations occurred toward the end of the novel study and as the classed moved on to the next unit, my student became their quiet self again. I thought nothing of it and we had no further conversations beyond assignment due dates and the like. We had our last day of class together, said our good-byes, and they walked out the door. Two weeks after classes ended, I had a new email in my inbox from this student, asking to stay in touch so we could continue our conversations about how to live in this

world. My student's desire to stay in touch acts as a microcosm for this entire educational project I am pursuing. For me, this is a statement of possibility, that in discussing how we live our lives, we might be open to consider other ways of living. Other ways of *being*.

My work, throughout this study, is to understand how my personal and professional life was and continues to be impacted through my encounter with educational events. If I can better understand these impacts, perhaps, I might invite my students to experience the same, and come to a fuller sense of how their lives are also informed by engagements within the public sphere. I also wish that my work might invite the opportunity for other teachers to embark on truth-processes of their own.

Chapter Five (Data Analysis Part One)

The Road to Hell is Paved with Copies of *Ishmael*: Experiences of Teaching Disastrously, or Teaching with Humility

The novel *Ishmael* opens thusly: "TEACHER seeks pupil. Must have an earnest desire to save the world. Apply in person" (Quinn, 1992, p. 2, emphasis in original). For a long time, I envisioned myself as that kind of teacher, one who desired to save the world through his students. This chapter discusses my reckoning with that desire. My experience of teaching *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1992) acts as a cautionary tale. Chronologically, this experience began during the Fall term of 2015 and is a story of my attempt to enact new curricular and pedagogical engagements that followed my experiences of two educational events as a doctoral student. Following the events I have already discussed in in Professors Eppert's and den Heyer's courses, I attempted to teach this novel twice more, in the Winter of 2016 and finally in the Fall of 2017. I thought about organizing this chapter chronologically, in order to differentiate my experiences of teaching the novel on three separate occasions, with three separate classes. However, looking back on my experiences of teaching this novel, though the students in front of me changed, my pedagogical approach and "philosophy" of teaching *Ishmael* did not change. Furthermore, my experiences of teaching this novel occurred prior to my decision to consider these experiences as data for my dissertation, meaning my primary data source for analyzing these experiences are my memories of doing so. Additionally, unlike a course outline in a post-secondary class, where course assignments and readings are indicated at the outset, my course outlines provide a general overview of the class alongside the outcomes students are expected to meet (see Appendix F for a recent example). Though I do have one course outline from 2015 that contains a direct reference

to my throughline questions (as discussed in Chapter 2), this format diverged from the administration directives and so I had to remove those in order to comply. I also analyze and discuss other tangible artifacts of my teaching at this time.

I wish to begin this chapter with a review of how I remember teaching the novel. Rather than offer three distinct and likely repetitive discussions of my teaching, I instead organize this chapter thematically and analytically, viewing my experiences of teaching this novel holistically rather than discretely. Though one might question this decision by wondering about the nuances each different student group and my teaching might have engendered, I would respond by saying this lack of pedagogical change was an instance of teaching the curriculum as planned rather than lived (Aoki, 1991) and that the students themselves resided in my pedagogical and curricular blind-spot. Of course, I say this now, with the benefit of a Badiouian hindsight – that is, this realization is true for me now though it likely was not apparent to me then.

Briefly, the novel *Ishmael* is about a telepathic gorilla named Ishmael who, along with his student (a young, college-educated American man whose ethnicity is never specified), desires to save the world from humankind. Unfolding as a Socratic dialogue between the gorilla and his student – also the unnamed narrator – *Ishmael* aims to dispose of the "myth" that humans represent the end of the evolutionary cycle. As rulers of the Earth, humans have exempted themselves from what Ishmael calls the natural laws that would help keep the planet in balance; one culturally specific group of humans are described as *takers* who wage war with the planet in the name of scientific and anthropomorphic progress.

This novel, and my experience of teaching it, acts as the intersection of my personal, curricular, and pedagogical re-cognitions – the narrator embodies the versions

of me before and after my experiences in Professor Eppert's and den Heyer's classes. Furthermore, given the Socratic nature of the student/teacher interactions in the novel, *Ishmael* offers a meta-commentary on how education – and educators – might offer a space to help their students experience the same eventful encounter that I, and the novel's narrator, had undergone. Again, it is along the lines of these analyses that this chapter unfolds.

In the years between 2015-2017, I decided I would teach this novel to my grade twelve English Language Arts students so that I could begin changing lives and changing the world, as I saw fit. My teaching of the novel occurred after my experiences of taking the first of Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes; my enrolment in the second set of courses with these professors (Fall 2015 with Professor Eppert and Winter 2016 with Professor den Heyer) overlapped with my teaching of the novel between 2015 and 2016. My desire to change my students and the world indicate my teaching aims at that time; my aim now – to invite my students to encounter an educational event, is distinct from the former. I came to understand this distinction especially as my coursework continued to provoke in me questions about my pedagogical practice alongside my students' overwhelmingly negative reactions to the *Ishmael* unit.

In theorizing on the post-event process, or truth procedure, Badiou (2001) suggests that there is a potential for Evil (*le mal*) to emerge. As mentioned previously, Badiou is not referring to "evil" in a religious sense (i.e. a manifestation of the devil, or evil as an ephemeral force); instead Badiou's notion of evil accounts for the different ways that an individual's truth process might inflict harm onto others. Of the various modes of evil he describes – *terror, betrayal, disaster* – the form of evil that emerges from this particular story of teaching is "disaster" (p. 71).

To simplify this configuration of Badiou's (2001) evil, disaster is when a single truth, paired with absolute power, is imposed onto others. Badiou considers this imposition of an absolute truth an evil because of its potential to prevent any other truth to emerge. This evil is akin to pronouncing a "one truth for all" that would eliminate any resistance to that truth. Historically speaking, den Heyer and van Kessel (2015) offer the example of Charlemagne, who imposed his Christian truth onto others, upon pain of death. den Heyer and van Kessel also offer the mythical figure of Procrustes, who "forced his houseguests to fit his guest bed through the tortures of stretching or amputation" (p. 13). Much like Procrustes's poor victims, an absolute truth would give rise to violent change on the evil-doer's terms. My story of teaching this novel places me alongside Charlemagne and Procrustes, as a figure who demanded his subjects accept his truth, upon pain of *educational death*. This claim may seem hyperbolic and I must admit I am being a tad histrionic, however – and more plainly – students who did not align their views with mine incurred an increased likelihood of academic struggle during my course. The death – metaphorical, of course – connotes the reality that many of my students may only had one last attempt to pass my class prior to "age-ing out" of the public school board; they would then have had to pay close to one thousand dollars (per course attempt) to a private institution. In this sense, the cost would have been too great for some of them and their educational pursuits may have ended prematurely. This sense of failure in my teaching of the novel will be discussed later in the chapter. In this next section, I attempt to reconstruct what my teaching of *Ishmael* looked like.

Teaching *Ishmael*

I had read *Ishmael* in my youth but came to it again after Professor den Heyer mentioned in class that he taught it when he was a High School Social Studies teacher. I

remember going home and over the weekend, reading it again, in one sitting, conjuring up ways I could teach it with my students. *This book*, I thought, would provoke in my students some kind of awakening to their own captivity and compel them to wrest free of the chains of capitalism and anthropocentrism.

As I read the novel, I opened a Word document and charted a scope and sequencing of how I would lead my students to their freedom: Unit 1: "Read Ishmael. What is the Grand Narrative? What narratives/stories does this exclude? How are we taught to accept (and not see) the Grand Narrative?" Looking back on this document now, I notice my phrasing indicative of how I embedded my didacticism in the questions themselves: the narratives *do* exclude; we *are* taught to accept and not see the Grand Narrative. While I still believe these claims to be true, I have since learned that students do not wish to have the rug pulled from under them so directly, so forcefully.

If I consider an eventful encounter as a type of existential shock, it may be wise to consider a useful analogy for how some might react to having their worldview punctured. Van Kessel (personal communication) offers a metaphor for this reaction; namely that our worldview is like a warm winter jacket on the coldest of days; an attempt to puncture a hole in this jacket only results in a person holding it tightly in order to stay warm and comfortable. Instead, she asks, how might we raise the temperature of the room so the jacket itself becomes uncomfortable and is then willingly removed? In each instance of teaching *Ishmael*, following the jacket and rug analogies above, I thought I left my students either shivering in the cold, or falling over as the ground beneath them was ripped away. Each time I taught the *Ishmael* unit, the rug pulling continued, to my increasing frustration. I detail the reasons for this shortly.

As I continued to plan out my *Ishmael* unit, I understood that the narrator of the story acts as a stand-in for the reader. In the way the novel unfolds, as the narrator absorbs his teacher's lessons, the reader does the same. In this light, I decided to introduce the novel in a similar fashion to how Ishmael (the gorilla) introduces his "course" to the narrator in order to prepare them for what was to come. I assigned my students a pre-reading task (Appendix G) that posed three kinds of questions. The first set of questions connected to *Ishmael* in that my students were asked to grapple with ideas that emerge from the novel. I wanted my students to begin thinking about how they know what they know, the relationship between humans and non-humans, and the successes and failures of humans, as a species. Some of these questions quoted the novel directly and others paraphrased key ideas or moments from the novel. The second set of questions concerned itself with getting students to imagine the possibilities of the future, following my experiences in Professor den Heyer's class. Students were asked to "think deeply about this, beyond flying cars and hoverboards" without much direction about what that might mean. The last question on this pre-reading activity was, "what role do YOU play in shaping the world around you? How might your actions lead us toward the probable/preferable/possible future?" The way the word "you" is stylized was intentional on my part: I wanted to emphasize the way they are in fact implicated in shaping the world. Looking back now, I can see how this may have been perceived as an accusatory. It would be relevant to note that this unit was taught quite early into the semester. My Google Classroom postings (for the Fall 2015 semester) show that we were doing this work between the end of September to October meaning that my students and I were still getting to know each other and perhaps it might have been too soon to broach these topics

especially considering the ways in which I wanted my students to vulnerably implicate themselves as evidenced by the pre-reading activity.

The next part of our anticipatory activities involved a short-answer survey I posed via Google Classroom. Unfortunately, the results are no longer accessible (student accounts are deleted, along with all of their electronic work, once they leave the school board), however the questions themselves remain. The first question was “What are some different forms of captivity?” The second question was “What would it be like to live in captivity?” The final question had three parts to it: “Do we live in captivity? How might we be captives? Who or what might be holding us captive?” As I review how and when I introduced my students to this novel and its themes, I cannot help but wonder, “what was I thinking!?” Trying to place myself back into the mindset of the teacher I was then, I thought that posing what I thought were provocative questions would be enough to jolt my students into some kind of awareness of: their captivity (to neoliberalism and consumerism), humankind’s arrogance as a species (and the consequences of this arrogance), and finally, their ethical responsibility to act on this newfound awareness. By asking these questions in order to provoke this awareness, I had hoped the reading of *Ishmael* would then satisfy their need to know more about how “all this” came to pass and what they could do about it. My assumption, at that time, was that because that is how I reacted to my eventful recognitions in my coursework that naturally, they would too. As I detail somewhat in this chapter and more fully in Chapter 7, my expectations did not match up with reality. And because I considered myself to be a “Good Teacher” I was not yet thinking about how my pedagogical approach might have missed the mark; this realization would only occur after I stopped teaching *Ishmael* and was teaching the novel *Nothing* instead. Of course, I cannot be sure that it was these anticipatory

assignments that affected my students' reactions to the *Ishmael* novel unit; however, I can say that if I were to teach that novel again, I would go about it much differently, along with placing that unit much later into the course's sequencing of units.

The choice to teach *Ishmael* was last minute and the copies of the novel I ordered for my classes would not arrive in time. No problem; as someone who loves the sound of his voice, I would gift my students by reading the novel to them in class. Furthermore, reading novels aloud was not something I had not been doing prior to teaching at this particular school; the perception many of us in the English department had of our students was that they struggle with reading and they struggled to do their homework; to compensate for this we read to them. Plus, I could photocopy up to ten percent of the novel without violating copyright laws.

Living Memory, Winter 2016

The memory I share below is emblematic of how, as I read the novel to my students, I would wink and nudge my "real" thoughts to them as snide remarks, tangential comments, and digressions about the state of the world, and beyond. For example, I paused and said:

> *You guys have to realize that everything we do has consequences for our planet! All of your fast-fashion H&M brand clothes that you get for cheap eats up such a vast amount of resources and is made by incredibly low-wage workers in factories that will collapse and kill hundreds of them and we don't really care or even know about it because we're so caught up in wanting to look good so we can impress others or feel better about ourselves. And when an important issue comes up? We just share about it on Facebook and feel like we've done our part, and go on living the way we always have. Just like in the book, when he says that every*

> *attempt to change the world ends up becoming a fashion statement. So we wear our pins and our ribbons to "raise awareness" about something – remember Kony 2012? That was everywhere on Facebook. What was it again? Child soldiers in an African country? The point is it was everywhere for a moment and now, what, three years later, are we still talking about it? Still trying to do something about child soliders? Sure, maybe some money gets raised for a good cause, but nothing really is going to change unless we change the world itself and how we live in it! Thoughts? Comments? Wonderings? No? Okay, where was I? Oh yeah, page 44, at the top.*

Such moments were typical of my teaching at that time. During my teaching of *Ishmael*, particularly my oral recitations of it, these winks and nudges devolved into outright soapbox pontificating and proselytizing. I would shame and guilt my students into the realization they were complicit in steering our "civilizational [aircraft]" toward "disaster" (Quinn, 1992, p. 69). As I tried to show in this living memory, *Ishmael* was my excuse to bludgeon and extemporaneously batter *my* students with *my* truth. I emphasize "my" here because like a shepherd leading his flock, or a pastor delivering a sermon to his congregation, these students – and their salvation – belonged to me during our daily seventy minutes together.

I tried teaching *Ishmael* over the course of three semesters before I stopped altogether. The copies of the novel finally did arrive, however, I still read large swaths of the novel to them aloud, allowing me to continue with my provocations. It was not all sermonizing, however, and I did still teach them about allegory and symbolism, how to interpret literature, and how to write a critical/analytical response to text (or a CART essay as it's colloquially known in Alberta; the CART essay is one of two essays students

must write on their standardized diploma exam at the end of the ELA 30-1 course). Because I did not have the time to read the whole novel to them, I would strategically assign chunks of the novel for them to read on their own, usually assigned over a weekend to give them time to do so. When classes would resume the following week, there would be a written assignment for them to complete, usually asking them to develop short answers in response to selected passages or concepts from the text (see Appendix H for an example).

These reading response assignments – unlike the ones that Professor Eppert assigned – were limited to the novel's content and often left no room for the student to explore their personal reactions or questions about the ideas they encountered in the book. The example I include in the appendix does have one such question, "what are the signs that our 'civilizational aircraft' [sic] is about to crash?" At the end of these written assignments, I did include a YWIW (you write, I write), a space for my students to share "notes/ideas/comments and/or questions for Mr. Piazza about what we're reading/discussing in class. If you have a question, write it here, and I will respond!" These were often left blank. Sometimes students did ask questions but due to the nature of the assignment, they were often content related instead of revealing how the student might have been implicating themselves into the central themes and questions of the novel and our class discussions. As I look back now on my experience of teaching this novel over those years, I can see how even if some might not have found the novel itself interesting or engaging, my pedagogical approaches were not quite engaging either.

At the end of each semester, I would give my students an anonymous survey to complete, asking if they were satisfied with the course, their effort, and what they had achieved. I also asked their opinions of my teaching, and the texts we studied in class. In

the three years I taught the novel, I gave the survey three times. The survey was made up of both multiple choice responses and short answer questions. I used the survey in order to gauge overall student satisfaction with my teaching, their satisfaction with text selection, and in order to solicit more specific feedback on my teaching and how I can improve. Though not all students respond to the survey, most of them do. I no longer have the exact numbers of responses for each survey and because they were administered through Google Classroom, the responses themselves are no longer available. Here, I rely on my memories of how my students responded and my reactions to their feedback.

The first time I gave the survey I was surprised by how few students chose *Ishmael* as a worthwhile text to study. In the open-ended questions, a number of them told me, in various ways, not to teach it again: "Mr. Piazza, please choose another book, this one suuuuuucked lol" or another that went, "I can see why you want to teach this book but honestly what's the point it's not like anything is gonna change" and others were more curt: "different book." *Hah! I thought. I guess a few students have willfully remained captive. I'll do better next time*. Sometimes, an unexpected survey result can be attributed to a particular group of students in a specific class, however, these responses were similar across the two groups of students I taught that semester. And, while I understand taste in literature or film is subjective, *Ishmael* was an outlier in terms of the negative reactions it garnered, compared to the near-universal acclaim for my film and short story choices. After teaching the novel a second time, there was something within me that must have recognized the challenges of teaching that novel. This time, my open-ended question read, "What do I have to stop doing/change up when I teach this course again? (don't say "no *Ishmael,"* ha ha)." My students were trying tell me that there was something wrong; what I was doing – my teaching of that novel – wasn't working *for*

them. That I embedded that "joke" in the comments reveals to me that I knew this to be true, but it also brings to bear deeper implications about my persistence in teaching this novel in order to produce certain desired effects in my students, in spite of the data telling me that something needed to change. These implications are explored in Chapter 7. Regarding my surveys, I ignored the data and taught the novel once more, with similar results.

Each time I taught the novel *Ishmael*, my frustrations with my students' reactions increased. They were not reacting to the book and its ideas the way I had hoped or expected. I also began cautioning against using *Ishmael* as a source text for their diploma exams. On that exam, a student is posed a topic question and they must offer an analysis of a text they studied in class in order to support their thesis/response to the topic. English teachers from across the province apply for and are selected to mark these essays; the marking is done in Edmonton and teachers are paid a daily rate supplemental to our teaching salary. Teachers are encouraged to only mark essays written about texts they themselves have taught in their classes. If you receive an essay written on a text that is unfamiliar to you, it gets placed on an "unfamiliar text" table; essay markers can then browse the table and mark texts they are familiar with (but may or may not have taught). I cannot say that I was the only teacher using *Ishmael* in an ELA 30-1 context, but after the first time I taught the novel, colleagues who marked diplomas that year said those essays were some of the last ones picked up from the unfamiliar text table. Understanding this unfamiliarity could be a disservice to my students, I began cautioning against writing about it on their diploma exam. As a result, because the novel no longer carried with it the stamp of Diploma Approved Text (not officially, of course, but as per my advice), many of my students were not interested in reading it: "Hey Piazza, why are we spending

so much time on this book if we can't even use it on the Dip?" Eventually, I became tired of fighting them on it. I would come to class and they would not have completed the assigned pages. To circumvent this occurrence, I returned to reading the novel aloud to them; many began to skip class altogether. In most cases, the novel never transcended itself into "the poem" (Rosenblatt, 1995). Drawing on Rosenblatt (1994), I imagine that as I had not fostered the right conditions, an aesthetic reading stance did not have a leg to stand on, or, was on ground so shaky, as to leave most of my readers perpetually imbalanced. And, because the novel was no longer relevant to the diploma exam, its relevance to my students diminished as well.

Although I am painting an overwhelmingly pessimistic view of my experiences with *Ishmael*, it is important to note that there were some students who did respond positively to it, though these were exceptions to the overall trend. However, because of the kinds of impersonal assignments my students were asked to write, it was hard to discern whether the students who enjoyed the novel were eventfully implicated by it. That is not to say that one's love of a text bears any relation to its eventful potential; conversely, if I don't love a text enough to read it in the first place, I find it hard to see any eventful possibilities emerging. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, in my view, what matters more is that students read the (complete) text thoughtfully, than whether they enjoy it.

Right Saviorism: Proclaiming my One Truth, for All

One of the themes explicitly discussed in *Ishmael* is that of captivity, especially the ways in which humans are both blindly held captive to their civilizational *situation* and how humanity holds the world captive; in each case, the consequences of this captivity are the same: devastation. I offer this excerpt from the novel in which Ishmael

attempts to enlighten his human student to this truth:

> Ishmael thought for a moment. “Among the people of your culture, which want to destroy the world?”
>
> “Which want to destroy it? As far as I know, no one specifically wants to destroy the world.”
>
> “And yet you do destroy it, each of you. Each of you contributes daily to the destruction of the world.”
>
> “Yes, that’s so.”
>
> “Why don’t you stop?”
>
> I shrugged. “Frankly, we don’t know how.”
>
> “You’re captives of a civilizational system that more or less compels you to go on destroying the world in order to live.”
>
> “Yes, that’s the way it seems.”
>
> “So. You are captives—and you have made a captive of the world itself. That’s what’s at stake, isn’t it? — Your captivity and the captivity of the world.”
>
> “Yes, that’s so. I’ve just never thought of it that way.”
>
> “And you yourself are a captive in a personal way, are you not?”
>
> “How so?”
>
> Ishmael smiled, revealing a great mass of ivory–colored teeth. I hadn’t known he could, until then. (Quinn, 1992, pp. 14-15)

The narrator in *Ishmael* is more readily convinced than my students were, I believe. A reason for his malleability, in my view, is that his encounter with Ishmael occurred *by choice*. Granted, he was not aware that the teacher he sought out was a giant gorilla who

could communicate telepathically; however, the novel opens as I opened this chapter: with an advertisement inviting interested applicants who sought to save the world but required a teacher to do so. The point at which the reader encounters the narrator in the opening pages is one where the ideation of a world in crisis, on the brink of destruction, even, is already true in his mind's eye. To an extent, the narrator is a willing party to Ishmael's aims.

My students, on the other hand, received no such invitations prior to the start of the class. There was no opting out, other than to drop the class altogether or to take advantage of a timetable change period within the first week of classes. Even then, those that do leave during that time are replaced by new students who would not have been a part of my first-day preambles and course overview.

From my memory of their responses to questions about human captivity, my students did not see themselves as complicit or captive in anyway, save for the occasional broad notions of "society" or "the media" (some said, for example, "media brainwashes us"); in the context of my classroom and fresh from my experiences in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes, this perception – that many of us are captive or implicated by neoliberalism or consumerism with increasingly pernicious consequences for the planet – belonged to me and stemmed from my own eventful understanding of my own captivity and complicity within a situation of Western neoliberalism. And so, unlike Ishmael, who did not have to work very hard to convince his pupil of the central premise that "the world is not going to survive for very much longer as humanity's captive," (this understanding is achieved within the first few of their many conversations) my students required such "explication" (Quinn, 1992, p. 15). Looking back now, my task was Sisyphean in nature – a constant uphill journey of compelling a rock – my students'

perceptions of themselves and the world – only to have to repeat this process with every new chapter, and every new revelation prompted by Ishmael the teacher.

Reading* Ishmael *Aloud: Speaking Truth to Power (and Power to Truth)

How do you help your students understand that our current situation is untenable, is failing, and headed toward disaster? To what extent would they be receptive to this notion? How might reading offer a space through which these truths might be considered or even accepted? I begin this section with another excerpt from the novel, wherein Ishmael deploys the metaphor of the civilizational aircraft, a metaphor for humanity's current trajectory, in order to illustrate a central irony of human understanding: an inability to re-cognize the sensation of flight as potentially leading to the reality of a deadly descent:

> But of course there are optimists as well, who say, "We must have faith in our craft. After all, it has brought us this far in safety. What's ahead isn't doom, it's just a little hump that we can clear if we all just pedal a little harder. Then we'll soar into a glorious, endless future, and the Taker Thunderbolt will take us to the stars and we'll conquer the universe itself." But your craft isn't going to save you. Quite the contrary, it's your craft that's carrying you toward catastrophe. Five billion of you pedaling away—or ten billion or twenty billion—can't make it fly. It's been in free fall from the beginning, and that fall is about to end. (Quinn, 1992, p. 64)

In addition to my perceived ownership of my students and a desire to save them, I understood myself to be a passenger on this same crashing civilizational craft: As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, I was teaching to save myself. Again, this may

seem like a statement that understates the many privileges I do have; however, climate crisis is here and strikes closer to (figuratively and literally) home each year. Each year brings increased risk, of fire, flooding, tornados, and earthquakes. In light of these crises, I sometimes lay awake at night, wondering whether we should have brought two children into this world, and the kind of world we have left them, and their potential descendants. The feeling and urgency in my teaching was visceral, at least for me.

There was no time to dawdle in debates about whether climate change is real or whether the colonization of people and the planet was a necessary price to pay for heated seats during wintertime driving. As long as I understood these crises to be true, I would proclaim them as such. And I thought, at the time, my teaching was good (because I have always been a "good" teacher: award winning, scholarship receiving, Master's educated, doctorate in process, various leadership roles at my school, etc. I was too *qualified* to not be good!). However, and borrowing from Ishmael's metaphor, my pedagogical aircraft was crashing too and much like those flying in Ishmael's metaphorical aircraft, I too was in denial of my impending pedagogical doom.

The Pains of Being Totally Right: Badiou's *Disaster* and my Teaching

In *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou (2001) begins his exploration of disaster by posing the following question: "Does the power of a truth, in the situation in which it pursues its faithful course, have the potential to be *total*?" (p. 80, emphasis added). He follows this question by distinguishing truth – that which emerges after an eventful encounter on the edge of a situation's void – from opinion, "a judgment applied to this or that element of the objective situation" (p. 81). Opinions, occurring within the context of our quotidian life, are statements we make about the weather or about politics: Looks like it's gonna be a cold one today, or, all of these politicians are in

it for themselves. According to Badiou, opinions are how we discuss the "named" elements of a situation; this capacity to name is what distinguishes "human animals" from the others (p. 81). After an eventful encounter, the militant truth seeker also wishes to discuss the elements of a situation, albeit "from the perspective of the event" rather than from within the situation itself (p. 81).

Truths Caught Between Situational and Eventful Perspectives

In my view**,** Badiou (2001) suggests that the becoming subject lives within a liminal space that unfolds upon embarking on a truth process. It is this liminality that gives rise to the potential for evil to emerge. I interpret Badiou's writing about evil as the "terms and conditions" of the eventful encounter and ensuing truth process, so to speak. Just as we must pay attention to the language of any contractual agreement, Badiou focuses on the function of language and the role it plays in generating post-eventful good or evil.

After being seized by an event, the becoming subject begins to see the world anew, through the "perspective of the event" (Badiou, 2001, p. 81). This eventful perspective is precisely what allows the individual to re-cognize themselves and the world around them. Though the event encounter shatters the individual's situational coordinates, they still use "the language of the situation…just like everyone else" (p. 81). Badiou describes this reconsideration of the situation as "[changing] the names of the elements in the situation" (p. 82). For example, prior to my eventful encounters, I might not have named my lifestyle as one that contributed to neoliberalism and its relationship to climate crisis; my post-eventful re-cognition of my lifestyle is far more capable of viewing my choices through a more critical – and truthful – lens. In my view, this naming is also complicated by the ever-evolving nature of the truth process – and its future-

anterior tense – I am still finding out what the truth will eventually be. In this way, although my teaching of *Ishmael* occurred after my eventful encounters, I am now further along in the trajectory of my truth process and see even those actions more truthfully.

Badiou (2001) notes that although declarations of truth might have the appearance of being "banal," for those seized, these declarations wield "power in the situation [that is] nevertheless entirely distinct from the common usage of these same words" (p. 82). Badiou uses, as an example, the powerful expression, "I love you" for a couple who has just fallen in love, especially, perhaps, in their first utterance of those words to each other (p. 82). As Badiou states, the power of a truth, especially when deployed against opinions, "forces the pragmatic namings (the language of the objective situation) to bend and change shape upon contact with the subject-language" (p. 82). Following Badiou's reasoning, the seized individual could yield the power of their truth

> to name and evaluate *all* the elements of the objective situation from the perspective of the truth process. Rigid and dogmatic (or "blinded"), the subject-language would claim the power, based on its own axioms, to name the whole of the real, and thus to change the world. (p. 83, emphasis in original)

Blinded by the light, indeed. It is difficult for me to read Badiou's writing here and not think of my experiences of teaching *Ishmael*; I unpack this rigid and dogmatic approach to teaching *Ishmael* more fully in Chapter 7.

For Badiou (2001), the event and its ensuing truth-process are affirmative and generative in the sense that they land on the side of what he terms "the Good" and that the potential for Evil is secondary to the emergence of the Good (p. 85). I understand that the terms "Good" and "Evil" have long histories in their use and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore these fully; I use these words because Badiou does and style

them according to his usage. For Badiou, the conception of Evil serves as a caveat of sorts, a reminder that the road to hell *is* often paved with good intentions. Concerning disaster – the totalitarian or authoritarian application of a single truth to rule the world – Badiou warns us thusly: “The Good is Good only to the extent that it does not aspire to render the world good…So it must be that the power of a truth is also a kind of powerlessness” (p. 85). In my view, an example of a Badiouian Good is one’s ability to remain faithful to their truth process while avoiding becoming ensnared by the three Badiouian Evils. The complication here, as concerns an educational education, is what to do with *my* truth (as emerging from my eventful experiences), as I encounter students I feel might benefit from it. Badiou’s discussion of evil has implications for my teaching of the novel that I will discuss in Chapter 7. Here, I wish to return to my discussion of *Ishmael* in order to explore the pedagogical approaches Ishmael deploys with his student, specifically, how he figures as a pedagogue who avoids succumbing to such Evils.

Ishmael is the Teacher I Am (Trying to Become)

The quote, “TEACHER seeks pupil. Must have an earnest desire to save the world. Apply in person” that opens this chapter of my dissertation is taken from the first page of the novel *Ishmael* (Quinn, 1992, p. 2). Not much context is provided about the nature of the advertisement the narrator responds to, other than it intrigued him from the moment he saw it. The narrator remains unnamed throughout the novel; according to a Q&A on the author’s website[15], this was done because “it universalizes his role as a narrator.” In that same Q&A, Quinn suggests that if the narrator was too smart, “the average readers will get lost; if the pupil is too dumb, average readers will get bored.” I

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[15] See the full conversation at https://www.ishmael.org/about/faq/

include these insights on the narrator because, in my view, the unnamed, average narrator-pupil acts as a stand-in for the reader. I believe we can see ourselves in him (especially male readers, since he is male), precisely because he is like so many of us – he is average. That he lacks a name allows me to use mine as a placeholder as I read. The identification of the reader-as-narrator is significant when I consider my earlier discussion of eventful reading; in viewing the narrator as a proxy for myself, it is as if Ishmael is addressing and teaching *me* throughout the novel. This was the case in my experience of reading *Ishmael*. I also note this information – and its relevance to eventful reading – because Ishmael's pedagogical approach is to begin with his advertisement-cum-invitation: only "earnest" applicants are wanted (Quinn, 1992, p. 2).

I believe the problematic of desire applies to the teacher more so than the student; if anything, the nature of an invitation, necessary for the emergence of an event, is to seek out students possessing a "disinterested interest" to be educated (Badiou, 2001, p. 49). Again, because the narrator is a stand-in for me, I am also being invited into becoming Ishmael's student – the ultimate "acceptance" of this invitation is the reader seeking out the book too. Although you might say that Ishmael has to invite his students because he is a gorilla, I might counter that by thinking that, as a gorilla, he could presumably avail himself of a student by force. I prefer to see his advertisement through the lens of a humble invitation while he waits patiently for applicants to respond.

I also see Ishmael as a Badiouian militant figure. He has had four students before our narrator and although he was not successful with them, he is faithful to his enterprise and, as Badiou writes, manifests this notion of "keep going!" When asked by the narrator why he failed, Ishmael responds by saying that he "underestimated the difficulty of what I was trying to teach – and because I didn't understand the minds of my pupils well

enough" (p. 6). Ishmael's subject area? "Captivity" (p. 6). In many ways, and despite my "official" subject matter being English Language Arts, I strive to address the potential captivity of gender norms, toxic masculinity, homophobia, racism, settler colonialism, and neoliberalism. My teaching aims to help my students understand the ways in which they might be held captive to the demands and expectations these concepts hold over them. Granted my approach has evolved over the last few years, but my "subject area" remains somewhat consistent.

Pedagogically speaking, I also identify with Ishmael's recognition of his failures as being both the challenge of the task of teaching to these aims while simultaneously misunderstanding how his students' "minds" might receive those teachings if not primed to do so. Elsewhere, as any good reflective teacher does, Ishmael tweaks his teaching in order to become a better educator. He tried and failed before finally arriving at the names "Takers" and "Leavers" to describe the two "cultures" of people inhabiting the Earth (p. 21). As he tells the narrator, "I've used various names with various pupils, but I'm going to try a new pair [of names] with you" (p. 21). Although these are the names that Ishmael prefers to use, he invites his student to consider alternatives that would make him more "comfortable"; given the choice, the narrator opts for Ishmael's nomenclature (p. 22).

Unpacking and Repacking My Backpack: Re-cognizing **Ishmael**

A moment of honesty. Writing this in 2022, it has been a few years since I last read *Ishmael,* cover to cover. The last time I read it was also the last time I taught it – back in 2017. Reading it now in the four years since reading it last, what strikes me is how my current style of teaching has become more aligned with Ishmael's. Granted I do not communicate telepathically, and I do not fully engage in the kinds of rhetorical and Socratic questioning that Ishmael so often employs. I consider this a rediscovery because

I had somewhat lost the thread of *Ishmael*'s pedagogical impact on me; I don't know whether the novel directly inspired my current mode of teaching because I do not remember making the conscious choice to teach like Ishmael.

Perhaps my encounter with the novel more subtly shaped my teaching and in returning to the novel now, I am noticing these overlaps. The convergences I am referring to are that Ishmael begins his student's educational journey by considering what must be done before the lesson can begin. Employing the metaphor of a journey or voyage, Ishmael's second day with his student consists of "packing a bag for [their] journey together" (Quinn, 1992, p. 21). This metaphorical bag contains some essential vocabulary, a map, and some definitions (distinct from the earlier vocabulary). Once their bag is packed, they embark on their journey. Here, I wish to spend some time with the definitions that Ishmael provides as they too, are a point of convergence with my current teaching practice.

Culture is a Story We Enact

The three terms that Ishmael defines for his student are: story, enact, and culture. Ishmael defines story as "a scenario interrelating man, the world, and the gods" (Quinn, 1992, p. 23). Enact is defined as "to live a story so as to make the story a reality. In other words, to enact a story is to strive to make it come true" (p. 23). Lastly, culture is "a people enacting a story" (p. 23). Elsewhere, and although he never pairs it with the word "dangerous," the concept of a "single story" (Adichie, 2009) emerges in reference to the single story that Taker culture enacts as way of explaining, from an anthropocentric perspective, "*how things came to be this way*: From the beginning until now" (p. 23, emphasis in original). As I read the passage from *Ishmael,* excerpted below, I see, implicitly, the danger of this single story that our culture enacts. Referring to Taker

culture and how they/we go on living even though we are aware of neoliberalism and impending climate disaster (amongst other disasters), Ishmael says:

> They've been told an explainer story. They've been given an explanation of *how things came to be this way* and this stills their alarm. This explanation covers everything, including the deterioration of the ozone layer, the pollution of the oceans, the destruction of the rain forests, and even human extinction – and it satisfies them. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it *pacifies* them. They put their shoulders to the wheel during the day, stupefy themselves with drugs at night, and try not to think too searchingly about the world they're leaving their children to cope with. (Quinn, 1992, p. 26, emphasis in original)

The narrator is incredulous that such a *single* story exists and doubly so that this single story is the one that defines *his* (and our) culture. In my opinion, a particular neoliberal blindness is endemic to so many of us living within its grasp. The story that Ishmael refers to is the explanation of how humans came to be; furthermore, this story places humans at the end of evolution. In our mind's eye, the human is the apex creature on this planet and rightful heir to the throne; in my view, positioning humans at the top of this hierarchy of beings is antithetical to humility and instead spawns an unchecked hubris that has led to where we are today as described by the lengthy quote I offered above.

The blindness to the mythical nature of our origin story prohibits us from seeing validity in other ways of being and knowing, and ultimately, in my view, to the detriment of historically oppressed and marginalized peoples; when people fail to recognize human and non-human others in their complexity, we place ourselves above them in the evolutionary hierarchy, giving us the permission to treat them inhumanely. In my view, educators need education that can begin to replace this anthropocentric explainer story

with one that restores balance and harmony amongst all our relations. It is not that these stories have yet to be written – Indigenous creation stories offer ample possibilities (see King, 2003, for example) – I feel that our schools, especially elementary and secondary schools – might act as optimal sites for our students to encounter these alternatives in an eventful way. Though he eventually arrives at a similar conclusion, the narrator is hesitant to accept this premise outright. Nevertheless, Ishmael persists. Here, I would like to explore exactly how Ishmael persuades his pupil to consider the mythical single story as being enacted by Taker culture; specifically, I will focus on how Ishmael works alongside the narrator to co-author this story, and through oral recitation.

Eschewing the Bully-Pulpit Within: Teaching through Story

I eventually came to understand that an eventful encounter cannot be planned or demanded; it took me a while to arrive at this truth and I feel my pedagogical approach to inviting eventful possibilities might have also caught up to this reality. Whereas I used to believe dropping what my students colloquially refer to as “truth bombs” onto them would be enough to warrant such an encounter, I know now that when faced with a barrage of existential threats, my students would work to shield themselves from harm. Recalling my earlier rug analogy, not only would they nail the rug into place, they would build a shelter over top of it so that not a single thread would singe or fray. When reflecting on the failures with his previous students, Ishmael suggested that he did not understand their minds well enough and that the challenge of the task proved to be too great. Although this is conjecture, I interpret his reflection as being aligned with my own failures; Ishmael’s students were not able to work through the existential shattering he presented them and he hadn’t quite figured out how to teach them in a way that would resolve this crucial educational facet.

In my view, the educationally eventful encounter – what I purport Ishmael to be aiming for with his teaching – hinges on a pupil's willingness and readiness to embrace such a shattering. After my eventful experiences and still to this day – and much like Ishmael does – I begin my post-*Ishmael* ELA 30-1 courses by exploring Adichie's (2009) *Danger of a Single Story* in order to raise the possibility that what we think we know about ourselves, the world, and in the context of my teaching, schooling, might be based on a single story or myth that likely excludes a more complex truth and resists a multiplicity of stories.

Following our work with Adichie's TED Talk, we then read other authors, for example Jim Burke's (2016) chapter entitled, "A personal prologue: The student I was, the student I became, the teacher I am" in which he shares his story of being schooled and of encountering an education. Students are then given a choice of articles (Chomsky, 2002; Thompson, 1958; or Wallace, 2005) that explore similar themes. While I do have particular ends in mind – as Ishmael does with his students – we both adapted our pedagogical approaches in order to invite our students *into* the conversation. One way I try to achieve this is by having students lead discussions of these articles in small groups. We begin by working through the Burke piece as a whole class, where I try to model the thinking and questioning processes I use when reading, along with the kinds of personal connections that arise. Following this, students apply these processes to their individual reading and annotating of their chosen article along with the ensuing discussions. Our classroom conversations then become student-led, and I try to use questioning in response to what they share (for example: That's a great point about how some teachers care more about discipline than a student's education. How might we want to proceed in this class?). To further develop their individual and collaborative efforts in engaging with

what they read in this unit, they are asked to complete an online “Discussion Board” assignment (see Appendix I for an example of the assignment instructions and requirements). This assignment poses some thematically overarching and interrelated questions and invites the students to respond by drawing upon their articles as well as their personal experiences. The assignment asks that each student post one initial response and a minimum to two replies to other students in their group. This assignment creates a “teacher-free” space where the students do the work and together explore the myths, realities, and possibilities of school and education. In class, as they engage in this collaborative work, we aim towards articulating a co-constructed definition of what education will mean for us, and a set of criteria for what that might look like (for example: education is about being open to possibilities; education is not when the teacher tells us all the answers; education is about trying to understand ourselves and the world around us).

When considering alternatives to the single story, I ask my students to create their own story of what education can be, for example in the Educational Journey personal response assignment they are asked to complete (an adaptation of Professor Eppert’s Biotext assignment from EDSE 610 – see Appendix J for my version), whereas Ishmael works with the narrator to co-construct a new story to be enacted by humanity. Just as Ishmael packs a knapsack for the journey, my students and I, through these aforementioned readings and discussions, describe what an educational journey might entail: being comfortable with discomfort, a willingness to be vulnerable, and the bravery to “keep going!” in sharing and “writing true” about those moments of vulnerable discomfort.

Throughout the novel, though never written down, Ishmael and the narrator exchange stories and work with each other to uncover how these stories either have been brought to bear through culture, or possibly, might offer an alternative story for humans to enact. The first story recounted is Ishmael's origin story – how he eventually came to be in that room as a self-aware, telepathically communicative being. When he finishes his story, Ishmael invites the narrator to offer his own explanation for "how *you* come to be here" (Quinn, 1992, p. 16). Currently, in my classroom teaching, I begin with my origin story; after our work with Adichie's (2009) TED talk, students are invited to explore their own experiences of having been storied in a singular way with the opportunity to interrogate and complexify the story of who they are. Furthermore, as our work continues in that unit, the "Versions of My/Self" assignment invites them to consider the origins of their story (see Appendix K); this task is similar to another set of stories in *Ishmael* where the teacher and student work together to reveal the origins of the human creation myth.

As the narrator struggles to articulate the human creation myth, rather than offering a rational analysis, Ishmael counters with what he calls "the jellyfish story[16]," using this allegory in order to help the narrator "see" not only the existence of a human creation myth (as separate from the Biblical account), but how this story is enacted through Taker culture. Upon arriving at this moment of understanding, the narrator reacts: "I bared by teeth in a rueful grin. 'It's a myth. Incredibly enough, it's a myth'" (Quinn, 1992, p. 35). Having prepared the narrator for the kind of work they were

[16] Ishmael recounts an exchange between a jellyfish and an anthropologist occurring at a time before humans existed. When asked by the anthropologist to describe how jellyfish came to be, the jellyfish responds with its creation myth – essentially a version of evolution but one that ends with the jellyfish's arrival. When the anthropologist inquires about the land that encompasses the water the jellyfish is swimming in, it replies that the land is simply that which contains the world, with nothing else beyond it. Ishmael uses this allegory to represent how the human creation myth similarly "ends" with humans' arrival on the planet, positioning ourselves, like the jellyfish, as the final act of creation. As humans we understand that there has been evolution beyond the jellyfish and are meant to understand that there might be a post-human phase of evolution too.

undertaking together, this in-credible and rueful reality – though still a difficult pill to swallow – is embraced by the narrator who continues with the work rather than leaving altogether. I have seen similar reactions in some of my students as they begin to re-cognize either their own institutionalization or that their experiences of schooling withheld what they professed to offer. In some cases, I have learned it is the philosophical nature of the coursework that motivates them to attend class, in spite of the myriad other challenges they experience (for example, struggles with and/or gaps in their literacy). In this sense, even though I no longer teach *Ishmael* as part of my course content, there still exists the possibility for an eventful encounter with the other texts we read.

The Pedagogical Ishmael within Me

The “storied” exchanges between Ishmael and his narrator continue throughout the novel. At times Ishmael takes the lead in reciting a story; other times, he leaves the narrator to conjure up his own. Each time, they come together and conversationally work through the implications of their stories. In my teaching practice, the stories my students and I now exchange are manifold. Each unit of study in my course centers on a principal text: A TED Talk, a novel, a short story, or a film, alongside peripheral non-fiction pieces meant to offer theoretical perspectives through which my students can consider the meaningful implications of the central texts for themselves, the world around them, and the ways in which these worlds “function.” These peripheral texts are not directly related to the central work of fiction – rather, students are invited to form their own connections and interpretations, attempting to establish links between the fictional and non-fictional pieces.

Throughout *Ishmael*, the stories the characters share are told variously through in-person exchanges, or, via tape recordings that capture the stories the narrator "writes" while away from his classroom. In my classroom, my students and I exchange our stories in a similar fashion. We alternate between in-person small and whole-group discussions and our writing. Sometimes I am privy to their stories as they share them with the whole class and at other times they share among their small groups.

When it comes to writing, I share my writing with my students both to model appropriate format and writing techniques and also to model that I too am doing this work alongside them. Many of the stories I have shared in this dissertation – for example the one about my shoes, are shared with my students too. I invite them to offer feedback on my writing and their insights always shift my work. For example, a piece of my own writing that I shared with my students as an example of a personal response essay (for assignment details, see Appendix L) is titled "Learning to Live in my House of Shame" and stands as an exemplar of option three from the assignment (interpreting a Western choice through a non-Western lens). I include the writing here in full in order to show how I attempt to model the kind of thinking and reading (and writing) I am inviting my students to attempt. The "new conclusion" refers to how my students offer me feedback so that I can "workshop" my writing alongside them. They felt the conclusion I had originally was an insufficient ending to my response. I also include this example of my writing because it also reveals the way my reading of the Dalai Lama's (1999) chapter deeply affected me. It was a reading that was part of Professor Eppert's coursework that distilled and made visible to me many of the ideas that guide my teaching, still now in 2022. I use italics to signal how this is a piece unto itself:

In the summer of 2016, my wife and I had our luggage stolen in Italy. Naively, we left our suitcases in the trunk overnight and we awoke the next morning to find them missing. I lost several pairs of shoes, my running gear, and some of my favorite pieces of clothing, like my linen shorts with a multi-colored floral pattern. I remember feeling frustrated because of the likely paperwork or insurance hassle we would have to endure, but I don't remember being truly bothered by the loss of all that stuff. It was all replaceable and no one had been hurt.

I used to be obsessed with material things. I defined myself and my self-worth based on how much my outfit cost. It was a dark time in my life, and I spent many of those years spending on what I know now to be useless material things. I didn't just wake up one morning and change. Much of my current thinking was shaped through my experiences of being a student in a University course taught by Professor Claudia Eppert. During, and after the course, I began to rethink and redesign my day-to-day life outside the classroom. First came the shattering. I remember feeling horribly uneasy upon reading the Dalai Lama's (1999) "Modern Society and the Quest for Human Happiness." In the article, he suggests that the crisis in today's culture is our predilection for material wealth at the expense of a deeper spiritual joy or emotional fulfillment. He recounts visiting the homes of the very wealthy, only to find medicine cabinets full of antidepressants.

My wife and I had just purchased a new house. We were living in the middle unit of a townhouse condo-complex, without a yard, or a large deck to eat outside on. This wasn't a small townhouse by any means – it had three floors including a finished basement, and, four bathrooms. But no yard. Or deck. We did live across the street from a huge park. But it wasn't ours. We had also had our first child, and he didn't have a yard to play in either. So we bought the house. It has the same number of

bathrooms as the town house, but these ones are bigger. Our shower is bigger. The basement is bigger. The kitchen is bigger. My ego is bigger. We also have our own yard now. As I read the article in the spaciousness of my new home, a question formed in my mind. Why did we need this house? Looking back at the article, I had scribbled in the margins: "Why, really, did we need the new house?" In that moment my house – and me in it – came to represent what, and who, the Dalai Lama was critiquing. He was critiquing me. And then I was critiquing me. In my original annotation, I had underlined the word "need" so as to emphasize the internalization of this critique. I began to feel a sense of shame and embarrassment. We had only moved one block away from the townhouse – we literally walked much of our furniture over during the move. I couldn't look at our house in the same way after reading the article. I still don't. I have learned to live in my house of shame, and over time, I feel less anxiety about it. We have two boys now, and when there are what feels like five hundred screaming and messy children running wild, scratching the floors, smearing chocolate cake on the walls, and jumping on the couches, I don't feel so bad. I learned, from the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh that it doesn't really matter. Everything is temporary. There is and is no self. There is and is no house. I have learned to enjoy the present moment as best I can, even that time my wife rode the Plasma Car indoors and gouged a jagged line running the entire length of the hallway. Even then.

Following the Dalai Lama's (1999) wisdom, I became less interested in creating and maintaining an image of upward mobility or of "keeping up with the Jonses." Perhaps the most significant evidence of this disinterest is my nearly complete disavowal of expensive designer clothing. I have not purchased any more Prada shoes, nor do I have the desire to. Even when I wear the expensive clothing I

still have, they do not bestow any sense of power or status upon me – at least none that I recognize. I still appreciate these objects for their aesthetic value; however, they no longer indicate the quality of my being.

Now, instead of obsessing over materialistic items, I obsess over how to teach my children to disinherit this predominantly neoliberal Western pursuit. When I was younger, my mother would tell me stories about how, in spite of growing up poor, her mother - my grandmother - would always find a way to buy her the nicest clothes; buying these things was a way to hide the truth of their socioeconomic standing. In turn, my mother passed on these teachings to me, and even when we struggled to make ends meet, or, when we were dealing with family drama, buying expensive things is how we made ourselves feel better. I admire my parents and my grandmother, and from them I have learned so much. And yet, this relentless pursuit of stuff-as-happiness-and-status is one lesson I wish to unlearn, and, one family tradition I hope has ended with me. Only time will tell, and I can use my Timex watch to keep track of my progress.

New conclusion:

What I've learned, from that moment of reading that article, is that I had been under the influence of some very powerful forces in my life. First, would be the force of materialism. In other words, the notion that I am what I wear, or, I am what I own, was so powerful that it inhibited me from being comfortable with how I was without the expensive clothing, bigger house, etc. Secondly, the force of self-doubt and denial - the idea that my authentic self wasn't good enough - consistently told me that I couldn't do it: I couldn't be myself. I became my own oppressive force and in so doing, I placed my authentic self behind a walled garden, so to speak. Along this journey, I've realized that the forces of materialism, and a desire to feel validated are

what inhibited me from being comfortable and accepting my authentic self. However, the realization that material excess at the expense of authentic living was detrimental to who I am encouraged me to break free from my fears, embrace my vulnerability, and seek fulfillment more authentically.

This piece was shared with my students in the Fall of 2020. The topic I was responding to revolved around the forces that inhibit or encourage an individual's actions.

Lastly, I have also shared the feedback I have received on my candidacy proposal and dissertation work because I want to reinforce that I too am "in progress" of learning and being educated. I present my document on the screen at the front of the classroom and show them my writing, replete with edits and questions and comments from my doctoral committee; they do take some measure of delight in seeing my pages marked up in red and full of feedback!

Swapping Stories and (the Evil of) Mistaking Paraphrasing for Novelty

The importance of having a new explainer story to replace the current one, one that can be enacted into culture, is not lost on Ishmael and his student. Toward the end of the novel, they begin discussing how to go about saving the world and saving humankind from itself. If it is said that nature abhors a vacuum, this law of physics can be applied to human nature too. In one of their final conversations, Ishmael and the narrator broach the subject of "what next." The narrator describes why the counter-cultural revolution in the sixties and seventies was not counter-cultural at all, rendering it doomed to fail: "People can't just *give up* a story. That's what the kids tried to do in the sixties and seventies. They tried to stop living like the Takers, but there was no other way for them to live" (Quinn, 1992, p. 128). Thinking of Badiou's Evil of "simulacrum" (2001, p. 71), for Badiou, simulacrum "mimics an actual truth-process" and its end result is "terror and

violence" (p. 75-77). The "revolution" of the sixties and seventies – in the context of *Ishmael* – can be considered such an Evil act because the peace and love movement had not quite punctured a hole in the overarching Taker culture. Instead, faced with the disillusionment of the revolt's failure (read: disillusionment as a form of existential terror and violence), the movement "just dwindled away into a fashion statement" (Quinn, 1992, p. 2). Rather than offering a new story to enact, those leading the rebellion merely paraphrased the same old story.

The question arises then, of how to engender a more faithful allegiance to a truth process aimed at resolving the various crises inflicted on the world. Here too, *Ishmael* offers a possibility that echoes King's (2003) exploration of the power of story: That story is all we are. Continuing the discussion Ishmael and the narrator have about saving the world, the narrator offers the following insight: "[The counter-cultural revolution] failed because you can't just stop being in a story, you have to have another story to be in" (Quinn, 1992, p. 128). Ishmael wonders whether there is an appetite for such an alternative story; the pair continue: "Do you think they *want* to hear about it?" Ishmael asks (p. 128). The narrator responds, "I don't know. I don't think you can start wanting something till you know it exists" (p. 128). Elsewhere, the narrator suggests a pedagogical imperative to whetting humanity's appetite for wanting such a story. Ishmael guides him, suggesting, "people need more than to be scolded, more than to be made to feel stupid and guilty. They need more than a vision of doom. They need a vision of the world and of themselves that inspires them" (p. 148).

This last quote acts as a microcosm of my own journey of figuring out how to best teach eventfully. Though I never would use the word "stupid" explicitly in my addresses to students or in my conception of them, I feel "ignorant" would be an apt substitute to

describe how I thought of them at the time. Conversely, and thinking of my reading of Rancierre's (1991) *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in order to allow an eventful encounter to occur, we must work to dismantle the socio-economic, political, and cultural barriers to the will of the other to become educated. As an *educator* I ought to ignite the will to learn, in my students!

To recap this chapter thus far, my endeavors to work as an educator interested in bringing my students to an educationally eventful encounter is aligned with the ways in which Ishmael taught his student. Ishmael and I both came to understand that our task is an epically challenging undertaking that requires insight into the minds of our students. We both used our own experiences of being educated, along with our failures in educating, in order to arrive at these conclusions. In order to educate *educationally*, our students ought to feel inspired to possess the will to make themselves uncomfortable and vulnerable and need to be invited into accepting this disposition. Furthermore, declarative exhortations of truth and playing on feelings of shame and guilt render the educational approach ineffective, resulting in a classroom with terror and disaster as its ultimate outcome.

Approaching education through the power of storytelling and collaborative story-making might stand as a more affirmative and generative alternative to authoritative approaches. Once aware of these alternatives, students might be inspired to further embrace their own truth processes, faithfully. The question that remains, and one I wish to explore in this next section, concerns the limits of teaching; what I mean here is that my time with my students – and our time together – is finite. The school year ends, the course is over, and we each go our separate ways. What happens then? Is it all for naught?

Is Teaching at the End, the End of Teaching? Or, What Happens when the Lesson is Over?

Spoiler alert: The novel *Ishmael* ends with Ishmael's death and the narrator is left without an explicit answer for how to save the world. The book's author Daniel Quinn, via Ishmael the teacher, offers no explicit "how to" guide for the narrator to begin the next step of the journey. The teacher has died and the student is alone. In their final encounters, however, the pair did arrive at some important conclusions; these are less prescriptive in nature and are instead taken to be a theory for how we might enact eventful possibilities across all of humanity. In my view, the ending of *Ishmael* stands as an example of the following question: what is the work that must be done *after the lesson ends?* I wish to take a moment to explore what happens when teaching at the end of a course and whether it signifies the end of teaching.

Inevitably, in our classroom conversations about schooling and education, I bring up the film *Men in Black* (Sonnenfeld, 1997) – that, and the analogy of the children's toy, the Etch-A-Sketch. Students often use these references to describe their experiences of schooling. The film *Men in Black* is about a secret government organization that polices alien activity on the planet Earth and beyond. The presence of aliens is kept secret from humankind and a device called a Neuralyzer is used in the event of human-alien encounters. What the Neuralyzer does is to wipe the human's memory if having witnessed some form of alien life; the government agent then offers them an alternative explanation for what transpired and the human leaves blissfully ignorant of their encounter. An Etch-A-Sketch is a toy that allows you to manipulate two dials in order to draw on its screen; with a vigorous shake of the device, the image vanishes and you can begin anew. In my view, both the film and the toy act as metaphors to describe what

happens to my students (and often in my own experiences) at the end of a unit or a course. Once the test has been written or the final assignment turned in, we cross the threshold of the school and emerge in the real world, so to speak. This threshold – in our conversations – acts as a Neuralyzer that saps the students of their subject-area knowledge; the threshold shakes the students' minds in such a way as to create a space for new knowledge to be inscribed. Both the Neuralyzer and the Etch-A-Sketch suggest a temporary grasp on this knowledge – a disposability required in order to make room for something new. Students have described this process as forgetting everything I just learned so I can make room for the next unit, or, finishing a course and not really remembering what it was about or what I learned. It just vanishes. Poof. Gone. On to the next. This problematic of a vanishing education is then classified under the category of schooling and its corollary – education – is described as an interminable and recursive life-long process. With an educational encounter, the ideas "stick" with you even after the unit or course has been completed. This notion of an everlasting eventful encounter is aligned with Badiou's (2001) notion of fidelity and the evil of betrayal.

With Badiou, as I have described variously throughout this dissertation and drawing upon den Heyer's (2009) scholarship in this regard, the verb tense of the truth process is in the future anterior – we are always seeking to discover what the event *will have meant*. This future-oriented disposition of the truth process implies that the educationally eventful encounter, too, is a recursively interminable process: the becoming subject seeks to make sense of the eventful moment through the lens of an ever-evolving understanding of a truth. As Badiou (2001) writes, this process "calls on me to continue; it has the eternal power of the truths that induce it" (p. 79). Attempting to halt this

process – to Neuralyze it or to vigorously shake it out of our minds – amounts to a betrayal, an Evil from a Badiouian perspective.

In this vein, my aim of teaching toward an educationally eventful encounter is one that seeks to resist the urge or the ability (or the necessity, according to some students) to erase or disavow one's educational truth process. If I succeed in this endeavor, then teaching does not end at the end of my teaching period – be it a particular class, unit, or entire course term. Instead, the effects of a student's eventful encounter made possible by the conditions of my pedagogy potentially continue in perpetuity. Returning to *Ishmael*, although the teacher has died, the narrator's truth process – and the responsibilities that come with it – are likely to continue. We do not know for sure what choices the narrator makes, however, since the narrator is a proxy for the reader, as I argued earlier, I draw upon my experiences of how the novel impacted me and my desire to have my students experience this same effect, as evidence in support of my claim.

When I initially set out to write the chapters of my dissertation following the successful examination of my candidacy, I thought the outline would be relatively straightforward to follow: a chapter on teaching *Ishmael*, a chapter on my experiences of teaching *Nothing*, and a final chapter that explored the implications of each for my teaching and for English Language Arts education, and curriculum and pedagogy, more broadly. Easy. Instead, my journey in getting here has been full of twists and turns, and panicked – though contemplative and lengthy – emails to my supervisory committee offering possible alternative paths and detours I wished to take. Even an hour ago, prior to writing these words, I wrestled with how to organize and write about my experiences. At one point I became hesitant in including a complete chapter about my teaching of *Nothing*. Part of this hesitance was my reluctance to position my current pedagogical

approaches as an ideal model and, out of fear of being too prescriptive regarding how (I think) others ought to teach.

My understanding of eventful teaching is that much of my work of arranging for the possibility of an eventful encounter must occur *prior to* my students' engagement with a novel. To this end, I feel that exploring how I arrived at this conclusion – as I hope to have done in this chapter so far – offers more nuanced insight into my teaching of *Nothing*. Moreover, and thinking of Ishmael's untimely death, the timing of the reading of *Nothing* should be arranged such that students no longer need to rely on the teacher in order to read the novel eventfully. In a sense, much like Ishmael is no longer accessible and the narrator is on his own at the end of the novel, I work to minimize my impact on my students by the time they encounter Pierre Anthon and his classmates in the *Nothing*; in other words, if the work is to ignite the will of my students in order for them to take control of their educational education, the novel study and my lack of involvement in it creates a space for them to do so. The following chapter is on my teaching of *Nothing* and I include it because much like my teaching of *Ishmael*, *Nothing* and my teaching of it, offers educational insights as well.

Chapter Six (Data Analysis Part Two)

Something from *Nothing*: Learning to Stop Worrying and Instead "Keep Going!"

Janne Teller's (2010) novel, *Nothing,* acts as an allegory for teaching, and, in my experience of teaching it, invites students to explore such concepts as the meaning of life, happiness, and consumerism. The novel unit I teach has evolved to explore these themes because they address what my students have been interested in. We also inquire into these concepts (each framed as a problematic) due to their emergence as consequences of neoliberalism, as I will argue later in this chapter. Paired with non-fiction peripheral texts my students read to supplement the novel study, students began to question and critique "inalienable truths" of neoliberal society and come to recognize the implications for themselves. In Chapter 5, I provided an example of how reading the Dalai Lama (1999) chapter impacted me through the inclusion of my personal response essay I shared with my students. For some of my students, reading the novel alongside these peripheral texts challenged their taken-for-granted assumptions and left some feeling similarly "shook," as one student mentioned to me in passing. Although it is difficult to ascertain whether my students' reading of these texts produced any long-term refractive trajectory, my students would return to the themes and ideas within these texts throughout the remainder of the course. With *Nothing,* I accidentally achieved what I had worked so hard but struggled to do with *Ishmael*.

Disinterested Interest in Teaching *Nothing*

What my story of teaching *Nothing* helps me to explore is how my pedagogical approach differed from when I taught *Ishmael*. In my view, the most significant variable that shifted was my interest in the novel I was about to teach. *Ishmael* was *my* novel – it was my idea to teach it, I crafted the lessons, it was my enlightenment I wanted my

students to absorb. *Nothing* did not *belong* to me. I had never read it, did not plan the lessons, and had no sense of what my students might experience in reading it. If the novel failed, I did not have to own that failure in the same way I owned the failure of *Ishmael*. When it came to *Nothing*, I had what Badiou (2001) would call *disinterested interest*.

Badiou (2001) writes that an “interest in myself” would prohibit fidelity to a truth process as it would lead me to “pursue my own interests” selfishly, rather than submit to an uncertain and emerging truth that might contain too much discomfort, a truth I would prefer not to know, or through which I would resist “becoming” something other than what I already am. Although difficult to pinpoint exactly, I do feel that my failure in teaching *Ishmael* might be interpreted as being due to a pursuit of *my* interests and agenda.

Conversely, a disinterested interest decenters the attachment of my ego to wherever my truth process might take me. This disinterested interest is what will allow me to have “fidelity to the fidelity” of the truth process (Badiou, 2001, p. 49). As I stated earlier, my interest in the *Nothing* novel study unit resided more with the non-fiction texts than with the novel itself. Therefore, I remained, pedagogically speaking, hands off when it came to teaching the novel (especially in my first attempt with student choice but also in Winter 2018 when it was the only novel I taught). What I explore in using my stories of teaching this novel, is how the novel itself beckoned to the students who read it, shattering some of them in the process. Recalling Eagleton’s (2008) claim that hegemonic discourse works to police what is and is not considered literary, and his call for broadening what gets designated literature, I wish to state that I do not privilege fiction over non-fiction in my teaching. Rather, my students’ engagements with central (the novel) and peripheral (non-fiction readings, TED Talks, etc.) texts might work

together toward achieving educational aims. Furthermore, a text's centrality – versus its peripheral positioning – does not connote hierarchy inasmuch as indicate a unit's object of study (as in a novel study unit, or a poetry unit, for example). In a non-fiction unit, a short story might act as a peripheral text.

When teaching *Ishmael* the third and final time in the Fall of 2017, I tried pairing it with readings I encountered in my courses with Professor Eppert: by the Dalai Lama (1999) on materialism, Thich Nhat Hanh (1987) on interbeing, Richard Wagamese (2011) on humility, and Joanna Macy (2007) on climate change, along with Adichie's (2009) TED Talk on the single story. I paired these articles with the novel in the hopes that they might provide some theoretical context for the issues it raised and its critiques of modern Western consumerist ideals and notions of one's meaning and purpose in life. These peripheral texts – the non-fiction pieces that surrounded our principal text – apparently hit home with many of my students who suggested I should use them again. I observed the impact of these readings through the way students discussed them in class, addressed them in their writing, and their questions to me, revealing a resonance, or at least a curiosity about the subject matter. In particular, the Dalai Lama chapter aroused the most engagement. It was also after deciding I would refrain from teaching *Ishmael* that I stumbled onto the novel *Nothing* by Janne Teller (2010). Having discarded the notion that the novel was essential to inviting my students to experience a potential educational event, I thought I would keep going and focus on their engagement with the non-fiction texts that my previous students had appeared to respond to positively.

Teaching the novel *Nothing* was now incidental to my focus on these non-fiction texts; however, I discovered that despite my waning interest in teaching that particular novel, my students read it and could not stop talking about it. They scolded each other for

falling behind or revealing spoilers. Students were discussing it in the hallways before and after class. Some students even stayed behind so they could discuss the novel with me. In reading *Nothing* something began to happen within a number of my students.

The novel *Nothing*, like *Ishmael*, can act as the intersection between identity, curriculum, and pedagogy. The novel is set in the fictional town of Taering in Denmark and revolves around a class of grade seven students. The novel begins with one of the students, Pierre Anthon, proclaiming that “Nothing matters” and therefore “nothing is worth doing” (Teller, 2010, p. 5). Upon making this announcement, he leaves the classroom while the rest of the class remains behind. Pierre Anthon refuses to return to class and instead sits in a plum tree and taunts the children on their way to school. He urges them to follow in his footsteps and abandon the artifice and illusion central to their daily existence and sense of self-worth: everything they have been told is meaningful—their education, career plans, material wealth, is meaningless.

At first the students try to ignore Pierre Anthon and his daily castigations, however, eventually, the rest of class 7A bands together and decides to teach Pierre Anthon that things do have meaning and he is the one who must recant and return to the existing social order. The students decide the best way to convince Pierre Anthon that things do matter is by sacrificing the objects most meaningful to them with one caveat: the student making the sacrifice gets to select the meaningful object the next student must give up. Although this begins harmlessly enough, with requests to give up favorite sandals or books, the students become more vengeful, demanding students sacrifice objects whose meaning transcends the value of the “thing” itself. For example, one student must sacrifice her beloved hamster; another student is made to sacrifice the body of her dead brother, whose casket is exhumed under the cover of night. Each of these

objects is then placed into what the students call the “Heap of Meaning,” hidden in an abandoned sawmill, with the aim being to show Pierre Anthon how these meaningful objects disprove his claims of meaninglessness.

As the novel continues, the sacrifices begin to transform the students physically and psychologically. Sophie is made to give up her virginity to another student; she is never quite the same after. Hussein, made to give up his prayer mat, is severely beaten by his father as punishment; Jon-Johan, a talented guitar player, must cut off one of his fingers. By the end of the novel, the Heap of Meaning has received media attention and a New York art gallery makes an offer to purchase it, to which the students agree. Before the sale is finalized, Pierre Anthon is shown the pile and his reaction is to scoff: “if it truly meant something, you wouldn’t have sold it,” he tells them, using their own Heap of Meaning – and its pending sale – against them. In a fit of rage, the students lunge at him, killing him, and they burn down the sawmill, the Heap of Meaning it safeguarded, and Pierre-Anthon’s body, still inside.

At Pierre Anthon’s funeral, Agnes – the narrator of the novel – describes why the students were crying that day. She says they cried because “we had lost something and gained something else. And because it hurt both losing and gaining. And because we knew what we had lost but weren’t as yet able to put into words what it was we had gained” (p. 120). Agnes’s comments on losing and gaining seem to echo Badiou’s notion of Event: the individual knows what has been lost or shattered and the work of the truth process is to articulate what has been gained instead. I consider this novel as offering insight into pedagogy and curriculum in that the characters – Pierre Anthon and the rest of the students – each have an educational event and ensuing truth they wish to teach others, and through these educational encounters, their identities change in various ways.

Such an analysis might also offer eventful insight into my educational experiences.

Teaching *Nothing*

I began teaching *Nothing* in the Fall of 2017 and I teach it still (I write this in the Spring of 2022). My initial attempts at teaching this novel were very much a *laissez-faire* affair. The novel would be assigned for students to read, more as an excuse to deepen our discussions of the peripheral non-fiction texts. I adopted a small-group approach with the novel, where students could discuss the novel through the lens of the non-fiction authors they had read. In order to assess their conversations, I borrowed and adapted for my setting Alexis Wiggins's (2017) notion of a spider-web discussion from her book *The Best Class You Never Taught*. Wiggins offers a model for student-led discussions centered on their lines of inquiry. During a spider-web discussion, the teacher is simply an outside observer, annotating the conversation; the teacher writes down the names of the students and draws lines showing the direction of the conversation, and, using short-hand codes, tracking if a student is asking a question (Q), answering (A), interrupting (I) and more. Here is an example of a conversation I tracked with a whole class (with names, year and block number removed):

Figure 1

Scan of an ELA 30-1 Spiderweb Tracking Sheet

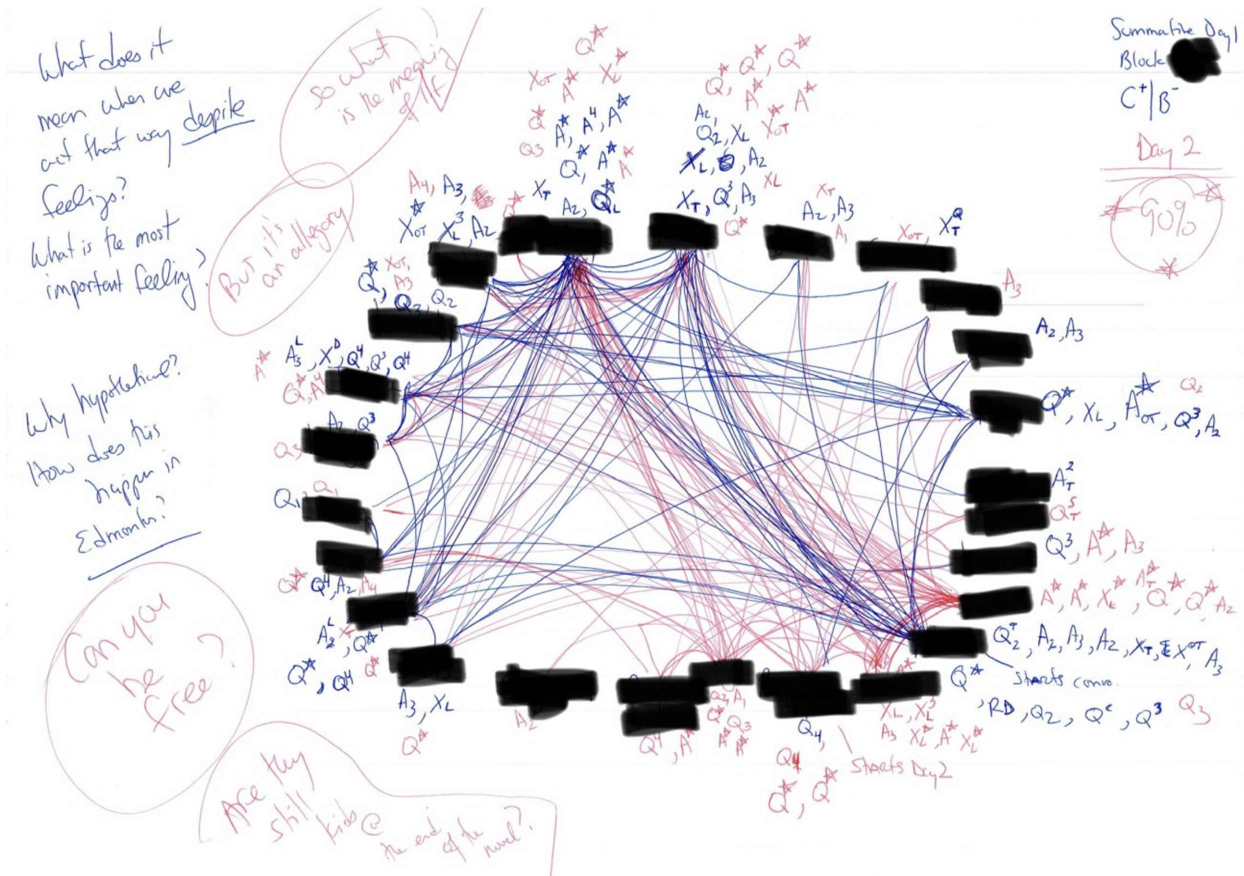

Figure 1: Original document created and scanned by Robert Piazza

The conversation captured in the above image took place over two days (blue ink and red ink) and in addition to the aforementioned tracking codes, I also numbered these to indicate a level of profundity or insight (1 being straightforward and the star (*) indicating the highest level of insight). After the first day, I showed the students the scan and they self-assessed (you can see initially they gave themselves a C+/B-). The next day, they attempted to "level-up" the conversation. The mark is awarded to the whole group, based on success criteria we co-constructed (participation, depth and complexity of questions/responses, evidence-based responses, connections to peripheral readings, etc.). In the margins, I captured some of the key comments and questions the students put forth. You can see how during the second day, the students' questions and responses were more

nuanced and thoughtful – more stars were awarded – and they self-assessed the whole conversation at a 90%, to which I agreed. Although this particular conversation occurred as a whole group summative assessment at the end of the unit, the classes leading up to that day were similar with the exception being the conversations occur in small groups and focused on a particular section of the novel or a particular non-fiction text. All the discussion questions were self-generated, following a lesson we had on different kinds of questions (factual: focused on the plot; inductive: focused on interpreting the plot within the world of the story, for example, asking what motivates a character; analytical: focused on linkages between texts, self, and world, for example, asking how Pierre Anthon might be aligned with the Dalai Lama's (1999) views (see Appendix M for the guiding document called "types of question" that I share with my students).

In discussing this approach to teaching the novel, I am showing how I do my best to keep my distance from imposing my own views and interpretations of the text. Of course, my presence is still implicitly felt through my curation of texts in this unit. Because of how I surface my students' thinking in this unit and because I know I cannot resist interjecting if I read aloud, the reading of the novel is assigned entirely outside of class time, aside from the initial pages I read to them in the beginning. When the COVID-19 pandemic moved all our in-person classes online (via Google Classroom Meet in my case), I wondered how I would be able to capture these conversations. Recalling my earlier experiences with discussion boards, I attempted something similar with the novel: digitally based group annotations of the novel.

For this digital annotation assignment, I assigned my students into groups of 5-7. Each group received their own digital copy of the novel in a Google Doc format. I divided the novel into different sections and students were responsible for annotating

these sections over a given period of time. Much like the discussion board, students were responsible for a minimum number of annotations – 3 per assigned section – and replies to their peers' annotations. Students used the "comment" function within Google Docs in order to post their annotations, respond to an annotations, and, they could tag individual members to invite a response (for the complete assignment details, see Appendix N). Furthermore, each section of the novel was paired with a required and recommended non-fiction text and students were asked to use these in order to help deepen their thinking and interpretations of the novel (for an example of these pairings, see Appendix O). As an exercise in reading comprehension assessment, the digital annotation assignment was a fascinating look inside the minds of my students. Some students annotated at the level of plot summary only. Others appeared to define unfamiliar words. Others still shared the material traces of philosophical wormholes they travelled down, including links to articles, videos, and Wikipedia entries. Some groups went above and beyond the minimum requirements and ended up with hundreds of comments, replying to each other, and pushing each other's thinking. I really was able to get a sense of their grasp of the novel at various levels of complexity. Now that my classes are in-person again, I have kept this assignment and use it in addition to the "spider-web" conversations we continue to have.

For similar reasons I outlined in Chapter 5, I asked my students to write a summative personal response essay rather than the more formal critical analytical essay for this text and unit. Furthermore, I was interested in observing the ways in which students implicated themselves – or did not – in the overarching themes of this unit. Though it is beyond the scope of my dissertation to provide exemplars of their work, I can say that in some cases, students wrote in ways that signaled, at least on that

assignment – a willingness to recognize the ways in which they understood themselves to be mediated by the forces of capitalism and implicitly, in my view, neoliberalism too. In other cases, students hewed more closely to the world of the novel and offered their take on its meaning as a work of literature without necessarily dealing with the personal or "real world" implications. In very few cases, students did not read the novel; these were most often students who struggled to attend classes on a regular basis for a variety of reasons.

Over the course of a number of semesters, the non-fiction texts I paired with the novel evolved. I began to offer students a choice from a selection of articles and videos and I noticed which ones they were drawn to. Interest in the texts from Macy and Wagamese began to wane, and I searched for others that might fit within the theme students were interested in most, namely, the quest for human happiness in the modern age. I returned to a text I had used toward the end of my *Ishmael* novel study, an article by Emily Esfahani Smith (2013) entitled "There's More to Life than Being Happy" wherein she elaborates on Victor Frankl's notion that the pursuit of happiness itself thwarts happiness. Frankl survived imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp, after which he wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*, about the theory of meaning and happiness he developed based on his experience of the Holocaust. Students responded positively to Esfahani Smith's article and became interested in complicating the notion of "happiness" in the context of the novel study and beyond. A colleague of mine recommended an animated short film by Steve Cutts (2017) called *Happiness*[17]. The film acts as a metaphor for the human rat race by literally depicting a day in the life of a rat as he

[17] For the full video see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9dZQelULDk)

attempts to be happy. The rat's pursuit involves shopping, alcohol, a fancy sport car, prescription medication, and ultimately, literally chasing money until he ends up rat-trapped at a desk in an office building, alongside hundreds of other rats.

After viewing the short film, usually twice in succession, I ask students to begin making connections between the video and *Nothing*. One of the questions we ask is, "to what extent do Pierre Anthon's ideas and Steve Cutts's short film overlap. Or, is this a video that Pierre Anthon could have written and directed?" Much conversation ensues. My question aside, I try to center the students' contributions, interjecting to offer a, "tell me more," or, "where do we see that in the text?" Here I wish to offer a digression from my description of teaching, in order to contextualize these more recent (and current as of 2022) non-fiction texts, with a view to showing how they work, together with the novel, to address neoliberalism by way of consumerism and its relationship to happiness.

Cutts's (2017) video illustrates the effects of what Zygmunt Bauman (2007) calls the "society of consumers" (p. 52). In his chapter of the same name, Bauman traces how, through the establishment and enforcement of a "consumerist culture," ours is a society that "interpellates its members (that is, addresses them, hails, calls out to, appeals to, questions, but also interrupts and breaks in upon them) *primarily in their capacity of consumers*" (p. 52). As society slowly evolved into one of mass consumerism, Bauman argues, one's ability to participate – i.e. to consume at will – is, "painted as the final triumph of the individual's right to self-assertion, understood primarily as the indivisible sovereignty of the unencumbered subject; a sovereignty which tends in turn to be interpreted as the individual's right to free choice" (p. 61). Although he does not explicitly name neoliberalism in conjunction with his argument, Bauman's description of the "members" of this society aligns with the policy aims of neoliberalism, in my view

(p. 62). Bauman describes these members thusly:

> Members of the society of consumers are themselves products of commoditization; their deregulated, privatized relegation to the realm of the commoditization of life politics is the main distinction which sets the society of consumers apart from other forms of human togetherness. (p. 62)

In other words, Bauman describes the end goal of neoliberalism for humans as being the same as its aim for everything else: deregulation, privatization, and commodification – a unit to be sold, but must first be made "market-worthy" (p. 62). In this sense, Bauman completes Harvey's (2005) articulation of the aims of neoliberalism: policies that "curb the power of labour, deregulate industry, agriculture, and resource extraction, and liberate the powers of finance" (p. 1). Put another way, Bauman (2007) identifies humans as a resource to be commodified and extracted. What Harvey (2005) also adds in his discussion of neoliberalism is that while a dictator has oppressive means at their disposal to enforce such extraction, leaders in democratic nations must entreat their voters to choose such a life of their own "free will." I use scare quotes here in order to illustrate something that Harvey (2005) and Bauman (2007) both identify, alongside a theme in Steve Cutts's (2007) short film, and, I would argue, what Pierre Anthon is yelling in *Nothing*: that our sense of meaning, purpose, freedom, and happiness, is all a "big masquerade, all make-believe" (Teller, 2010, p. 6). This commodification of individuals is again hinted at when Agnes, in an attempt to refute Pierre Anthon's claim, suggests that she "was supposed to amount to something, be someone" (p. 8). Here, Agnes frames her "being" first as an amount, then as a thing; only then would she be a some-one in possession of a worth-iness. Returning to Pierre Anthon, the aspects of modern life that he critiques as illusory are precisely aligned with what the structure of neoliberalism

requires in order for it to maintain itself. I referenced this idea in Chapter 3 but it is worth returning to here in the context of *Nothing* and the non-fiction texts I have been pairing with it.

Bauman (2007) describes the durability of our society of consumers (which is again, in my view, a requirement of neoliberalism) as predicated on a "secret," that is, in order for it to remain "successfully self-reproducing" the system in question must recast its "functional prerequisites into behavioral motives of actors" (p. 68). Elsewhere, Bauman states:

> the secret of all successful "socialization" is making individuals *wish to do* what *is needed* to enable the system to reproduce itself and this can be done either "explicitly" or "surreptitiously and *obliquely*," through overtly or covertly enforcing or drilling in certain behavioral patterns. (p. 68, emphases in original)

Crucially, and tying together the loose ends, I have attempted to weave together, humans engage in a project of pursuing a happiness that – by design – is always future-oriented and never attainable in the present moment; this present moment is, "just a means to an end, that is to a happiness that was always in the future, always 'not yet'" (p. 69).

Hopefully, my students leave my classroom having had this future-oriented notion of happiness refracted towards something else altogether. As I write this (May, 2022), my colleagues and I are preparing an excerpted version of Bauman's writing to add as a peripheral text to be read alongside *Nothing* and the animated short film.

I think, perhaps, that given my evolving pedagogy and everything I have learned over my doctoral studies and teaching experiences, if I had to choose between teaching *Ishmael* and *Nothing*, I continue to prefer the latter precisely because it is through *Nothing* that I can invite my students to contemplate and complicate "happiness" and this

curricular move becomes my conduit to implicitly (for now, at least) address neoliberalism. My students might not have an appetite to discuss neoliberalism as a political theory; they are, however, hungry for an understanding of why they are so often unhappy, dissatisfied, and feeling unfulfilled. It is here, in the tension between my students wanting to be happy in the future and our critiques of happiness in the present, that I believe the possibility for an eventful refraction might emerge. In this next section, I wish to offer some analysis of the novel *Nothing* with a view to exploring both its themes, and, how it stands as a novel with pedagogical implications.

What *Nothing* Taught me about Teaching

One of the reasons I teach the novel *Nothing* is that if capitalism—a major theme in the novel – is in me, it is likely in my students too. In bringing this novel into conversation alongside the non-Western (or Western-critical) non-fictional peripheral texts I use, I aim to have my students' literary and educationally refractive encounters with these texts instigate a possible eventful encounter, one that might bring about a re-cognition of their relationship to neoliberalism. However, I must tread carefully in achieving these aims. What I mean by "carefully" is that I work to restrain over-acting on my desires by which I dictate the precise outcomes of these encounters. In my experiences of teaching *Ishmael,* I used that novel as an excuse to have my students encounter lectures from my bully-pulpit; I now work to yield my "lecture time" in order for my students to encounter texts and the act of writing about them.

I still read parts of *Nothing* to them, specifically (and limited to) the opening pages, in order to model various thinking and metacognitive techniques – I do, after all, still have to *teach* my students how to be analysts, thinkers, and writers; however, the focus of my teaching aims to reside more on the technical and less on the ideological – at

least explicitly. Implicitly, the ideas I bring to the forefront during these lessons – although still aligned with my educational aims – are couched in a language of hesitance and humility. “This is just my opinion, you don’t have to agree” or “I think the Dalai Lama or Thomas King might say this about what Pierre Anthon says in this quote” are examples of how I try to de-reify my interpretations of this novel. For me, the aim is to always bring into focus how my students interpret, discuss, and ultimately encounter this unit, through the lens of *their* personal experiences and ideas. In so doing, my hope is that the eventful encounter will belong to them instead of expecting a more disastrous (in a Badiouian sense) supplication to the truths I want them to absorb.

In my view, removing myself (as much as is possible) facilitates an eventfully refractive *reading* encounter on the students’ terms, rather than an encounter with my encounter of these texts. In the former, the text-as-mirror brings the student into view whereas in the latter, I become the reflective surface – one that distorts how they might see themselves. Without using the language of eventful dimensions in my teaching, I try to invite them to consider the ways in which an insight or re-cognition – an ability to see within themselves, perhaps – might emerge from encountering literature and nonfiction eventfully. In the image below taken from my whiteboard notes on March 10, 2021, I try to convey how insight (perhaps an eventful truth) resides at the intersection of multiple dimensions. I use the metaphor of an atom[18], with a nucleus (the point of intersection) with the various components (protons and electrons) acting as elements encircling this potentially eventful center. As a class we called it the *atom of thoughtful literary*

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[18] Scientifically speaking, my depiction and metaphor of the atom is likely inaccurate with how atoms truly function; this design and nomenclature was sometime that was developed in class, in the moment, without much thought for scientific accuracy. It makes more sense, looking at this image now, to consider a Venn diagram as a more apt framework for understanding the intersection of these dimensions.

engagement (a term I used with my students to help describe and map out the dimensions of reading):

Figure 2

A photograph of my classroom whiteboard featuring "the atom of literary engagement"

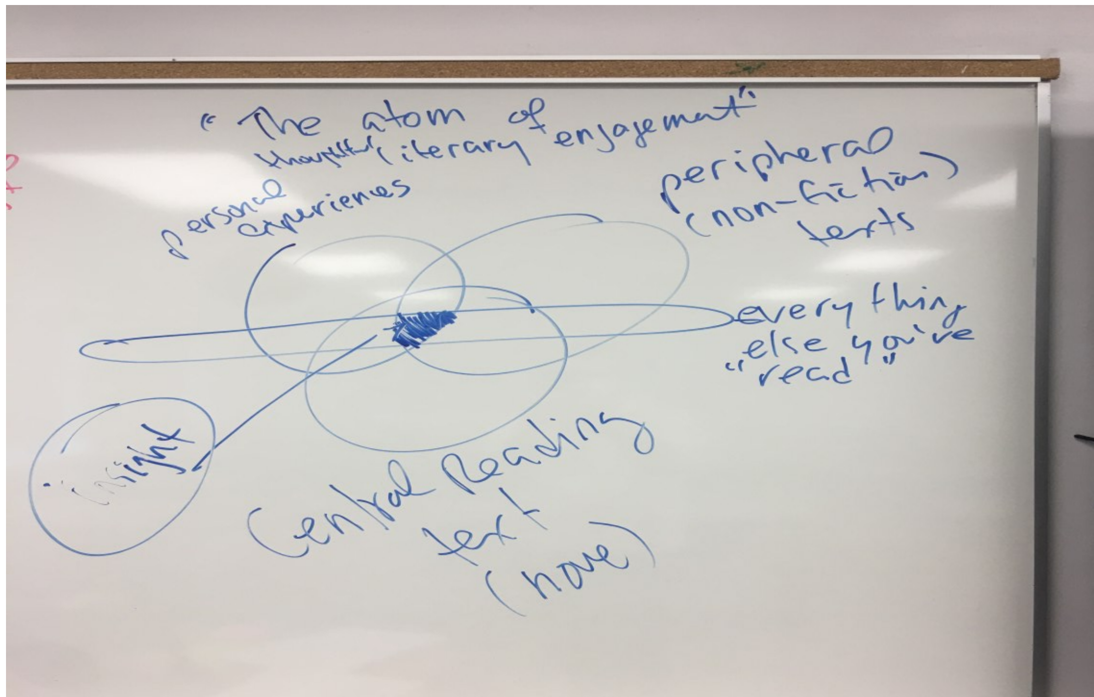


Figure 2: Photograph taken by Robert Piazza

The above image (Figure 2) is framed in "student-friendly" language, however, in a more academic sense, this image represents the atom of a refractively eventful encounter: as the students bring their lived experiences into conversation with the various texts and authors we read in class and that they have read throughout their lives, an educational insight, or an eventful re-cognition might emerge. I would like to illustrate how the element of personal experience and reading allows my practice of reading to change over time; in so doing, I infer that as my students learn how to bring themselves into their reading, the possibilities for a refractive encounter might arise.

This next section began as a note to my students and as I drafted it, I lost sight of my intended audience – I began to write for myself. In this piece of self-writing, I begin by discussing some of my annotations from reading *Nothing*. In one iteration of teaching the novel, I had read aloud the first few pages in order to model the annotation process for my students. Packing my (literal) backpack for the weekend, I discovered a second copy of the novel I had annotated when teaching this course previously. Flipping through the pages, I noticed that my annotations were markedly different both in frequency and in substance; I thought I would share with my students an example of how my thinking (and annotating) had shifted between the two iterations of the course. My earlier copy is not dated, but I surmise these annotations might have occurred during the Winter 2019 semester. I offer this next section of personal writing *with italics*, however, I feel it belongs to neither the refraction nor vignette nor memory category. Instead, I think of it as a representation of how I live at the intersection of teacher and student, someone still working through his own truth process.

Writing about *Nothing* from the Teacher-Student Intersection

*I have been thinking about this novel [*Nothing*] especially since my reading of it in class on Friday. I remembered that I have two copies of the novel that I had been annotating – one that I shared with you in class, and the other that has been sitting in my backpack for a while. I thought it might be interesting to re-read my first copy and revisit the thoughts I had and whether they differed or matched my more recent annotations.*

The first thing that struck me is how the earlier version (the one not shared with you) is far more detailed. I guess in my first few read-throughs I was generating more ideas (see Figure 3 for an example of these annotations, after this italicized section) – *I can see traces of the conversations I was having with colleagues about this book. I also*

feel that my insights then were more insightful and that perhaps now, due to laziness or sheer exhaustion, my mind has grown duller. Perhaps the lingering effects of having had COVID, too? Who knows?

The second thing that I noticed is how I tried to hone in on this question of performance and authenticity – the ways in which everyone (with the exception of Pierre Anthon and those living on the commune, perhaps) fundamentally know that what Pierre Anthon is saying is true, but refuse to give up the "masquerade" so to speak. And I wonder if this resistance to the truth is because living truthfully is as-yet unimaginable. At the end of chapter two in the novel, the narrator, Agnes states unequivocally:

> *Nothing had ever indicated that Pierre Anthon was the smartest among us, but suddenly we all knew he was. He was onto something. Even if none of us cared to admit it. Not to our parents, not to our teachers, not to one another. Not even to ourselves.* We didn't want to live in the world Pierre Anthon was telling us about. *We were going to amount to something, be someone. (Teller, 2010, p. 6, emphasis added)*

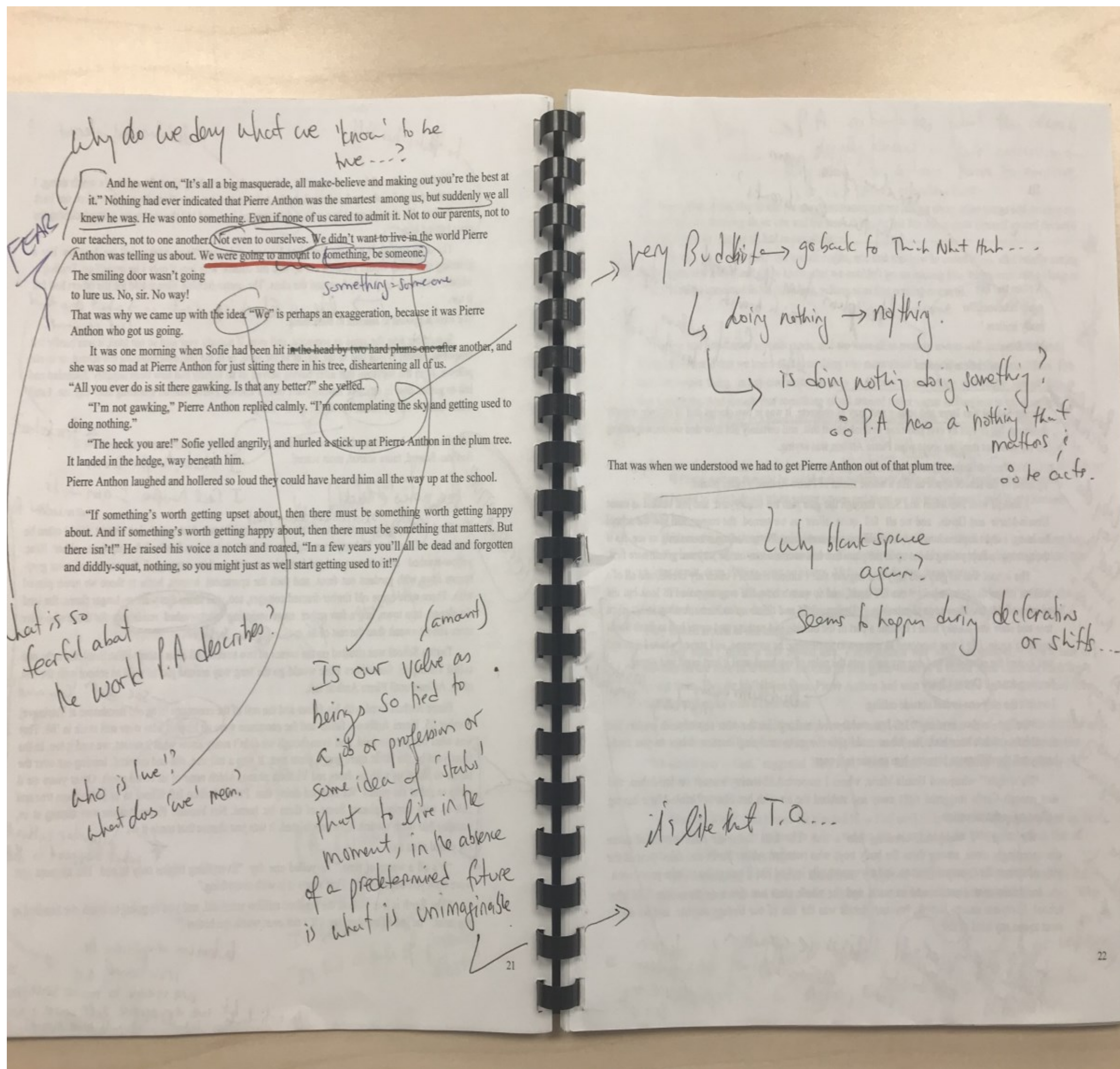
In my annotations, I had responded with the following question: Is our value as beings so tied to a job or profession or some idea of status that to live in the moment, in the absence of a predetermined future is what is unimaginable? In another annotation connected to the above quote, I ask: What is so fearful about the world Pierre Anthon describes?

Regardless of what the fear is, this dread or anxiety is clearly a motivator in why the kids in the novel are willing to participate in a performance of living. Recalling Badiou (2001), Britzman (1986), Adichie (2009), Bauman (2007) and King (2003), there is simultaneously an interested interest in sticking to the cultural script, or single story,

that permeates everyone and everything in the world; my pedagogical thought here is how I might consider teaching in such a way that students are brought into an awareness of a truth they did not already know they knew and to offer an alternative story that contains within it the possibility of enacting that story in an imaginable future and thereby establishing a culture that eschews inauthenticity and insists on a kind of real-er, more authentic becoming subjectivity.

Figure 3

A photograph of my Nothing *annotations, referenced in the above italicized section*



And he went on, "It's all a big masquerade, all make-believe and making out you're the best at it." Nothing had ever indicated that Pierre Anthon was the smartest among us, but suddenly we all knew he was. He was onto something. Even if none of us cared to admit it. Not to our parents, not to our teachers, not to one another. Not even to ourselves. We didn't want to live in the world Pierre Anthon was telling us about. We were going to amount to something, be someone.

The smiling door wasn't going
to lure us. No, sir. No way!

That was why we came up with the idea. "We" is perhaps an exaggeration, because it was Pierre Anthon who got us going.

It was one morning when Sofie had been hit in the head by two hard plums one after another, and she was so mad at Pierre Anthon for just sitting there in his tree, disheartening all of us.

"All you ever do is sit there gawking. Is that any better?" she yelled.

"I'm not gawking," Pierre Anthon replied calmly. "I'm contemplating the sky and getting used to doing nothing."

"The heck you are!" Sofie yelled angrily, and hurled a stick up at Pierre Anthon in the plum tree. It landed in the hedge, way beneath him.

Pierre Anthon laughed and hollered so loud they could have heard him all the way up at the school.

"If something's worth getting upset about, then there must be something worth getting happy about. And if something's worth getting happy about, then there must be something that matters. But there isn't!" He raised his voice a notch and roared, "In a few years you'll all be dead and forgotten and diddly-squat, nothing, so you might just as well start getting used to it!"

21

That was when we understood we had to get Pierre Anthon out of that plum tree.

22

Figure 3: Photograph taken by Robert Piazza

Relating to my research here, I argue that, not only do English Language Arts courses offer the potential for this kind of pedagogy, I am also arguing that these English courses – in the context of the *core* courses students must take in order to graduate (Social Studies, Science, and Math are the others) – offer the most potential for such eventful encounters that students can encounter. Of course there are exceptions – other subjects, such as Drama, offer such potentialities, and many English Language Arts classes stick to the script of standardized test prep, etc. – however, in my experiences with teachers in my school and school district, the ELA class can offer a more immersive experience, whereas other classes might be prone to skimming the surface of these issues without necessarily inviting students to more closely read, speak, and write personally in order to learn at the intersection of these eventful dimension sites.

In another section of the novel, the idea of inauthentic living, or, of living according to the cultural script or the single story one is handed, resurfaces. After Pierre Anthon exposes the children to a truth they already knew, Agnes begins to see her school and neighborhood through a different set of eyes, as if she were viewing her "situation" and situatedness *from the perspective of the event*. Recalling Badiou's (2001) notion of language, truth, and perspective, Pierre Anthon's proclamation in class, that nothing matters, works to shatter Agnes's conception of herself and the world around her. As I have been arguing throughout my dissertation, this shattering leads to a re-cognition – a knowing again – of herself and world; the process of coming to know this "knowing again" emerges from faithful adherence to the truth process.

In the opening pages of the novel, Agnes describes the school and classroom in terms of a blank slate – the odor of "detergent and weeks of emptiness" permeates the building, whose "windows reflected clear and bright" and where "the desks stood two by

two in rows as straight as hospital corridors" (Teller, 2010, p. 4). Compare this description to when the students walk to school after their eventful encounter:

> we all fell quite silent as we turned the corner and saw the school building…it was like it was something Pierre Anthon was making us see. As if the nothing he kept yelling about…had overtaken us on the way and gotten here first. (p. 8)

Agnes continues describing the school through the eyes Pierre Anthon had (re)opened:

> The school was so gray and ugly and angular that I almost couldn't catch my breath, and all of a sudden it was as if the school were life itself, and it wasn't how life was supposed to look but did anyway. (p. 8)

Although this thought had never occurred to me before writing these words, as I typed the above quote onto the page, I am reminded of my experience of "seeing" the house we had just purchased through the Dalai Lama's (via Professor Eppert's) eyes (see Chapter 5 for my writing about this exact moment)! The paradoxically slow yet sudden realization that my house (like Agnes' school) was emblematic of a sort of performative living, according to a script I had been following, about how I was supposed to live.

The "kicker" is perhaps what Agnes shares with the reader next – and this too has resonances with me. Agnes, in re-cognizing her school as a metaphor for the bleak and gray and harsh ugliness of life, feels:

> a violent urge to run over to Taeringvej 25 and climb up to Pierre Anthon in his plum tree and stare into the sky until I became a part of the outside and nothing and never had to think about anything again. But I was supposed to amount to something, be someone, so I stayed where I was and just looked the other way and dug my nails into the palm of my hand until it hurt good and strong. (p. 8)

We see here Agnes deny her fidelity to the truth process instigated by Pierre Anthon's eventful declaration. This urge to become an ally of Pierre Anthon – and of truth – is so violent that I also am thinking of the militant nature of one's fidelity to a Badiouian truth process. And yet, Agnes insists on staying put, alluding to the pull, allure, and seduction of neoliberalism and through it, the notion of the "American Dream" and the riches it affords us. Agnes's violent denial of her violent urge sets the stage for the acts of violence that proliferate throughout the novel. The class of 7A exhumes an infant's coffin, terrorizes a hamster, rapes one of their peers, beheads and already dead dog (it died of natural causes), cuts off a guitar player's finger, and in the end, kills Pierre Anthon. When Badiou (2001) discussed how the betrayal of one's militant fidelity to a truth is an Evil, this novel might stand as an allegory for this exact point. In my view, there is another Evil in this novel: the *disaster* that Pierre Anthon – due to his pedagogical approach – enacts on his classmates in his attempt to speak his truth to power.

Pierre Anthon: Nothing Short of a Pedagogical Disaster

In Badiou's (2001) explication of the evil of disaster, he cites the examples of Nietzsche and the Red Guards of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (p. 84). Their flaw – the root of their disastrous evil – was their belief and desire to create a "situation in which all interest had disappeared, and in which opinions had been *replaced* by the truth to which [they] were committed to" (p. 84). But, as Badiou points out, "Nietzsche went mad. The Red Guards were imprisoned or shot, or betrayed by their own fidelity," and, he adds that "our century has been a graveyard of positivist ideas of progress" (p. 84). Although Pierre Anthon remains clear-eyed throughout the novel, the class of 7A

eventually destroys him. His death, I believe, is a direct result of his disastrous pedagogical approach.

During the novel study unit, when I assign the Dalai Lama's (1999) chapter "Modern Society and the Quest for Human Happiness" for my students to read and bring into conversation with *Nothing*, my students often arrive at the conclusion that the Dalai Lama's article has much in common with Pierre Anthon: they both offer a critique of the Western masquerade that positions individuality and material wealth as the means to achieving happiness. In my view, I also see some parallels between Pierre Anthon and Buddhist notions of living in the present moment severing attachments to material things, of the temporary and fleeting nature of our existence, and of living a life of awareness. Of course, this list does not at all capture the complexity of Buddhism, nor am I framing Pierre Anthon as a Buddhist figure; however, thinking about Pierre Anthon as aligned with these perspectives helps us (my students and me) make connections between the world of the novel and the (socio-political) Western world. In this sense and in the context of my classroom, we sometimes refer to Pierre Anthon as a Dalai Lama figure in the novel, one who "sees" beyond the illusion of happiness and attempts to enlighten his classmates. His aims, though noble, are betrayed by his righteously militant pedagogical approach, meaning his inability to enter into dialogue with his classmates; instead, the bulk of his interactions with them consists of angry tirades that seek to prove his friends wrong, rather than attempt to understand and address their resistance to his claims. I cannot help but also see my past teaching self in Pierre's approach, a finding I unpack in Chapter 7. Though I have been focused on Pierre Anthon, it is the novel's narrator, Agnes, who also warrants attention.

Nothing Belongs to Agnes

Throughout the novel, Agnes recounts the misadventures the class of 7A experience. Because she is telling the story, the events are filtered through her eyes and her interpretation might not be as reliable as we think. I am less interested in her reliability as a narrator and more interested in Agnes as a teacher figure. Though she never explicitly addresses her audience, nor does she indicate to whom she recounts this story, I take the reader to be Agnes's student and her story to be her teaching.

In my first readings of the novel, I was puzzled as to why Teller (2010) opens the novel with Pierre Anthon's proclamation, apropos of nothing, that "Nothing matters. I have known that for a long time. So nothing is worth doing. I just realized that" (p. 4), only to have that same statement repeated a few pages later. Working with my students to figure out the author's intentions, we came to a fascinating realization: The opening lines are in the present tense and the bulk of the novel is written in the past tense. Since Agnes is our narrator recounting the events that transpired, the opening lines belong to her: according to many a teacher's desire to "even change one student," Pierre Anthon succeeded! Upon this discovery, the novel might be thought of as the story of Agnes's refractive encounter (the past tense narration) that lead to her re-cognition of herself and the world (the present tense opening lines of the novel).

In offering her educationally eventful journey, Agnes is inviting the reader along, and though she never states it explicitly, I interpret her narration as an attempt to refractively enlighten anyone who might listen. Although her story is rife with brutality and violence, Agnes herself is never righteous with the reader. She offers her tale in all its ugliness, including her own participatory role in the matter. The reader who has taken up the invitation to encounter the story (through the purchase of the novel, let's say), is then

left with the ambiguity of the ending; like *Ishmael*, we are left without a clear answer for what to do next. Each novel – *Ishmael* and *Nothing,* presents its readers with a problematic that it seeks to articulate and bring to our attention, and each withholds the solutions. For Pierre Anthon and in my own teaching of *Ishmael*, we attempted to name the problem and then to dictate how others should live, seeking to disastrously replace their opinions with our truth, much to our own demise.

Although Pierre Anthon succeeds in "converting" Agnes, the price paid – his life, and the trauma they all experienced in the process – was far too great to justify his cause. I think of this often in regards to my teaching of *Ishmael*. There were a few students who did like the novel; we would meet after class and talk about the book and they would tell me how they recommended it to their friends and family. At the time, I thought those moments were my indicators of "success." Perhaps this is why, when talking about the novel with my supervisor Professor Eppert, I conveyed my teaching as going quite well. Only in hindsight did I realize that the suffering I may have caused – the sanctimonious, shame and guilt laden classroom I had overseen, the students who dropped the class or didn't pass because of that unit, potentially causing delays in students getting into post-secondary – was too much a price to pay for the few students who enjoyed *Ishmael*. It took pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree for me to realize that as stated in the Hippocratic Oath, we must *do no harm*, or as Badiou might say, to do no evil, in the pursuit of a truth.

Here I wish to offer an excerpt from an e-mail a former student sent me, reprinted with their permission. The email was sent to me a few years after I had taught them. In their e-mail, they wrote about their experience in my class and described my teaching and its impact in a way that fuses the best of both *Ishmael* and *Nothing*, where, in their view,

the potentially eventful education they experienced in my class was similar to the effect Pierre Anthon had on his classmates, however, with Ishmael's pedagogical touch. The student wrote:

> I always felt fortunate to be able to have you as a teacher because I recognized that your class was far greater than the classroom. You taught 30-1 at a level so far beyond what it had to be that you were able to open our minds to thought. I was always amazed by that. You're like a Pier Anton [sic] but in a good way, you've instigated expansive thoughts and in some odd way it gave me perspective to the infinite edge of the mind (Greenwood, personal communication, Dec. 20, 2020[19]).

Being Pierre Anthon but in a good way cuts to the heart of my teaching. The "good way," in my view, is the ability to teach in a manner opposed to the Badiouian evil way that Pierre Anthon goes about his attempts to get his classmates to experience the same re-cognition as he did. In this sense, I consider my pedagogy to be aligned with Ishmael, and my curriculum belongs to Pierre Anthon, as he seeks to bring into awareness the implicitly neoliberal values of modern living so firmly entrenched within us so as to render any alternatives incredible – the inability to believe that any other way of *being* is possible.

I end this chapter with an anecdote that stands as a possible example of an alternative approach to teaching *Ishmael*; this approach will be discussed further in the next chapter. As a precursor to that chapter, I offer this anecdote as a form of "table-setting" for my findings chapter as it lays the groundwork for the key findings of my

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[19] Student's name changed to protect anonymity; written permission received to quote from their email.

research. Chronologically, the anecdote takes place more recently, beginning in Spring 2019 and ending in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on my teaching and learning. Briefly, the anecdote describes how in spite of swearing off *Ishmael*, certain conditions arose through which I was able to return to teaching that novel again. In fact, I should not use "teaching" as a verb – instead, a few of my students and I read that novel, and talked about it, outside the confines of the formal classroom setting. It is perhaps an anecdote about teaching without teaching, or, a response to the question of what is necessary for inviting the possibility of the educational. In this sense, the anecdote that follows exemplifies all that I have tried to achieve, pedagogically and with respect to my curricular aims, since I experienced my own educational events in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's courses all those years ago. This anecdote acts as both an ending and a beginning: the culmination of working (and then not working) so hard for students to (possibly) read *Ishmael* eventfully, and the feeling of having figured out how best to invite this possibility. Sometimes.

Living With (and Not Planning For) **Ishmael**

In the midst of the *Nothing* unit (Winter 2019), my students (mostly) and I (with restraint) engaged in some deeper-than-usual philosophical conversations. As I discussed in Chapter 6, I arranged them into small groups and throughout the term, taught them how to have self-sustaining conversations wherein I played a limited role – more of an eavesdropper than a participant. As a class, we talked about our purpose and meaning in life, and, paired with the peripheral readings from that unit, began to veer into discussions that critiqued our Western ways of living, specifically through complicating our understanding of "the pursuit of happiness."

As they discussed, students began to wonder why it was that life in our world has become so fraught, and asked for more and more things to read. I posted lists of books on our class website and linked to articles and documentaries. Some of these were academic while others dealt with pop culture (articles about the death of hip-hop artist and community activist Nipsey Hussle; Latin-American pop star Bad Bunny's gender-bending aesthetic; anything about Beyoncé). Students read these and asked for more. I emailed our librarian and asked if he could create a "Piazza" section of the library, filled with mostly non-fiction books relating to the conversations my students and I were having in class; a few students borrowed books from this section.

Given the nature of our classroom discussions, I began to wonder if there might be interest from my students, in reading *Ishmael*; however, I was hesitant to even broach the subject for a few reasons. The first reason was largely due to my experiences teaching the novel before. Secondly, I did not want to burden students with yet another novel to read and whatever assignments might have emerged from that work; I also was not looking to add to my marking load. Thinking of the corner of the library our librarian had set aside, I thought perhaps I could do a "book talk" and if students wanted to read it, they could.

I grabbed my copy of the novel and brought it to class with me. As I shared a synopsis of the book and described where they could find it, I informally surveyed my students in order to find out how many copies I would need to set aside; about twelve students expressed interest. I was surprised, figuring it would only be one or two. In that moment I offered a moment of "real talk" – when I speak to my students as if they were colleagues – sometimes these real talk moments are when I talk about the challenges of teaching, or even about my own anxieties or doubts about how effectively a lesson is

going. That time, I sat down and said, "it would be cool if we could find a way to read this book and talk about it together. What if we read it as if we were in a book club? No assignments attached, no marks, no obligations other than meeting. What do you think?" My students furtively glanced around the room at each other. I also wanted to add some intrigue to the novel and described how reading *Ishmael* was potentially dangerous: "it made me see things differently and there's no going back to how I saw the world, myself, and the people around me before." In order to seal the deal, I added. "I will bring pizza." Their hands went up – about ten students.

I leveraged my morning students' interest in the book club in my pitch to my second class. I had a similar number of interested students. We found consensus for a time frame and reading schedule and agreed to meet, after school, once a week, for four weeks. We would read *Ishmael* and have pizza, and talk about it informally, with no academic strings attached. After I got approval from our admin team, the *Ishmael* book club became real; here is my message to students via my Google Classroom page, posted May 3rd, 2019:

> Ishmael Book Club Reading/Meeting Schedule:
>
> Tuesday May 7th: Read to page pages 75
> Thursday May 16: Read from pages 75-148
> Thursday May 23: Read from pages 151-207
> Tuesday May 28: Read from pages 211-263
>
> Our weekly readings will be between 50-75 pages. I will provide snacks at each meeting. Pizza if that works for everyone. Meetings will start 15 minutes after the end of block 5 - enough time for me to run over and get the pizza(s).
>
> I think the best way of proceeding might be to come to each meeting with a copy of the novel (available for pickup at the finance office - where you get your bus passes) and, perhaps, a few questions you might have about the book and we can go from there.
>
> Right now, there are approx. 20 students who have expressed interest (as per the

> question I posted in Classroom). If you are interested and have not yet signed up, please let me know ASAP so you can get your book before this weekend.
>
> I look forward to our first meeting :-)
> Thanks!
> RP

Each week, I ran out as soon as the bell rang, picked up the pizza I had pre-ordered from the conveniently located corner shop, and welcomed the *Ishmael* book club members into the classroom. Each meeting was supposed to last for an hour at most; we often exceeded that time. I made a conscious effort to have my students lead the conversations and tried to redirect questions they had for me, back to the other students. I applied the same teaching techniques and spider-web model from the *Nothing* unit, without any of the formal tracking. I was worried such formalities or imposing my own interpretations and opinions might overwrite theirs or shut down conversation. We would sometimes digress away from the novel for long stretches, only to find our way back to it again. We ate lots of pizza. Not every student showed up having read the "assigned" pages and some missed a week or two.

I would say that the book club was an overwhelming personal and pedagogical success, not because anyone was shattered by it (though they might have been), but because I think I succeeded in creating a space through which the potential for refractively eventful reading might have emerged, and students responded to the invitation and read parts of, and in some cases, the whole novel. In my view, this book club was less about coercing the possibility of an eventful encounter and more about *inviting* the possibility of a refractive encounter with a text I had struggled so hard to deploy in my teaching. Looking back, the idea of a book club outside the confines of the classroom seems so simple, however, I feel I was too caught up in the righteousness of

my own desires – that *all* my students had to read *Ishmael* and be seized by it – and these righteous desires usurped any other "educational" possibilities.

During that Spring 2019 term, there was a particular alchemy in those classes and of the lived curricular energies from which the book club emerged. In my next semester (Fall of 2020), those energies and that alchemy did not materialize in the same way. Our *Nothing* unit came and went, and we did have terrific moments of conversation, but – at least to me – it felt like I was trying to recreate a moment in time that just was not there. I was teaching an entirely new group of students and looking for the same conversations to emerge as they had previously. Looking back, I found myself trying too hard to steer the conversation so that *Ishmael* might yet again rise into being, my overly "militant" approach emerging once again. However, in spite of my inability to conjure up the *Ishmael* book club once more, I view the choice to not have forced the idea upon my students as a success of sorts – an exercise in resisting those militant urges, perhaps.

During the Winter 2020 semester, I came close to the experience of another *Ishmael* book club; however, the reality of teaching in the midst of a global pandemic cut our in-person teaching time short. The district moved all classes online, and we met weekly for the remainder of the semester. The alchemy was there – a sense that there were enough students who would have responded to the invitation to read *Ishmael* – however, the shift to online learning dashed those hopes. The technological hurdles alone would have been too difficult to surmount, and so once again, no *Ishmael*.

During the 2020-2021 school year, our district shifted to quarterly terms rather than two semesters; I taught *Nothing* again in the first quarter and, similarly, no sense of possibility for *Ishmael*. One group of students did decide to start a podcast about their philosophical questions on their own, so that's something! In the spring of 2021, I taught

Nothing once more, in our third quarter; I asked my students whether they were interested in reading *Ishmael*, informally, as part of a book club, no academic strings attached. I floated the idea with a few of my students and there was interest in this project. The students had been really leaning into the schooling/education units, and our conversations about *Nothing* were quite vigorous. I had also added the first chapter of Thomas King's (2003) *The Truth About Stories* to the peripheral readings for the *Nothing* unit, and that garnered some interest in our classroom discussions. Over the remainder of that quarter, my students and I met once a week and I listened as they discussed the novel *Ishmael*.

I conclude this chapter by reminding myself – and you, the reader – of the potential harm that might arise in spite of a teacher's *educational* aims, and by showing how in spite of that looming Sword of Damocles, it is possible to remain humbly faithful to my educational truth process in the hopes of continuing to re-cognize my teaching and myself. In Chapter 7, I discuss the findings I have re-cognized throughout my teaching and the educational implications of my research – the culmination of this journey I embarked on almost seven years ago, and the expression of my realization that this journey never quite ends.

Chapter Seven

Toward Humilitant and Refractive Curriculum and Pedagogy in Neoliberal Times: A Discussion of My Research Findings

Teresa Strong-Wilson (2006b) writes that, "teachers are enmeshed in stories" (p. 103). Although she is referring to elementary school teachers whose "curriculum involves working with narratives" (p. 103), I would suggest that for an English Language Arts teacher, her claim holds true. She also outlines the responsibility of the teacher, "whose job it is to transmit, interpret and critique culture and society," especially since "cultural knowledge is embedded in the stories teachers tell" (p. 103). My dissertation is also enmeshed in stories: stories of teaching and being taught; stories about the stories I teach; and stories about writing about my stories! Following Strong-Wilson, each story I shared in this dissertation attempts to transmit, interpret, and critique the intersection between neoliberal, curricular, and pedagogical cultures and the implications of these intersections for who I am becoming. Through autoethnography, Strong-Wilson might suggest that I have "brought memory forward" in order to re-cognize the reconfiguration (past, present, and future) of my "landscapes of learning" (p. 105). Through the event and ensuing truth process I encountered, that landscape itself "[became] manifest" (p. 110) and was rendered visible to me. Considering the ever-shifting temporality of this work, this chapter stands as a response to the following question: what might Badiou's (2001) truth process and its future anterior orientation hold for autoethnography rooted in analysis of the past?

Described as a "building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self and…opens a door to the richness of the past," memory can also be considered "a foe" to the autoethnographic researcher (Chang, 2008, p. 71).

Memory can reveal only a "partial truth" or be "unreliable" in the ways it sometimes "selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past" (p. 72); despite the potential to be led astray, "personal memory taps into the wealth of information on self" (p. 72). From a Badiouian perspective, memory is central in re-cognizing a self I did not know I already was. Here, I wish to offer a brief personal refraction that exemplifies the way that the findings from my teaching experiences shift and evolve over time, always leading me to re-cognize what a particular moment *will have meant*. For context, the conversation I describe below arose after I began understanding my teaching of *Ishmael* as a Badiouian disaster. Prior to this realization, I had perceived my teaching of that novel to be effective, however, as I continued along my truth process, that perception became more and more untenable; in the drafts of my writing I began describing my teaching as imbued with arrogance and authoritarianism. Professor Eppert helped me probe deeper into why I began describing my experiences in this way.

A Moment of Refraction, April 24th, 2019

During a candidacy feedback session, Professor Eppert asked me where my self-described arrogance in my teaching, mentioned in my story of teaching Ishmael *evilly, came from. In truth, I had not paused to think about that question before she posed it. I had recognized that I was being arrogant, yet I never sought to question where that arrogance came from, or, how it might be a product of globalization, modern individualism, and the neoliberalism I have been critiquing throughout my years of doctoral studies. I mistook symptoms for illness and never arrived at a diagnosis. Or, I attributed these ills to personal choice, rather than making a connection to how my lived context – as a privileged, straight, white, Christian, middle-class, cis-gendered male – contributed to my indignant response to students (often: lower-class, female, non-white,*

immigrant, Indigenous). Although I proclaim myself an ally for and with those less privileged, I have to wonder, if some of my "layers" of self, or multiples of self, have not yet joined "the cause," as it were. What Professor Eppert brought to bear, in wondering about my perception of my arrogance, is her rich scholarship and background in non-Western philosophical, ontological, and epistemological traditions. Moreover, it was a literal matter of time that enabled us to eventually have the conversation leading to this particular insight: We had had this conversation before, however I had not initially described my teaching of Ishmael *as disastrous in any way. The truth about my pedagogical arrogance only revealed itself farther along my truth process from when I first began contemplating how I taught that novel.*

The findings in this chapter are informed by a Badiouian application of autoethnography, especially arising from the process of describing and analyzing my memories of teaching *Ishmael* and *Nothing*. When we remember, "we come face-to-face with at least two sides of ourselves: the self writing and the self who is remembered" (Chambers, 1998, as cited in Granger, 2011, p. 58). In this sense, my refractively post-eventful writer-self is remembering the experiences of my pre-eventful self; this is complicated further, in my view, if we understand that a truth process is interminable. Remembering that the Badiouian truth process is ongoing and recursive, something that was true for me in the past (teaching *Ishmael* was a success) remains open to re-cognition (my teaching of *Ishmael* was complicated). In this sense, although my eventful encounters began almost eight years ago, my ever-evolving understanding of what those events are to have meant requires an ongoing reassessment of my experiences, even post-event. I make this claim because my teaching of *Ishmael* occurred after my shattering; however, my refractive realization of teaching this novel evilly (in a Badiouian sense)

arose only after I had the time to investigate on those experiences, talk about them with my dissertation committee, and write about them for this dissertation. Even then my initial thoughts on teaching the novel were that I was helping my students; as my truth-process evolved, those same experiences were seen at a much different angle. Feedback from my supervisory committee on earlier drafts of this dissertation noted that I tended to over-exaggerate my descriptions of teaching *Ishmael* and advocated that I write about those experiences with more nuance. Thinking about why I was so hyperbolic, I wonder if, because this recognition of teaching evilly was so devastating and shocking to me, that I could not help but frame those experiences in terms of life or death stakes for my students and I, especially as I drafted those pages immediately after coming to this realization. I have since scaled back the melodrama in the hopes of showing, rather than telling (or yelling!) what my teaching was like. The truth process continues to shape how I remember my experiences, permitting me to retroactively re-think those moments through the event. Here I wish to explore this tension further.

When Professor Eppert read an early draft of my candidacy/dissertation proposal, she wondered why I had never mentioned what I considered my epic "failure" of teaching *Ishmael* in my conversations with her. The question puzzled me. Why hadn't I? I was not lying or attempting to deceive her. I believe it is because I had only understood my teaching of that novel earlier along my truth process; therefore, my memories of teaching *Ishmael* were still filtered through rose-colored glasses. However, by the time I shared my draft with her, the entire recollection had changed because my writer-self exhibited an evolving interpretation of what my teaching signified. This anecdote about memory is perhaps my clearest example of what den Heyer (2009) means when he suggests that truth belongs in "neither the present nor the past, but rather the future anterior" wherein

the subject will “declare ‘this will have been true’” (p. 442). In my view, the “will have been” points precisely to the possibility of an ever-shifting interpretation of a past moment that is paradoxically presently true but subject to change.

What are the implications of this paradox for a becoming-subject writing an autoethnographic dissertation, if, a year, or even a week from now, these current interpretations are no longer tenable? Who, or when, is the “auto” in my autoethnography? And following my earlier discussion, in Chapter 3, of nested identities, which version of my “self” holds claim to the “auto” at any given moment? Badiou helps here; he acknowledges our inherent multiplicity and for him, perhaps, I might be engaging in *multi-ethnography*. In this way, the “facts” of my memories may not be different – what was said, or done, for example – however, what those facts will have meant depends entirely on who I am becoming as I write my dissertation and beyond.

This findings chapter revolves around the idea that relational humility is essential to the project of teaching for the possibility of a refractively eventful encounter. Following the section on relational humility, I will more fully explore the implications of *refraction* for teaching, curriculum, and autoethnography. However, these findings are predicated on another overarching insight I had about my teaching, especially of *Ishmael*: that in spite of all my aims and desires to teach that novel in a way that moved my students to recognize themselves as implicated and held captive by certain Western ideals (and their implications, for example, climate change), that I was the one holding them captive, educationally speaking. Before continuing my discussion of my dissertation’s findings, it is important that I unpack what this insight means for me, my students, and English Language Arts curriculum and pedagogy.

Alternatives to Neoliberalism: Teaching for Wisdom & Nonauthoritarianism

In my educational event in Eppert's and den Heyer's classes, I became aware of the need to teach alternatives to neoliberalism. A key influence for me here, was reading the work of David G. Smith, an author I read in each professor's courses. In one article, Smith (2009) engages with the work of Peter McLaren, one of critical pedagogy's prime movers. Smith challenges me to delve, in my autoethnographic inquiry, into my educational events in ways that show the potential limitations to critical pedagogy as teaching for social change. Although I read Smith (2000, 2008, 2013) many years ago during my coursework, it is only after my analysis of teaching *Ishmael* I became aware of these limitations in my attempts to practice critical pedagogy.

In my conversations with Professor Eppert and den Heyer about my experiences of teaching *Ishmael*, I began to see an image of my teaching that stood in stark contrast to the teacher I was trying to be. This image brought to mind words such as authoritarian and totalitarian; though these might seem hyperbolic, I do believe they aptly describe the teacher I did not realize I was. When I say that I taught with authoritarian urges, I mean that my teaching practices were authoritarian in nature, as evidenced by my description of teaching the novel in Chapter 5. Through my analysis of teaching *Ishmael*, I am concerned that I subjected my students to a regime of strict obedience to my authority; in many ways, they were to agree with my opinions, my truths, and my interpretations of the texts we studied. When they expressed a difference of opinion (for example, some would reject Ishmael's claim that our civilizational aircraft is crashing), I would sometimes tell them they were wrong. When they resisted accepting the truths I disseminated (for example, climate disaster is real and Alberta's oilsands-based economy contributes to our planet's destruction), I might have told them they were blinded by their own

institutionalization. These authoritarian, arrogant, or even righteous urges were not apparent to me at the time. In my view, I was simply trying to free my students from the tyrannies to which they did not know they were subjected. What I realize now is I replaced one form of oppression with another. With an oppression of my own creation. The urgency of these urges was informed by my then desire to save my students from themselves. In saving them, I was also saving the planet and by extension, my loved ones, and myself. Inspired by *my* interpretations of critical pedagogy scholars in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes, I viewed myself as a savior figure, and I understand this perspective, now, as tied to my interpretation, then, of Badiou's (2001) claim that one's faith to their eventful truth process must be militant.

Another example of this militant influence was how it was true for me then, that the perceived failings of the *Ishmael* novel unit belonged to my students' inability to read at grade level, or to be good students; however, thinking this truth through the eventful encounter, I can say the failure of that novel study (as a whole) could also be attributed to me and my authoritarian urges. As my recognition of authoritarian teaching bubbled to the surface, I tried to understand how it was possible I could teach in that way, especially following my discussions with Professors Eppert and den Heyer. During one of my conversations with Professor den Heyer, he recommended I read Smith's (2009) critique of critical pedagogy. That article, in addition to Ross's (2018) article (discussed in Chapter 3), sheds some light on the nature of my authoritarian approach to critical pedagogy.

Smith (2009) wonders whether McLaren's "revolutionary" critical pedagogy is a plausible approach to countering the "crisis in the West," and he suggests that there is a need for "more creative ways of imagining a better world" that lie beyond the

capitalist/Marxist binary (pp. 114-116). According to Smith, McLaren's call for a widespread revolution depends on a "human solidarity" willing to confront, confess, and repent its culpability; however, "facing the burden of that [guilt] is something most of us would do anything to avoid" (p. 113). Worse still, perhaps, is the "blind eye" turned to endeavours that also risk profitability: the genocide in Rwanda or production of cost-effective medication for Africa (p. 105). To return this problematic to the realm of education, I recall Smith (2000) asking, "what, then, are the main ways that truth seeking, truth discovery, and truth sharing get blocked in teaching" (p. 19)? In the spirit of Smith's question, thinking through education from a fixed Western (read: neoliberal, Market-logic based, etc.) perspective might limit our understanding of truth, and, risks excluding non-Western ontologies and epistemologies that might offer alternative conceptualizations. In my view, there is little room for humility within neoliberal Market-logic; it is dog-eat-dog and survival of the fittest. Through my educational events in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes, I came to realize that my thought and practice – personal and pedagogical – was also tied to the Market. In this sense, I had been acculturated to think that I had to go "all in" for my truth (i.e. my aims for teaching *Ishmael)* to become profitable; any competing ideas (for example, Alberta does not really contribute to climate change) needed to be dealt with accordingly. In this way, neoliberal Market-logic shaped my educational thought and practice.

The point Smith (2009) makes (among many) is that according to Market-logic, "humanity itself becomes superfluous," let alone our planet (p. 105). Framed though an analogy I often deploy in conversations with my colleagues, in the marketplace of my classroom I am a salesman. I need to "sell" ideas, approaches, texts, and assignments to my students such that they "buy in" and can be successful. In such a relational structure,

and in spite of my aims to *educate*, my students – potential clients – and I enter into a consumer/producer contract. If, as I stated in Chapter 1, my success is/was tied to theirs, I believed I needed to deploy all the manipulation tactics found in the advertising industry. What mattered less was what my students desired; what mattered more was that they desired what I wanted them to desire. And if my supply could not (or *would* not) cater to their demands, "eventually consumers themselves drop out" (Smith, 2009, p. 105). My students-as-consumers dropped out either by choice (they stop attending my classes) or by request (I send an email to their administrator, citing lack of commitment, incomplete assessments, etc.). Because of my educational events, I knew that I had to teach differently – for there to be a supplemental aim to my teaching in addition to diploma preparation and post-secondary preparation – but my teaching itself also needed to represent a pedagogy that was no longer tied to such Market-logic. Thankfully, following my evolving understanding of my truth process, the relational logic of my classroom changed; looking back on my descriptions of teaching in Chapter 6, I strove to be less authoritative and punitive and more student-centered, in my *Nothing* novel study unit. In so doing, I worked alongside students to invite them to the possibility of encountering an educational event.

In my view, after having drafted this dissertation, especially following my reading of Ross's (2018) critique of the critical pedagogue's messiah complex, I realized that what was righteous or authoritarian in my teaching – even hypocritical, perhaps – was how I attempted to forcefully persuade my students to confront, confess, and repent in spite of their unwillingness to do so. Add to this my own failings to completely live the revolutionary charge I was conscripting my students into: I still drive a gas-guzzling luxury SUV (and have just purchased a second gas-guzzling luxury sports car at the time

of this writing); I own a home too big for what my family needs, in a gentrified neighborhood; I don't eat or shop sustainably, etc. I find myself caught in the tension between desiring the moral high ground while living upon the low ground, "complicit in the processes of globalization in [my life] as a common citizen" (Smith, 2000, p. 8). In this light, I wonder if my teaching amounts to offsetting my Karmic footprint, so to speak. Perhaps my teaching is less about my students, and more about *my* reluctance to confront, confess, and repent. It is certainly easier for me to place the burden of responsibility on my students and for me to assume the position of the righteous sage on the stage, condemning my followers while living the good life.

Echoing Bauman (2007), Smith (2009) suggests, "in the most profound sense, capitalism-is-us" (p. 107). Following Marx who writes that capitalism is a "social relation" (cited in Smith, 2009, p. 107), I believe what is required is an alternative form of relationality in teaching (and in life). In early versions of my dissertation proposal, I began to outline and propose a conceptual framework for what I termed an *ethic of relational humility*. Though this dissertation has shifted away from that particular theorization, my earlier thinking still informs much of my work today. I think of my current dissertation path as, perhaps, a necessary step toward eventually attending to relational humility as an academic endeavor. As the neoliberal manifestation of capitalism continues to construct parts of me (and my students), how I might continue to resist that construction insomuch as such resistance is possible? And, autoethnographically speaking, because neoliberal capitalism and consumerism *are* me, I can begin to understand how it is also my students, and it might also be you, reading these words.

I continue to be shocked at how I was capable of teaching in a way that completely ran counter to my aims; in fact, the spectre of that teacher resides in my memories and haunts me still, informing my pedagogical approaches even now in 2022, and hopefully forever. By coming to recognize more deeply how neoliberalism relentlessly works its way into my self-construction, I might be better prepared to work alongside my students in an educational project of eventful subjectivity, and one that invites the refractive possibility to “de-reify, de-commodify, and de-colonize” particular subjects within particular situations (Smith, 2009, p. 107). The wager, through Badiou, is that the event might be the catalyst through which such de-centering might arise, to which I posit English Language Arts classrooms as sites for this refraction to occur. Central to this wager is the relationship between humility and the possibility of instigating an eventful encounter; my discussion of this relationship in the section that follows constitutes the first of two key findings in my dissertation.

Finding One: Humilitant Critical Pedagogy and Cultivating Dis/positions of Humility

In Chapter 3, I drew from critical pedagogy theorist and practitioner Joe Kincheloe in order to help me describe what critical pedagogy is and its central aims. Kincheloe (2004) poses a question about what happens when individuals come to know themselves as oppressors. I feel that I am such an individual; at stake for me now is how I can continue to draw from the insights of critical pedagogy without authoritatively imposing my ideology onto my students. What I wish to outline in the next section is how I attempt to respond to my authoritarian urges: through a curriculum encounter as invited, and through being a *humilitant* (humble + militant) practitioner of critical pedagogy.

Can Curriculum Truly Invite?

Throughout my dissertation, I deployed the term "invite" in various forms, especially in my consideration of how to bring students to the brink of a refractively eventful experience. In this section, I wish to explore the implications of this word and why I rely on it so heavily in theory, and in practice. As a high school English Language Arts teacher, I have seen how reading literature and non-fiction has yielded opportunities for subjectification in my classroom. However, this was not always the case in my teaching. I have learned that I can only invite my students to experience the possibility of the educational, and, I must honour their right to refuse. I learned this especially after the analysis of my teaching experiences with *Ishmael* where, in my view, my approach was coercive rather than invitational.

As I argued in the previous section of this chapter, if neoliberal Market-Logic underpinned my curricular and pedagogical engagements during the *Ishmael* study, then I might consider my desire for students to adopt my beliefs to be that market's currency. In this way, this logic put my students in a position where they had to "buy in" in order to complete the course work successfully. The sense I have is that in some cases students may have feigned interest in order to extract their profit – a passing grade. This potential act of self-compromise further reinforces Smith's (2009) conclusion that, "Market freedom is *not* the same as human freedom, contrary to what neoliberal politicians would like to tell us, or sell us" (p. 98). I wonder if some of my students felt they had no choice but to accept the terms and conditions of my classroom; those who actively pushed back against these unwritten rules (unwritten even to me, at the time) were declared (by me, even in my mind's eye) morally or ethically bankrupt. In order to counter this Market-Logic and return to students their human freedom, I now offer invitations. Even if my students accept this educational invitation, it does not guarantee that an educational event

will emerge, nor does it guarantee their academic success in the class (this is an invitation as distinct from blackmail, or, *an offer they can't refuse*). And of course, students who refuse this invitation are still subject to the consequence of their choices. However, in centering the student in this decision-making process, I attempt to offer them an informed choice, with the implications for either option made clear. Finally, however they respond to my curricular and pedagogical invitations, my task is to do my best in helping them become better readers, writers, and thinkers. In this next section, I wish to frame my use of the word *invitation* within the context of the curriculum encounter.

Although the etymology of the word invitation connotes a summoning, a challenge, or a feast, I would like to break the work apart into two different components. I think of in/vita/tion as *In* and *Vita* – as in a living within. In this double sense, to invite is to summon or to challenge ourselves to live in and with an other, and to request the possibility of the other to reciprocate living with me. I frame the word *invitation* in this sense to suggest that an encounter with the educational event cannot be unwillingly thrust upon students. I know this because on many occasions I have attempted to "coerce" my students into the educational dimension of education, and worse, provided them the template through which they should trace their truth processes. My intentions were not borne of nefarious aims; rather, I had experienced such an event and, in the hopes of providing my students that same (in my view) *good* education, I stripped them of their agency and they, in many ways, resisted. Following Biesta (2010) I unwittingly mistook socialization for education, and the social order to which I subordinated them was one of my making.

I also learned from curriculum theorist Ted Aoki (1991) who writes that, "for [curriculum] to come alive in the classroom, the curriculum itself has to contain, said or

unsaid, an invitation to teachers and students to enter into it" (p. 19). Aoki offers three views of what schools can be. First, schools can focus on "rational thinking" where students are perceived as "containers" to be "filled" with "intellectual skills" (p. 19). The second view is a "utilitarian" school given primarily to "doing," emphasizing "practical skills" (p. 19). In this view, "the school is a preparations place for the marketplace and students are molded into marketable products" (p. 19). The third and final view is most closely aligned with the educational and with subjectification: the "school [is] given primarily to being and becoming, a school that emphasizes and nurtures the becoming of human beings" (p. 19). Whereas the first two views of school are encountered through "implementation" of curriculum, the latter view is one whose encounter must be reciprocally invited and accepted (Aoki, 1991, pp.19-20).

In my view, Aoki (1991) is suggesting that rigidly implementing a "curriculum-as-planned" not only sees teaching as a series of executable scripted commands – as one would use to program a machine (p. 7). Such teaching executes, or kills, the potential for something unknown to emerge; the "curriculum-as-lived" dies as a result (p. 7). He further reinforces this idea of being attuned to the possibilities of the curriculum-as-lived when he offers "curriculum improvisation" as an alternative to curriculum implementation (p. 20). This improvisation of curriculum is premised on participants who willingly accept the invitations to encounter educational "possibilities yet to be" (p. 21).

Taking up Aoki's (1991) notions of curriculum, as I have here, helps me understand how in my teaching of *Nothing* I implemented and improvised curriculum encounters with my students, but I did not respond to my students in this way with *Ishmael*. In this next section, I wish to explore the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and invitation; in my experiences of research, teaching and learning, I have

noted that what binds curriculum and critical pedagogy to the notion of the educational – and to the possibility of a Badiouian educational event – is humility.

The Humilitant Critical Pedagogue

Helping me think through the implications of humility for my teaching is Karen Sihra (2007), who writes, “humility requires us to accept that our truths are not the truths of others” (p. 230). Humility, then, invites me to loosen my grip on the truths I believe and not to authoritatively impose those truths onto others. Sihra also offers an epistemological trajectory for teaching with humility: “Approaching the question of democratic education with the assumption that the learner can be *an other* without fear of violence, in both thought and action, demonstrates that there is something to be learned not only by the learner” (p. 230, emphasis in original). What Sihra is speaking to, in my view, is the notion that the role of humility in the pedagogical and ethical relationship is to invite the decentering of one’s own primacy in relation to knowledge and in relation to the student. In both instances, there is a letting go or a dis-positioning of power in favor of a more equitable relationship.

William Hare (1992), in his exploration of humility in teaching, suggests that the role of humility is to remind teachers, especially, that “what we present to students as *true* [is] capable of revision” (p. 230, emphasis in original). He suggests that any truths can be “revised and rejected” as we continue to learn and that humility is the foundation upon which we understand that our “grasp [is] tentative” (p. 230). Hare also describes humility as “[taking] the form, not of despair with respect to knowledge, but of deference to reason and evidence,” but in this mode, humility is not conceptualized as complete self-effacement, it rather suggests “the Dewyean view that the learned can still learn” (p. 230). Cogent to the role of humility in creating the possibility for an educational event, I

feel that the notions of self-aggrandizement (that I was all-knowing) and self-complacency (that I did not need to open myself up to new learning) were underscoring my pedagogically authoritarian urges and thwarting my efforts to engage my students educationally. In viewing myself as the emancipator-in-chief, I became complacent in investigating how I went about teaching my students about ecological devastation, privilege, and other social justice issues. In his discussion of "correct thinking," as analogous to critical thinking, Freire (1998) suggests that the educator who attempts to teach their students this kind of thinking requires, "the capacity for not being overly convinced of one's certitudes" (p. 14). The problem is not with critical pedagogy as a whole, rather as was the case with me, a concern is with how critical pedagogy is enacted or taught in the classroom. Freire states as much when he writes that critical pedagogues who "see themselves as bearers of the 'truth' that no one can refuse" risk a pedagogical approach that is "messianically authoritarian" (p. 57). For Freire, avoiding such an approach becomes a question of "proposing such truth for consideration" while resisting the desire for "imposing it without question" (p. 57).

In each case, Sihra (2007), Hare (1992) and Freire (1998), identify humility as an underappreciated modality for thinking pedagogically. Hare (1992) synthesizes it best when he writes that humility should not be thought of as self-abasement, or thinking less of one's self, but that one should think of one's self less. Similarly, Freire (1998) adds that humility is when "we allow ourselves to diminish so that others may increase" (p. 31). In other words, humility pushes me to constantly assess and be vigilant about my role in teaching towards an educational event. Building on Henry Sidgwick's (1962) work, humility tempers self-aggrandizing or "self-complacency" (in Hare, 1992, p. 231). Helping my students understand the implications of neoliberalism and consumerist notion

of happiness is incredibly important to me and I do feel it is my responsibility to educate my students about these realities. It is this responsibility that compels me to draw upon critical pedagogy. Sadly, I did not feel this responsibility before I began my doctorate. My understanding of my teacherly aims were really about helping my students succeed on their Diploma exams, so they could get a good job and make money. In my view, this responsibility is borne of the truth-procedure arising from my encounter with educational events. Before my experience of educational events, even during my Bachelor of Education degree, I saw myself as a certain kind of English teacher: someone who gets to watch movies and read books with students as we talk (and write essays) about symbolism. As I engaged in my doctoral coursework, this understanding of my English teacher identity and the implications of teaching English was shattered. The truth that emerged from this shattering redirected my sense of who I am in the classroom and how (and why) I teach. Badiou (2007) helps me articulate an alternative approach I believe educators ought to consider when teaching toward similar aims. According to Badiou (2007), the subject must adhere to a militant fidelity of truth. Here I wish to trouble what this militancy means for my teaching, and how teaching might require a balance between humility and militancy, or what I call a *humilitant* approach to critical pedagogy.

Badiou (2007) writes, "a subject is nothing other than an active fidelity to the event of truth. This means that a subject is a militant of truth" (p. xiii). He elaborates on this militant figure by suggesting that it includes not only "the political militant working for the emancipation of humanity in its entirety" but also the scientist, artist, or lover likewise seized by an event. If, as many argue (see, for example: Apple, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004), teaching and teachers are inherently political, then a teacher-subject might be understood as such a militant figure. My eventful encounters brought to bear my

neoliberal institutionalization and awareness of how neoliberalism exacerbates issues such as happiness, privilege or climate change, making my fidelity to truth doubly militant. First, I am a militant to the truth of my encounters. Second, this militancy to truth compels me to be militant in my classroom as I teach against neoliberal influences on my students and the world. In hindsight, I begin to understand these authoritarian urges in my teaching as stemming both from the neoliberal within me, and, as a by-product of the militant nature of fidelity to the truth process. Following this logic, I must strike a balance between being a militant of truth and embodying a disposition of humility in my classroom teaching. This balance is precisely what I mean by being a humilitant critical pedagogue – steadfast to my ideals, but not coercive in my teaching. Another element of humilitance is that my ideals are not quite set in stone and are always subject to revision. What was at stake for me, as I conducted this autoethnographic research, was to wonder how such a humilitant approach to critical pedagogy – in an English Language Arts classroom – might be brought to bear, if at all, in a way that satisfies both conditions of this portmanteau. I end this section with a brief note on the humilitant pedagogical implications of both *Ishmael* and *Nothing*.

What Pierre Anthon and Ishmael Taught me About Humilitant Teaching

Pierre Anthon – and his attempts to teach his classmates the same lessons that seized him – reminds me of how I approached teaching *Ishmael*. However, Pierre Anthon's power operates in a subtler way. Pierre Anthon's power comes from the very fact that he is right and that his classmates also believe he is right, in spite of their denials of his truth. In fact, they deny precisely because they wish to remain blissfully ignorant of the harsh (in their view) reality Pierre Anthon describes. Because Pierre Anthon is aware of what motivates their rejection of his truth, he lords his righteousness over them; like

Badiou's (2001) description of the Red Guard, every interaction between Pierre Anthon and his classmates is an opportunity for him to replace their opinions with the truth he has committed to and they seek to deny. Pierre Anthon weaponizes truth and uses it as a cudgel in order to bludgeon his peers as they walk by his plum tree each day. I am reminded of how I too tried to force my truths about the realities of our world onto my students during my teaching of *Ishmael*. Rather than self-immolate, Pierre Anthon prefers to set his truth afire, the light from which casts his classmates' opinions out of the shadows; perhaps the burning of his body toward the novel's close is a fitting exit for Pierre Anthon.

In spite of what I now understand to be my authoritative teaching of *Ishmael*, the novel stands as an example of humilitant teaching in that Ishmael seldom imposes his ideas onto his student. Giving the narrator time to formulate his own theses and by asking probing questions, Ishmael instead invites his student into the possibility of awareness and recognition. Even more significant is that Ishmael understands the stakes in his success or failure as a teacher; in spite of the urgency he must feel, Ishmael always moves according to his student's pace. In short, Ishmael represents the teacher I aspire to be. Conversely, I now understand my teaching the novel *Nothing* as aligned with a humilitant pedagogical approach. This novel also reveals the destructive approach of authoritarian teaching. Returning to his pedagogical approach, *Ishmael*'s Ishmael might suggest that Pierre Anthon fails because he does not offer his classmates a story to enact that might replace the masquerade they choose to pursue. In my case, I also did not offer my students a way out of the world that *Ishmael* was describing. It is no wonder that like Pierre Anthon's "students," my classes also did not want to acknowledge the world I wanted them to see. If my claim that educators teaching toward a refractively eventful

education ought to be humilitant pedagogues holds true, on what conditions might such an approach depend? In this next section, I discuss that the seeds of humilitant critical pedagogy blossom especially when a classroom's relational dynamics are also informed by humility.

Humility and an Educational Education

On October 22nd, 2020, I wrote myself an email. I had been editing my dissertation chapters alongside marking students' essays and I had what I call a dissertation idea – a flash of something that may have been an insight into my work. I was thinking about why I had been so willing to write so openly for my professors – writing about my shoes, my house, and countless other assignments I had shared with them as a student in their classes. My email opens thusly:

> Relationships relationships relationship [sic]...without the relationship, there'd perhaps be no desire to be so forthcoming in my writing...for me as a doctoral student, I arrive to the prof's classes with a built-in predisposition for trust and respect[.]
>
> For my students, in our/their context, trust and respect is not necessarily a given. Before they engage vulnerably with text, peers, and myself, I have found that building the community - what I have been calling "post-secondary" readiness, is essential.

The work of the autoethnographer is to understand the self as a cultural artifact writ small. In the above e-mail excerpt, I attempt to draw a parallel between my coordinates within a professor-student power dynamic and the power structure(s) my students have likely experienced. As someone who often was in the good graces of my teachers, and as someone who sought out a doctorate, I entered into my classrooms open

and ready to learn. Having found success infusing my scholarly work with personal and vulnerable anecdotes, and in conceptualizing coursework as a place where ideas, thoughts and feelings *ought* to be shared and exchanged freely, my disposition had always been to be forthcoming in my writing. My professors did not have to motivate, cajole, or coerce me in order to engage with the course work; for me, such engagement was entirely the point of pursuing higher education. I respect my professors as experts in their fields, and trust that I will not be taken advantage of in any way. Of course, as a white, heterosexual cis-gendered male, whose first name is Robert, my privilege is likely showing here; in my view, these same privileges are often not applicable to my own students. This is not to say that they lack respect for their teachers, either.

Following Britzman (1986) and Adichie (2009), and Professor den Heyer who often asked of us to consider what must happen before the lesson can begin, the work that must be done before the lesson can begin is the work of recalibrating expectations and emptying assumptions of what school, teachers, and students ought to be, *according to my students*. What follows this work is inviting students into the opportunity to experience an education that is educational! The humility required for this process is tied to Biesta's (2010) notion of risk. There exists the risk that the event might not occur; there is also the risk that a teacher might continue to reproduce "what already exists" (p. 140). In my view, what already exists is Bauman's (2007) society of consumers, a society required for neoliberalism to maintain itself. Biesta (2014) writes about a specific kind of educational engagement through which a refractively eventful truth process might emerge; as he describes this engagement, I cannot help but see humility as core to this *educational* engagement. Biesta reminds me that as I teach, I must remember:

> To engage with the openness and unpredictability of education, to be orientated toward an event that may or may not happen, to take communication seriously, to acknowledge that the power of the teacher is structurally limited, [and] to see that emancipation and democracy cannot be produced in a machine-like manner. (p. 140)

In hindsight, my teaching of *Ishmael* ran counter to this more humble educational engagement wherein I attempted to "take all the unpredictability out" of my students' education (p. 140). In spite of wanting to teach against neoliberal values, humility plays a role in creating the conditions for this aim to be aligned with non-authoritarian teaching practice. In my teaching of *Nothing*, informed by my struggles of teaching *Ishmael*, I do believe I course-corrected in that regard. In the section that follows, I offer a brief discussion of what I consider pedagogical approaches that support being a humilitant teacher. These supports are drawn from my analysis of teaching *Nothing*. The first support explores what it means to read such that an event might arise. In my classroom, I simultaneously teach my students how to read and, more specifically, how to annotate as they read with a view toward increasing eventful possibilities. This notion of reading and annotating in a particular way is developed in the next section as its own finding of my research. The second pedagogical support for humilitant teaching explores the extent to which the act of writing contributes to the possibilities of eventful teaching. Both of these supports help maintain the unpredictability and openness of my students' curricular encounters.

Pedagogical Support for the Humilitant Pedagogue – The Eventful Possibilities of Annotation: Reading for the Microcosm, the Macrocosm, and the Me-crocosm

For many years of my teaching, I had taken for granted that my students and I shared common conceptual interpretations of what it means to read and write; moreover, what I have realized is that although I have identified writing as an integral component of eventful teaching, the ability to read eventfully precedes the ability to write eventfully. In spite of this ordered process, I have realized that annotating acts as a bridge between reading and writing and teaching my students to annotate as they read might further open up the possibilities of an eventful encounter. After my eventful experiences and, after struggling with teaching *Ishmael*, I needed a way for my students to make connections between the texts they were reading, themselves, and the world around them. In order to achieve this kind of connection I discovered that the process of annotation could be framed in such a way so as to open my students to eventful possibilities when reading.

For most of my students – and I speak from experience – annotating has been a word the teacher mentions and is then often promptly ignored. Or else, annotation is an exercise in coloring: Grab the highlighter, mark up the page, and it is done. If all we do is highlight, there is no evidence of having deeply engaged with a text, I say. I continue:

> Annotation comes from the Latin "annotare," meaning to make a note. You must note, in words, in writing, onto the page. Otherwise you are merely coloring and even my four-year-old son can annotate. When we write our thoughts and reactions down onto the page, we enter into dialogue with the texts, the characters, the author, and all other texts we've encountered. Even – and perhaps most importantly – with ourselves. Also, when you have to use these notes to prepare for an essay, your annotations can become part of your draft. If all you've

> done is highlight, when it comes time to write your paper, you succumb to the tyranny of the blank page! You know, when you stare into the blank page for so long that eventually, it begins to stare back at you, judging your soul and your humanity? Annotating can liberate you from that terror. Annotating is freedom!

After I model what the process of annotating looks like, the next step is for us to decide what it is, exactly, that we should be writing in the margins. In the spirit of humilitant pedagogy, I do not want to be didactic, I give them time to generate ideas and together, we generate our list as seen in the image below (Figure 4) of my board notes from Winter 2020's iteration of the course.

Figure 4

A photograph I took of my classroom whiteboard featuring the students' co-constructed guide to annotation

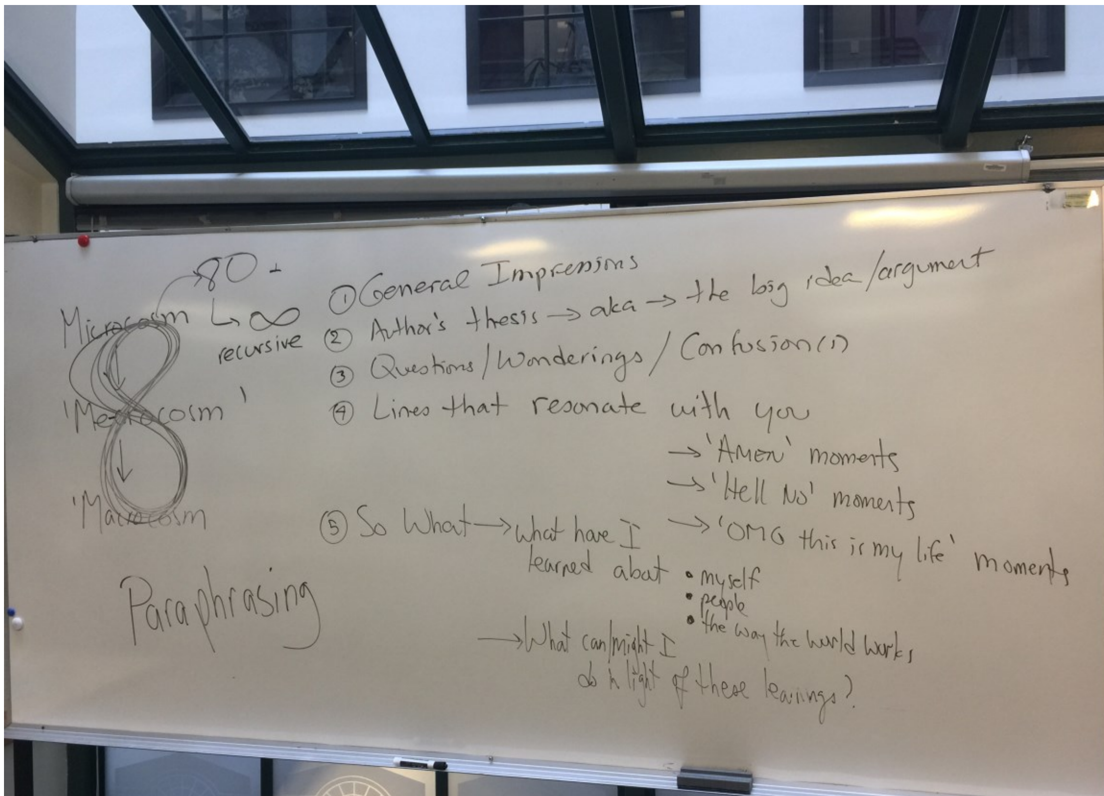

Figure 4 Photo Credit: Robert Piazza

While it is crucial that students are able to identify an author's thesis, ask good questions, and identify confusion, I especially feel that items four and five on the whiteboard – "Lines that resonate with you" and "So what?" – are what might nudge a reader closer to a refractively eventful encounter. I have found that framing annotation in this way has led my students to arrive at deeper, more vulnerable insights about themselves and the world around them. Furthermore, this level of personal implication then carries over into our small and whole-group conversations about the texts we study. Following Rosenblatt (1994, 1995, 2005), and Wiebe and Snowber (2011), it is reading with the senses, rather than more transactional sense making, that might stir something within the reader, encouraging, perhaps, a more visceral reaction or truth to emerge. I believe reading for resonance can be more refractive in nature; there are no Sparks Notes for how to *feel* about a text or for how a text makes me feel. The bottom-most line on the whiteboard reads: "What can/might I do in light of these learnings?" As my students come to learn, my teaching strives for praxis in education, where action follows thinking. For Badiou, such is the relationship between event and truth process – a shattering feeling-thought, followed by actively pursuing the emergent truth. This is why, I believe, his maxim is "Keep Going!" rather than "Keep Thinking!" Going, in my view, suggests a more active and embodied thrust in addition to the intellectual fallout.

I am particularly fond of the above image (Figure 4) because it captured the first time I thought of the microcosm-macrocosm-mecrocosm triad for reading and annotating. The first two components micro and macro relate to the world of the text/story and the world at-large/social systems, respectively. The microcosmic world of the story is often meant to reflect some element of the macrocosm. From an English Language Arts perspective, the micro/macro dyad helps students interpret literature and extend these

analyses to the world around them. One of the first things that we (as a department) do in our English 30-1 classes is to read a short story and have students write a short essay, in order to ascertain their baseline writing and reading skills. The story I use is Alden Nowlan's (1987) short story, "The Glass Roses," about a teenage boy named Stephen, who struggles between his authentic desires and becoming the kind of man his father expects him to be. For example, a micro/macro question would be the extent to which Stephen's father is emblematic of the toxic masculinity that exists today (one of the themes that students often identify in their reading of this story). What I call the *me*crocosm, emphasizes "me" the reader and "my" world of lived experiences. Here, I might ask, in what ways am I similar to Stephen's father, in perpetuating toxic masculinity? Or I could ask, in what ways have I suffered because of toxic masculinity?

What this "cosmic" triad helps my students and me with is linking the text to the world around us, and to our world within. In the spirit of humilitantly teaching toward an eventful encounter – and based on how I understand my own experiences of such encounters – the reader should be open to articulating their thinking and feeling, across all three realms. Furthermore, our annotation criteria then become the criteria for post-secondary ready academic conversations and writing. When we read to think and write, we are also reading to speak and share. An example of our reading, speaking and writing work occurred early in the Winter 2021 term. The students collaborated on generating a definition for education: "A fractal path that is created by a combined set of information gathered from different sources developing enlightenment, bringing growth into the society, expanding imaginations, and determining someone's identity. Education is life itself;" and for schooling: "A ranking system imposed by society, where there is often limitation of knowledge and opinions due to the fear of making mistakes. It is a ritual that

limits our thinking, kills creativity, and perverts our natural inclination to learn" (Piazza, Google Classroom communiqué, Feb. 22, 2021). I cite these definitions with a view to illustrating how, through the annotating and discursive work described above, students were able to formulate thoughtful definitions for an educational education. The alternative might have been the teacher (me) simply defining this concept for them; instead, not only did they define education in this way (as distinct from a schooling rooted in socialization and qualification only), as a class, they requested that the remainder of our course proceed in-line with their conceptualizations of what school ought to be.

Thus, the humilitant pedagogue cedes control of how students might relate to text. In providing my students with the opportunity to interpret text on their own, I hope to provide them the latitude to arrive at conclusions that belong to them, rather than simply reflecting or parroting my views and ideas. Central to students' ability to develop these insights, in my view, is how they read the texts they encounter – in a way that invites them to point both into their own being and out to the world in which they live. In so doing, as with our conceptualizations of education, we can then re-cognize our immediate "situation" (our classroom) in such a way as to evince eventful and *educational* possibilities. Once my students become more adept and confident in their ability to read and annotate, I then shift my focus to the eventful possibilities of writing.

Pedagogical Support for the Humilitant Pedagogue: Writing as Being and Being Eventful Writers

A surprising (and now seemingly obvious) observation that has emerged for me is the role that writing plays in both the possibilities of inviting a refractively eventful encounter and/or the ability to embark on its ensuing truth process. Earlier in this

dissertation, I wrote about Louise Rosenblatt's (1994) notion of "the poem" as the word she uses to describe the reading event. In the writing of this section of my dissertation, *the poem* keeps appearing in my mind's eye. According to Rosenblatt (1994), the poem is when the reader and text come into being, together. I am reminded of *the poem* because I think of writing as poetic, in this way: a generative act through which I come into being, into an awareness of myself, as I write. Although Badiou's (2001) event is structured as an encounter with the void, I interpret the ensuing truth process as a similar coming together of the seized individual and the emerging truth. If the truth process instigates the naming of truth (through the lens of the event), I view writing as a potential site for this truthful articulation to occur. It was, after all, through the writing of reading reflections, assignments, and this dissertation, that my articulation – and understanding – of my own truth process began and continues.

In turning to writing. I am also thinking of Wiebe and Snowber (2011) who suggest that truth-seeking or sense-making is not the sole domain of rational and empirical thought and knowledge; they too argue for a more felt-sense approach to being and knowing, suggesting that "the beckoning of the senses is a call to be present. And when words come through the body, they announce the bone beauty of having a lived curriculum through the senses" (p. 104). In my view, I feel as though Wiebe and Snowber suggest that prosaic writing – as a purely intellectual endeavour – is limited in its potential to articulate and make sense of truth that exists in excess of one's intellect alone; however there is more to writing than the end result. Freire (2005), Rosenblatt (1994), Wiebe and Snowber (2011), and Yagelski (2009, 2011), each point me toward affirming that the act of writing might be proposed as a dimension of refractively eventful teaching and specifically, the space through which the seized some-one comes closer

together with their truthful re-cognition. Put simply, writing as means, not its material ends, holds potential for subjective becoming. Badiou (2001) understood the limitations of language to articulate truth as well.

From the Writer's Writing to the Writer Writing. When it comes to writing, Robert Yagelski (2011) asks us to imagine what might happen if we "shift our theoretical gaze from the written text to the self writing – from the writer's writing to the *writer writing*" (p. 107, emphasis in original). According to Yagelski, such a shift opens us to see that "the experience of writing has an effect on the writer exclusive of the use of the writer's text, which is not insignificant but remains subsequent to the act of writing" (p. 107). In my view, this distinction between the writer's experience and the writer's artifact acts as an analogy for Badiou's (2001) notion of event and truth process: the psychosomatic act of writing precedes the writer's writing, the former existing in a post-eventful thought-space whereas the subject's capacity for language still resides within the given situation. The writer's text acts as the material trace of the writing act, an attempt to capture, in those moments, some ethereal, ever-elusive truthful articulation; I am sure that if you were to ask any writer, or to even ponder your own writing experience, the act of writing is rife with struggle: to find the words that adequately express what I *feel* to be true!

Writing is always subject to a seemingly interminable process of revision and edits and feedback from editors who suggest that you "say this more clearly so it's easier to understand." As a writer and a teacher, I have given and received, have shattered and have been shattered. But, as Badiou (2001) reminds us, the imperative is to keep going! For many of my students, however, the gap between truth and expression of that truth *in English* is an insurmountable chasm and the journey ends prematurely. Remembering the

axiomatic premise of equality that informs Badiou's event theory, the shift from the writer's writing to the writer writing is, to me, a hopeful and inclusive one since the act of writing can transcend language in ways that the writing this act produces might not. It is in this writerly space, perhaps, that writing and literacy can move beyond mastering the master's discourse (per Eagleton's (2008) usage; see Chapter 3) and toward a discourse of becoming subject. The interruption of the master's discourse – prioritizing the mastery of the English language over and above what ideas are being communicated – is very much part of my aims as a humilitant critical pedagogue seeking to teach eventfully.

The act of writing invites my students to become authors of their own subjectivity; I-as-teacher must let go of the attempt to control their narratives – again, an opportunity for supporting a humilitant classroom and pedagogy. Of course, my "invisible hand" is still in play as I curate the readings and parameters of the assignments my students respond to. In this way, I understand my role as an educator is to pose questions of my students that "point to a world beyond themselves to a world [I] wonder about and they wonder about" and, to elicit curiosity and wonderment about these worlds in such a way that students are perhaps seized (Grumet, 2006, p. 51). I also understand the caveats this role elicits – to not articulate that world *for* my students and instead to allow them the agency to (re)name their situation outside of (and in spite of) my vision of that world.

Ultimately, what matters to me is less that my students learn to write flawlessly and more that their acts of writing – the whole process, but mostly the ideas and thinking and potentially refractive writing they do and play with – stick with them. That is, through the acts of reading and writing they encounter in my class, I hope the experience of what they thought and felt reverberates and lingers and nags; that these nagging,

lingering reverberations fester and haunt, and that they hopefully, in the spirit of my entire research project, compel my students to act on those resonances, in a generative way. In a way that whispers to them: keep going!

Finding Two: Implications of Refraction for Teaching, Curriculum, and Autoethnography

Throughout this dissertation I have variously discussed the notion of refraction, whether in thinking about teaching refractively, the possibilities of a refractively eventful curriculum, and writing a refractive autoethnography. In this section I wish to outline and discuss the implications of refraction for teaching, curriculum, and autoethnography. When contemplating refraction as a way of conceptualizing the trajectory of one's post-eventful truth processes, there are three areas I wish to highlight. The first area is that of control and the humility/humilitance required on the part of the educator attempting to instigate an event in his or her students; the second area concerns the generative nature of refraction – as opposed to the closed system that reflective teaching might engender; the third area revolves around the temporality of refraction in that a refractive truth process is both forward moving and retroactive, changing how we understand the past. In this section, I offer my insights and will conclude by identifying the overarching implications of refraction for education.

Resisting the Urge to Control a Refractive Trajectory

There have been times throughout my eventful experiences where I have sought to control the trajectory of the truth processes I had hoped to instigate for my students. Indeed, this is a struggle that continues to endure. As I detailed in Chapter 5, my teaching of *Ishmael* is emblematic of that desire. If, as I suggested, the aim of teaching refractively

is for students to enter into the possibility of subjectification, it becomes imperative that the educator relinquish the desire to control of their students' truthful trajectory. For Badiou (2001), the truth process is a break through (and in my view, out of) a given situation in which a some-one's configured construal is no longer tenable and requires reconfiguration from the perspective of the event. It is in this post-eventful re-cognition – a coming to know one's self and world anew – that makes possible Biesta's (2014) notion of subjectification; the inherent risk with the subjective possibilities of eventful teaching are that the educator considers subjectification to be a "thing that can be produced" or that the teacher's aim is to "produce our students" (p. 145). Of course, a tension that exists for me is that schools are inherently productive in this sense: for example, as I outlined in Chapter 3, the English Language Arts have been used to instill particular social values and ideals in school children. Therefore, the desire to create the conditions for a possible eventful encounter must also be tempered with an active desire to resist producing the outcome of a potential subject's truthful trajectory. This desire to resist has pedagogical implications beyond text-selection: for me, letting go of controlling students' subjective trajectories meant creating the time and space for students to derive meaning from texts on their own. Without these pedagogical imperatives, refraction risks becoming incapable of breaking away from the quotidian situation and instead is rendered reflective – a closed system wherein students are expected to reflect a teacher's ideals back at them.

Living in this tension – of wanting a student to experience a refractively educational event but not designing the outcome of an event's aftermath – also reinforces the humilitant nature of teaching refractively: that I at once remain faithful to my teaching and curricular aims of bringing my students into an awareness of our current

situation, but humble enough to be at peace with what might actually happen – or not – during my time together with them. In this next section, I wish to delve deeper into the relationship between humilitance and refraction, especially with regard to the refractive trajectory's ongoing and generative nature.

The Ongoing Nature of Affirmative and Refractive Inventing

When I think of reflection, I imagine a straight line, bouncing back and forth between two mirrors, trapped within this system. Applying this image to education, I considered a reflective engagement one where the mirrors are replaced by a teacher and student, and the bouncing line representing knowledge. The teacher offers knowledge to the student and the student "reflects" their acquisition of that knowledge item through various assessments the teacher offers. On statewide exams, the student reflects both this knowledge acquisition and the teacher's successful dissemination of said knowledge back to the State, as means of ascertaining whether the student has successfully absorbed enough knowledge to pass, and whether the teacher has successfully taught according to the State requirements (via programs of study, etc.). In conceiving the trajectory of a refractive truth process, I had initially imagined a straight line that breaks away from the mirror-like reflective process. Throughout my research, it has become clear that although the breaking out of a closed system is my aim, conceptualizing a truth process as a straight line is overly simplistic. Instead, I ought to consider the trajectory of a truth process as being fractal in nature.

Davis and Sumara (2000) consider fractal geometry as a metaphor for complicating the forms of knowledge and knowing. They describe fractal geometry as inherently complex, whose mappings are "seen as irreducible unfoldings" and might bring forth "an appreciation of the universe as complex, ever-unfolding, self-

transcending, and relational" (p. 827). Furthermore, they suggest that fractal images "are the products of particular sorts of recursive or iterative procedures" where, importantly, it is not possible to "anticipate the details of [fractal] unfolding" (p. 827). Often, in my discussions of refraction, I tended to over-focus in the fracturing quality of this term – the notion of breaking away from the status quo or quotidian situation, for example.

What I have realized through my research is that I must also be cognizant of the fractal component of refraction because, as Davis and Sumara write, the fractal metaphor reinforces the "impossibility of predicting or controlling complex events" (p. 842). These qualities of fractal geometry – its recursiveness, its unpredictability, and its irreducibility – are apt descriptors for the refractive trajectory of a post-eventful truth process. In this sense, mapping a refractive trajectory through fractal geometry reveals how one's truth process is an ongoing articulation, one that requires a subject's faithful commitment to this endeavor. Secondly, the unpredictable and irreducible nature of a truth process acts as a reminder that a subject's truth process cannot be shaped or directed through coercion or force, and that "the structure that emerges or the path that unfolds has to be lived through for its endpoint to be realized" (p. 841). Thirdly, due to its recursive-yet-unpredictable nature, refraction's fractal trajectory suggests that a truth process is inherently generative; the subject of a truth must reject "thinking in terms of a pre-specified structure" and instead embrace "a myriad of potentialities" realized only "by living though" one's fidelity to the truth process (p. 842). Due to its generative nature, what we might consider obstacles or setbacks – potentially degenerative moments – ought to instead be considered remnants of linear thinking that "presumes a knowable goal" and, through the lens of humilitance, we should let go of such predetermined outcomes. In my experience, an inability to relinquish the particular ends I attempted to

achieve led me to feelings of despair in my classroom teaching and the emergence of more authoritarian practices designed to mitigate my perceived failings. From a fractal perspective, I understand these experiences twofold: first, my desires as an eventful educator must be tempered with humility and second, it is these perceived failings that have led me to the kind of teaching and curricular approaches I currently enact (as described in Chapter 6). In this next section, I wish to focus on the implications of this second understanding – that a refractive truth process changes how we understand the past, and the implications of this change.

Refraction is Past and Present and Future (Anterior)

In this autoethnography, I have attempted to understand my past experiences as a doctoral student and the enduring effects of those moments. However, from a Badiouian perspective, and in thinking refractively, I must consider my singular past as a multiplicity of pasts. What I mean by this is that the recursive and fractal nature of a truthful trajectory renders my relationship to – and understanding of – "the past" as an ongoing and ever-evolving process of re-cognition. A need to always consider my past, past self, past experiences, and past knowledge as being subject to re-interpretation because as I move forward in time whilst articulating what I know to be true, this emerging truth has the power to loop back onto past events forcing a new assessment of what was through the lens of what is. A prime example of this re-cognition is how I have grappled with my teaching of *Ishmael* compared to my initial conception of my novel study as being "successful." The forward thrust of a truth process that exists in tension with the present understanding of one's past has implications for autoethnography as a method/ology for conducting research. I often wonder, what if I had completed my dissertation prior to teaching the novel *Nothing*? If I had published about my teaching of

Ishmael prior to my ability to identify the authoritarian urges that permeated my pedagogy at that time? Would those works of writing, of setting in stone a particular version of me captured in time, hold true today? Knowing what I know now, would I want other readers to access those hypothetical works? Is it ever really possible to know, for certain, the truth about one's self, past and present? My current (in 2022) understanding of a refractive truth process would suggest that it is both possible and impossible, yet that is precisely the point, and why humility and humilitance ought to be central to the autoethnographer's work. Again following den Heyer's (2009) discussion that the future-anterior is the proper verb tense for approaching a truth process, my suggestion is that time becomes essential to those undertaking a self-study approach to their research. If not for the time I took to complete my dissertation (I am well beyond the recommended six-year timeframe proposed by my university and have had to apply for my third extension), I might never have arrived at the truths I have articulated herein.

The crux of this issue is that time is seldom what researchers have, as there exists a constant pressure to "publish or perish" as it were. Inspired by Berg and Seeber's (2016) *The Slow Professor*, and Loy's (2002) *A Buddhist History of the West*, Eppert (2018) focuses on slowness as a pathway for restoring joy and alleviating suffering, drawing upon ancient Buddhist wisdom alongside *The Upanishads* in order to do so. Eppert begins her article by lamenting the lack of time she experiences daily as an academic, describing a constant "fervor of rushing about" (p. 1). She attributes this constant pressure to the "modern instrumentalist logics and delimiting socio-economic grammars of efficiency, training, measurement, and technique" that "heighten suffering and diminish joy in school settings and other institutional sites of learning" (p. 1). One way of considering slowness is, for example, when "an educator is lost in engaging what

they love" and "this quality of engrossment applies equally to research and writing" (p. 16). However, this slow approach is especially at odds with "schools that model the factory or corporation" in which joy is "stifled" or "tragically cramped" (p. 15). Although my research does not focus on joy, per se, Eppert's attention to how slowness "contests narrow neoliberal educational grammars and structures" (p. 18) resonates with the slowness that a deeply refractive autoethnography might require. Of course publishing partially-truthful accounts would fit within a neoliberal capitalist model (requiring the need for follow-up or "sequel" articles that would serve to sell more publications, and newer book editions branded with updated chapter stickers, etc.), though I wonder about the potential (mis)direction a partially-truthful dissertation would send its readers towards. It is important to state that I would not have known my dissertation to be partially true had it been published a few years ago; this partiality would only have come into my awareness over time – a time that is always slipping away.

I am also aware of the time my students have with me over the duration of our course. Now that my school runs its courses in quartered, rather than semestered, structures, my students have much less time to sit with and process the material we study together. If the kind of writing I invite my students to complete during our novel unit possesses autoethnographic qualities, how might the condensed nature of the course affect their ability to become engrossed or lost in this work? Returning to writing and research, how realistic is it for an autoethnographer to spend an inordinate amount of time in pursuit of contemplating a refractive truth process? Rather than speculate answers to the above questions, I can only respond with the truth of my experiences, that without slowness (albeit not slow by design), my autoethnographic study might not have so thoroughly (and truthfully, in a Badiouian sense) addressed and discussed my eventful

experiences all those years ago. Ironically, since the refractive truth process is interminably complex and recursive, the autoethnographer might never be completely "true" in their writing and analysis; it is here that the humility to understand this process as ever-evolving and always subject to truthful revision lead the autoethnographic researcher to be open to the as-yet unknown possibilities that a future-anterior disposition might evince.

From Findings to Future Inquiries

One of the questions I wrestle with lately is what my educational and professional journey might look like once I have completed my doctoral studies. A recent experience has me wondering about the eventful possibilities of teaching at the post-secondary level. I had a student teacher a few years ago and they were with me during my teaching of *Nothing*. The experience came and went and after they completed their practicum we did not stay in touch. This year (2022) I received an email from my former student teacher excited to share that they were in the midst of teaching *Nothing* and that students were reacting to it in a number of different ways. Though the email did not detail how, exactly, they were responding to the novel, I began to wonder about whether I ought to be teaching pre-service teachers as a way of broadening my reach, so to speak. This rumination inspired me to think about areas of research that I would like to pursue, or, that I hope other researchers would take up.

I am also curious about the eventful possibilities of non-Humanities related "core" courses, such as Math and Science, at the High School level. How might we expand the extent to which students might experience a refractively eventful encounter in courses that, in my view and experience, might not always be open to such trajectories? I say this because in my conversations with many a Math and Science teacher, the emphasis often

is placed on getting through content. Of course, there are exceptions to this content-driven approach; it would be important to re-cognize the ways in which those subject areas are currently being (or not being) harnessed towards undoing the neoliberal situation we are currently living under especially through a Badiouian theoretical lens.

A second area of interest is to work alongside High School (or even Post-Secondary) educators who self-identify as critical pedagogues in order to research their curricular and pedagogical approaches, especially through a Badiouian-inspired theoretical framework: might they be instigating eventful encounters? How? Do they practice a humilitant approach or are they similarly caught in the tension between authoritarian urges and the desire to save their students and the world? In other words, I know that I am not alone in my experiences; I would want to read more Badiouian-inspired autoethnographic research from the perspective of others who strive to achieve similar aims as mine. What are their entanglements with Badiou's evils? Their truth-processes? Do they engage their students reflectively or refractively? What are the convergences and divergences between their processes and mine? Part of this curiosity is selfish – how might I become a better educator? However, as more research and insights into eventful teaching are shared, there exists the opportunity to widen the community of educators working in this anti-neoliberal regard.

Finally, I wonder about the eventful possibilities of a more cohesive and systemic approach to educating in ways that resist neoliberalism. In my experience, teaching against neoliberalism has been a relatively lonely endeavour. Though I understand that this work is being done in academia and beyond, my immediate experience of high school teaching has revealed that – in my school, anyway – I am but one of a few educators who attempt this approach. Through my informal collaboration with a

colleague in my department, we have begun a more concerted effort to create the possibilities for eventful teaching in our English Language Arts classrooms;[20] in this sense, might there exist a need for a more formal and collective methodology that seeks to address neoliberal structures within schools and school systems? Rather than individual educators with similar aims whose students are randomly assigned to them, what might a whole-school approach (or even a district-wide approach) to tackling neoliberalism look like? Currently in Alberta, the RAD Educators Network[21] has taken a step in this direction. Formed in 2018, this network brings together diverse educators from across the province interested in teaching toward equity and social justice. What eventful possibilities might emerge from introducing similar collectives within specific school sites, for staff and for students? What might a Badiou-informed refractively eventful pedagogy and curriculum, constructed and deployed within a collective/network context, bring to bear on teaching in neoliberal times? These last two questions, are at the forefront of where I would like my research trajectory to venture towards.

I know, as an autoethnographer, my research is limited solely to my individual experiences and perspectives and that there is a need for additional Badiouian-inspired research to be done in this regard with a view toward corroborating and building on my scholarly contributions. In this way, I also believe that ethnography, auto and otherwise, yields immense potential for more deeply understanding Badiou's theory and its capacity for deepening educational thought in neoliberal times. I am reminded of the incredible

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[20] For example, my colleague and I collaborate on text choices, assignments, and more explicitly, how our teaching might contribute to helping our students understand the personal and structural implications of neoliberal and consumerist ways of living.

[21] For a detailed description of the RAD Educators Network, their mission, members, and contact information, see https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Organizing%20with%20radical%20love.pdf

progress that has been made in so many ways, by groups of people coming together to interrupt and reconfigure oppressive and marginalizing structures, and how my work might contribute to, and bring together, other teachers, graduate students, and scholars as they attempt to articulate and act towards a preferable future.

Chapter Eight

A Conclusion that Signals a Re-Beginning

Through my autoethnographic study and what I have learned about the neoliberal within me, I can extrapolate that my experiences may be similar to those of my students, regarding our blindness or the ways in which neoliberalism can operate *incognito* and therefore, through a refractively eventful encounter be rendered visible, at least as a starting point. A second layer, once such a reality is rendered visible, is the extent to which someone might then grapple with and work against their neoliberal subjectivity. A truth process that leads to a subject's *re-cognition* of neoliberalism is ultimately the aim of my curricular and pedagogical engagements. In this closing chapter, I wish to end by ruminating on, and complicating, the possibilities of such engagements. I begin by offering a final living memory, one that attempts to illustrate how I experience the tensions of living within a neoliberal and consumerist situation while attempting to work against these forces. The memory captures my frame of mind, especially during my teaching in 2022. I follow this memory with a more detailed discussion of how these tensions continue to live within me and shape my insights about the implications of my research.

Living Memory, July 12, 2022

I can't read the news anymore, or go on Twitter because I spend an hour feeling so sad and helpless and hopeless about what I read. I honestly don't even know why I bother teaching anymore. It just feels like nothing I can do is enough to stop the tidal wave of neoliberalism from pulling us into its riptide. The students love Nothing *and we have really cool conversations about education and happiness, but, is all of that really affecting them? Is it really going to change anything? Even if half of them hear what I'm*

saying, that's just a drop in the bucket and so what, they'll stop buying things? How can we as individuals push back against the structures of consumerism and neoliberalism? And yet this cynicism feels manufactured in some way, almost like neoliberalism wants us divided and individualized in order to make it easier for us to be conquered

I remember hearing about how in old times, fishermen annoyed by starfish would try to kill them by cutting them into pieces and throwing them back in the water to die, only to realize that the starfish would regenerate, and the fishermen were exponentially increasing the starfish population. That's what teaching against neoliberalism, in Alberta, in the middle of a global pandemic feels like. One step forward, a thousand steps back. I know I'm being overly pessimistic here but maybe it's not all that bad.

With my students, I feel like the work is worthwhile and that they're beginning to recognize themselves. However, over the course of this school year (2021-2022) these moments can feel few and far between; our time together ends just as we're starting to dig deep especially due to the rushed quarterly structure of our schedule. It's like I'm working on the factory line: I get my few moments with them before they're whisked away and the new ones arrive, separated and individualized before we can really come together as a classroom society. The structure and speed of school mirrors the structure and speed of the "real world" outside its walls. Given the complex challenges our students face (with respect to literacy, especially), this frenetic scheduling choice will only accelerate their struggles. I guess this decision makes sense if your conception of teaching is one that is quite rote and mechanical and if the humans in my classroom are stripped of their human complexity and thought of as future units of production.

The one saving grace for me and my fellow English teachers (if I may speak on their behalf; I'm sure they would agree) is that at least the diploma exams have all but

been suspended over the course of this pandemic. Who knows what next year will bring – likely a return to the thirty percent diploma exam, if the current government has their druthers. Between that probable future and our school's continuation of the quarterly system, I am quite worried about my preferable and possible possibilities for refractively eventful teaching in the coming while. I wonder if my invitations for an educational education might be met with resistance from students needing the highest possible grades in order to get accepted into their post-secondary programs of choice (the absence of diploma exams has led to a marked increase in students' course averages, in turn increasing post-secondary programs' cut-offs for acceptance). Will they balk at studying a novel that is not "diploma-worthy?" Will they not want to spend the first two weeks of a quarterly course contemplating and complicating "what it means to be educated?"

It bears repeating, but, I'm tired. Actually: I'm exhausted, depleted, overwhelmed, wanting to take the easy way out, feeling like I'm inadequate, wondering if this is all for naught, afraid of giving up, compelled to keep going, needing the support of my colleagues, trying to balance work and home life, trying to parent two amazing young boys, striving to be a better husband, needing the support of my wife, trying to free myself from the clutches of neoliberalism, feeling myself getting away from neoliberalism only to have its claws tighten around me once more, needing to do more reading and research and writing, never having enough time to do anything but doomscroll on Twitter, watching Instagram stories, doing the Wordle, wishing for more vacations, buying better wine, wearing fewer hoodies and sweatpants, buying an electric car, eating less, gaining weight, finishing a dissertation, wanting to quit said dissertation at least twice a week, getting inspired, checking in, checking out, doing my best, and avoiding the worst.

But here's the thing. As much as I am quite literally feeling all of the above, all at the same time, more or less every minute of the day, I cannot bring myself to stop teaching in a way that aims to help my students recognize neoliberalism within themselves. This whole project – this dissertation and my writing about my eventful experiences – it's real. It's not just some exercise in theoretical mumbo jumbo. It is not simulacrum. In spite of everything I feel, I can't shake this drive, this fidelity to the truth process that emerged out of my relatively fleeting (in that they lasted merely weeks, 8 years ago) experiences as a student in Professor Eppert and den Heyer's classes. In as much as I have tried to describe this experience, there is some part of it that eludes articulation. I think that's why autoethnography works best, in this respect; it allows me to (try) to show what I've experienced instead of approaching this ineffable journey in a way that risks reducing it to a sterile and clinical autopsy. A post-mortem analysis on a life that is still being lived, a truth still in process, and still re-cognizing its own subjectivity. It's this unshakeable-ness that keeps me going. And yet, I don't know. I might only be able to understand these experiences a number of years from now, when I'll have a better sense of where my refractions have led me – what it will have all meant.

Questions and Answers?

I begin this section by restating my interrelated dissertation questions. I will then explore how my research has responded to these questions. My research questions, restated, are:

- In what ways did my experiences of "educational events" impact my English Language Arts teacher identity, curriculum, and pedagogy?

- What implications do my experiences of teaching eventfully have for English Language Arts teaching practice and curriculum in neoliberal times?

I am weary and wary: undertaking this work has been both affirming in many ways and demoralizing too; I am cautious about being overly hopeful and optimistic about the implications of this work and the possibility of undoing neoliberalism. Every semester that I have taught and recently, every quarter, I am usually quite excited about the educational prospects of what is to come. I look forward to anticipating my students' reaction to me and to the coursework. I also am hopeful about the potential for this course – and future iterations of it – to implicate and impact students in such a way that their trajectories might be fractured and redirected toward eventfully truthful ends. As the course gets underway I am confronted with the usual struggles of navigating my students' English Language Arts skills and abilities, their motivation, their commitment to their scholarly endeavours, and the sands of the hourglass speedily slipping away. In many ways, my students' struggles mirror my own: my skills and abilities as a humilitant critical pedagogue are always in question, my commitment to my educational aims, and the compressed nature of quarterly classes making me feel like this task is entirely overwhelming. In other words, as much as my experience of educational events has opened up my pedagogical and curricular engagements to refractive potentialities, being the subject of an ongoing truth process also brings additional tensions to bear upon my sense of who I am as an educator and has a human being who exists apart from his teacher-self.

Outside of school, I find it increasingly difficult to live in such a way as to resist neoliberal and hyper-commercialized urges. A key question for me is if I am struggling to

maintain fidelity to these aims, and I am supposedly so "educated" in this regard, what chance do my students have? What impact does my teaching *actually* have on the structures of neoliberalism that permeate our situation and our subjectivity? In addition to this question, I am bombarded by the realities of our current socio-political situation. Though my dissertation has focused on neoliberalism and by extension consumerist culture, I am realizing that these dimensions of the world we live in are also supplemented by pervasive and accelerating elements of oligarchic, plutocratic, and kleptocratic governments and policies at home and abroad. I wish the eventful truth process offered a "clean break" and more linear path toward some kind of destination. That the truth process be more teleological in nature – neoliberalism should be undone and therefore it is. It is not that easy. Nor should it be, perhaps. I sometimes (often?) feel as though my students and I are on board Ishmael's metaphoric civilizational aircraft hurtling towards the ground and my attempts to teach in such a way that resists neoliberalism is akin to pretending we can salvage the aircraft. An attempt to self-sooth(e) and distract from the inevitability of immanent collapse. I hear the hyperbole in these last few sentences but rest assured this vision of our situation is quite often in my mind's eye. It is in these moments that the militant component of one's fidelity to a truth process ought to be what compels me to go on.

Though it does feel like my attempts at achieving my curricular aims can be futile, I remain faithful to my commitment. In this sense, I hope that readers of my dissertation are able to grasp the baton my work might extend to them as they engage in their own research about how we might best proceed during these troubling times. As I consider the socio-political situation I find myself in, I am in constant need of reminding that these feelings of hopelessness and despair that I grapple with are precisely the kind

of subjectivity that neoliberalism seeks to create; as a structure, neoliberalism desires reproduction and resists dismantling and therefore operates in such a way as to facilitate the former and mitigate the latter. Harvey (2005) suggests that neoliberalism is too complex to be identified as a boogeyman to be defeated and that it is itself a manifestation of "class warfare" conducted on the part of the elite; he argues that neoliberalism's move to relegate class to a "fictional category that exists only in the imagination of socialists" must be countered with a need to "name [class warfare] unashamedly for what it is" (p. 202). He argues that it is through class struggle that neoliberalism contains "exploitable contradictions" as in the "widening gap between rhetoric (for the benefit of all) and realization (the benefit of a small ruling class)" (p. 203). However, he cautions that in shattering our neoliberal situation, we must do more than pine for a "return to some golden age" of democratic glory (p. 206) – a caveat echoed by Ishmael when he states that any survivors of the civilizational aircraft's crash would "immediately set about doing it all over again, exactly in the same way" (Quinn, 1992, p. 64). This return to a golden age, or rebuilding the same aircraft anew, would amount to the evil that Badiou (2001) terms "simulacrum" (p. 73).

A post-eventful truth process takes as its point of origin the void from which the event arises; the void is rendered momentarily visible during the eventful encounter and the ensuing truth is *supplemental* to the current situation. The seized subject attempts to articulate this truth from this eventful perspective. However, Badiou (2001) also states that, "not every 'novelty' is an event" (p. 72). In this sense, proclaiming the existence of an eventful truth (neoliberalism has been undone) only to have said truth point to that which already exists albeit under the guise of a new name (neoliberal structures continue to operate under the banner of a restored democracy) would be considered the evil of

simulacrum. What this notion of simulacrum portends for anti-neoliberal education is again linked to the humilitant and refractive nature of such a curricular and pedagogical undertaking, specifically the affirmative and generative nature of an unfolding truth process. Harvey (2005) points to this notion especially as he follows his caveat by stating that the "meanings" (and in my view, manifestations) of "democratic governance and for economic, political, and cultural equality and justice…have to be *reinvented* to deal with contemporary conditions and potentialities" (p. 206, emphasis added). The idea that I can simply teach my students and that would be sufficient in dismantling neoliberalism is also a dangerous line of thinking, one that falls into the trap of the kind of individualistic thinking rewarded by neoliberal logic. This individualistic logic is the same that has the power to delude me into thinking that placing my recyclables into a blue bag each week is enough to combat our ever-accumulating waste issue. It is not[22]. Such logic also has the power to distract me from the fact that complicity or resistance towards neoliberal structures does not exist solely in the realm of the individual; although my individual choices as a citizen or a consumer can affect my immediate surroundings, exclusively focusing on individual choices – mine or others' – too easily absolves neoliberal institutions, such as schools, from their responsibility to provide equity and justice for all, including the planet. Herein resides the crux of a humilitantly induced eventful curriculum: its humilitance is signaled by "hands-off" teaching, centered on an invitation to dialogue and an invitation to act, not unlike the conditions that gave rise to the *Ishmael* book club I described at the end of Chapter 6. And yet I continue to grapple with whether

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[22] https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/01/recycling-wont-solve-climate-change/617851/

such small-group engagement will suffice in angling us away from a probable future containing more of the same.

In other words, is an educational education possible in our current high-stakes, competitive and reflective educational context? If my research attempts to address how individual teachers might respond to the problematic of neoliberalism, I must also consider the extent to which such an approach is insufficient and to broaden my scope to schools and school systems that approach this problematic, as a whole. How might school administrators, school board superintendents, school trustees and scholastic governing bodies take up my research and apply it in order to address the systemic tentacles of neoliberalism? I cannot say that my Master's in Educational Studies and Leadership[23] delved into the implications of neoliberalism on curriculum and pedagogy too deeply; if it did, I can assuredly say it had no lasting impact on me.

My eventful experiences at the doctoral level brought to my awareness the relationship between the social and the educational, and how the various institutions that operate therein can work in tandem (knowingly or not) to reproduce and maintain the existing social orders and the logics required to uncritically support these. As I have shared in this dissertation, I have been privileged enough to attend top tier private and public educational institutions, and have worked in top tier private and public schools, yet it was only through fortuitous circumstance that I embarked on this particular educational journey, one that exposed the situation of my socio-political reality and my responsibility to address it, as an educator.

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[23] A program often recommended for those interested in pursuing leadership roles in my school district.

Ultimately, what my research aims to do in response to my central research questions, is to bring to the forefront the urgency with which all students, across all institutions ought to have the opportunity to encounter, eventfully and refractively, the void lurking within their socio-political situation, so they might be shattered by that event, and embark on their own refractive truth process. Thinking of *Ishmael* and *Nothing*, the story that so many people have about who they are and what really matters, is the same story that so often limits their ability to perceive their situation; this story so often implicates us into the masquerade of consumerist culture and neoliberal logic that Ishmael and Pierre-Anthon so desperately try to warn about and that I try so desperately to *avoid* reproducing in my students, for better and worse. But if those others grew up like I did, and as Ishmael explains to his student, the neoliberal story is the only one that we believe exists, then without a new story we risk reacting like the students in Pierre-Anthon's class: denying what we understand on some level to be true. This neoliberal story is, in my view, no longer adequate for continuing to exist in a humanizing way.

We need a new story, one that will help us envision a "worthier system of governance to be constructed" (Harvey, 2005, p. 206) and, as Ishmael reminds his student, we are "an inventive people" (Quinn, 1992, p. 153). The weaving together of new narrative threads that might invent a future we have no idea about and will not be a part of is incumbent on those who wish to enact the possibilities of a refractively eventful curriculum. It is my hope that through humilitant and refractively eventful teaching and curriculum, we might come closer to inventing and constructing a new story, one that permits the possibility of all beings to be in relation with each other and the planet, humbly, and equitably.

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Appendix A: Timeline of my Coursework and Novel Study Choices

Fall 2014 – EDSE 610 with Professor Eppert

Winter 2015 – EDSE 501 with Professor Eppert

Summer 2015 – EDSE 504 with Professor den Heyer

Fall 2015 – First attempt at teaching *Ishmael*

Winter 2016 – EDSE 501 with Professor den Heyer

Winter 2016 – Second attempt at teaching *Ishmael*

Fall 2017 – Third and final attempt at teaching *Ishmael*

Fall 2017 – First attempt at teaching *Nothing* (both *Ishmael* and *Nothing* were offered to students as a choice of novel for the Fall 2017 novel study unit)

Winter 2018 – present – Each ELA 30-1 course I have taught offers *Nothing* as the whole-class novel study

Winter 2019 – *Ishmael* book club (see end of Chapter 6 for discussion of this book club experience)

Winter 2021 – *Ishmael* book club, second attempt (also discussed at the end of Chapter 6)

Appendix B[24]: Bibliography from Professor Eppert's EDSE 610 Course

EDSE: 610
Course Instructor: Dr. Claudia Eppert
Fall 2014

Bibliography

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Bauman, Zygmunt (2007). Chapter "Society of Consumers." In Consuming Life (pp. 52-81). Malden, M.A. Polity Press. ISBN: 978-07456-4002-0. Total pgs. in bk. 160. Total pgs copied: 29.

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Behar, Ruth (1997). Chapter: The Vulnerable Observer. The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart. (pp-1-33). Boston, Mass.: Beacon. ISBN: 0-8070-4631-.0. Total pgs. in bk.195. Total pgs copied: 32.

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[24] Formatting as per original document; minor font and spacing changes made for length and consistency.

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Pedagon: Human Sciences, Pedagogy, and Culture (pp. 12-25). New York: Peter Lang. ISBN: 0-8204-2760-8. total pgs. In bk: 188. total pgs. copied: 13.

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Tuhiwai Smith, Linda (1999/2007)."Colonizing the Disciplines" and "Notes from Down Under." In Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (pp. 65-74, pp. 95-105). London: Zed Books. ISBN: 9781856496247. Total pgs. In bk: 209. Total pgs. Copied: 22.

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Zajonc, Arthur (2010). Chapter: “Beyond the Divided Academic Life.” In Parker J. Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal, Transforming the Academy through Collegial Conversations (pp. 53-75). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 978-0-470- 48790- 7. Total pgs. In bk.: 237, Total pgs copied: 22.

Appendix C[25]: Course outline from Professor den Heyer's EDSE 504 Course

University of Alberta
Department of Secondary Education
Course Outline

EDSE 504 Lec B1 - Curriculum Inquiry Summer, 2015
(Prerequisite 503)

Kent den Heyer, PhD: kdenheye@ualberta.ca
Office #:
Office Hours: Monday/Thursday 1 – 2pm

First Day of Class: July 27, 2015
Add Date: July 9, 2015
Delete Date: July 30, 2015
50% Withdrawal Date: Aug 4, 2015
Withdrawal Date: Aug 7, 2015
Last Day of Class: Aug 12, 2015
Course time and location: M/T/W/R - 9.30am to12: 45pm; rm. 358 education south

"Where, then, is the intellectual labor in our pedagogy, one that examines the delicacy of our position, the limitations of our capacities, and the psychic complexities that may frustrate, or elucidate, our proclaimed intentions?" – Dr. Debbie Sonu, Hunter College, CUNY

Course Description:
Curriculum Inquiry (504) course begins with this question by Dr. Sonu above. The content of the course will address basic concepts in, frameworks for, and approaches to the study of curriculum. The course interweaves two major themes: (1) diverse approaches and conceptualizations of curriculum and (2) contemporary debates shaping curriculum inquiry. Students will have an opportunity to theorize about curriculum as a concept and to think about the implications of such theorizing for curriculum inquiry as a set of statements about the world with deep ontological assumptions and implications.

Etymologically the term "curriculum" is derived from the Latin *curricle* (a two-wheeled chariot). The curriculum was the racecourse for these chariots. Both terms are derived, in turn, from the verb *"currere"* (to run). In 1973, William Pinar recollected these etymological roots of curriculum when he declared the need to re-conceptualize curriculum studies. In using the term "currere" Pinar was asking the field to shift its focus away from institutional preoccupations of curriculum design and development and to consider more deeply the connections between curriculum and the course taken by our personal and collective lives. This has opened up the perspectives of the curriculum field

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[25] Edited for length (university assessment policies removed, for example); minor font and spacing changes made for consistency. Written permission received to include this syllabus in my dissertation.

far beyond the program of studies to consider more fully the curriculum as it is lived. In making this shift, curriculum studies now becomes not simply a matter of designing what is to be taught, but also a broad perspective on the autobiographical, historical, political, philosophical, and cultural experiences of education and society. By opening to the lived curriculum, curriculum studies is now recognized as being a matter of intellectual, moral and practical importance for living well in the world.

The specific course objectives are for students to:

1. Explore various significant contemporary discourses of inquiry in curriculum studies.
2. Begin to position themselves in relation to the curriculum discourses.
3. Examine curriculum issues from the perspective of various discourses.

There is no textbook for this course. We will be using a series of journal articles and book chapters that are available on-line through our library on the course's e-reserve.

Course throughline questions:

1. To what questions are schools answers? Given that they may be responses to several, which questions and on what basis do you deem to be the most impactful?

2. How do different understandings about children/students/learners and learning shape practices of curriculum inquiry?

3. How do educators' conceptions of particular subject-matter 'disciplines' shape curriculum practice?

4. In what ways does both a program of studies and curriculum as a lived text reflect particular ideological frames and what evidence exists that it does?

5. What role do schools and curriculum play in what we come to believe what we do about human nature, learning, loving, relationships, the Nation-state, and wise living?

6. To what extent is the responsibility of teachers to transform the lives of students?

7. What role does the child play in education as a social practice?

Some of the inquiry lenses we examine…

Critical Pedagogy Poststructuralism
Psychoanalysis
Postcolonialism Phenomenology
Hermeneutics Queer Pedagogy Postmodernism
Complexity Indigenous Perspectives
Feminist Pedagogy

Points Regarding Evaluation Procedures

- Due to the condensed nature of the class, regular attendance is crucial.
- All written assignments must be word processed in Times New Roman 12 point font, double-spaced with 1inch margins (or equivalent) unless otherwise negotiated with the instructor. Writing ability/style will be assessed along with the content. Particular details on assignments will be communicated throughout the course.
- Written assignments should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style in format, citation and referencing.

Assignments: (With a special thanks and acknowledgement to Dr. D. Donald for developing the top 5 assignment)

1. *Top 5 Assumptions*

Due August 4th, 2015 (25%)

In this assignment, you are asked to think carefully about the prejudices and assumptions associated with a curriculum inquiry you may wish to pursue in this course. In this case, prejudices and assumptions do not necessarily have negative connotations, but are instead understood as genealogical frames of reference (based on inheritances, memories and experiences) that help us make sense of our relational positionality in the world. Attentiveness to prejudices and assumptions while engaged in curriculum inquiry can help us better understand what it is we think we are 'up to' as inquirers.

Your task with this assignment is to (a) provide a maximum 150 word summary description of your (tentative) curriculum inquiry as you currently understand it; (b) list and briefly describe (100 word maximum for each) **YOUR** top 5 assumptions and/or prejudices associated with this inquiry; (c) provide a 400-500 word exploration of the contextual particularities of **one** of the listed prejudices and/or assumptions as read or understood through two curriculum inquiry lenses.

As an addendum (500 words maximum) to the tasks outlined above, you are required to consider the ways in which curriculum thought can be conceptualized as basically an exercise in citizenship and the promotion of the development of a particular kind of citizen. Although this is not usually explicit, curriculum inquiry is typically guided by a theory of what a person needs to know and understand in order to be a 'good citizen.' So, who is this 'good citizen' that you have in mind in the particular curriculum inquiry that you have identified? What informs and influences your thinking on the connections between curriculum inquiry and citizenship?

2. Oral Evaluations (25%).

August 6th

Students will in groups of three prepare responses to a set of pre-identified questions to be shared in a group discussion format with the instructor. Further details will be shared in class regarding this assignment.

3. *Throughline synthesis project*:

August 12th, 2015 (50%).
Final synthesis assignment around our course's main throughline question or questions you pose. The purpose of this assignment is for you to address a throughline question (or make an argument for the cogency of your own throughline for this course which, if convincing, includes a bonus point in my books) as a way to synthesize the insights you gained in this course from readings, discussions, your in class teaching, and late night wonderings. By "synthesis" it is not meant that you simple review these insights, but that that these insights are formed into a powerful argument including a thesis statement and followed by a critical analysis of the relevant issues. In the spirit of diverse evaluation opportunities, the form this project takes (e.g., video, music, physical art piece, performance) depends on your imagination. A more artistic project form requires an artist statement of up to three double spaced pages, including thesis statement

Assignments are due on the date specified in the course schedule handed out first class. Late work will not be accepted. The instructor reserves the right to make exceptions to the late work policy (whether to accept and appropriate changes in possible grades) in extreme circumstances. It is up to the instructor to determine extreme.

These assignments are designed to promote evaluation as itself an opportunity for learning: please do so.

Appendix D[26]: Reading List from Professor den Heyer's EDSE 504 Course

Tentative reading list: articles available through our library and in some cases through google search. Articles grouped together are taken up in class together

1. den Heyer, K. (2009). Sticky points: teacher educators re-examine their practice in light of a new Alberta social studies program and its inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. *Teaching Education*, 20(4), 343-355.

Biesta, G., & SÄFSTRÖM, C.A (2011). A manifesto for education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 9(5), 540-547.

2. Davis, B., & Sumara, D. J. (2000). Curriculum forms: on the assumed shapes of knowing and knowledge. *Journal of Curriuclum Studies*, 32(6), 821-845.

Donald, D. T (2009). Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts. *First Nations Perspectives* 2(1), 1-24.

3. Britzman, D. P. (1986). Cultural myths in the making of a teacher: Biography and social structure in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 442-456.

Ranciere, J. (1991). *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. Translator's introduction and chapter one. Available as a pdf on line.

4. Felman, S. (1982). Psychoanalysis and education: Teaching terminable and interminable. *Yale French Studies*, (63), 21-44.

den Heyer K. (2015). An analysis of aims and the educational 'event'. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 38(1), 1-27.

5. Greene, M. (1986). In search of a critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review* 56(4), 427-441.

Malewski, E. (2013). Do Stemhagen, Reich, and Muth have ears to hear and eyes to see? Toward the subaltern and counternarratives in curriculum studies, *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, *10*(1), 73–88.

6. Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (google, available as a pdf)

Bowers, C.A. (2010). Understanding the connections between double bind thinking and the ecological crises: Implications for educational reform. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*. 6(February), n.p

7. Smith, D. G. (2000). The Specific Challenges of Globalization to Teaching and Vice Versa. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 46(1), 7-26.

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[26] Formatting as per original document.

Grumet, M. (2006). Where does the world go when schooling is about schooling? *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 22(4), 47-54.
Apple, M. and King. N. (1977). What do schools teach? *Curriculum Inquiry*, 6, (4), 341-358.

8. Honeychurch, K. G. (1996). Researching dissident subjectivities: Queering the grounds of theory and practice, *Harvard Educational Review, 66*(2), 339-356

9. Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review* 79(3), 409-427.
Wallin, J. (2008). Living with monsters: An inquiry parable. *Teaching Education* 19 (4), 311–323.

Appendix E: Course Outline from my Fall 2015 ELA 30-1 Course

English Language Arts 30-1
Instructor: Mr. Piazza
English 30-1 Course Outline:

A university professor went to visit a famous Zen master. While the master quietly served tea, the professor talked about Zen. The master poured the visitor's cup to the brim, and then kept pouring. The professor watched the overflowing cup until he could no longer restrain himself. "It's full! No more will go in!" the professor blurted. "This is you," the master replied, "How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

http://truecenterpublishing.com/zenstory/emptycup.html

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”, TED Talk given on October 2009

This English 30-1 course will provide us with an opportunity to examine and explore the multiplicity of stories about ourselves and our world.

The essential questions that will guide this inquiry are:
1) What does it mean to be human in the 21st Century?
2) What are our ethical responsibilities to each other, and to our planet?
3) What role do/will you play in shaping the world?

To answer these questions, we will be exploring a number of different texts and mediums. We will explore how other authors and artists have attempted to answer these questions, and you will create texts and explore ideas in a number of mediums to answer these questions for yourselves.

We will begin this course by examining the English Language Arts Program of Studies and the Minimum Requirements for Text Study and Text Creation. From there, we will map out our trajectory for the rest of the semester. We will use Portfolio Assessment as a means of collecting your work, and for me to provide feedback and help you revise your work.

Communication – The absolute best way to reach me is through email. My email address is and I do check my email every day. If you email me, I will respond within 24 hours, or, in person if I see you before then.

Weighting for all course work:

Major Assessment: - 50% of your mark – this includes written essay work, such as a Visual Response Essay, Persuasive Letter, and Literary Exploration Essay

Minor Assessments - 30% of your mark - Includes Research assignments, oral presentations, image and video productions, songwriting, poster presentation, artwork, etc

Exams - 20% of your mark - Includes all tests and exams.

The final course mark is calculated using 70% of your class mark and 30% of your Diploma Exam mark

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT POLICY

The Diploma Exam/Class Mark weighting has changed; course marks will now be made up using 70% of your class mark, and 30% of your Diploma Exam. This means that it is even more important that you attend each class, and complete your assignments. Class communication and collaboration with others is required as part of the English Language Arts Program of Studies; participation and attendance in all activities is required in order to provide a complete assessment of your growth this semester. The following guidelines will be used in the event that you are not able to fully participate in classroom activities and assignment completion. As will be expected of you in your life after high school, communication with your peers and teacher is essential for success.

1. The basic expectation for all students is that they will be in class every day. If a student must miss a class due to emergency, they are expected to contact (email, text message) their teacher as soon as possible.

2. If a student must miss an assessment day, he or she must contact their teacher before the assessment day; otherwise, students can be awarded a zero and will be given the opportunity to use the replacement exam at the end of the semester to replace that zero. There is only one replacement exam at the end of the semester; this will replace your lowest multiple-choice exam mark.

3. Two class days will be given for Critical Essays (30-1/20-1) and Literary Explorations (30-2/20-2/10-2). If a student misses one of the days without contacting their teacher ahead of time, the student is choosing to write the essay in one day. What the student completes in one day will be assessed by his or her teacher.

4. Mark updates will be given to students immediately after exams and significant written pieces are graded.

Plagiarism is serious academic theft and forgery.
All written work is to be your own. This means that you may not “borrow” another’s paper, alter a few words or phrases and hand it in to expect credit. The responsibility for proving that the work is indeed original rests with the student and not with the teacher. The teacher accepts the work in good faith; if that faith is broken, the student must be ready to accept the possible consequences. Cheating of any kind is not tolerated at Centre High. If you are caught cheating and/or plagiarizing your work, the consequences include (but are not limited to) receiving a zero on the assessment, meeting with your administrator, as well as other disciplinary actions.

Appendix F: Course Outline from my Winter 2022 ELA 30-1 Course

English Language Arts 30-1
Instructor: Mr. Robert Piazza
Email:

Course Description

If you're interested in pursuing a university or college program, this course is designed for you. In English 30-1, you'll explore a variety of texts: poetry, visuals, short stories, essays, modern drama, film, the novel, and other texts to gain an understanding of how the English language is used to convey the human experience.

With an emphasis on critical analysis of complex texts, you'll demonstrate your mastery of the knowledge, skills, and attributes required by a student of English language and literature in the province of Alberta. Specifically, this course will challenge you to refine and polish your reading, writing, and language skills, urging you to deepen and mature your understanding of the significance, artistry, and value of literature.

Students will be required to use language clearly, correctly, and articulately in analytical, critical, persuasive, and personal situations.

The course concludes with the writing of the English 30-1 Diploma examination.

GENERAL LEARNER OUTCOMES: General Learner Outcomes (provided by Alberta Education) identify the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that students are expected to demonstrate to successfully complete ELA 30-1.

The five outcomes are interdependent and are achieved through a variety of assignments, experiences, and tasks.

The G.L.O.s for ELA 30-1 are:

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

1. Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences;
2. Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts;
3. Manage ideas and information;
4. Enhance the clarity and artistry of communication; and
5. Respect, support, and collaborate with others.

The diploma exam will worth 10% of your final grade (and course work is then 90%). Your coursework grade will be based upon:

70% major assignments	**30% minor assignments**
This may include • Personal Response to Texts • Critical/Analytical Response to Literary Texts • Reading Comprehension	This may include • Online annotated discussion • Article Review • Discussion • Presentation • Reading Comprehension • others as determined by your instructor

Assessment Policy: It is important that you attend each class and complete your assignments. Class communication and collaboration with others is required as a part of the English Language Arts Program of Studies; participation and attendance in all activities is required in order to provide a complete assessment of your growth this semester. The following guidelines will be used in the event that you are not able to fully participate in classroom activities and assignment completion.

1. The basic expectation for all students is that they will be in class every day. If a student must miss a class due to an emergency, they are expected to contact their teacher as soon as possible. YOUR TEACHER'S EMAIL IS
2. If a student must miss an assessment day, he or she must contact their teacher before the assessment day.
3. One class will be given for on demand Critical/Analytical Response to Literary Text essays. . If you arrive late, you will be assessed on what you are able to complete in the remaining time.
4. Mark updates will be available AFTER your instructor has evaluated your work.

Plagiarism is serious academic theft and forgery. All written work is to be your own. This means that you may not "borrow" another's paper, alter a few words or phrases and hand it in to expect credit. The responsibility for proving that the work is original rests with the student and not with the teacher. The teacher accepts the work in good faith; if that faith is broken, the student must be ready to accept the possible consequences. Cheating of any kind is not tolerated at Centre High. If you are caught cheating and/or plagiarizing your work, the consequences include (but are not limited to) receiving a zero on the assessment, meeting with your administrator, as well as other disciplinary actions.

Device Policy: You are expected/required to bring your own device in order to access classroom resources, conduct research, and write your essays in class. In the case of essay writing, using a device other than a laptop or large tablet (with an external keyboard) is not recommended and would likely be detrimental to your success in this class. Use of devices for purposes outside of course work such as: social media, texting, gaming, etc. is not permitted. There will not be devices available in the classroom for your use.

Appendix G: *Ishmael* Novel Study Pre-Reading Assignment

Please answer the following questions as you read through the novel:

1) How do we know what it is that we know? In other words, who or what teaches us everything we know about the world? This doesn't just mean 'school knowledge', but also the 'rules' of how we should behave, think, act, feel, about ourselves, others, the world.

2) Explain the possible answers for the following statement: WITH MAN GONE, WILL THERE BE HOPE FOR GORILLA?

3) If 1000 years from now, a new species were to read about the story of humans, what would that story be? How does it begin? How does it end (does it end?)? What were the successes and failures of humankind?

4) Describe the future in the following three ways. Think deeply about this, beyond simply flying cars and hoverboards:

   a) Probable (what is the future probably going to be like?)
   b) Preferable (what is the ideal future that YOU would prefer seeing?)
   c) Possible (what is the future that YOU think might be still possible to achieve?)

5) With respect to the last question, what role do YOU play in shaping the world around you? How might your actions lead us toward the probable/preferable/possible future?

PART B

1. According to Ishmael, who is Mother Culture? What makes up Mother Culture?

2. According to Ishmael, who are the Takers?

3. According to Ishmael, who are the Leavers?

4. According to Ishmael, what is a *story*?

5. According to Ishmael, what does it mean to *enact* a story?

6. According to Ishmael, what is *culture*?

7. What event marks the birth of the Takers; when does this happen?

Appendix H: *Ishmael* Novel Study Chapter Questions

Chapter 6: Close Reading:

"There he is in free fall, experiencing the exhilaration of what he takes to be flight. From his great height he can see for miles around, and one thing he sees puzzles him: The floor of the valley is dotted with craft just like his—not crashed, simply abandoned. 'Why,' he wonders, 'aren't these craft in the air instead of sitting on the ground? What sort of fools would abandon their aircraft when they could be enjoying the freedom of the air?' Ah well, the behavioral quirks of less talented, earthbound mortals are none of his concern. However, looking down into the valley has brought something else to his attention. He doesn't seem to be maintaining his altitude. In fact, the earth seems to be rising up toward him. Well, he's not very worried about that. After all, his flight has been a complete success up to now, and there's no reason why it shouldn't go on being a success. He just has to pedal a little harder, that's all.

1. Considering Chapter 6, and the above passage, explain Ishmael's use of the 'aircraft' metaphor –
   a) briefly describe how it's deployed
   b) how is it interpreted as a reflection on Taker culture?
   c) Do you agree with Ishmael's assertion? Why/Why not?

2. What are the signs that our 'civilizational aircraft' is about to crash?

Chapter 7:

3. What is the point of the story of the A's, B's and C's? What does this have to do with the "law of how to live?"

4. Why does Ishmael send the student away to find his own answers? What does the student mean when he says he wanted to have a teacher *for life*?

Chapter 8:

5. Explain the 3 things takers do that leavers never do.

6. How does this knowledge help us define the law of limited competition?

7. What happens to species that violate this law?

8. Explain the value of diversity as a contribution to the survival of the community. Why is unlimited growth of any given individual dangerous to the community?

9. Close Reading, Chapter 8:

"Yes, I can imagine. His colleagues all over the world understand perfectly well what he was saying, but they have the good sense not to confront Mother Culture with it in the midst of her benevolence. If there are forty thousand people in an area that can only support thirty thousand, it's no kindness to bring in food from the outside to maintain them at forty thousand. That just guarantees that the famine will continue."

"True. But all the same, it's hard just to sit by and let them starve."

a) Explain the larger context for the above quotation – in other words, why are Ishmael and the narrator talking about famine and overpopulation?

b) What solution does Ishmael appear to be suggesting in order to resolve this issue?

c) Is Ishmael's approach to sustainability ethical? Is his solution realistic? If not, what are some ethical and realistic solutions to sustainability?

YWIW (You write, I write): Notes/Ideas/Comments and/or Questions for Mr. Piazza about what we're reading/discussing in class. If you have a question, write it here, and I will respond!

Appendix I: Discussion Board Assignment

Each of the texts selected for this unit invites us to question what an education can be and what the goal(s) of education might be for the individual, and for the larger world. The text creators often challenge the notion of 'school' and how attending school does not necessarily mean that one is educated. The text creators also tend to implicate us in our education and suggest we must be active, engaged participants in our world.

In your discussion board conversations, using your text, you will seek to deepen your collective understanding of education's meaning and purpose.

A **basic posting** will answer the following questions:

- ❑ What is an education? Include specific quotations from the text to support your claim.
- ❑ What is/are the goal(s) of education? Include specific quotations from the text to support your claim.

A posting aiming for highly skilled or post-secondary ready might also respond to one or more of the following questions in the response. **Don't simply answer each question in a sentence of two**; carefully select the question(s) that prompt you to **think deeply and respond with detail:**

- ❑ What is the relationship between action and education, according to the text creator? According to you? Include specific quotations from the text to support your claim. What is your author's idea of a "real" education? Do you agree or disagree? Explain. What is a real education according to you? Include specific quotations from the text to support your claim.

- ❑ Choose a quote from the text that challenges your current understanding of education. Include it in your response and discuss what the implications of this idea might be for your education? for shifting your thinking?
- ❑ The word educate is defined by Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary as "to develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically [especially] by instruction." It comes from the Latin verb *educare*, related to *educere*, which means "to lead out." Apply this definition and etymology to your discussion about the text creator's educational experiences. You may choose to compare this to your educational experiences.

- ❑ These are the questions I had posted to the board the other day and can act as a guide for your responses too:
    - ❑ What is an education?
    - ❑ How might an education be different from "schooling"

    - ❑ How do we know if we're experiencing education? Schooling?

- ❏ What has your experience been? Moments of schooling? Moments of education?
- ❏ What are the risks of experiencing education? Benefits?
- ❏ What are the risks of experiencing schooling? Benefits?
- ❏ If we had to choose a path for this class during this quarter, what should we aim for - education or schooling?
    - ❏ How might we need to prepare in order to achieve this aim?

Initial Posting By: ___________	
Reply by: ___________	
Initial Posting By: ___________	
Reply By: _______________	
Initial Posting By: ___________	

Appendix J: Educational Journey Assignment Instructions (Personal Response)

My Educational Journey Paper

This assignment allows you to ask and answer the questions "Who am I?" and "How did I get here?" The underlying purpose of this assignment is to become aware of the "constellation of particular life events and experiences" that has brought you to this moment in this class. Be prepared to share excerpts (of your choosing) from your work in class, with your colleagues and teacher.

This is a personal response--write the best personal narrative or personal essay that you know how to write. I will not be providing further instruction on the personal narrative because I want to see what you already know and can do as a writer. Your response will influence future lessons on these two forms.

Your response should explore the following:

a) Consider the influences (personal, familial, social, geographical) that have shaped your self-understanding to-date. Share some constellations of experiences that have led you to your educational and life path.
b) Consider your social history, culture, and location. Describe how these have informed/ shaped/impinged upon your self-identification and beliefs. Explore the relations with which you identify/disidentify; for example, engagement with the environment, involvement with social justice issues, working with various rights advocacy groups. What is most important to you as a student living in these complicated times? How would you like to see the world transformed?
c) Identify your meaning and purpose with regard to your roles as learner and co-participant in the world, and the personal significance of your education. Reflect upon where you hope your education will lead you in your life journey. How do you see your education developing further on down the road? What do you identify as some of the most essential reasons for embarking on a scholarly path? What contributions would you like to make to our society and environment through your education and as a human being?

Of course, you will not be able to completely address all of the above questions; they are meant to be more of a guide to help you with your response. A good suggestion would be to pick 1-2 questions from each section to address in your response. Furthermore, you are encouraged to use the readings we have completed in class to provide you with a more insightful approach to answering these questions. I want to see that you are wrestling with new ideas, using them to help you understand who you are as a person and co-participant in this world.

Appendix K: Version(s) of My/Self Assignment Instructions (Personal Response)

ELA 30-1 Version(s) of My/Self: The Educational Journey Paper

This paper begins with the premise offered by Burke, Foster-Wallace, Chomsky, and Thompson: that much of our *education* happens outside of schools; education, in this sense, is understood as the learning we experience about who we are, the people around us, and, the world(s) we inhabit. In a more complicated way, *schooling* has also offered experiences that have shaped how you understand yourself and the way the world around you works.

Based on the conversations about education and schooling you've been having in class, at your tables, in your discussion boards, and with yourself in the article review, this assignment offers you the opportunity to synthesize these learnings wherein you can explore the various versions of who you've been, who you are, and who you want to become.

There are three (3) sections to this personal reflection:

1) The person I was; in other words, how you would discuss or describe the human being you have been? What were your beliefs? Assumptions about self/others/world? Values, attitudes? And, where did these beliefs/assumptions/etc., come from? Who/what taught you to be that person?

2) The person I am; in other words, who are you now? Is this a different version of yourself than in the above section? How have you changed? What are your current beliefs/assumptions about self/others/world? Why have you changed? Why haven't you? What are the fears or anxieties that hold you in stasis? What/who led you to be brave/take risks to become someone/thing different? How do you feel about who you currently are?

3) The person I am trying to become; in other words, where might you be headed? This is less about being unhappy with yourself but more about where you see yourself evolving. Who is the person you're aspiring to become? Is this an 'updated' version of yourself? A complete reboot? Why that person? What are the ways in which you may have to empty your cup in order to make room for this growth? How might this class - or others - be an opportunity for you to begin to enact this new trajectory? How might it be a barrier? Finally, so what? What does it mean for who you are now? Based on this desired version of yourself, what do you need to do today?

*****Please note, the above guiding questions do not each need to be answered - they are there to help you if you're stuck. Answering each of these would take you past the one page maximum for this assignment.**

Requirements:
Single/Double spaced - up to you and the amount of room you need to fill the page.
Font Size 12pt. Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri. Please no script font or wingdings ;-)
Due: ______________________ To be negotiated in class. (TBD)
Is this for marks? Should it matter? Also, to be negotiated in class.

Appendix L: *Nothing* Unit Personal Response Assignment Instructions

ELA 30-1
PRT Assignment Guidelines and Options

Please see below for the different options you may use for your PRT assignment.
The Recommended Page Length for all responses: Anywhere between 2-5 pages
The corresponding exemplars (for options 2 and 3) will be posted in Google Classroom. These were written by me. I will also see if I can post 1-2 student exemplars from previous semesters.

The key to success for this PRT response is to dwell less on the ‘play by play’ of something that happened in your life and more on the significance, or *so what* of these moments. What is necessary for powerful writing is that you are introspective, that is, that you look deep within yourself and write about who and what is there, how you’ve lived, live, and will continue to live. Powerful PRT writing is open, honest, vulnerable, and emotional. By emotional, I mean that you are dealing with your emotions in all their complexity. It is a reckoning with your human-ness for all its flaws and beauties.

Don’t write this piece for me or to impress me or for a good mark. Write for yourself. Use this piece of writing, during these strangest of times, to explore your own inner workings, and, how you came to be in such a way. In Moonlight, Chiron’s worldview and what he thinks matters and is ‘the meaning’ is formed and forged by the forces around him. In *Nothing*, Pierre-Anthon refuses to be constrained by these forces and attempts to escape, only to be destroyed by the very people he has attempted to save. Agnes, perhaps, eventually realizes the same freeing truth as he. In this piece, what are the forces - personal, cultural, environmental, historical, racial, sexual, political, material, etc., that have shaped and guided your life, for better or worse. And finally, here is an opportunity to exit any caves you now realize you’ve been in, or, to at least honestly admit (and explore why) you are actively choosing to remain in the cave(s) you’ve now become accustomed to!

I look forward to reading your incredible responses - these tend to be my favorite essays of the semester. Have fun, and, tread carefully!

Below, you will find 3 options for how to approach this assignment. Each option is designed to respond to the novel and/or the required/recommended readings we’ve engaged with over the last three weeks. Pick an option that works for you. Combine two or all, if you desire. The PRT is less of a ‘strict’ format than the CART was - enjoy the freedom here :-)

OPTION 1 – Personal Reflection on significant quote(s) from the prompting texts in relation to the topic. Use the novel/articles/etc. to help you arrive at a deeper world of thought.

For this option, as many of you were doing in your annotation assignment, you will choose either a quote/moment from the prompting texts (image/poem/excerpt).

Based on your selected quote/moment/text, you will offer an in-depth personal reflection on the ideas contained within and their implications for you, as well as the broader world around you. Two 'templates' for organizing your thinking and writing might be the Article Review format or the Microcosm/Macrocosm/Me-crocosm.

What I am looking for here is less of an analysis of the text and more of a meditation on what this text means for you, how it aligns and/or challenges your thinking in some way, how it has opened your eyes to a different perspective or made you realize something *significant* about yourself and your world.

Although this is informal writing (please, refer to yourself as 'I' or 'me') and is meant to be personal and meaningful to you, I still do expect excellent quality of writing as usual (spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, etc).

OPTION 2 – A Moment of leaving, *or choosing to stay*, in The Cave

> I used to believe...but now I know…
> I choose to believe...even though I know…

The above sentence frames offer us an encapsulation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The freed prisoner who lives outside used to believe in one thing and through a particular experience, has come to exit the cave and embrace a new world-view (both literally and figuratively). The prisoners who destroy the freed prisoner make the choice (consciously or not) to remain in the cave, despite the opportunity to exit into a different and freer world. Similarly, these sentence frames can be used to map onto different characters in our novel, as well as authors of the articles we've had to read. PA, Agnes, the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Emily Esfahani-Smith have all cast aside old views and have embraced alternative world views and beliefs on what is important in life. Many of the other students in "Class 7A" along with forces in the world (greed, materialism, etc, etc, etc) make the choice to deny truths and realities that they (might?) know deep inside to be true - for example, the denial of climate change.

Your task, with this option, is to offer a meditation or analysis of your own moment(s) of exiting or choosing to remain in a cave. This option is less interested in the moment of realization (by that I mean *the what happened*) and more interested in (obviously) the *so what* of this realization. In other words, what were your beliefs prior? What happened? What do you believe now? And *so what* - how has your life/will your life be potentially altered because of this realization? ***It is crucial to relate your action of staying/exiting to a particular force, in order to relate back to the topic question for this PRT.***

The exemplar for this option is called "Learning to Live in my House of Shame". This exemplar offers an analysis of when we bought the house we currently live in and attempts to explore why, exactly, we needed that house. I had just read the Dalai Lama article for the first time right after we bought it, and that moment 'shook me' as I realized I was the exact person he seemed to be critiquing!

OPTION 3: Western Choices viewed through a non-Western lens

Many of the readings, and in my opinion, Pierre-Anthon, offer an alternative framework to dominant Western thinking. By that I mean that in the West, often, our purpose and meaning in life is driven by the belief that “when you become some*thing*, then you will be some*one*”. In my view, Pierre-Anthon (along with the authors from the required/recommended readings) push back on such a framework for living and deriving meaning in the world. Pierre-Anthon and the Dalai Lama, especially, invite us to contemplate how our dependence on material objects or the pursuit of material happiness (house, job, cars, toys, ballin’, flexin’, doing it for the ‘gram, etc, etc, etc, etc) is what actually leads us to deep dissatisfaction in our own lives and a misguided (literally, this belief guides us along the wrong path) notion that we can actually attain deep fulfillment and satisfaction through the procurement of stuff and things. In this sense, when I hear PA say that “nothing matters” and therefore “nothing is worth doing” I can use non-Western thinking to interpret this as really being no *thing* matters → no one *thing* or object or car or BAPE or Stone Island or job matters to the point that those things cannot bring us long-lasting happiness. In this sense, PA invites us to contemplate a life in the pursuit of no/thing where we can instead be present in our present moment without being chained to the forces of desire, greed, and material gain. Much like the students in class 7A, such a life seems so absurd that we accuse PA of being a Nihilist, in believing in nothing, rather than, perhaps, living free of such material constraints.

Ok - so what does the above mean for a PRT? Well, this option invites you to consider a (or some) Western choice(s) you’ve made and to reflect on this/these choices through a non-Western lens. Again, it is less about the moment itself (I’m not looking for a play by play of what happened, although some narration will be necessary) and more about the *implications* - or so what - of how that choice impacted you then, now, and might still. Another element in this option might be about how you have changed since then, or how you are attempting to live now, according to a different set of guiding principles. **What is the force that lead you to those particular actions? Especially as you are now looking back and discussing this/these moments/actions?**

The exemplar for Option 3 is entitled: “Walk a Mile in *Those* Shoes?”. Here I explore my obsession with Prada shoes, how owning a few pairs made me feel so powerful and how now, looking back on a particular moment, I’ve realized (from a non-Western perspective) how I was attempting to use those things as a substitute for meaning and happiness in my own life. You will notice in this exemplar (compared to the House of Shame one for Option 2), that I am playing with narrative style a bit more. I use italics to hop in and out of story-telling, and I end the piece with a non-italicized analysis/reflection or ‘so what’ about the moment and its significance.

Appendix M: Types of Questions Resource

Types of Questions

Directions: After reading the assigned text, create one of each type of question, accompanied by the additional information requested. Be prepared to contribute these questions to class discussion with evidence from the assigned text.

1. Factual Question • Is verifiable—answers found on the page. • Responds to questions: *who, what, when, where, how*? • Takes the reader *into* the text. *Examples* • Who does Romeo kill? • What does everyone in the book think Ultima is? • Where does George tell Lennie to go if he gets in trouble again? • When is the story set?	Write *your* factual question here: Write the answer, cite the page number, and explain its importance below.
2. Inductive Question • Is verifiable—answers found *in* the text, based on details and examples. • Responds to questions: *why*, *how*, and *so what*? • Takes readers *through* the text, allowing them to eval- uate and interpret evidence from the visual, spoken, or written text. *Examples* • Why does George continue to care for Lennie after all the trouble he causes? • How does O'Brien convey his attitude toward the war in this story? • Why does Hamlet treat Ophelia as he does? • How does Ralph's relationship with the others change by the end of the story?	Write *your* inductive question here: Write the answer, provide the examples, and explain its importance below.

3. Analytical Question • Connects the text to other texts, ideas, or situations through analysis. • Responds to questions: *How are these similar*, *different*, *related* ? • Takes readers *beyond* the text, allowing them to analyze the relationship between this text and other texts, ideas, events, or situations. *Examples* • How is *Frankenstein* similar to certain modern problems we face today? • In what ways are *The Plague* and *Blindness* similar and different? • What does *Lord of the Flies* tell us about human nature?	Write *your* analytical question here: Write the answer, provide the examples, and explain its importance below.

Appendix N: Guidelines and Instructions for the *Nothing* Annotation Assignment

Guidelines and instructions for your daily annotation assignment
Read all the way to the end, it's not that long!!

1) Each round, you are being asked to conduct a close reading of a few chapters of our novel, paired with some non-fiction reading that has been chosen because of how the themes overlap. Based on our guide for annotating and asking questions, you will be expected to, *individually and as a group,* annotate the novel.

2) Similar to a discussion board, the expectation is that you are creating *both* your own original annotations *and* responding to the annotations of your group members.

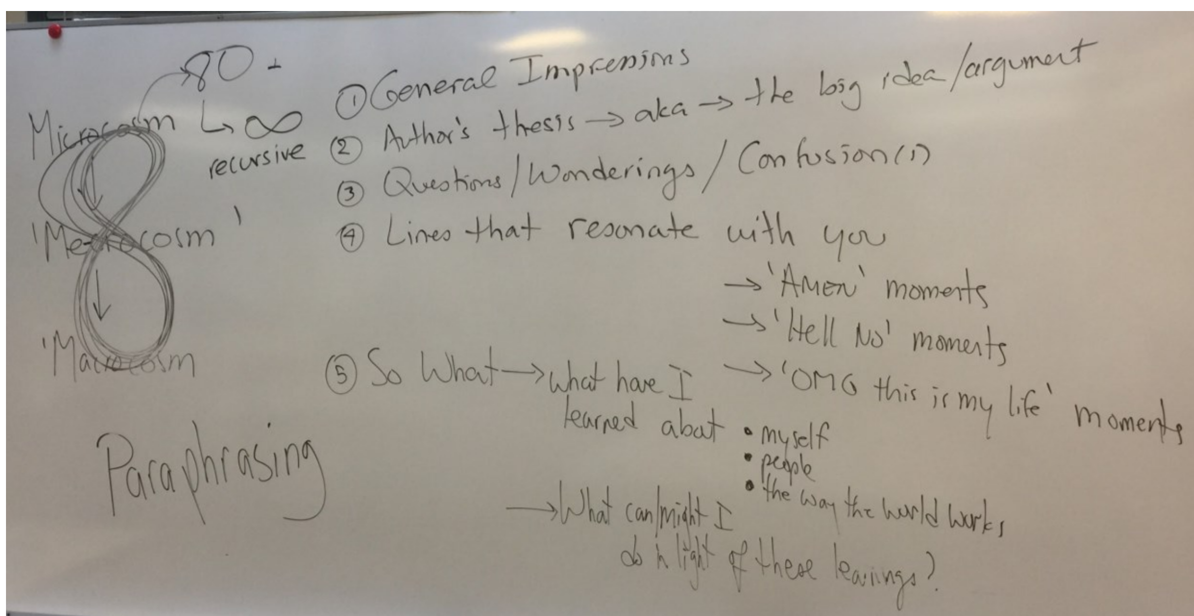
3) To create your own annotation, highlight the relevant passage from the novel (could be a key word, sentence, phrase, paragraph, etc.) and insert a new comment. The comment should be the annotation.
   a) To respond to the annotation of others, you can reply to their comment.
   b) You can also @ them to tag them in a response/comment or question; clicking on "assign to" once you @ them will then send them a notification that they've been tagged! ***Make sure you tag the right person…!

4) Original annotations should:
   a) Attempt to discuss/interpret a key moment from the text
   b) Indicate a personal connection/moment of reflection
   c) Ask a question (factual/inductive/analytical)
   d) Attempt to answer your own question
   e) Identify a symbol + interpret it
   f) Link to other texts/readings/articles from inside and outside our course, especially the assigned non-fiction readings for that particular week. (when referencing research you've done on your own, please include links for others to read the article, where possible)
   g) Anything else that pops into your head as you read (**see below** for our co-constructed guide to annotating, theme glossary, and types of questions documents to refresh your memory)

5) At the end of the three rounds, I will give a mark out of 5 (Excellent, Proficient, Satisfactory, Not Yet) for your annotations. As usual, I will be looking for quantity, but more importantly, *quality* of annotations. The minimum requirements for this assignment are below:

a) For each chunk you are required to read: Posting a minimum of 3 annotations of your own
b) For each chunk you are required to read: Responding to a minimum of 3 annotations from group members
c) Posting a variety of annotation types (a question, a comment, a text connection, for example)
d) As with the discussion board - meeting minimum requirements often leads to receiving the minimum passing grade...to score excellent/university level work you are encouraged to go above and beyond minimum expectations. Remember, however, always quality over quantity. I'd rather 6-7 quality annotations than 20 annotations that say "cool" or "wow" or "huh?"
e) Please refer to the rubric for evaluation criteria

Here are the board notes, as a reminder of our annotation guidelines/possibilities:



I have also linked to the kinds of questions sheet here factual/inductive/analytical)[27]

[27] This inactive hyperlink would lead students to the same document as provided in Appendix M of this dissertation.

Appendix O: Schedule of Paired Readings and Assignment for the *Nothing* Unit

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE NOVEL STUDY UNIT

	Required Novel Pages	**Required Non-Fiction Readings**	**Highly Recommended Non-Fiction Readings**	**Weekly Assignment**
Due by Thursday Feb. 24th	Read and Annotate pgs. 1-41	1) Essential Food by Thich Nhat Hanh (Whole Class Text) 2) Modern Society and the Quest for human Happiness (posted as PDF in classroom)	How to Build a Life by Arthur C. Brooks Education and Plato's Allegory of the Cave by Anam Lodhi (yay! We've done this one together in class already!)	Complete this annotation assignment.[28]
Due by Monday, Feb. 28th	Read and Annotate pgs. 42-79	The Truth About Stories, chapter 1, by Thomas King.	The Nature of Lack, by David Loy[29]	Complete this annotation assignment
Due by Wednesday, March 2nd.	Read and Annotate pgs. 80-100	For this week's required readings, open the linked google doc and select one article (of your choice) from ***each*** of the two sections. The first section is called "Good and Evil" and the second section is called "Happiness and Meaning"		1) Complete this annotation assignment

[28] This text is hyperlinked in the original document; the link leads to the assignment description, provided here in Appendix N.

[29] In original document, I hyperlink to the following website containing excerpts from Loy's work; students are encouraged to read as much as they want, as it is a long piece. The link is the following: http://www.zen-occidental.net/articles1/loy14-eng.html