

**EXAMINING SECONDARY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ENGAGEMENT,
AUTONOMY, AND EMPATHY THROUGH INTEGRATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY**

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Abstract

Philosophy is not widely taught in Canadian high schools, although research surrounding its benefits to secondary students—critical thinking, open-mindedness, interest, curiosity, and autonomy—is significant. This study examines an interdisciplinary high school program that integrates English Language Arts (ELA) and Philosophy (ELAP). Not only does ELAP create connectivity across subjects, but it has the potential to engage students in new ways by offering the strengths of ELA’s narrative and creative modes of thinking with the strengths of Philosophy’s paradigmatic or critical modes of thinking. Together, ELA and Philosophy can also lead to more caring thinking. This qualitative research study uses semi-structured interviews with six students who experienced and completed ELAP. This thesis attempts to find out how students’ experiences with ELAP encouraged their engagement, nurtured their autonomy, and/or cultivated their capacity for empathy. Using this study’s findings, the researcher outlines the rationale and benefits of not only integrating ELA and Philosophy curricula, but the value of including Philosophy in Canadian high schools.

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Preface

Since 2011, I have taught a Grade 12 integrated English Language Arts and Philosophy (ELAP) class in an urban high school in Saskatchewan. It is an interdisciplinary course of study that achieves the same aims, goals, outcomes, and indicators as the Saskatchewan Renewed English Language Arts (ELA) B30 curriculum; however, the course content—its vehicle for the development of literacy skills—has been reimagined, using Philosophy. Students still read and explore traditional texts like George Orwell’s *1984*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Walt Whitman’s *Oh Me! Oh Life!*, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*. However, they are coupled with overtly philosophical texts like Descartes’ *Meditations*, Plato’s *Republic*, Albert Camus’ *The Outsider*, and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. I created the class and it has since expanded into another collegiate in Saskatchewan, taken on by another teacher. On average, 75 or more students enrol in the class each year—which is about half the Grade 12 population of the entire school. The course is in high demand, which leads one to believe that student engagement is strong in the class, yet there is no discernable difference in class size or student composition from a traditional ELA class. Conversations with graduates have confirmed the potency of the program; past students consistently state that the class engaged them, challenged them, and changed their thinking about themselves, others, and the world around them. Students have consistently reported that ELAP makes them feel competent in their academics and daily life; that their experiences with the class are more significant and relevant, in that the course deals with ideas and skills that they see as being applicable to their everyday lives. Although an elective course, students still receive an ELA B30 credit when they complete the class. Essentially, students take ELAP instead of a traditional ELA B30 class. The course continues to evolve as a result of student input through conversations and suggestions and the teacher’s critical assessment and need for change. It continues to be tweaked and changed, and each group of students that comes through leaves their indelible marks—whether through their ideas, suggestions, creations, or conversations.

Motivation

The motivation for developing and teaching ELAP was twofold. Firstly, I developed the class for my students to foster learning engagement in new and exciting ways. The second motivation for teaching ELAP was a selfish one. I teach the class for my own engagement, and emotional and intellectual stimulation. I have always had passion for my disciplines—ELA and

History—and I do my best to engage students and get them questioning each other, themselves, and their world as much as I can, through discussion, video games, simulations, role-play, inquiry, and debate. Like many of my students, I have always felt limited by the traditional academic disciplines. They can become constrained when they are tied to curricular content and objectives and outcomes. I applaud the difference between disciplines and value their worth and contribution to a meaningful education. I understand their necessity for a meaningful education. I agree with Gardner and Mansilla (1994) that “while disciplines can blind or sway, they become, when used relevantly, our keenest lenses on the world” (p. 16-17). Yet, I still cannot help but feel limited when I am tasked with instructing within a specific discipline’s boundaries. I have always found myself meandering between disciplines, wandering from one to the next, borrowing and merging skills and abilities and ways of thinking and organizing thoughts based on my students’ immediate questions and needs, and my own thinking patterns and passions. And so, I created ELAP as a way to merge my own passions into something that I could get excited about every day. This is not to say that I am not excited in my other ELA and History classes, but I lack a certain amount of autonomy in those classes. In my other classes, I get to interpret the curriculum but never fully shape it. ELAP is different. It gives me the autonomy to use the fullness of my education and skillset as a professional educator. I feel that this autonomy increases my teaching and learning passion in ways not possible in my other classes and I strive to pass this passion on to my students.

This integrated approach to teaching ELA and Philosophy stands apart from traditional disciplines—although I recognize it is not a new idea, as there are other programs that combine other disciplines such as ELA and Social Studies in my own school division. ELAP is not bound by the limitations of any one discipline. This is one of the reasons why students respond so well to the course: the content, along with their ideas, opinions, conversations, and creations are better able to meander across disciplines, providing a less restricted freedom of thought that nurtures their learning, engagement, and autonomy. Moreover, and most significantly, the course appears to foster caring thinking (Lipman, 1995a; Lipman, 1995b, Lipman, 2007), which might result in more caring human beings, who work to transform themselves, others, and their surroundings (Noddings, 1995; Noddings, 2010; Noddings, 2013). At the same time, students can explore mathematical problems, scientific inquiries, literature, and philosophical argumentation all in the same classroom. There are no limits when it comes to philosophical thought, and ELA only

buffers this potency with the limitlessness of language. The two disciplines work hand-in-hand to provoke deep, meaningful reflection, thought, and conversations. Much like an art class allows students to experiment with sketching, painting, sculpture and the like, or a music class allows students to experiment with the blues, jazz, classical, and other musical styles, students in ELAP are only bound by the limits of their imaginations. ELAP's content and approach is different from a traditional ELA class and largely new to students. It keeps them wondering. It keeps them curious. It offers them a new experience in their schooling and education, which I think they find not only engaging, but refreshing and enlightening (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Development

ELAP largely developed from my own love of literature and ideas. I have always read widely, but I have developed a fondness for overtly philosophical literature. Fyodor Dostoyevsky always enthralled me more than Charles Dickens. Milan Kundera captured my attention more than Dan Brown. Italo Calvino absorbed my mind more than D. H. Lawrence. This is not a slight to these latter authors or their ideas—I still enjoy a vast array of different styles and stories—but Dostoyevsky, Kundera, and Calvino, and many others, led me to actual “hard” Philosophy. The ideas within their novels, short stories, and poetry turned me toward David Hume and Soren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre. This mingling of literature with Philosophy was the genesis of ELAP. However, I cannot pinpoint a single instance for its creation, because its existence is dependent on so many other people and variables beyond my control—from a colleague, to a family member, to the curriculum, to superintendents, to school administrators, and, ultimately, to students. I wish I could take all the credit for this course's creation, but the truth is that ELAP has been a tremendous collaboration; one I am thankful for.

Colleagues. In my first year as a teacher, I was lucky enough to meet a colleague—I'll call Thom—who planted the idea for ELAP in my mind. Thom had a passion for language and ideas. He loved literature. He loved Philosophy. He brought these passions to life day in and day out in his teaching, but he still believed that something was missing. Like many other thinkers and educators, Thom viewed education and schooling as being political and transformational (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1970/2011; Giroux, 1981; McLaren, 1998). He often talked about how traditional approaches to education and schooling limited the ways students thought and interacted with each other and their worlds. He taught an interdisciplinary program that merged the Saskatchewan ELA 30A and History 30 curriculums. This was the first time that I saw an

interdisciplinary approach in high school. It was also the first time I saw a teacher actively changing education and schooling for the better. He loved teaching his integrated program—and students responded with matched enthusiasm—but what he really envisioned creating was an ELA class integrated with Philosophy. Thom believed it would engage and challenge students equally, if not more than ELA and History. However, before he had the chance to make his idea a reality, he ended up leaving the school, leaving me with a pile of resources that included a rudimentary syllabus, ideas for potential curricular changes, textbooks, contacts, as well as an expectation that I would do something with it all. Thom had already done a lot of the heavy-lifting, even giving the course its name; all I had to do was carry on the vision he had started.

Family. At the same time, and by complete coincidence, my brother, Matt, was in the process of creating a Philosophy class in a private school overseas. It was not an interdisciplinary approach, rather a proper Philosophy class. An English and History teacher by trade, Matt also has a passion for language and ideas; teaching Philosophy was a natural evolution. His principal trusted him enough to pilot a Philosophy class with his Grade 11 and 12 students. Unlike many teachers, he was given the autonomy to write his own curriculum, and the chance to implement it, which is powerful (Ministry of Education, Finland, 2003; Sahlberg, 2010). Matt had the luxury and responsibility of setting his own vision and goals, using his professional judgement. Needless to say, the class was a success. Demand was high. The class filled each semester, to rave reviews from students and parents—parents who spent tens of thousands of dollars in tuition on their children’s education. In conversations with my brother, he told me about how his kids were responding to studying Philosophy. Matt said his students were engaged with his Philosophy class. He did not know why that was, but suspected it had something to do with students being ready and willing to directly tackle big ideas and questions that may have only been indirectly touched on in other classes. Matt, too, was convinced—and is still convinced—that Philosophy holds a key to transforming students’ learning, understanding, and thinking. Moreover, he had created a working Philosophy curriculum that he believed in. Lucky for me, he gave me his resources with the understanding and hope that I would do something with them.

Curriculum and administration. And so, the groundwork for ELAP was laid; all I had to do was continue building. I had the ideas. I had the resources. I had the curriculum. Now all I needed was permission. Saskatchewan’s Renewed ELA 30B curriculum "invites and challenges educators to think about education, schooling, and English language arts as it might be, rather

than the way they might have known it to be in the past” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p.7). This government sponsored invitation opened the door to conversations with administrators and superintendents about the possibility of offering the class. The curriculum explicitly gives educators permission to think about new and other ways of authentically engaging students in their learning. It gave me the permission to merge my passions with my practice. It also gave me an argument for ELAP as a reconceptualization of the curriculum.

Practically speaking, I reasoned that the class would fulfil ELA curricular outcomes. However, I was also able to sell the idea that the class would fulfill the curriculum’s vision in other ways. The curriculum goes on to ask the following questions:

How can schooling and English language arts be more purposeful, dynamic, fulfilling, and authentic? How can it help students become competent, confident users of the English language and, at the same time, become knowledgeable about themselves, their community, and the world as a whole in a deep and meaningful way? How can it help students find fulfillment, be socially responsible, and act in ways that will make their community and world better places? How can it help students become effective self-directed, self-regulated, strategic, and collaborative learners to meet the demands of personal, social, work, and global life in the 21st century? (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p.7)

ELAP provides meaningful and practical answers to each of these questions. I believe it embodies these ideals in a unique way. School administrators and superintendents agreed that the curriculum’s invitation and questions were all the permission that I needed. Of course, they also required a proposal, along with a working curriculum, resources, and a plan for implementation, which I already had. Thus, ELAP was born.

Students. According to students—from anecdotal conversations with past graduates outside this study—ELAP is a class that integrates their experiences and understanding differently by merging disciplines rather than exploring them in isolation; challenges and changes the dynamics of their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences; and builds critical and creative thinking skills. It is a class that meets them at their developmental level, and responds directly to their wants and needs and questions; engages them as it introduces them to new ideas, while holding their attention as they get re-acquainted with old ones. It is a class that transforms students’ awareness of other peoples’ perspectives, experiences, and ideas, making them more

empathetic people. My hopes are that these anecdotal examples from students can be supported with research in the form of students' actual lived experiences after having taken the class.

Philosophy invites students to explore their beliefs in new ways, asking them to reflect on what they actually believe about themselves, others, and the world around them. Students get excited when they are encouraged to be introspective, when they are asked to investigate their foundational ideas on their terms and with their peers. At the same time, ELA's strength is that it invites students to communicate these feelings and ideas, making them concrete. Students start to get a sense of their capabilities, purpose, and self. Together, Philosophy and ELA nurture critical and creative thinking, which enables students to develop their own autonomy and self-confidence. However, I believe this combination also fosters caring thinking, which involves empathy. Philosophy and ELA naturally complement each other, and the possibilities of students transforming their learning, understanding, and actions are exciting to think about.

From my observations and experiences with ELAP in the classroom, I have come to believe that the class positively affects students in a number of ways. As the teacher, because I created this program of study, I have been observantly aware of how material, ideas, students, and contexts are woven together. It is through the observations of these pieces that my questions began to surface and lead me to this research. I began to wonder what my students were really experiencing and what sort of values, dispositions, and emotions they were developing. I wondered if my observations of their conversations and actions aligned with what they were actually experiencing and the one way to receive a snapshot of their realities within ELAP course was to research this experience.

As a result of my experiences with this curriculum, the development and subsequent teaching of it, a desire to learn more about my students' experiences within this integrated learning opportunity kept prodding me to answer the question:

What are secondary students' experiences with engagement, autonomy, and empathy as a result of studying through an integrated English Language Art and Philosophy program?

This is the question I explored within this thesis research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter's purpose is to outline the curricular connections between ELA and Philosophy that result in ELAP. It then provides a context and theoretical basis for understanding the class' philosophical and educational foundations. The rationale for the study and its research objectives are also discussed. Finally, the main research question is presented.

Curriculum

ELAP achieves the same aims, goals, outcomes, and indicators of Saskatchewan's (2016) Renewed ELA 30B curriculum. The primary difference is that the content has been reinvented. Rather than focusing on traditional visual, multimedia, oral, and written texts and communications, the class focuses on an array of classical, contemporary, and Indigenous philosophical mediums. Essentially, the ELA 30 B curriculum already reads like a Philosophy curriculum. It presents students with "Big Questions" and "questions for deeper understanding," which are defined as, "overarching understandings that have enduring values beyond the classroom" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 9). The curriculum asks the questions: Who and what are we? What is our purpose for being? Are there universal ideals for which we all strive? How ought human beings to behave? What is the "good life"? What is "truth"? What is "justice"? (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 17-18). These questions are the foundations of all philosophical inquiry. Learning to interpret and respond to these questions is the root of all communication and literacies, which are the focus of ELA. ELA, oftentimes, takes an indirect approach to exploring these questions, through novels, short stories, poetry, plays, films, essays, oral communications, and visual literacies. On the other hand, Philosophy tackles each question directly, attempting to provide clear, logical answers. Both disciplines have the potential to independently address these questions and ideas, and offer meaningful responses. United together, students have the possibility to engage in even broader, more diverse conversations, reflections, responses, and understandings.

On top of these "Big Questions," the ELA 30 B curriculum lends itself to this type of interdisciplinary approach, because its themes also explore foundational philosophical ideas. Traditional ELA B30 courses are broken up into two overarching units: "The Search for Self" and "The Social Experience." The Search for Self is comprised of sub-units like the Sense of Self; Ideals; Joy and Inspiration; and, Doubt and Fear. Whereas, The Social Experience is made up of the sub-units: Dealing with Universal Issues; Ambition, Power, and the Common Good;

Social Criticism; and, Addressing the Issues (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 17-18).

Much like a regular ELA class, ELAP can address these themes, but in a different manner. Instead of the “Sense of Self” and its sub-themes, ELAP reimagines them using the philosophical terms: epistemology and existentialism. Epistemology examines human perception, sensation, the mind, and self; at the same time, existentialism examines the human condition, the meaning of life, and how passion and imagination fit into the human experience. Students explore their sense of self through examining how they know what they know, and how others do the same. Through studying existentialism, students are also provoked to tackle their joys, inspirations, doubts, and fears as they delve into the nature of human existence.

ELAP does the same with “The Social Experience” and its sub-themes, by reimagining them as metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. Students investigate their universe and its limits, by directly focusing on varying moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic perspectives on the nature of truth, goodness, beauty, and ultimate reality. Finally, ELAP adds its own unique theme: Logic and Argumentation, where students are exposed to inductive and deductive reasoning, and formal logic that includes valid and invalid arguments and an examination of logical fallacies. The difference between the themes in the ELA 30B and ELAP curriculums is largely semantic and they share the same spirit and intent, as they both attempt to explore what it means to be a human being—living and communicating with others—in the context of the larger world.

ELAP students explore themes in basically the same ways they would in a traditional ELA classroom—through visual, multimedia, oral, and written texts and communications. Existing curricular bibliographies already include philosophical works by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Descartes, Montaigne, Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Thoreau, Pascal, Bacon, and Voltaire, only to name a few (SaskEd, 1999). So, there is very little need to change content requirements. Many of these resources have also been reinterpreted through a range of mediums, from text to film to oral tradition.

Students are also tasked with fulfilling ELA curricular outcomes—by engaging in group work, debates, essays, letter-writing, creative writing, critiques, and multimedia presentations. Ultimately, the ELA 30B curriculum encourages outcomes that increase student capacity to “construct knowledge to make sense of the world around them,” so they can, “develop understanding by building on what is already known,” in order to, “make sense of information,

experiences, and ideas through thinking contextually, critically, and creatively” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013). I believe ELA can achieve these lofty goals on its own. However, in my experience—when ELA and Philosophy are integrated—students engage with literature, ideas, and discussions in equally sophisticated ways. ELAP encourages students to construct knowledge and develop questions about themselves, others, and the world in ways that are not better, but different from my regular ELA classes.

Context of ELAP

ELAP is a reimagining of what an English Language Arts (ELA) class can be. It is an interdisciplinary course that uses literature and composition to explore philosophical concepts, and it has the potential to engage students and encourage their curiosity by expanding their perceptions and experiences. Students work to comprehend and respond to their world by viewing, listening, and reading a wide range of texts (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6). However, the nature of these texts is overtly philosophical (i.e., Plato’s *Republic*, Descartes’ *Meditations*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*). Students also compose, create, and use other forms of representation to develop their language skills (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6). But in ELAP, they are encouraged to respond philosophically, as they explore logic, argumentation, and fallacious reasoning. Students are also encouraged to assess and reflect on “how language works” and how to make “appropriate language choices” so they can “learn the power of language in their own lives, in their communities, and in the world” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6). This is not to say that a traditional ELA classroom cannot do some or all of these things, rather that ELAP approaches them differently. In the ELAP classroom, ELA and Philosophy work in tandem to encourage students to discover, shape, and share their own ideas, which I believe nurtures authentic, autonomous learners. Along with learning about themselves, students also learn about others’ values, beliefs, and perspectives. It is this relationship and understanding of the “other” that I am deeply interested as I believe it lays the foundations for building empathy, and transforming students’ understanding of the self, others, and the world. I became interested in exploring students’ experiences in the ELAP classroom, and the impact it has on their engagement, autonomy, and empathy.

Much of the existing research and theory surrounding teaching Philosophy in school—on its own or integrated with others—focuses on the discipline’s ability to cultivate students’ capacities for critical thinking (Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Davis, 2013; Gasee, 1998; Lipman, 2007;

Norris, 2015; Schleifer, et al., 2003; Vasieleghem & Kennedy, 2011; UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2011). There is little doubt that teaching critical thinking is a focus and distinct strength of Philosophy. According to Davis (2013), “Philosophy teaches students to think rigorously and systematically about important ideas and concepts in a way that is often not part of the traditional high school curriculum” (p. 218). However, in Philosophy, it is not enough for a student to simply offer up and explain their opinions regarding themselves, others, and the world around them. That is just the start of their journey through thinking about what they hold dearest. Ultimately, they need to justify these opinions, much like in their other Humanities classes. By using logic—inductive and deductive reasoning—they are required to construct rational arguments to validate their claims. This philosophical process encourages students to think in divergent and creative ways. It gets them to think in ways they might never have thought before. In short, Philosophy offers these students the ability to engage themselves, others, and the world around them with a rational mind: with a critical mind. Yet, as important as this reality is, I am more interested in the other human capacities of my students—engagement, autonomy, and empathy—that Philosophy might cultivate, especially when integrated with ELA.

It is through the observations of these pieces that my questions began to surface and led me to this research. I began to wonder what my students were really experiencing and what sort of values, emotions, cares, and attitudes they were developing. I wondered if my observations of their conversations and actions aligned with what they were actually experiencing and the one way to receive a snapshot of their realities within ELAP course was to research this experience. The main questions that I began to ponder considered the students’ development in the areas of autonomy, empathy, and engagement.

This integrated experience with ELA and Philosophy can encourage students’ engagement. It coincides with their psychological, emotional, and academic development. Philosophy encourages students to think explore and reflect on their values, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences at a time during their development and maturation when these types of profound existential questions are starting to naturally appear (Davis, 2013; Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). Experientially, students respond to this interdisciplinary approach differently from a traditional ELA class. Time and again, students commented that the class was different, in a way that spoke to them when they felt ready. It is a class that integrates their experiences and understanding differently by merging disciplines rather than exploring them in isolation (FNBE, 2015; Hursh,

Haas, & Moore, 1983; Kain, 1993; Vars, 1991). Students get excited when they are encouraged to be introspective, when they are asked to investigate the foundations of their ideas on their terms and with their peers. Their engagement harkens back to Dewey (1938/1997) and Whitehead's (1967) beliefs that students' learning needs to be centered on authentic learning experiences that are both intellectually and emotionally absorbing, while at the same time being educative. ELA and Philosophy work in tandem to achieve student engagement.

ELA invites students to communicate the feelings and ideas that result from exploring philosophical questions, helping to make them concrete. Through articulating their responses to these "big questions"—in writing, through speaking, and other mediums—students start to get a better sense of their capabilities, purpose, and, ultimately, their sense of self. When ELA and Philosophy are integrated, they encourage critical thinking, which works to help students develop a sense of autonomy (Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Davis, 2013; Lipman, 2007; Nussbaum, 1990; Nussbaum, 1997; Vasieleghem & Kennedy, 2011; UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2011). They start to see that they can figure things out on their own, using their minds and that difficult questions can be solved by approaching them in divergent ways.

Autonomy can loosely be defined as "both the right and the capacity to conceive personal goals in the light of the possibilities the world offers and the necessary constraints it imposes" (Wringe, 1995, p. 49). In the ELAP classroom, students are given the chance to explore who they are, and their place and context with the people around them and within the world. They are given the chance to take control of what they believe, by exposing these beliefs to rigorous testing and examination. In the end, I believe students leave this course with a better understanding of themselves and their capabilities; which, in turn, gives them a better opportunity to make choices on their own, hopefully resulting in more authentic actions. My goal in this particular study was to explore whether ELAP nurtures student autonomy.

But perhaps the most important consequence of students' experiences with ELAP might be the development of their capacities for empathy. With neuroscience's discovery of "mirror neurons" in the human brain, which function to share emotion when an individual is exposed to other's emotions, human beings' capacity for empathy has had an increased focus on determining their social nature, including their motivations for cooperation, communication, and understanding the other (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Gallese, 2001; Iacoboni, 2009; Kaplan & Iacoboni, 2006). Theoretical constructs of whether or not empathy can be taught or enhanced

are no longer simply in the realm of the humanities and social sciences; they are being supported in the hard sciences. Empathy is powerful; it is transformational; it is an imaginative act; it involves stepping into the shoes of another person and attempting to understand their feelings and perspectives; and, empathy also requires action (Krznaric, 2015). As individual disciplines, both ELA and Philosophy have the capacity to encourage empathy, but when they are combined they have the possibility of offering a richer experience for students.

Foundationally, ELA and Philosophy operate using what Jerome Bruner (1986) called “narrative” and “paradigmatic” modes of thinking (p. 11-13). According to Bruner, “A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as a means for convincing another. Yet what they convince *of* is fundamentally different: arguments convince of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness” (p.11). Bruner viewed all thinking as being connected to either storytelling or reasoning—fantasy and fiction, logic and fact. ELA and Philosophy deal with both, but arguably in different ways.

Bruner (1987) believed that narrative thinking—humans’ attempts to name their world and experiences—was an attempt to imitate life, stating “Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative” (p. 692). Bruner (1991) asserted that human beings, “organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative-stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on...Narratives, then, are a version of reality” (p. 4). Language is one of the dominant ways human beings define themselves, others, and their world. And human beings desire to explain their world and experiences is an attempt to attain some sense of meaning from life (Bruner, 1991). These narratives, Bruner argued, organize “the structure of human experience” (p. 21). Not only do human beings construct their understanding of reality using narrative thinking, but they then can also create new ideas and social organizations and understandings by adding to, deleting from, and changing existing narratives. ELA and Philosophy classrooms are centered around texts as narrative, and students read and write in order to interpret and make sense of ideas, themselves, others, and the world around them. The ELA classroom also gives students the tools—dispositions, skills, and abilities—to develop more profound ways to construct, explore, and reconstruct diverse narratives.

On the other hand, paradigmatic thinking is defined by being sequential, systematic, and analytical. Bruner (1986) stated, “The paradigmatic mode leads to good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis” (p. 13).

Bruner (2004) went on to clarify paradigmatic thinking, arguing that, “Good thought is right reason, and its efficacy is measured against the laws of logic or induction” (p. 691). Paradigmatic thinking is logic in action. It makes up the bulk of thinking that takes place in a Philosophy classroom. It also makes up a large portion of what goes on in an ELA classroom as students engage in analyzing, organizing, and arguing their ideas and experiences so they can be justified in their own minds, and the minds of others.

ELA and Philosophy both involve narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking. In ELA students read stories and write poetry, while also engaging in creating arguments for essays; in Philosophy, students look for a rational basis for beliefs and experiences, and then create narratives to clarify their reasoning—they always end up communicating their thoughts and perspectives through writing, speaking, or representing. Students meander to and from narrative and paradigmatic thinking in both disciplines, although each discipline—just like each individual—has a tendency to lean towards one more than the other. Individual students operate between both poles, too, although they may also have a propensity to favour one mode of thinking over the other. In this case, ELA leans more toward narrative thinking as it traditionally focuses on storytelling, while Philosophy leans more toward the paradigmatic mode as it focuses on systematic thought. When combined—as in the ELAP program—these disciplines complement each other, merging narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking to greater effect.

Bruner discussed narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking, but did not overtly discuss how human emotion or the affective domain related to them. Certainly, Bruner’s ideas leave room for emotions in narrative and paradigmatic thinking, as human emotions intertwine and apply to both modes. Human beings can think and know through stories, and through logic and reason, and these narratives and conclusions can exist and be complemented, augmented, and understood alongside feelings and emotions. Neither mode is mutually exclusive. Bruner’s notions of narrative thinking and paradigmatic thinking are instructive when thinking about ELAP as an interdisciplinary class, but emotion also plays a role.

While Bruner said a lot about how human beings construct knowledge, he was relatively quiet on how they go on to value those interpretations and knowledge once they have been constructed—regardless of whether they were attained through narrative and/or paradigmatic modes of thought. Bruner’s theory dealt with how humans come to know what they know about the world, rather than how they come to care about and/or value themselves, people, others, and

ideas. This silence on value can, most likely, be attributed to Bruner's focus on human beings' cognitive functions, which are traditionally separated from the affective domain—this is not to say that he did not speak about the affective domain, rather that his narrative and paradigmatic theory did not overtly address the issue or possible connection. However, Bruner's epistemology is useful when considering conceptions of students' capacities for higher-order thinking in connection to their emotions. Matthew Lipman's (1995a, 1995b, 2007) ideas shine light on an emotional component to thinking that is not in opposition to Bruner's theory of narrative and paradigmatic modes, but complementary to it.

ELAP also involves what Lipman (2007) called "caring thinking." In short, caring thinking is "thinking that values value" (Lipman, 1995a, p 6). It involves students not only imagining ideas or analyzing perspectives, but also valuing these ideas and perspectives. Caring thinking complements narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking so that students do not just think in the abstract; instead they begin to value their thinking, which is a step towards caring for self, and, perhaps, caring for others.

According to Lipman (1995a), "There is such a thing as *caring thinking*, and it is the third prerequisite to higher-order thinking"—the other two prerequisites being creative and critical thinking (p. 1). Lipman (2007) seems to have agreed with Bruner that human beings operate using narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking, although Lipman defined them differently; he connected narrative modes of thinking more to creative thinking and paradigmatic modes more to critical thinking. This is not to say that narrative thinking is creative thinking or that paradigmatic thinking is critical thinking, rather that they have similar structures and functions. This is also not to say that paradigmatic thinking cannot be creative or that narrative thinking cannot be critical. In fact, Lipman (2007) cautioned viewing each mode of thinking on its own, stating, "There is more to be learned about each dimension of thinking by considering in a relationship with the others than by thinking about it in isolation" (p. 253). Consequently, much like Bruner (1991) saw narrative thinking as a way to organize meaning and structure to human experience, Lipman (1995a; 2007) saw creative thinking as being concerned with seeking meaning, along with its dependence on qualitative considerations. Lipman also saw critical thinking as concerned with seeking truth—which is similar to Bruner's (1986; 2004) notions of paradigmatic thinking being connected to theory, logic, argumentation, analysis, and reason. Lipman, however, also added caring thinking to the mix, which concerns itself with seeking

value. He believed that all three modes of higher-order thinking came together to make up “three dimensions, like length, breadth, and depth” of human thought (p. 65). According to Davey (2005), Lipman’s notion of caring thinking intertwines—if not envelops—with all aspects of critical and creative thinking (See Appendix D).

Lipman (1995a) acknowledged that the notion of caring thinking ran counter to existing frameworks regarding the cognitive and affective domains, although he was not trying to challenge this division. He did not argue that caring thinking was a “causal condition of thinking” but—like Bruner with his narrative and paradigmatic modes—a “mode or dimension or aspect of thinking itself” (p. 8). Lipman’s theory of caring thinking concerned itself with higher-order thinking. He examined how higher-order thinking had been organized throughout history by the Greeks with their “three regulative ideals: the True, the Beautiful and the Good”; by Aristotle with his divisions into “the theoretical sciences, the productive sciences, and the practical sciences”; by Immanuel Kant and his notions of “pure reason, practical reason, and judgment”; and, with more recent psychological theories, most notably by Harold Bloom and his compatriots, that divided higher-order thinking into analytic, synthetic, and evaluative modes (Lipman, 1995a, p. 6-7). In the end, Lipman postulated that these Trinitarian approaches to thinking shared a common desire to explain how human beings constructed truth, meaning, and value: value being connected to caring.

Lipman (1995a; 1995b) believed that just as human beings could learn to think more historically, musically, dramatically, critically, and creatively, that they could also learn to think more valuationally: that is, they could learn to care for and value the self, others, ideas, and the world appropriately. Rather than students learning to think about values, they could learn to think in values. A student first learns to think about Biology by studying terminology, slowly learning to think in biological terms, or scientifically like a biologist would; likewise, a student learns to think about values before learning to think in values, or valuationally. Lipman stressed that “valuation” should not be confused with “evaluation,” as valuation does not involve deliberate appraisal or assessment of evaluation, rather less critical processes like prizing and esteeming. It should be noted that this distinction does not make thinking in values any less intentional.

Lipman (1995a) stated:

Thinking in values is always "intentional" in the phenomenological understanding of that term, in the sense that one who values (or thinks valuationally) is always directing his or

her thinking at something. Thus, thinking that values rational beings is *respectful* thinking. Thinking that values what is beautiful is *appreciative* thinking. Thinking that values what is virtuous is *admiring* thinking. If it values what is sentient, it is *considerate* thinking. If it values what needs to be sustained, it is *cherishing* thinking. If it values what suffers, it is *compassionate* thinking. If it values the fate of the world and its inhabitants, it is *concerned* thinking. In general, we can say that *thinking that values value* is *caring thinking*. (Lipman, 1995b, p. 6)

It is this notion of “thinking that values value” that ELAP attends to, and that completes the connection between critical, creative, and caring thinking. ELAP attempts to focus students’ attention on seeking truth (critical thinking), seeking meaning (creative thinking), and seeking value (caring thinking). While the importance of critical and creative thinking cannot be stressed enough, the importance of caring thinking also deserves attention.

Lipman (2007) separated caring thinking into five components: appreciative, affective, active, normative, and empathic thinking. Appreciative thinking occurs when students pay attention to something that they think matters, like a task they engage in because they recognize its inherent importance. Affective thinking occurs when a student’s own emotions turn into judgements; for example, when students are disgusted by acts of oppression that they read about or see. Active thinking occurs when a student shows that they care for something other than themselves. Normative thinking occurs when students can identify an ideal and then strive for it; for instance, students might see an ideal character in literature, who they in turn desire to be like because they feel a sense of duty towards the ideal that character embodies. And, finally, empathic thinking occurs when students step out of their own feelings and perspectives in order to imagine and understand another’s experiences.

Along with critical and creative thinking, each component of caring thinking can probably be impacted and attended to in the ELAP classroom. In the ELAP classroom, students learn to value their beliefs; learn to value their emotions; learn to value the world outside themselves; learn to value their and others’ ideals; and, learn to value the experiences and feelings of others. While each component of caring thinking is worthy of further study, caring thinking’s connection to empathic thinking is intriguing, because it is perhaps the most transformational. As Krznaric (2015) stated, “Empathy education is what we need to activate young people to care about issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and global inequality.

It is foundational for creating a ‘common interest’ frame of thinking” (p. 18-19). Appreciative, affective, active, and normative modes of thinking lead to beneficial types of valuation, but only empathy involves the “I” trying to understand the “other”, which can lead to changes in thinking, imagining, feeling, and, potentially, acting.

When students enter the ELAP classroom they are asked to imagine, create, and tell their own stories, as well as experience the stories of others. It is this imaginative element that links ELA with empathy; students learn to imagine not only their own stories, but others’ stories and possibly step into their shoes. At the same time, in the ELAP classroom, students are also asked to systematically examine, contemplate, and argue their most closely held values, beliefs, and perspectives. Much like with Bruner’s (1986) notion of paradigmatic thinking, it is this focus on reasoning that encourages students to weigh and evaluate competing perspectives (Krznaric, 2015). By telling stories about human experiences, while building arguments to justify beliefs, students engage in narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking, and get closer to empathy. Caring thinking links these experiences and arguments so they take on personal value for individual students. Narrative and paradigmatic modes of thinking focus on human beings’ capacity for abstract thought; whereas, caring thinking focuses on human beings’ capacity to value and feel. It is this focus on feeling that leads students to be able to “feel with others” and take action to alleviate hurt feelings, pain, and suffering (Noddings, 2010). It is of value to learn if the ELA Philosophy combination engages students in creative, critical, and caring thinking; thereby, leading students to a greater sense of empathy.

Rationale for Study

The vast majority of research into integrated programs and Philosophy currently focuses on increasing educational standards and outcomes, and encouraging critical thinking (Bleazby, 2011; Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Davis, 2013; Jopling, 2002; Lipman, 2007; Perkinson, 1976; Vasieleghem & Kennedy, 2011; UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2011). As such, I looked into other areas that Philosophy might enhance—on its own and when it is integrated with ELA. There was ample research on student autonomy, engagement, and empathy in educational circles, along with numerous studies into the value of interdisciplinary programs. But there was limited research looking into all of these elements in combination with ELA and Philosophy. My research, thus, focused on students’ perceptions and experiences with engagement, autonomy, and empathy in an interdisciplinary Philosophy and ELA program. My hope was that this study

would show that the curriculum could be used to transform not only the content and learning that students' experience, but that it could also work to transform them into more concerned, confident, capable, and caring people.

Limitations and Positionality

As the developer and teacher of ELAP, my added role as researcher was complex. In order to position myself, I acknowledge the potential biases in my multiple roles, especially my "insider role" (Chavez, 2008). It would be misleading to state that I—as developer and teacher—did not want ELAP to succeed or my students to enjoy their experiences in the class. However, as a researcher, I also wanted to understand the extent to which ELAP affected students with regards to engagement, autonomy, and empathy. I was open to the fact that ELAP might not achieve the outcomes that this study set out to examine. This binary between being invested in the course and being invested in the research was complicated, but I do not think that it unduly influenced the nature of the research or the participants' responses concerning their experiences.

Merriam (1998) stated that researchers needed to be "responsive to the context" of their research so that "what is known about the situation can be expanded" (p. 7). As the developer and teacher of ELAP, I believe that I was positioned well to examine the course and its outcomes, because I understood its complexities; I knew the curriculum at a theoretical level and I knew how it worked in practice. Certainly, this study is limited by my own perspectives, to the detriment of others, through potentially "selective reporting" or "difficulty with recognizing patterns due to familiarity with community" or "bias in selecting participants" (Chavez, 2008). Nonetheless, Chavez (2008) stated that this "insider status" provided me with "a nuanced perspective for observation, interpretation and representation" (p. 479). Understanding the nuances of ELAP, and of how students had responded to the class in the past, gave me a position that an outsider could probably never hold. Moreover, MacLean and Poole (2010) agreed that the possible benefits of a researcher investigating former students was inherently valuable and outweighed the potential risks.

Throughout this study's chapters, I refer to my positionality as developer, teacher, and researcher in order to demonstrate limitations and inherent biases. In the end, I think that the student-participants' voices overcome many of the limitations of this study. They were free to say what they wanted about their experiences with ELAP. They were free to comment on the

good, the bad, and everything in between. As such, I have attempted to let their words explain and speak to their experiences in the class as much as possible.

Research Objectives

This study took place in an urban secondary school located in the Canadian prairies. I had no desire to quantify students' experiences; instead, I wanted to evoke their experiences—through their stories, feelings, and observations after having taken this interdisciplinary class. As Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) stated, “Qualitative methodologies embrace the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (p. 12). Qualitative methods enable the researcher to best discover, explore, and share students' perceptions and experiences with an integrated ELA and Philosophy curriculum (Patton, 1999; Van Manen, 1989; Van Manen, 2002; Van Manen, 2007). The study involved semi-structured interviews with students who had graduated the program (Kvale, 2006). This study was important because it aimed at discovering students' perceptions and experiences of a curriculum and course that integrated ELA and Philosophy. I wanted to see if my own observations were accurate—if they measured up to my reality. I believed that this curriculum was transformational for students, but that was only my belief. It was not substantiated by anything other than my own feelings and perceptions. And even if these feelings and perceptions were based on experience, they were only based on the experiences of a single person, which, although valuable, was not very convincing. I hoped to see whether students felt the same way. This was why I wanted to research whether students' experiences showed that ELAP engaged them academically and emotionally, whether it nurtured their autonomy, and whether it cultivated their empathy.

Main Research Question

What are the outcomes of secondary students' experiences with engagement, autonomy, and empathy as a result of studying through an integrated English Language Art and Philosophy program?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review begins by defining and examining the potency of interdisciplinary and integrated programming in secondary schools, along with the research and rationale for combining subject areas such as ELA and Philosophy. Secondly, an examination of traditional arguments for incorporating Philosophy in education systems and schooling will also be included, which outlines research demonstrating how Philosophy promotes critical thinking, along with increased student autonomy. These concepts have a substantial body of research to support the premise that Philosophy should be included in the curriculum—whether as an individual discipline or as part of an integrated program. The research surrounding Philosophy and how it stimulates increased student engagement will be discussed. Finally, research that shows connections between Philosophy and empathy concludes the review.

ELA can foster autonomy, engagement and empathy (Benson, 2013; Freire, 1970/2011; Manitoba Education, 2015; Trebbi, 2008). ELA nurtures engagement in secondary students' education and schooling (Alsup, et al., 2006; Applebee, 2002; Baines & Stanley, 2003; Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Shernoff, et al., 2003). At the same time, ELA also cultivates empathy (Cress & Holm, 1998; Hammond & Kim, 2014; Jamieson, 2015; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). Prairie curriculums have been, and still are, centered around more traditional subjects and disciplines like ELA, Math, History, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry, which all provide learning opportunities for students (Manitoba Education, 2015; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2016). While ELA works well its own, its integration with Philosophy offers promise.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum

ELAP is an interdisciplinary approach to teaching ELA and Philosophy that makes connections in new and exciting ways. Interdisciplinary curriculum is not a new pedagogical concept, as it has existed in educational theories and in public education and schooling since the turn of the 20th century (Dewey, 1938/1997; Whitehead, 1967). In fact, modern ELA and Social Studies curriculums are examples of variations of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate several separate subjects—ELA merges composition, and literature, while Social Studies does the same with history and other social sciences (Ellis & Fouts, 2001). To begin, it is necessary to define what is meant by an interdisciplinary curriculum, as integrated programs can be complicated and have a variety of terminology (Vars, 1996). According to much of the research,

interdisciplinary curriculum is often used synonymously with integrated curriculum, because it attempts to integrate knowledge across diverse fields. However, the term actually stems from the integrated approach (Jacobs, 1989). Integrated curriculum looks to make connections across disciplines, to real life, to skills, and to knowledge, and it can be broken down into numerous categories, such as multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches.

Multidisciplinary approaches—also known as intradisciplinary or fusion—use a multiplicity of disciplines to organize curriculum around larger themes—however, the disciplines that are merged together cannot always be individually recognized. On the other hand, interdisciplinary programs organize curriculum using common learnings—skills, concepts, and knowledge—that are shared between disciplines; furthermore, in an interdisciplinary program, disciplines are recognizable. Transdisciplinary programs, alternatively, refer to curriculum that is organized around students’ experiences (Drake & Burns, 2004; Vars, 1991; Wiggins, 2001). ELAP is, therefore, an interdisciplinary program, as it merges skills, abilities, and ways of knowing from ELA with Philosophy, yet both disciplines can still be clearly identified.

The significance of interdisciplinary approaches is how they improve students’ educational experiences, allowing them to meander within and across disciplines, making connections that would otherwise not be possible. Dewey (1938/1997) placed importance on interdisciplinary learning, theorizing that all realms of study—disciplines such as arithmetic, history, and geography—should be derived from students’ ordinary life experience. This notion that students’ experiences need to drive their education, rather than the prearranged disciplines was also promoted by other progressive thinkers of the early 20th century, like Jean Piaget and William Perry (Ellis & Fouts, 2001; Hursh, Haas, & Moore, 1983). Dewey (1938/1997) stated that educators needed to select a wide range of materials and provide a diversity of experiences for their students, rather than falling back on the subject-matter taught in traditional schools. This is not to say that Dewey did not value the disciplines, rather that he placed more value on the connections that could possibly be made between disciplines by the student. According to Dewey, traditional subject matter was found wanting because it was largely chosen by adults rather than students, and the “material to be learned was settled upon outside the present life-experience of the learner” (p.73). Although Dewey’s educational Philosophy would most likely follow a transdisciplinary approach—organized around students’ experience—he still advocated

for the integration of subject-matter and disciplines, rather than teaching them in isolation. Moreover, Dewey railed against curriculum that limited students' curiosity by forcing them to stay within tightly controlled and prescribed boundaries, stating, "Improvisation that takes advantage of special occasions prevents teaching and learning from being stereotyped and dead" (p. 78). A student's thoughts are limitless. Dewey wanted a student's curriculum to be the same.

At the same time, Whitehead's *Aims of Education* (1967) also championed an interdisciplinary approach. Whitehead outlined his Philosophy of education whereby—in the same vein as Dewey—learning stems from students' life experiences, as students are encouraged to play with ideas across disciplines. Failing to do so, according to Whitehead, would lead to "inert ideas," which are, "ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (p. 1). Whitehead went on to say that teaching a large number of subjects—or disciplines—to students could possibly lead to the "passive reception of disconnected ideas, not illumined with any spark of vitality" (p. 2). Instead, he suggested letting students explore ideas in "every possible combination" (p. 2), which he believed needed to happen through an interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, he believed that the artificial divisions between disciplines blunted education and schooling. Whitehead stated, "The solution which I am urging, is to eradicate the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum" (p. 6). Whitehead was a progressive who was not interested in the positivist and behavioural approaches of education that had come to dominate the first half of the 20th century (Bobbitt, 1918; Spencer, 1884; Thorndike, 1904; Tyler, 1949/2013). He viewed them as potentially damaging to a student's education, going as far as saying, "no absolutely rigid curriculum, not modified by its own staff, should be permissible" (p. 14), and that modern education's focus of teaching multiple subjects and subject knowledge was an "educational failure" (p. 29). Like Dewey before him, Whitehead was a pioneer and advocate for interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum.

There also exists a body of criticism concerning the interdisciplinary curriculum. Those, like Gardner and Boix-Mansilla (1994) and Phenix (1964), were more skeptical of the potency of interdisciplinary programs in education and schooling. Some believed "interdisciplinary" is nothing but a buzzword (Sowell, 1995). According to Gardner and Boix-Mansilla (1994), the disciplines "constitute the most sophisticated ways yet developed for thinking about and investigating issues that have long fascinated and perplexed thoughtful individuals" (p. 16). Yet,

even antagonists to interdisciplinary programs acknowledged that disciplines “can blind or sway”; they acknowledged that interdisciplinary work is, “indeed vital and impressive” when it is done successfully (p. 16-17). This does not mean that they suggested integrating all education and schooling, as they placed an immense significance upon individual disciplines in examining the world.

Gardner and Boix-Mansilla viewed interdisciplinary work in schools as actually being closer to “predisciplinary” work. Others concur, calling interdisciplinary work “nondisciplinary” because it ignores the borders set up between disciplines (Sowell, 1995). Academic disciplines require a certain amount of mastery, and many do not believe that students necessarily have the proper foundations in order to meaningfully think and question across disciplines. They thought students required time to develop the proper dispositions and ways of thinking through mastering disciplines before connections between disciplines could be made (Burton, 2001). Phenix (1964) echoed this claim stating:

The difficulty with cross-disciplinary studies is that they offer a temptation to shallow, non-disciplined thinking because of the mixture of methods and concepts involved. They require more knowledge and skill, greater care, and better mastery of materials than do studies within a particular discipline, where the lines of productive thought may be kept more directly and continually in view. (p. 18)

Phenix (1964) asserted that interdisciplinary approaches could pose significant problems in educational systems, but he still admitted that, “It is possible to use knowledge from disciplines in connection with studies that cut across several disciplines” (p. 18). At the same time, Gardner and Boix-Mansilla (1994)—skeptics as they were—acknowledged that interdisciplinary work enabled the possibility of students exploring their world and experiences in new ways.

Interdisciplinary approaches definitely have legitimate room for criticism, as they are not the perfect answer to education and schooling, but even many critics seem to see their potential and value when organized successfully.

Interdisciplinary programs also yield compelling results. All criticisms aside, interest in interdisciplinary approaches is growing because they are valuable: they are enhancing and improving education and schooling in a very real way (Kain, 1993; Vars, 1991). According to Vars (1991), students in interdisciplinary programs perform as well or better on standardized tests than students in traditional disciplines. Vars (1996) also stated, “Studies conducted over

more than 60 years point to the same general conclusion: Almost without exception, students in any type of combined curriculum do as well as, and often better than, students in a conventional departmentalized program” (p. 181). At the same time, Ellis and Fouts (2001) completed an overview of the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches, concluding “that knowledge is learned more quickly and remembered longer when constructed in a meaningful context in which connections among ideas are made” (p. 23). They also went on to claim that interdisciplinary approaches improve higher-level thinking skills. While Burton (2001), saw interdisciplinary programming as finding authentic connections between ideas, perspectives, and understandings that make a real difference in students’ learning and their experiences in schools. Currently, Finland—ranking among the top education systems in the world—is reforming its education system around broad interdisciplinary topics to redesign education for the 21st century (FNBE, 2015). Finland has been a leader in international education for many years, and sees the value in merging disciplines rather than continuing to have students focus on them in isolation. This does not mean that Finland will be successful in its efforts, or that interdisciplinary programs should make up the bulk of education and schooling, but it does add weight to the worthiness of adopting interdisciplinary curriculum at some level, and it will be interesting to see Finland’s results.

Noddings (1994; 1995) agreed that interdisciplinary programs are the most beneficial when they are aimed at the central questions of life; she advocated connecting students and the disciplines to lofty existential questions, which is what ELAP does. Philosophy is a discipline that deals directly with these types of connections and questions. Moreover, Noddings thought that philosophical questions and themes naturally fit with many disciplines across the curriculum, including ELA. Nussbaum (1990; 1997) also put forth the idea that Philosophy and literature should be used to complement each other in order to get a better understanding of the human condition. Davis (2013) agreed that ELA is a natural fit with Philosophy because, “English classes for the most part focus on closely reading and analyzing literary texts; yet, writing literary criticism involves critical thinking and understanding how to make arguments, with which Philosophy can assist” (p. 228). Ellis and Fouts (2001) also shared this notion that disciplines in the humanities—like Philosophy—can advantageously be combined with ELA.

Noddings (2013) article, *Curriculum for the 21st century*, stated that the curriculum of the future should be organized around existential themes and broad social questions. Noddings

claimed that, “Of course, we would like our students to appreciate the power and beauty of great writing, but we would also like them to see literature as a contribution to their search for meaning in their own lives” (p. 402). She concluded that disciplines need to be, “stretched from within,” and that we need to, “push back the boundaries between disciplines and ask how each of the expanded subjects can be designed to promote new aims for the 21st century” (p. 405).

The Value of Philosophy

It is essential to demonstrate the potency of Philosophy in secondary education and schooling. Philosophy can transform students’ learning, understanding, and experiences in secondary schools. Philosophy is taught worldwide in secondary schools—both public and private. It exists on almost every continent, from Argentina to Bangladesh to Costa Rica to Denmark to Nigeria. In Canada, it is taught in Quebec and Ontario. However, even though Philosophy is valued the world over, it is not formally part of the curriculum in Saskatchewan (Jopling, 2002; UNESCO, 2007). Currently, in Saskatchewan, the closest thing to Philosophy in schools is Matthew Lipman’s (2007) Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, which was taught in a handful of elementary schools in Saskatoon from 2013-2014 (DeLathouwer, 2014); or, the International Baccalaureate (2016) program’s Theory of Knowledge (TOK) class, which teaches students about epistemology. Integrating Philosophy with ELA, as ELAP, offers the real possibility of Philosophy being offered in Saskatchewan secondary schools in a meaningful way.

Critical Thinking. Saskatchewan’s ELA B 30 curriculum emphasizes teaching critical thinking (Ministry, 2013). The research is clear: alongside ELA, Philosophy also improves students’ abilities to think critically (Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Davis, 2013; Gasee, 1998; Jopling, 2002; Lipman, 2007; Norris, 2015; Perkinson, 1976; Schleifer, et al., 2003; Vasieleghem & Kennedy, 2011; UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2011). The United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) published a report outlining the importance of Philosophy in “training the critical mind” (p. 71) stressing that when students are exposed to Philosophy, their capacities for critical and creative thinking increase (UNESCO, 2011). In the end, UNESCO concluded, “To question the teaching of Philosophy is ultimately to cast doubt on the relevance of the free and rational exercise of judgment in our schools” (p. 41). Critical thinking is already valued as one of the “Cross-curricular competencies” in Saskatchewan’s K-12 curriculum (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013). The research shows Philosophy teaches

critical thinking—and while ELA and other humanities classes can also do the same—perhaps it is time to examine Philosophy’s link with critical thinking in more detail.

Lipman (2007), founder of the P4C movement, argued that Philosophy was one of the best ways to enhance students’ critical thinking abilities.¹ In the tradition of Dewey, Lipman believed that Philosophy imparted the necessary “reflective thinking that was the true harbinger of critical thinking” (p. 35). Lipman defined critical thinking as “thinking that facilitates judgment because it relies on criteria, is self-correcting and is sensitive to context” (p. 212). Lipman stated that Philosophy built and enhanced students’ critical thinking because it encouraged students to consider ideas based on evidence. Philosophy focuses students on set standards of logic—based on inductive and deductive reasoning and logical argumentation—which he believed were necessary foundations for critical thinking. Moreover, Philosophy asks students to reflect on the ideas they come in contact with, rather than accepting them at face value. In Philosophy, students are taught to reconsider ideas if they cannot be proven or explained. In the end, students are pushed to examine and question their own ideas and perspectives, and those of others, before adopting them as fact, which is the essence of critical thinking.

Many others writers agreed with Lipman’s assertions about Philosophy’s link to fostering critical thinking. Daniel and Auriac (2011) stated that Philosophy allows students to think critically, which helps them to understand their own—and others’—experiences. They asserted that Philosophy nurtures critical thinking by stimulating doubts and questions that help students to self-correct their own ideas, as well as those of others. Davis (2013) claimed that Philosophy trains students to think logically, reflectively, rigorously, and systematically about important ideas and concepts. Many others argued the same (Bleazby, 2011; Riley, 2013; Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011). At the same time, Jopling (2002) contended that, “Training in Philosophy can provide high school students with powerful tools of analysis and critical reasoning, new ways of looking at the world, and new approaches to problem solving” (131). According to Norris (2013), the aims of Canadian educational systems frequently include the promotion of critical

¹ The Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement was developed by Mathew Lipman, a professor at Montclair State College. It was developed to “facilitate the improvement of thinking in schools” (Lipman, 2003, p. 156). The program uses novels to stimulate students into “patterns of questioning and discussion” (p. 156). Students, individually and collectively, learn to create their own questions and are encouraged to come to reasonable solutions for themselves and others, based on sound reasoning.

thinking, which is one of the central aims of any Philosophy class. It is a wonder why Philosophy, as a discipline, has been overlooked and excluded from Saskatchewan's curriculum. Saskatchewan's ELA 30 B curriculum (2013) is clear that ELA develops critical thinking. At the same time, research is clear regarding Philosophy's potency in cultivating critical thinking. Through integrating ELA and Philosophy, student's critical thinking skills, abilities, and dispositions can be complemented and, perhaps, even enhanced.

Autonomy. Critical thinking and autonomy go hand in hand with Philosophy. Although the notion of autonomy can be traced back to the Greeks and their autonomous city-states, the idea of personal autonomy did not exist until the Enlightenment with philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and Immanuel Kant. Ever since, autonomy has been heavily associated with notions of self-determination, authenticity, and individuals' intellectual and physical freedom and agency (Piper, 2016). It is noteworthy, that throughout history, philosophers have been the main proponents of autonomy; perhaps introducing Philosophy into secondary education and schooling can build upon their ideals.

With regards to autonomy in education, Dewey (1916/2009) outlined that an individual's physical freedom was limited by a variety of factors in society; however, he stated that a progressive society should value individuals' intellectual freedom because it was essential for the development of society. Dewey stated, "A democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures" (p. 165). He viewed education and schooling as a means of giving students the freedom to explore their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives in relation to others and the world, which encouraged not only their own personal development, but which also coincided with societal growth. MacIntyre (2002) shared the same ideas:

But what education has to aim at for each and every child, if it is not to be a mockery, is both the development of those powers that enable children to become reflective and independent members of their families and political communities and the inculcation of those virtues that are needed to direct us towards the achievement of our common and individual goods... Teachers have the task of educating their students, so that those students will bring to the activities of their adult life questioning attitudes that will put them at odds with the moral temper of the age and with its dominant institutions. (p. 3)

MacIntyre viewed education as a way to temper students' autonomy so that they could freely challenge society in order to improve it. Both Dewey and MacIntyre advocated that education systems needed to build students' autonomy.

While autonomy is an ever-changing concept, Wringer's (1995) definition is useful as a basis for seeing whether teaching Philosophy to secondary school students can foster more autonomous human beings. Wringer defined autonomy as "both the right and the capacity to conceive personal goals in the light of the possibilities the world offers and the necessary constraints it imposes" (p. 49). This definition acknowledges that students need to be able to understand their own choices in light of their own limitations and the world's limitations. To be sure, students need the capacity to criticize dominant ideas; but they also need to understand the limits of their criticism and the limits that the world imposes upon them. Students who can make their own decisions and come to their own conclusions, are less likely to be manipulated by those in power; authentic education and schooling should champion and encourage student autonomy (Apple, 1984, Freire, 1970/2011; Giroux, 1981; McLaren, 1998; UNESCO, 2007). There are many ways for educational systems and schools to nurture autonomy and UNESCO (2007) asserted that, "Teaching Philosophy can and should play in the development of autonomous and critical citizens" (p. 62). Research also demonstrates Philosophy's ability to build student autonomy, which is valuable to students as individuals, but also valuable in creating thoughtful citizens.

UNESCO is not alone in its belief that education and schooling should develop student autonomy, and that Philosophy should play a pivotal role in doing so. According to Bleazby (2011), students who study Philosophy become:

...the autonomous creators of their own meaning rather than merely the recipients of the other people's meanings. They are not rendered completely dependent on others because they have the tools to reconstruct their own environment and satisfy their own needs. Students learn that knowledge and reality have been shaped by people like them and they too can transform it so that it is more meaningful and facilitative of their own growth.
(p. 463)

Bleazby showed how Philosophy encourages students to develop and construct their own meanings, understandings, and conclusions, rather than doing so without thought. Furthermore, Gasee (1998) believed that Philosophy's role in making students autonomous human beings is

one of its greatest strengths—in addition to helping students become curious, rational, open-minded, and inquisitive. Gasee concluded, “There is perhaps no other discipline more ideally suited for helping high school students learn to become autonomous human beings than the discipline of Philosophy” (p. 39). Certainly, other disciplines can nurture autonomy. Drama can encourage self-confidence. ELA can develop a strong sense of the self. Social Studies and History can instill a sense of who a student is in the larger world.

Both Bleazby (2011) and Gasee (1998) agreed that Philosophy fostered autonomy, and that teaching students to be autonomous human beings needed to be the foundation of education and schooling. However, there were those who did not view Philosophy and its effects on nurturing autonomy so positively. Wringe (1995) stated that emphasizing autonomy in education was highly political, and as such, an ethical debate that still required discussion. Neves de Macedo (2011) saw an obsession with Philosophy teaching autonomy as selfish and potentially damaging. Instead, Neves de Macedo asserted that autonomy needed to be redefined as empowerment because certain definitions of autonomy could lead to “individualism and alienation” and to “an endorsement of dogmatism and oppression” (p. 137). Neves de Macedo’s argument for abandoning autonomy in favor of empowerment rested on Young’s (1990) definition of autonomy, which defined autonomy as, “An agent, whether individual or collective, is autonomous to the degree that it has sole and final authority to decide on specific issues and actions and no other agent has the right to interfere” (p. 249). Neves de Macedo stated that while this conception of autonomy focused on excluding others by preventing them from being involved in an individual’s decisions and actions, “empowerment” involved both the individual having a right to say and believe what s/he wants, and also having her/his thoughts being taken seriously by the larger group.

Philosophy’s ability to cultivate student autonomy is also noteworthy because adolescents are already in the process of breaking away from parents, institutions, and others, and developing as autonomous individuals (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). Kohlberg and Gilligan went as far as stating, “The adolescent is a philosopher by nature...If the high school is to offer some purposes and meanings which can stand up to relativistic questioning, it must learn Philosophy” (p. 1084). There is much to be said about the connections between Philosophy and autonomy.

Engagement. Within the last decade or so, student engagement has become a veritable buzzword in educational circles, although it has been on the minds of educational theorists and

researchers since the turn of the century (Dewey, 1938/1997; Whitehead, 1967). The reality is that modern education and schooling oftentimes result in disengaging students (Shernoff, et al., 2003; Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Re-engaging students is, therefore, an educational necessity—especially in the humanities and languages, where students report that they pay attention least frequently (Shernoff, et al., 2003). Philosophy offers a chance to reverse this discouraging trend with disengagement among secondary school students.

Engagement, like autonomy, is a fluid concept—one that has been developing over the last two centuries. Many define engagement as students putting time and effort into their studies in a purposeful way, which results in positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Kuh, et al., 2006; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Others view engagement as being connected to concentration, enjoyment, and interest in education (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

Dewey (1938/1997) and Whitehead (1967) both contended that engaging students in meaningful learning was a necessity for any educator or educational system. Dewey understood that education was more than simply learning a set of skills or facts, but that it also required fostering a positive disposition if it was to be truly authentic and productive. He viewed students' experiences as the prime driver of learning, with the caveat that not all experiences were equal. Educational experiences, to Dewey, should be not only educational, but also agreeable:

Everything depends on the quality of the experience which is had. The quality of the experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence on later experiences...It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. (p. 27)

Education, at its best, exposes students to experiences that are both enjoyable and educative. By the same token, educators can also expose students to experiences that are unpleasant but educative, which seems to be a symptom of the current state of affairs in North American education and schooling. Students end up learning knowledge, skills, and abilities, but become apathetic to their own learning in the process. At the same time, Whitehead (1967) advocated that learning required, first and foremost, the learner's interest; without interest, learning would not take place meaningfully. He advocated the idea of "romance" in education, which connects

closely to modern notions of engagement, stating, “There is no comprehension apart from romance... Without the adventure of romance, at the best you get inert knowledge without initiative, and at the worst you get contempt of ideas—without knowledge (p. 33). Whitehead understood that student disengagement could kill curiosity and the desire for lifelong learning. Both Dewey and Whitehead understood that education needed to feed students’ curiosity, so that they not only wanted to learn, but actually enjoyed learning in and of itself.

Modern researchers concur with Dewey and Whitehead’s ideas on engagement and student experiences; although the modern measurement of engagement is more focused on quantitative data than the qualitative assessment of students’ actual experiences. Kuh, et al. (2006), concluded that student engagement is directly correlated with the development of values, cognition, and attitudes towards future learning experiences. Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi (2008) stated that students’ enjoyment and interest are directly related to how they perceive educational experiences, and also how motivated they will be toward future learning. Others agree (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Clearly, engagement matters with regards to students’ learning and their future attitudes towards education and schooling. However, McMahon and Portelli (2010) contended that most research on engagement focuses on measurable academic outcomes and desired behaviours, rather than looking at engagement from a personal or philosophical perspective.

Research shows that engagement is a necessity in education and schooling for authentic student learning. It also shows that Philosophy can engage students with their learning. According to Jopling (2002), in Ontario, Philosophy is extremely popular with students, being dubbed by students as, “the coolest subject on the planet” (p. 134). Colter and Ulatowski (2013) saw Philosophy as engaging students’ interest while making them “begin to wonder” (p. 261). Others, like Gasee (1998) concluded that students “become more curious simply because the questions that they would be exposed to would capture their interest or their imagination to such an extent that they would be driven to explore them” (p. 91). Gasee went on to state, “The questions that students examine in Philosophy courses are the same questions that have intrigued human beings for centuries” (p. 91). Norris (2015) has been exploring how Philosophy impacts students in an ongoing project titled, *Teaching and Learning High School Philosophy in Ontario High Schools*. His research on Philosophy in secondary schools coincides with other research on

engagement; students frequently report increased enthusiasm, motivation, challenge, and enjoyment.

Empathy. This literature review has discussed how Philosophy has the potential to foster critical thinking, autonomy, and engagement. These three concepts on their own present a solid argument for why Philosophy should be included in the curriculum. And yet, Philosophy does not stop at these. Perhaps Philosophy has the potential to cultivate empathy through more concerned and caring human beings. The majority of research in Philosophy in secondary schools concerns critical thinking—and other valuable dispositions, skills, and abilities. It was of interest to examine the potential of Philosophy to inspire more empathetic thinking and acting, thereby furthering the understanding of others’ beliefs, perspectives, and experiences. That was the intent of this study.

Before going any further, it is important to define empathy. And yet again, it is exceedingly difficult to define a term that is not always agreed upon and constantly changing. According to Lipman (2007) empathy occurs when human beings explore other people’s beliefs and perspectives by trying to imagine their experiences as their own. *Roots of Empathy*² creator, Gordon (2005), agreed with Lipman about identifying with feelings and perspectives of others, but also believes that people need to “*respond appropriately* to the feelings and perspectives of others” (p. 30). Krznaric (2015) seemed to combine Lipman and Gordon’s ideas and define empathy in the proper context, concluding that empathy requires an act of imagination in order to try to understand another’s feelings, ideas, experiences, or perspective, followed by acting on that understanding in a meaningful way. Numerous writers suggest that empathy can be taught (Gordon, 2005; Hatcher, et al., 1994; Palermo & D’Erasmus, 2001; Neu, 2011; Schleifer, et al., 2003; Schonert-Reichl & Oberle, 2011; Spiro, 1992). Others stated the same, adding the caveat that empathy should be taught (Gordon, 2005; Kohn, 2006; Krznaric, 2008, 2015; Palermo & D’Erasmus, Neu, 2011; 2001; Rifkin, 2010; Sharp, 2006; Shertz, 2006). To date, there are theories that Philosophy increases empathy, but not a lot of evidence, which is why research into this important topic needs more attention.

² Mary Gordon (2005) developed the Roots of Empathy program. It involves mothers bringing their infants into classrooms in order for students to observe the mother/child relationship in action. Students are encouraged to ask questions and interact with the mother and infant, resulting in discussions on how human beings love and care for one another. Roots of Empathy has been shown to enhance students’ “emotional literacy” and their “capacity to take others’ perspectives,” while reducing aggression and bullying in schools (p. 8).

P4C founder, Lipman, argued for “caring thinking,” which is different from, but complements, critical and creative thinking (Lipman, 1995a; Lipman, 1995b, Lipman, 2007). Like critical and creative thinking, caring thinking can be learned, which means that it can probably be taught. And although Lipman’s notion of caring thinking is multifaceted, it includes empathetic thinking (Sharp, 2006). Lipman explained that empathy was an important aspect of caring thinking; he stated “one way of caring is to step out of our own feelings, perspective, and horizon and imagine ourselves instead as having the feelings, perspective, and horizon of another” (p. 269). And while the notion of caring thinking is potent on its own, Lipman connected this idea to the teaching of Philosophy. Lipman (1995a) stated that, “Thinking that values value is caring thinking” (p. 6). Lipman alluded to the idea that because Philosophy focused on thinking about, examining, and affirming values, that it was perfectly situated to help teach caring thinking, and empathy. Lipman’s ideas have been translated into reality in the form of the P4C movement. This movement uses literature and Philosophy to help students explore profound philosophical questions. Furthermore, P4C encourages students to try to understand others’ feelings, ideas, and perspectives by building communities of inquiry that support the development of empathy (Sharp, 1987; Shertz, 2006).

At the same time, Noddings (2010) placed an emphasis on the idea of human beings “feeling with” and “being moved” by others (p. 9), which are closely related to empathy. And even though she has traditionally not used the word “empathy” in her writings on the ethics of care, she recognizes its transformational power. Noddings’ (1995) ethic of care is an overhaul of existing ethical systems founded on principles of justice or virtue. Instead, she asserted that ethics should be founded on themes of care suggesting, “caring for self, for intimate others, for strangers and global others, for the natural world and its nonhuman creatures, for the human-made world, and for ideas” (p. 675). Noddings divided care into two parts: natural care and ethical care—the latter of which connects to empathy. Ethical care involves an individual’s idea of themselves, not only as a caring person, but as a caring person who has a duty to care for others. In order to fulfill this obligation, one must be able to understand and attend to others’ beliefs, perspectives, and experiences. In short, a person must be able to empathize with another, acting according to the other’s needs. Noddings (2010) stated:

Empathy should help us to recognize the hurt feelings and pains of others even if we have had no part in causing them. Moral sensitivity is not merely a matter of not causing pain, it should lead us to relieve pain whatever its cause. (p. 8)

Noddings' (2010) claim that empathy requires a recognition, followed by action, is profound. She believes this ability to recognize others' feelings and ideas can be learned and extend to those closest to us, and to "distant others" (p. 12). Moreover, Noddings (1995) concluded that Philosophy—by connecting students and disciplines to great existential questions—plays a central role in getting students to learn to care, and, ultimately, empathize. Lipman and Noddings' ideas demonstrate the importance of teaching empathy and its connection to Philosophy. The "I" who can understand the "other" is powerful. The "I" who acts upon this understanding in order to care for the "other" is even more profound.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study lent itself to a qualitative research methodology, because it examined students' experiences, perceptions, and understanding of themselves and the world (Creswell, 2012; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). This study grounds its qualitative characteristics in the investigation of students' experiences in an interdisciplinary class that merged ELA and Philosophy. Aside from the overall impact of this class on students' learning and lived experiences, it was of interest to understand students' perceptions of engagement, autonomy, and empathy, and the extent to which they believed this class fostered these concepts and dispositions within their behaviours and actions.

Qualitative studies that do not utilize the major methodologies—like ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, or case study—can be labeled “generic” or “basic” (Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Merriam 2009). As such, this research study was founded as a generic or basic qualitative study. Merriam (1998) stated:

Many qualitative studies in education do not focus on culture or build a grounded theory; nor are they intensive case studies of a single unit or bounded system. Rather, researchers who conduct these studies, which are probably the most common form of qualitative research in education, simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved. (p. 11)

Kahlke (2014) added that, “The generic qualitative approach—also called basic qualitative or, simply, interpretive—can stand alone as a researcher’s articulated approach” (p. 13).

This research study sought to discover students' perspectives and experiences in their ELAP classroom, which is why a generic or basic qualitative methodology was used.

The students' voices were primary within this research methodology and there was little desire to turn their lived experiences into data points in a quantitative study (Kvale, 2006). Students become the expert participants within qualitative research; they were the ones who experienced this interdisciplinary class and they were in the best position to provide valuable informative data regarding their experiences (Creswell, 2012). This study's focus was on what I believed were relatively unquantifiable student experiences with autonomy, engagement, and empathy. As the researcher, I was aware of the dominance of technocratic and systematic ideologies that pervade educational discourse, which is why the focus and emphasis was on the lived experiences of students in their education and schooling. I wanted to get away from the

increasing focus in educational research on quantifying outcomes and standards (Van Manen, 2007). Education is lived day in and day out in the classroom. The class is the place where students grow and question and think and learn. I did not want their thoughts and feelings turned into statistics. The students' stories of their experiences, either positive or negative became central to this research. Their semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions became the doorways into students' experiences with ELAP and what it was like for them to sit in a class every day and study a combination of ELA and Philosophy. The goal was to understand their reactions and responses to ideas they had never encountered before and if they felt that this experience was transformative.

At the same time, I recognized that as the creator of ELAP, the way it existed in my classroom, and as a researcher, I could not divorce myself from this study. As Patton (1999) stated, "Statistical analysis follows formulas and rules while, at the core, qualitative analysis is a creative process, depending on the insights and conceptual capabilities of the analyst" (p. 1191). Moreover, Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative research is mediated through the researcher who is "responsive to the context" and who can "adapt techniques to the circumstances" so that "what is known about the situation can be expanded" (p. 7). As the designer of the program and the teacher, I was positioned well to set up the study and analyze the data. Van Manen (2006) agrees that qualitative research requires the creative talents and processes of the researcher.

Since I am passionate about this program of study for my students and have invested time and professionalism within its development, I recognized my biases and my subjectivity with regards to this study. I would be disingenuous if I did not admit that I want the program to succeed and I want my students to enjoy and grow from their learning experiences in the ELAP classroom. It was my perceived observations and inquiries into their experiences over several years that led me to this research question: What are the outcomes of secondary students' experiences with engagement, autonomy, and empathy as a result of studying through an integrated English Language Art and Philosophy program? I was cognizant of my biases towards critical theories that view education as transformational and emancipatory (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1970/2001; Giroux, 1981; McLaren 1998).

Critical theory guided much of my thinking with regards to education and schooling and even though I want ELAP to be a success for students, I was under no illusions that the program functioned the way I thought it might. In fact, I looked forward to finding out student's responses

to their experiences with ELAP whether good, bad, indifferent, or some other result. At the same time, while many studies concerning Philosophy in secondary schools focus on increasing academic standards, I was more focused on students' perceptions and experiences when they study Philosophy and ELA together. The majority of educational studies into the value of Philosophy and high schools have been increasingly focused on "technical solutions" to solve "standards of practice, codes of ethics, and perceived problems" (Van Manen, 2007, p. 19). This technocratic approach to education relies on systems and models that often ignore the human components of education and schooling. I see education and schooling's primary function as fostering happy, functional, critical thinkers, and citizens over emphasizing skills and abilities for the workforce.

Recruitment

This study used purposeful sampling to acquire participants. I intentionally selected my own ELAP classroom as my research site because it was the only class that met the criteria for this study; at the same time, I intentionally selected students who had completed this class, because they were the ones with the necessary experiences (Creswell, 2012). According to Patton (1990):

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 169)

Students who had experienced ELAP were my information rich cases. Their experiences with ELA integrated with Philosophy were analyzed in depth.

Student-participants needed to have finished the program in order to provide meaningful insight into experiences and perceptions with the class. Since the students had completed the class and were no longer my students, issues of power were removed as there was no risk to the students involving marks or outcomes. Twelve former ELAP students—from a class of 30—were invited to participate in the study by their guidance counsellor, who explained the nature of the study to each student and gave them the assent and consent letters (See Appendix B & Appendix C). These students were invited to participate in this study because they were "experienced" and "knowledgeable" about ELAP (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64), as they had recently graduated from the program. According to Rubin and Rubin, interviewees need to have

relevant, first-hand experience in order to uncover credible data. They also need to be well-informed in order to gain convincing results. These twelve students were also chosen because, in my experience, they were not hesitant to speak, they were articulate, which meant they were more open in sharing their perceptions and experiences (Creswell, 2012). It was anticipated, for reasons outside the researcher's control, that not all students who were invited to participate in the study would give their consent. As such, six students were selected from the twelve—or less—to participate in the final study.

In order to narrow the study and yield richer results, maximal variation sampling was used, which “presents multiple perspectives of individuals to represent the complexity of our world” (Creswell, 2012, p. 207). Acquiring a variety of student perspectives with ELAP was important to the researcher. It was hoped that students who excelled in school, struggled in school, and those who were indifferent would be part of the participant pool. It was important to understand students' experiences with ELAP and whether they felt it impacted their lives and their sense of autonomy, engagement, and empathy. Obtaining different perspectives from students who had a variety of feelings towards their schooling—positive and negative—as well as who had had a variety of experiences in their education—good, bad, horrible, or anything in between—might provide a richer variety in data and experience.

Three males and three females were chosen to heighten the possibility of understanding a greater diversity of experiences. While I believed males and females might have many similar and shared experiences and perceptions from the ELAP classroom, I also believed they may have had different perspectives and feelings concerning autonomy, engagement, and empathy, and I wanted to be cognizant of this possibility in participant selection. In my experience, male and female students are treated differently in school from gender norms through enforced dress codes, to a clear focus on male dominated sports. My observations of this gender inequality led me to believe that male and female students might have different perspectives in and out of class, which is why I thought there needed to be a gender balance between the six participants. As Patton (1990) stated, it is necessary that participants “have had quite different experiences” with the class in order to more thoroughly “understand variations in experiences while also investigating core elements and shared outcomes” (p. 172). Secondly, I divided students further by selecting them based on their academic performance in ELAP. By selecting student-participants according to academic performance, I hoped to get a diversity of perspectives from

students who may have excelled or struggled with ELAP's course content. Selecting student-participants by their academics was also an attempt at "identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of characteristics of interest in the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 63). I have found that, oftentimes, students' attitudes concerning themselves, their peers, and their education and schooling differ based on their grades. This required going into the researcher's grade books for ELAP in order to select students with grades above an 80 percent—which is the cut-off for honours. In my experience, "honours" students are typically pleased with their relationship with education and schooling. However, I wanted this study to represent all students and not just students who excelled, or were perceived as being "successful" in their education and schooling. I also intentionally selected three students who I believed usually struggled in school—students whose grades were roughly between 50-70 percent. By selecting students along gender-lines and grades, I thought the interviewees would present more diverse responses regarding their perceptions and experiences in the ELAP classroom, and whether or not they felt like the class fostered their engagement, autonomy, and empathy.

The students' guidance counselor sent potential student-participants who had already completed the course an informational letter explaining the rationale and details of the study (See Appendix B). When a student chose to volunteer for the study, and they were under the age of eighteen, their parents or guardians were contacted with another informational letter that once again explained the rationale and details of the study (See Appendix C). Once both students and parents had expressed interest to the guidance counselor for participation in the study, then the researcher initiated contact in order to further explain the study's rationale, to clarify student participation, and to answer any lingering questions. Interviews were then set up to meet the student-participants' individual schedules.

In the end, only six students from the shoulder-tapped twelve volunteered. Luckily, it was an even split between genders, so I was not required to change up the interviewees. There were three students who met the criteria for exceptional learners, and there were two students who met the criteria as struggling students—the third student's grades were a bit above the 70 percent cut off, but I included this student anyway, because I believed that the difference in the student's grades were negligible and that this student was "experienced" and "knowledgeable" about ELAP (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64).

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Merriam (1998) stated that in a generic or basic qualitative study in education that, “Data are collected through interviews” (p. 11). This research study lent itself to using semi-structured interviews to understand this class from the students’ point of view—their thoughts, reflections, and feelings (Kvale, 2006). Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to narrow down their focus, whereas un-structured interviews can result in not dealing with the topics or themes that are connected to the central research questions; semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to focus on specific topics, while also maintaining the voices and stories of the participants (Rabionet, 2011). Six students were interviewed in order to ensure data saturation. According to Francis, et al., (2010) data saturation is the process of gathering and analysing data until the point where data begins to form themes and repeat itself so that there are no new observable insights; data saturation addresses the validity of research content. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) state that data saturation in qualitative studies is problematic, and that there is no set number that exists to insure data saturation. However, Fusch and Ness (2015) state that “data saturation may be attained by as little as six interviews depending on the sample size of the population” (p. 1409). Because the student-participants in this study were from a relatively small homogenous group, six interviews were adequate for common themes to emerge and repeat themselves.

This study used semi-structured interviews that were based on, “open-ended questions so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). Although focus groups were considered, semi-structured interviews were chosen so that students’ voices would not be unduly influenced or led by their peers. I believe that semi-structured interviews allowed student-participants to better explain their individual perceptions and experiences in the ELAP classroom. All data collection from interviews took place during the first two weeks of June, 2016. All interviews occurred in a conference room in the students’ high school for their convenience. Interviews also took place at a time of the participants’ choosing—again, this was to make the process as convenient as possible for student-participants. The conference room was windowless, to protect student identities. Each interview took between 35 to 70 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and stored on a password protected device. Each interview was transcribed for later analysis. Individual participants all had the opportunity to listen to their

personal interview and read the transcript to check for accuracy (Creswell, 2012). All students—and parents/guardians—gave their consent to use their transcripts for this study. All of this study’s data analysis—including transcription, coding, and evaluation—took place between September and December of 2016.

Interviews provided students the opportunity to explain their lived experiences in this class, using their own words (Kvale, 2006). Single interviews lasting 35-70 minutes with each participant sufficed, producing rich data—160 pages of interview transcripts in all. I was aware that interviews establish an asymmetrical power relationship by the very nature of the interviewer/interviewee relationships (Kvale, 2006). It was my hope that the rapport, and positive teacher-student relationship, that I had with these former students hopefully alleviated this reality and led to a more informal tone in the interviews.

Data Analysis

All interview transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative research software *Nvivo*. This software was used to code, assess, and analyze interview data in order to discern whether students’ feel their experiences in ELAP cultivated their autonomy, engagement, and empathy.

Saldana (2010) states that initial coding can include categories based on individual words. This research study applied what Saldana calls “structural coding” which applies “a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data to both code and categorize the data corpus” (p. 66). In order to unpack ELAP students’ data, codes were initially created, assessed, and analyzed based on the three words this study focuses on: engagement, autonomy, and empathy. According to Creswell (2012) it is important to reduce coding to broad topics during this initial cycle. The concepts of engagement, autonomy, and empathy were then unpacked throughout the data analysis process. The initial coding cycle of the study addressed the central research question and sub questions in the simplest and broadest way possible.

After the initial reading and coding of the data, a second cycle of coding involved “the exact same units, longer passages of text, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves” (Saldana, 2010, p. 3). During this second cycle of coding, Creswell (2012) states that new themes and descriptions emerge. Saldana (2010) talks about themes emerging as complete phrases or sentences that describe the initial categories in more detail. During this second cycle of coding, I used “Focused Coding” to develop relevant categories in the data (p. 155). Focused coding

helped organize the initial data, and also helped attribute meaning to the data. This is where the students' perceptions of engagement, autonomy, and empathy were deconstructed beyond their surface meanings in order to find divergence and commonalities as it became evident that students' experiences with ELAP varied. As Saldana stated, "Focused Coding enables you to compare newly constructed codes during this cycle across other participants' data to assess comparability and transferability" (p. 158). Focused coding was used to unearth new connections, contrasts, and patterns with participants' data. How students thought and felt about the ELAP classroom emerged as these new codes uncovered their experiences and perceptions.

Ultimately, I was interested in students, their experiences, and their perspectives within their ELAP class. These narratives yielded rich data that were able to help answer the central research questions. In order to reconstruct these narratives in relation to the data, I began this research study's findings with my own personal reflections on the research process. By doing this, I hoped to place my biases out in the open and outline my experiences with the research process. I then introduced my student-participants in order to get a better understanding of who they were as people and as students. After, I reconstructed the interview data into individual sections that summarized student-participants' responses to this study's central questions about engagement, autonomy, and empathy—emergent themes that resulted from the coding process were included in each section. Comparisons and contrasts were then made between the literature and the data. In the end, this study also presented limitations and made suggestions for future research (Creswell, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

This study presented some ethical issues, as the researcher was involved in exploring former students' lived experiences, although nothing that merited concern (Hutchings, 2003). According to MacLean and Poole (2010), the potential benefits of researching former students is worth the time, effort, and risk. Because all participants involved in this study were former ELAP students, I believe that any ethical issues were lessened substantially, because I was no longer tasked with their instruction, assessment, and evaluation.

In light of the fact that former students were involved in this study, the main ethical concerns centered around attaining the ethical and un-coerced consent of participants, while maintaining their individual privacy. MacLean and Poole (2010) believe that when students are involved in research, that informed consent becomes a complex issue. I avoided ethical concerns

connected to consent by having a neutral third-party provide all participants with full disclosure of the nature of the study. Students were approached with informational letters that outlined the study's rationale and procedures in order to gain student consent. Students' parents and guardians were also sent informational letters that did the same, in order to get their assent. To avoid coercion, it was explained that all participation in this study was voluntary. At the same time, it was made clear to participants that they could withdraw their participation from the study at any time—upon withdrawal, all their individual audio-recordings, transcriptions, and findings would be destroyed. It was also explained that students' education and schooling would not be affected negatively by their participation or non-participation in this study. By clearly explaining all of this in advance, I believe I limited any coercion. To limit and avoid privacy concerns, all individuals, data, and research sites in this study were anonymized. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The participants' school and interdisciplinary program were also given pseudonyms. Upon completing this study, all data—their individual audio-recordings, transcripts, and findings—were shared accordingly with individual participants and their parents or guardians. Participants had the opportunity to correct and change their individual transcripts for accuracy and intent.

This research study received ethical approval from the Behavioural Research Board of the University of Saskatchewan. It has also received ethical approval from the Saskatoon Public School Division. Approval from these institutions lead me to believe that I took care of all necessary ethical considerations regarding the study, my role as teacher-researcher, and the safety and anonymity of student-participants.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Results

This chapter's purpose is to outline and describe the findings and results of this research study. I start by offering reflections on the study's methodology and my experiences with the research. Subsequently, each student-participant is introduced and described to get a better understanding of their similarities and differences as students and as individuals. The participants' experiences with ELAP—in the form of data taken from the interview transcripts—is then explored individually and collectively through this study's central research question and the following concepts of inquiry: autonomy, engagement, and empathy. I attempt to present the data without my own interpretations, but recognize my own subjectivity as a researcher. As such, I use extensive direct quotations from the interview transcripts in order to report students' experiences and perspectives of the ELAP classroom as transparently as possible, recognizing the inherent subjectivity of my choosing what information is important and valuable. In this chapter, the quotations from the student-participants' interviews are cited from individual interview transcripts and page numbers are linked to each transcript.

Student-Participants

Each student-participant has been given a pseudonym of their choosing based on a philosopher or artist that meant something to him or her. Each student-participant was also asked to briefly describe him/herself as a student and his/her high school experience with schooling. They were asked how they feel about school, their classes, and education in general (See Appendix A). I begin by introducing each student-participant using their description as well as their responses to the above questions. I also include some of my own perceptions of them as students—as I was their former teacher—to try to give the reader a better understanding of the diversity and uniqueness of the personalities of the students who participated in this study.

Soren

Soren chose the Danish existentialist philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, as her pseudonym because she identified with many of his ideas. Soren was an academic student. Soren's reflective and thoughtful nature manifested itself as she described herself as "a curious person" who is not afraid to "ask questions" because, as she put it, "I always want to know more" (p. 1). Along with her innate curiosity and desire to question the world around her, Soren also said, "I'd definitely say I'm an introverted person" (p. 3). As such, her curiosity is sometimes misconstrued as daydreaming and she has "been told lots of times that my head's in the clouds sometimes. Even

though I do well in school, sometimes I kind of drift off. I'm always kind of thinking about the next thing" (p. 1). This unique mix of curiosity and introversion has worked well with her schooling.

When it came to school, Soren reported being confident in her skills, abilities, and intellect. She explained that she sees herself as "a student that does well in high school" who "can get good marks taking tests and things like that" (p. 1). Soren went on to state:

Overall in school, I do well. Like, I learn well in that kind of setting, I guess. I'm pretty self-motivated. I like doing projects and things sort of for myself or take a leadership role if I'm doing them, even if I'm not like naturally a really assertive person. But I want to get the work done and do it right, so I'll often kind of take on that kind of leadership.

(p.1)

All in all, Soren's academic career was positive. She reported enjoying school using words like "comfortable," "ready-to-go," and "engaged," although she admitted that her interests leaned more toward Maths and Sciences over the Humanities (p. 2). That being said, Soren graduated with a diploma in French Immersion, so even though her interests may have been elsewhere, she found a way to excel in academic disciplines that were not her favourite. Even when school finished for the day, Soren still pursued her education. She reported that "I'll still look stuff up after school" and "I'm very musical outside of school," stating that these pursuits were "my way of learning when I'm not in school" (p. 2). Ultimately, Soren expressed that her relationship with schooling and education was linked to her personality, upbringing, and interests; she concluded with the following statement: "I know that I'm kind of a person that is able to learn in school, and that not everybody is" (p. 3). Soren could have let her many accomplishments in and out of school go to her head, but instead she took a more contemplative approach that not only showed her maturity, but also an awareness of her own privilege amongst peers who might not have had the same chances, choices, or experiences as her.

Nietzsche

Nietzsche chose the German existentialist philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, as his pseudonym, because he remembered being intrigued by some of his ideas. Nietzsche was a student who was not afraid to admit that he struggled with his schooling, yet he maintained a positive attitude towards his education. Nietzsche reported being an extremely social person, stating, "I'm a very social kind of student. I like talking" (p. 1). He repeatedly talked about how

he enjoyed speaking with other people and sharing his own thoughts and ideas, emphasizing that he valued “relationships and stuff like that” (p. 1). At the same time, Nietzsche explained that he was also more of an experiential learner and that sustained individual desk work was not his strength. He identified as learning best through “hands on stuff. But I’m not one to like write major essays and like put stuff on paper. I can’t put my words on paper, usually” (p. 1). Because Nietzsche’s strengths revolved around social interaction, he enjoyed school because he was around people. That being said, his personal strengths were not always rewarded by the educational system.

Nietzsche explained that he “struggled with school” throughout his academic career, explaining that he was unsure if he would graduate (p. 2). He understood his strengths and weaknesses when it came to school, showing a keen self-awareness and ability for self-reflection. His struggles with school occurred in all classes, from Math to Science to English Language Arts. Nietzsche repeatedly explained that, “It’s just, like, hard for me to, like, sit and listen and try and learn all these concepts, while everyone else is just sitting there in silence. I like talking and I like figuring out different ways of learning” (p. 2). He seemed aware that his preferred modes of learning were not rewarded or held in high esteem by the educational system. He stated that he understood the way school was “set up” and he expressed his frustrations with his experiences, stating “I don’t like how you have to focus on certain classes” and that he would rather “focus on other things, like English classes, History classes, instead of just Sciences and Maths” (p. 1). For all of Nietzsche’s struggles with his education and schooling, his openness, honesty, self-awareness, and capacity for self-reflection were always evident in my interactions with him as a student, and during his interview.

Frida

Frida chose the Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo, as her pseudonym to symbolize her independence and passion for the Arts. Much like Nietzsche, Frida emphasized her social nature, repeatedly mentioning how she valued “friends” (p. 1). When speaking about herself as a student, she stated, “I’m very into the Arts side of things. I’ve never really been good at Math or Sciences. I’m like an average student, I’d say. I try really hard at school, but some classes are definitely more difficult than others” (p. 1). When asked what “average” meant to Frida, she explained that she was referring to grades, stating, “Average: as in getting more average marks. I’m typically like a seventies to eighties student, not like eighties and above” (p. 1). When Frida

was asked if she enjoyed school, she responded enthusiastically stating, “I like it. I like it a lot” (p 1).

Frida’s experiences with education and schooling were, for the most part, positive. She was happy that school was a place where she “can make a lot of friends” and do interesting things, like, “You get more than just learning experiences, like especially with extra-curricular activities. You know? You can go on the canoe trip, or you can go on the travel clubs, or something like that” (p. 1). Her love for the Arts was evident, along with how she believed they brought people together; Frida stated, “...with Arts you can always make a lot of friends in there” (p. 2). She also stated that although the Arts are “a lot of work,” that it is “fun work” because “you enjoy what you’re doing” (p. 2). When asked if she thought school was important, she replied, “I think it’s very important. Without it, you’re not going to go very far in life” (p. 2). It was clear from her responses and feelings towards education and schooling, that Frida was concerned about the relational and communal nature of education and schooling. While she recognized that she sometimes faced difficulties in her education and schooling, Frida’s work ethic, determination, and positivity shone through her responses.

Plato

Plato chose the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, as his pseudonym because he enjoyed learning about Plato’s ideas, specifically the “Allegory of the Cave.” In my estimation, Plato struggled with school more often than not. He was a student who seemed outwardly disengaged with his academics, although his ability to jump into and add to a discussion was often surprising. Plato explained that as a student that he was a man of few words. He reported being relatively disengaged with his studies and that he tended to “sit back and listen rather than partake in most conversations” (p. 1). However, he also said that he “can get pretty involved in conversations rather than just listening” when he found something interesting (p. 1). This statement was evident throughout my experiences with Plato in the classroom and the interview process. At times, he offered up very little in the way of responses and seemed quite disengaged, but then he would suddenly latch onto an idea, get excited and energized, and go on a self-described “rant,” providing all sorts of insights and examples into his feelings and experiences (p. 5).

When asked how he felt about school, Plato replied with a chuckle, “It’s rather boring” (p. 1). When asked what classes bored him the most, he said, “History definitely bores me.

Philosophy was good. Um, Science is good. Math's okay. I like Woodshop" (p. 1). Like Nietzsche, Plato reported being more of a hands-on-learner. He explained that he enjoyed Woodshop because "you can make something out of nothing" (p. 1). Plato made it quite clear that he liked when school allowed him to be creative, but that his schooling had given him limited opportunities to do so.

Simone

Simone chose the French feminist and existentialist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, to symbolize her affinity for Existentialism as a Philosophy for life. Simone excelled in all aspects of her education and schooling. Simone described herself as someone who has "always done pretty well in school" and as someone who never "struggled in school" (p. 1). She characterized herself as a "fairly good student," although she admitted that when it comes to school, "I haven't really taken it too, too seriously" (p. 1). She outlined how she has a "positive approach" to school and how she did not feel like "dreading it every single day or anything like that" (p. 2). What is not evident in Simone's replies, is her extreme modesty when it comes to her skills and abilities, or the verve with which she seems to approach ideas, people, and life in general. It needs to be stated that Simone was a stellar academic who carried herself with a poise and maturity beyond her years.

When it came to the particulars of Simone's high school experience, she explained that her interests changed over the years. There had been a time where she "used to really think I liked, you know, Math and Science," but her focus shifted to Biology, History and English, because "I just find that stuff more interesting to me personally" (p. 1). Simone clarified what she meant by "liked," saying:

I didn't like Chemistry because I hated experiments and I was afraid of it. I think I liked Biology because it was the least "hands on" of the Sciences (laughing). And, I'm a very nervous, anxious person, when it comes to crazy chemicals and things like that. And I liked just like the learning—I, I found it really fascinating to learn about life and like how it worked, and all these things that I had never really thought about, like how a tree reproduces and stuff. It's like, "I never thought about that?" But I found it interesting.
(p. 1)

What was evident by Simone's explanation was that this interest in Biology extended to many other avenues in her life. She was always ready and willing to discuss, debate, and examine new ideas, always approaching them with thoughtfulness and wonder.

Freud

Freud decided to use the Austrian psychologist, Sigmund Freud, as his pseudonym for this study because of his propensity to reflect on the human condition. Freud was an abstract and thoughtful thinker who did very well with his academics. When asked to describe himself as a student, Freud explained that he viewed himself as a "music-centric/art student" who was "more focused in the Music/Art part of school," although he did "dabble in creative writing and English as well" (p. 1). He characterized himself as a student who "focuses in class" but "talks too much sometimes" (p. 1). Freud also explained how he viewed himself as a student who achieved "above average grades" (p. 1). By the length of his responses to each question, it was evident that Freud enjoyed language and dialogue. He seemed open and honest with his replies, showing a willingness to unpack his feelings and experiences with Philosophy.

When it came to school, Freud talked in abstractions rather than specifics. Where other student-participants talked about specific classes they liked or disliked, Freud focused on broad notions of what school and education could and should be. Freud started with, "I feel like it's a good idea" and "the idea of education is always a great idea" (p. 1). He then went into an explanation of how the education system had been built on a factory model, stating "that system hasn't really adapted over the years" and that education and schooling "still has the shadows of standardized testing and not really focusing on education but rather the marks and stuff like that" (p. 1). He finished by saying, "That 'education' isn't the forefront of school is kind of concerning, considering that's the whole point of school" (p. 1). Freud was the type of student who believed that grades should be secondary before passions. When asked what the purpose of school should be, he stated, "To learn. To learn as much as you can, as effectively as you can. Instead of teaching people how to get into the workforce, I thought school should always be about 'educating' people" (p. 2). It was clear that Freud was conflicted with his experience with formalized education and schooling. He concluded his thoughts by stressing that he thought the "true essence of education" was "self-education" (p. 2).

Reasons for Enrolling in ELAP

Before going into the student-participants' experiences with ELAP, I first want to explore their reasoning for taking the class instead of a traditional ELA class. It is interesting to get a reference point for students' preconceived thoughts and illusions about taking Philosophy in comparison and/or contrast to their actual experiences after having taken the class. On the whole, student-participants reported choosing to take ELAP because they thought the idea of learning Philosophy was an intriguing option and seemed like an interesting discipline. Freud stated:

I've always been interested in Philosophy. Like, in school they never really talk about Philosophy, but Philosophy is always around us. You'll hear Philosophy ideas. Like I heard of the 'Allegory of the Cave' long before I actually took your Philosophy class. So, when I heard that there was actually a Philosophy class I could take in school, the idea intrigued me. (p.2)

Frida was of the same mindset. She explained:

I don't remember which class it was—but you came in and you started talking about it. And, just the kind of ideas you were bringing forward made it seem really interesting. And I know a lot of us were talking about it afterwards, and that's when a lot of us signed up to do it the next year. (p. 2)

Nietzsche, Plato, Soren, and Simone also expressed that they were interested in taking ELAP because they thought it would be a "better" or "different" experience than a traditional English class.

The desire for a change from their traditional ELA classes was also a common reason for taking ELAP amongst many of the student-participants. For some, this change was because of negative experiences with ELA, while others said they still enjoyed ELA and the change was more to do with trying something different after more than a decade in ELA classes. Plato and Nietzsche both seemed to have more cynical views of ELA; Plato "thought it would be a better experience than just a regular English class where you go over Shakespeare" (p. 1) and Nietzsche "never really liked English" (p. 3). These two students saw ELAP as a potential way to explore new ideas outside of traditional ELA methods and content. At the same time, Simone and Soren were both open to trying something else after twelve years of ELA classes. However, for them it was not a case of being tired of or not enjoying ELA classes. Both students expressed that they enjoyed their past experiences in their ELA classes. When asked why she took ELAP instead of

a traditional ELA class, Simone said, “Why not try something different?” (p. 1) and “I thought it was a nice sort of changeup” (p. 2). Soren felt the same way in that she had enjoyed her experiences with ELA, but when asked why she enrolled in ELAP she replied, “I just kind of wanted to try something else out” (p. 3). For a variety of reasons—both positive and negative—it seems that student-participants were open to trying something other than the ELA classes they had been accustomed to over their high school careers.

A few individual student-participants also expressed their own unique reasons for taking ELAP. Soren’s curious and inquisitive nature—that I mentioned earlier—was also one of her motivations, as she stated:

Philosophy is something that I didn’t really know much about, so I was like, ‘Oh, I can learn this whole thing—like this entire subject that I haven’t been exposed to is now available, so like, why not try it out?’ (p. 4).

Nietzsche also expressed that he largely took ELAP based on the recommendations of former students who had said, “It’s a really good course to take” (p.3). It seems that some student-participants were simply motivated by the discovery of new experiences, while others valued the opinions of their peers.

Regardless of their reasons for taking ELAP, every student-participant expressed that he/she was happy with the decision to enroll in the class. When asked if they had any regrets about their choice to take ELAP instead of a traditional ELA class, they all responded positively about their experiences. Frida stated, “I’m very glad I made the choice” because “it makes you think in a lot of ways that other classes don’t” (p. 2). She concluded by saying, “I think it was just a really good decision because you get to think in a lot of different, critical ways that you probably never would have in any other class” (p. 2). When asked if he regretted his decision to take ELAP, Freud laughed and responded, “Nope” (p.3). When asked what he meant by “Nope,” he explained:

Well, one: I was able to identify my own ideas. Two: I was able to identify everyone else’s ideas. And three: I was able actually—I learned to actually listen to people more, like pick apart what they say and really understand them as a person, rather than, say, a stereotypical context. (p. 3)

Nietzsche stated, “I’m really glad I made the choice. It helped me learn, like, new things. Like, it helped me open up new doors into, like, understanding. Like, seeing different views of people

and stuff like that” (p. 3). Plato said, “I’m glad I chose Philosophy instead,” because, “I like Shakespeare but, at the same time, it’s a really close-ended course. So, through Philosophy it’s more open-ended where you can have your own interpretation of things” (p. 2). Moreover, when asked if she was happy with her choice of enrolling with ELAP, Soren stated, “I’m very glad that I took the class” (p. 4). She expanded on how she valued her decision because the class challenged her to think:

It was a really different class than everything else that I was taking at the time, and that I’ve sort of taken since. It focused, I thought, a lot on kind of almost how to think. Or, not telling us...how to put this...it was focusing on, like sort of collecting your own thoughts and knowing how to express them and things like that, which I find isn’t done so much in regular classes. Like, they are usually kind of taught what you want to teach, but Philosophy was more “how”: “how to think” rather than “what to think. (p. 4)

Likewise, Simone responded, “I’m glad I made the choice. Yeah, I’m glad I took Philosophy instead of English” (p. 2). She concluded, “I don’t think I would have ever learned some of those things outside, like, outside of school or in another class, unless I chose one in university or something” (p. 2). Irrespective of their gender, prior interests, competency, or academic outcomes, it is interesting to see that every participant expressed satisfaction with their choice to take ELAP over a traditional ELA class, as well as with their experiences in the class. As researcher and former teacher, I was certain that at least a few of the students would have said that they regretted their decision, but was pleasantly surprised to see that they all reported having pleasant and rewarding experiences with ELAP.

Student Satisfaction with ELAP: Academic, Emotional, and Social

Each student-participant was asked if their experiences with Philosophy were academically, emotionally, and socially satisfying. Students’ responses to these three domains were instructive because positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes relate closely to engagement, which is a central focus of this study (Kuh, et al., 2006; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Students’ academic, emotional, and social satisfaction play a role in fostering autonomy; as students become more invested and comfortable with their own beliefs and those of others, they can gain insight and confidence into their own decision-making processes and choices (Bleazby, 2011; Gasee, 1998; UNESCO, 2007). At the same time, students’ satisfaction with ELAP also

directly relates to the teaching of empathy, as students are required to be emotionally and socially focused on themselves and others in order to develop empathy (Lipman, 2007; Noddings, 1995; Noddings, 2010).

Academic satisfaction referred to students' interest and competency with the material and methods in ELAP. Emotional satisfaction referred to students' feelings—excitement or indifference—throughout the term. Social satisfaction referred to students' individual and collective experience with the course, whether or not they felt like their ideas and others were validated, accepted, or rejected by the group. ELAP often dealt with wedge issues and ethical quandaries, along with personal values and beliefs, so examining positive and negative students' experiences within these issues was of interest. On the whole, students responded positively to each question, expressing that they found satisfaction in these three domains through taking ELAP.

Academic Satisfaction

Five of the six students stated emphatically that they found their experiences with ELAP to be academically satisfying. Freud was the only student who equivocated, stating that he viewed his experiences with ELAP like he did any other academic pursuit. He explained that he took a lot from the class academically, like he did with any other class that he put his time and effort into:

It felt like any other class. Like, you had to do work, obviously. And you had to—like you had to put time into it. But you got just as much out of it as say a Math course, or an English course, or a Music course. (p. 4)

That being said, Freud later stated that ELAP had engaged him on a day-to-day basis: “with Philosophy, I always felt engaged” and that ELAP “definitely engaged me more” than his other classes (p. 19). Whether this engagement was a result of his academic, emotional, or social investment—or a mix of the three—was unclear.

In contrast, the rest of the students involved in this study overtly expressed that their experiences with ELAP were academically satisfying. This almost universal acknowledgment that ELAP was academically satisfying is noteworthy because—as was previously mentioned—this study dealt with students from diverse academic backgrounds. Some students excelled academically and had positive dispositions towards their education and schooling, while others reported that they sometimes struggled with academics. Yet, a majority of student-participants

said they found academic satisfaction with ELAP. These findings are obviously connected to these specific six students' experiences and are not generalizable to every student who has taken ELAP. However, experientially, I have found that after spending over a decade in the classroom that it is rare to find such widespread agreement amongst such a diverse group of students. It is difficult to have a class that academically engages, challenges, and provokes all students. These six students led me to believe that ELAP has characteristics that speak to a wide variety of student personalities, skills, and abilities.

To get a better understanding of their academic satisfaction with ELAP, it is necessary to explore their responses in more detail. Frida, Plato, Soren, and Simone stated that ELAP's focus on encouraging students to become "critical thinkers," to explore "different ways of thinking," and to hear new "perspectives" satisfied them academically. Frida stated:

It just makes you a more critical-thinker and you kind of don't take things as they come. You start to question them, which I think I really like. Because if you take things as they come, you don't really get to think for yourself. And, in this class, you really got to think for yourself. (p.3)

Plato concurred, "We went over bigger ideas. It gave us a lot of different ways of thinking, so we don't just take the simple route all the time. It's, 'How can we do better?' rather than 'Just keep things the same'" (p. 2). Soren also spoke of being academically satisfied by being encouraged to explore "different ways of thinking" that she could "apply to my other classes" and that she "didn't get from her other classes" (p. 4). When pressed to explain what she meant by "different ways of thinking," she replied, "different way of sort of thinking about the world or examining the world" (p. 4). From these students' experiences, it would seem that their academic satisfaction in ELAP came from learning different perspectives and systems of knowledge and understanding, and that they felt their other classes did not overtly address diverse ways of knowing. Simone's response seemed to encapsulate this sentiment:

I just had never really considered a lot of the topics we talked about—like, just the things like Existentialism, or just some of the sort of theories of some of the philosophers. Like, I just, I had never heard of them. I had never talked about them. Just never really encountered them before and it was like fun for me to sort of like encounter new things like that. Because, I don't know. I find a lot of times in my classes, I'm like, "Yeah, ok.

Like, move on. I've heard of this. Keep going." And, um, it was interesting to like hear these new sorts of perspectives on stuff I'd never heard before. (p. 3)

It is interesting to see a correlation between these students' academic satisfaction and ELAP's focus on a diversity of thoughts, beliefs, and opinions.

I found it curious that Nietzsche and Plato equated their academic satisfaction as being connected to their emotional satisfaction. These two self-declared "struggling" students reported that they had been academically engaged through their experiences with ELAP. Both Nietzsche and Plato acknowledged that school was boring or difficult at the best of times. They both also mentioned that they were more academically invested and satisfied with the class because it affirmed their ideas and their learning styles more than other classes they had taken. They felt emotionally validated. ELAP tends to focus a lot on getting students to express their own beliefs and opinions, using informal and formal discussion.

Emotional Satisfaction

Nietzsche and Plato's academic satisfaction seems to be at least partially linked to their reported emotional satisfaction with ELAP. Nietzsche stated that being encouraged to vocalize his thoughts helped him to organize them later on when he was required to respond in writing:

I really did think it was very interesting. Umm, it was actually a pretty good class for me personally to take, because obviously we discussed more. And it was more of a discussion class as well, which helps me out a lot, because I talk a lot. And, uh, just like when we have discussions, you can write essays on the discussion we've talked about. And it just helped me out a lot, because instead of writing in an English class—it's just kind of like you sit there, you read a book or something, and then you just write down on an essay—and I'm not the type of person to do that. It's better for me to, like, talk and then easier for me to write ideas down after we've talked about it. (p. 4)

ELA classes frequently use lots of small/large group and formal/informal discussion to explore questions and ideas, but—for unknown reasons—Nietzsche felt his experiences with ELA had not included many learning opportunities that allowed him to draw on his strengths as a learner. At the same time, Plato acknowledged that his academic satisfaction came from being able to express himself; he stated, "It gave more of an opportunity to express yourself rather than just express something out of a book" (p. 3). Again, in my experience, ELA classes also give students

ample and purposeful time to express themselves, but Plato felt that ELAP provided him with more opportunities to discuss his own thoughts and experiences.

All of the other student-participants also reported emotional satisfaction from their experiences with ELAP. Students seemed to link their emotional satisfaction with notions of self-worth, self-esteem, and self-realization, which are all connected to the development of autonomy (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). A common theme that emerged from the students' experiences was the idea that ELAP contributed to a confidence in their own beliefs. "I could look at myself and be like, 'Oh, I think like this,'" Freud said, "Oh, I understand these sorts of things. Oh, the world is like this, etc. etc.'" Like, I was able to be content with who I am" (p. 5). Frida also felt the same way; she thought that studying Philosophy gave "more assurance of yourself than a lot of other things" (p. 3). I think these students uncovered this growing sense of confidence and autonomy partly through being exposed to the existential questions and language that ELAP offers, which seemed to help them articulate and solidify some of their beliefs. Philosophical discussions seemed to validate them as young thinkers. They reported that they were empowered and respected through the class, which meant a great deal to them.

These ELAP students also felt a sense of solidarity—resulting in emotional satisfaction—when they were exposed to new theories and ways of knowing that supported their own existing thoughts and feelings. Students expressed that they felt connected to specific philosophical narratives, and that they also felt more emotionally connected to other people. These two ideas connect directly to the teaching of autonomy and empathy. Being more certain in one's beliefs is a foundation of autonomous people (Bleazby, 2011; Gasee, 1998; UNESCO, 2007). While in order to develop empathy, it is necessary to understand one's self in order to understand others, and it is necessary to understand others to gain a better understanding of one's self (Noddings, 2010). Soren was of the mindset that "Philosophy can help me" because it buffered some of her own previously held convictions (p. 5). "We would talk about certain philosophies that other people had," she went on, "and I was like, 'Oh, yeah, I kind of think like that, too'" (p. 5). She added, "Or, even in connecting with people; it kind of helps, like, I guess, be more open to other people's points of view as well" (p. 5). Simone agreed, stating that she related to aspects of ELAP—like Existentialism—on a personal level; she said, "I found that I was really happy that I was like, 'Oh, there's like a theory behind some of the things I've like thought before and some

of the feelings I've had before. Students, like Soren and Simone, were emphatic that knowing that their own beliefs were valued and held by others brought them emotional satisfaction.

Social Satisfaction

All student-participants reported social satisfaction from their experiences with ELAP. They universally stated that they felt like they better understood others' perspectives as a result, which made them feel more connected to their peers in the classroom as well as with people out in the world. When asked about the origins of his social satisfaction in ELAP, Freud gave a powerful example of what he learned through class discussions and how it led to social satisfaction and connection:

I started to see those people in a different light... I'd actually see them as like someone I could get along with, instead of just like, just a one-dimensional view of them. You know? Because I actually saw their ideas. So, like, after a class the more... I would actually think about more, like instead of them in that instance, in that moment, I would think more about all their decisions and what all of that would mean. Instead of just immediately dismissing them, I'd actually like try to understand why they thought that way. And, therefore, that actually like helps me connect with them more as a human.
(p. 6)

Frida found social satisfaction through feeling like her own opinions, as well as those of her peers, were validated, "In that class, I kind of felt like everyone's opinions were valid even if we had different views and ideas" (p. 4). Plato mentioned that he gained social satisfaction from, "trying to figure out how different people think in regards to a social setting" (p. 3). Nietzsche also stated the same, saying that he felt satisfied because he started to understand people better, "Just like understanding how people work. Like, understanding conversations more. Like, we talked about, like, how people have different views all the time... it's easier to, like, understand how people work and stuff like that" (p. 4). Simone added that she gained social satisfaction from her experiences with ELAP because "it helped me like know what my brother was talking about. Like, he was always—he always said 'Existentialism' and I was like, 'What are you talking about?'" (p. 3). She went on to explain how her experiences connected her more with the people closest to her, "But then, yeah, I think it made me more informed, and like, I was more able to like express things to people, and got to talk to my parents about it" (p. 3). It is clear that

students attributed their social satisfaction with their experiences in ELAP to understanding the perspectives and beliefs of others.

It was necessary to unpack students' perceptions of their academic, emotional, and social satisfaction with their experiences in ELAP, because it closely related to the aims of this study, namely whether or not ELAP fosters engagement, autonomy, and/or empathy. I was also pleasantly surprised to see that some of my observations seem to be validated by many of the student-participants' responses, as they frequently alluded to the foundations, experiences, and dispositions that, I believe, are necessary to build these concepts. However, their collective satisfaction with ELAP only unveiled some of the possibilities. It is now necessary to take a more focused look into students' feelings and perspectives and the extent to which ELAP nurtured their senses of engagement, autonomy, and empathy.

Experiences with Engagement in ELAP

My experiences teaching ELAP led me to believe that students are engaged by their experiences in the class. Aside from my observations of seeing increased engagement in ELAP—whether through discussions or assignments or presentations—I have never really understood the foundations of their engagement. As a teacher, it is difficult to determine the root of students' engagement because you cannot get into their heads and think what they think or experience what they experience. And even though I have felt and observed that ELAP engaged students, I do not know this to be true. It might be that their engagement stems from ELAP. However, students could be engaged for countless reasons that might not connect with ELAP. Maybe they simply enjoyed me as a teacher—my personality, style, and methods? Maybe I am a better Philosophy teacher than I am an ELA, History, or French teacher, and I do not hold students' interest in my other classes? Maybe they were naturally intrinsically motivated to learn in all their education and schooling? Maybe they were extrinsically motivated and forced themselves to engage regardless of the class or content? Their engagement could be connected to any number of internal and external influences and factors. That being said, I was still interested in knowing whether their engagement was actually connected to their experiences in ELAP.

Student-participants were asked a number of open-ended questions about whether or not they felt that an interdisciplinary approach to Philosophy and ELA was engaging. For context, I have briefly summarized the definition of “engagement” as well as student-participants' own definitions and examples of engagement to contrast educational theory from the lived

experiences of students. I then summarized students' perceptions and experience of engagement within the ELAP classroom based on four themes that emerged from the data: interest, competence, challenge, and content.

For the purposes of this study, the working definition of engagement was derived from Dewey (1938/1997) and Whitehead's educational theories. Although they did not use the word "engagement" to explain students' attitudes or affections for education and schooling, they both believed that students not only needed to be curious about learning, but also had to want to learn and enjoy the learning process. Dewey (1938/1997) spoke about educational experiences as needing to be simultaneously "agreeable" and "educative" (p. 27). Similarly, Whitehead (1967) believed that educational experiences had to include both "romance" and "precision" (p. 33). As such, engagement is not simply a matter of enjoyment, but authentic education does not happen without its presence. According to Dewey and Whitehead, students' educational experiences need to first be engaging (agreeable/romantic) before they can be educative or move onto any degree of precision.

Each student was asked to define "engagement" from his/her own understanding and experiences and was encouraged to give examples of what engagement "looked like." The student-participants were unsure when it came to formally defining the concept, but they could easily draw on their own experiences to give clearer examples of their understanding. For the purposes of this section, I have summarized their individual definitions, followed by a more in-depth look at their examples and experiences with engagement in the ELAP classroom.

Definitions of Engagement

Even though I knew that students would not simply regurgitate Dewey and Whitehead's notions of engagement verbatim, they all touched on engagement's link to interest and/or enjoyment, as well as the idea that engaged learners were active learners. Most students alluded to the notion that intentional activity with learning either followed enjoyment or, was at the very least, closely related. Freud defined engagement as, "How receptive someone is to the things they're being told" (p. 18). He then provided an elaborate example that showed his love for music and clarified his notion of what it meant to be "receptive" explaining that he believed that engagement required active participants:

A good example of low engagement would be theory in music. A lot of people dislike theory because it's a lot of words, a lot of contrived laws that some guy made back in the

16th century when they only had pencils. And a lot of people have, like, very low engagement with that, but when you actually get to the music-making, and like actually actively participating, a lot of engagement tends to turn up. A lot of people will tend to get more engrossed with the idea of actually, like, making the music. So, when I think of engagement, I think of that. Like, people actively wanting to do it. Instead of being just like, “Oh, it’s a thing I have to do,” it’s an, “Oh, I want to do it.” (p. 18)

Freud’s belief that engagement was a mix of desire and action was shared by his peers.

Soren also defined engagement as a state of focus and active thinking. She stated that she knew she was engaged with a class when “I wasn’t, like, bored or kind of thinking about other things” (p. 13). Frida held similar ideas, stating:

When you’re engaged in something, you’re listening, and you’re following along, and you’re doing all of the things that you’re supposed to be doing. You’re putting in the effort and the time into whatever you’re doing, so you’re engaged in it” (p. 9).

At first, Plato’s definition of engagement was simply the verb “participating” (p. 8). When asked for an example, he extended his notion of participation by adding that it did not need to be an outward participation, but a receptiveness to ideas. He stated that introverted students might not look engaged but, “They’re taking in the ideas but they’re not necessarily letting out the ideas” (p. 9). In Plato’s mind, engagement required action, but not necessarily outward expression; it could be an internal dialogue.

Nietzsche and Simone also latched onto the idea that engagement was linked to enjoyment and action. At first, Nietzsche struggled to articulate a succinct definition of engagement favouring an example instead:

I feel like I’m engaged when we’re having a big group discussion and people are talking, but they’re like bouncing ideas off me and I’m bouncing ideas off them. I’m not just sitting there listening, trying to pay attention. I’m like actually trying to learn more and understand more. (p. 11)

Eventually, he defined engagement, stating, “If you’re having fun, like, during the class then I definitely think you’re more engaged. If you’re not having fun, then you’re not really going to want to pay attention and be engaged in the discussion” (p. 12). Likewise, Simone defined her own engagement as an interest or curiosity, “Where I am fully interested in what’s being said” (p. 9). She did not “really feel engaged unless I actually feel like I might have a question, or have

something to say about it, or want to contribute to the dialogue about it” (p. 9). While each student’s definition of engagement differed, they all shared common themes. According to the students, engaging educational experiences were characterized by the learner being receptive, focused, and involved. At the same time, educational experiences needed to be fun and/or interesting if they were to be engaging.

Engagement and ELAP

The student-participants all unequivocally expressed that they had been engaged by their experiences in ELAP. As already stated, research found that Philosophy fosters engagement (Colter & Ulatowski, 2013; Gasee, 1998; Jopling, 2002, Norris, 2015), and it is noteworthy that all six participants replied that they had been engaged by Philosophy. Students reported being engaged because they felt interested, competent, and/or challenged by the content and ideas in the ELAP classroom. They also all reported that they had higher levels of engagement with ELAP than with other classes in their high school experience.

Interest as engagement. Students’ interest for new ideas and ways of thinking seemed to be a collective reason for their engagement with ELAP. As Whitehead (1967) stated, “Without interest there will be no progress” (p. 33). Whitehead outlined that all learning first required interest, what he called “romance”, which connects to many modern theories on engagement. According to Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi (2008), student engagement requires not only concentration and enjoyment, but also an “interest in learning activities” (p. 133). Student-participants’ responses indicated that ELAP fostered engagement because it piqued their interest.

Frida and Plato suggested they felt engaged because they were enthusiastic about getting a class they were interested in, even though the class took place first thing in the morning. Frida exclaimed, “I looked forward to coming to class every day” (p. 9), while Plato stated, “Well, it was first period and I really wanted to, wanted to get to class first period. And I was wide awake and ready for it” (p. 9). That two Grade 12 students were motivated to get to ELAP—even though it occurred early in the morning—is a significant finding with regards to the class’ connection to student engagement and interest.

Many student-participants explained that they had been interested by new ideas and ways of thinking that were introduced by ELAP. Soren’s enthusiasm for ELAP stemmed from her interest in contemplating big ideas and questions in the class; she stated, “When I was in Philosophy, I was thinking about Philosophy because there were always things to be thinking

about that was content related” (p. 13). Simone’s experience with ELAP also pointed to enthusiasm for new ideas:

I think it was engaging just for the sheer fact that I have never, like, encountered those things before. Like, there’s just never like—it’s just kind of a totally other side of things that they just don’t really ever teach you in other classes. (p. 11).

Freud’s engagement and experiences with ELAP seemed to coincide with Simone’s, as he stated, “Like, overall, just the fact that we were learning all the schools of thought kept me the most engaged. Like the fact that I can learn all these worldviews and ideas” (p. 18). On the whole, student-participants reported that their interest in the class was one of the reasons for their engagement with ELAP, even though the motivations behind these interests may have differed. Student-participants all expressed an interest in ELAP’s content and methods, which will be addressed later on in this section. At the same time, interest in learning and engagement are closely related to feelings of competence (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993).

Competence as engagement. I was pleasantly surprised that two student-participants offered a personal sense of competence as another reason for their engagement with ELAP. I had always had a hunch that students’ interest in ELAP elicited engagement, but had never really thought about their competency. According to Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece (2008), students’ experience increased motivation and engagement when they feel like they are actively in control of their learning: when they feel competent. Whether or not ELAP provides students with a sense of competence is difficult to know for certain, as students’ motivations are so vast and varied. Nevertheless, two student-participants—Plato and Nietzsche—did report that they felt increased competence with their education and schooling as a result of their experiences with ELAP.

Plato, who was typically quite a reserved student, explained that he was engaged because he was interested in discussing his newfound knowledge and understanding of philosophical concepts. He was motivated to engage with the material because he felt competent in his own understanding. He stated, “I had a little bit of an idea of the concepts, and I wanted to try and share that” (p. 9). Plato felt competent in his knowledge, ideas, and opinions, and his experience seemed to encourage him to want to engage in the class through sharing his insights.

Likewise, Nietzsche also stated that ELAP fostered a sense of competence in him that led to increased engagement. He admitted that he was not an easy student to engage, but that ELAP was different for him. “I’m not very good with like getting engaged and like learning things,”

stated Nietzsche, “But, it actually helped me a lot with my future courses, I guess. It helped me learn like if I sit down and I just like focus on something that I can actually do it” (p. 12). Nietzsche’s belief that ELAP encouraged his confidence, in turn, building competence is a testament to the potential of ELAP. However, the idea that ELAP also extended Nietzsche’s competence into other areas was not something that I had considered prior to this study, although Lipman (2007) and his P4C movement believed that Philosophy could improve students’ skills, abilities, and dispositions across disciplines. It is noteworthy that two self-reported “struggling learners” felt engaged with ELAP because it made them feel more competent.

Challenge as engagement. Student-participants also suggested that they felt engaged in ELAP because it appropriately challenged them (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). This engagement through appropriate challenge seemed to reach across genders and academic abilities. Multiple students reported that being challenged either led to or increased engagement; students also reported that these challenges pushed them out of their comfort zones and made them feel like they wanted to learn more and that they learned more.

Soren—who excelled in all aspects of her academics—stated, “I would always find myself really engaged in that class, which to me means that it was a good, like, difficulty level” (p. 13). She went on to say that she felt challenged by the ideas in the class and really wanted to explore them in order to feel prepared:

I found myself always really trying to think through my answer before I gave it. Like, sometimes in the class, you know, you just kind of throw your hand up and say something, but with this class it kind of felt like you had to be prepared with your answer. And I find that engaging. Just, yeah, sort of to think through “What am I going to say?” And, you know, “Why am I saying it?” (p. 14-15)

Soren also expressed that her engagement came from grappling with challenging ideas (Sizer & Sizer, 1999):

... sometimes I’d be like, “I don’t really get this,” but then as we would discuss it more, and give examples and things like that, yeah, I would... Sometimes you’d have that, that “eureka” kind of moment where, “Oh, yeah, I get it now,” which I really liked. (p. 14)

I think it is important to take note from a student like Soren—who reported getting good grades and having a relatively easy time with her schooling—when she says that her engagement was a result of being challenged by ELAP.

Simone—another self-described successful academic student—also expressed being challenged by her experiences in ELAP. She also connected her new encounters as being both challenging and engaging:

I think I was challenged by the ideas, you know, in the way that I hadn't really heard of them before and it was like there were a lot of new concepts for me, like I hadn't really encountered. Like, the Solipsism one, or, you know, Existentialism. And just some different philosophies that I hadn't encountered before, so yeah I think it was challenging in that respect. (p. 8)

Simone went on to describe how the new ideas that she encountered were also connected to her engagement:

Yeah, I think it was engaging just for the sheer fact that I have never, like, encountered those things before. Like, there's just never like—it's just kind of a totally other side of things that they just don't really ever teach you in other classes, like, they never really go into. So it was engaging in the way that I was like, "Oh, something that I've never really talked about." (p. 10)

Simone, like Soren was highly academic, and agreed that she also felt challenged and engaged by the new ideas presented in ELAP.

At the same time, Frida—a student who expressed getting average grades in her schooling—also confirmed that her engagement came in part from the challenges posed by ELAP. She stated, "I looked forward to coming to class every day, because I knew that we'd be challenged with something that we may not have thought of before... So, it kind of made you more interested in taking the course" (p. 9). She went onto say, "It gave us, like, the right amount of challenges, but it also kept to the side of, 'Like, we're still in high school,' but it made you think at a bit of a higher level" (p. 8). Again, I think it is significant that a student who self-reported as being an "average student" was not only being challenged by ELAP, but being engaged by these challenges (p. 1). Frida—like Soren and Simone—expressed being engaged through challenge and new experiences. It would appear that ELAP has the potential to engage different kinds of students by challenging different interests, abilities, and skill levels.

Moreover, Plato also reported that the challenges of ELAP helped to engage him, which corresponded with his peers' experiences. With regards to ELAP's content and methods, Plato invoked a Goldilocks metaphor, stating, "They were in the middle area where it was, it wasn't

too difficult—where it wasn't too difficult—for me to understand, but it wasn't too simple, at the same time” (p. 7). He explained that the level of challenge “kind of spurred me on” and encouraged him to try harder to figure things out (p. 7).

Nietzsche reported a similar experience to Plato, stating, “Uh, yeah, it did challenge me. I feel like it challenged me harder than an English class, I guess. But like in a good way. It helped me. Like, it challenged my logical thinking about things” (p. 9). He also connected his challenging experiences in ELAP to increased engagement on his part:

... like when you gave us some like logical ideas or philosophical ideas, like, you'd understand it, but you would want to understand it more, I guess. You know? Like, you kind of understand the basics, but I would want to understand more of what it actually means. Like, there's always a new meaning inside things. Like, there's always a meaning for something, but there's always bigger meanings, I guess. (p. 10)

For a student who reported that, “I've struggled with school. I'm, like, barely graduating” and that he would usually forget about his studies and “go and do my own thing,” this example of engagement in ELAP is, in my mind, a powerful testament to ELAP's potential for engaging a vast array of different personalities and types of students. It showed a student who was typically disengaged with his studies, engaging in new ways.

All in all, students expressed engagement with their experiences in ELAP, whether they were motivated by interest in content and methods, competence in their skills and abilities, and/or challenged by the course.

Content and methods as Engagement. ELAP's content and methods were also mentioned as potential reasons for student-participants' engagement. As previously mentioned, ELAP substitutes regular ELA materials for more overtly philosophical resources. Students still encounter novels (*The Brothers Karamazov* 1984, *The Stranger*), short stories (*Love is a Fallacy*, *Man Descending*), poetry (*The Road Not Taken*, *Oh Me! Oh Life!*), drama (*Hamlet*), film (*The Matrix*, *The Truman Show*), essays (*We Should All be Feminists*), and the like, but they are encouraged to approach these mediums from a philosophical point of view. The methods used in ELAP mirror those of any traditional ELA class. The only real difference between the methods in ELAP and an ELA class is the emphasis that is placed on discussions and dialogue—although other ELA classes may emphasize discussion and dialogue in a similar manner (Lipman, 2007; Sharp, 1997; Shertz 2006). Student engagement in ELAP resulted largely from the content, as it

is oftentimes new to students (Kuh, et al., 2006) and addresses relevant existential questions that concern all human beings, no matter what their age, gender, or experiences (Gasee, 2010; Noddings, 1995; Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

All student-participants communicated that they had been engaged by the content in ELAP. This engagement largely seemed to depend on individual's personal interests, but their collective agreement that ELAP's content provided them with engaging experiences was evident in all our discussions. In order to understand students' engagement with the content, it is first necessary to examine when they were disengaged with it to provide a contrast, as well as the degree of students' reported engagement levels.

Student-participants' disengagement largely stemmed from different reasons. There was relatively little agreement on what they found disengaging about the class. Most of their qualms came from personal feelings or interests not being stimulated or met by course content. Frida and Nietzsche were the only students who expressed that they were disengaged for the same reasons. Frida stated that she preferred actively doing Philosophy rather than simply learning about it by taking notes or through readings; her disengagement was most prevalent when "we were going through more of the history stuff" (p. 10). At the same time, Nietzsche stated that he was disengaged when he had to read or write down notes:

I feel like when we're sitting there and reading, I'm kind of bored and I just, like, want to move on to the next class. Or, like when we're sitting there writing down assignments or like writing down some notes and stuff, I'm not really engaged in the class, I don't think. Mostly because, again, I'm not having fun. (p. 13)

Where Frida and Nietzsche found a common theme of disengagement, other student-participants' reasons for being disengaged in ELAP were not unified.

Freud explained that he was disengaged in ELAP when the class examined "schools of thought that didn't really appeal to me, or like I really didn't agree with" (p. 19). When asked to explain the "schools of thought" that disengaged him, he gave no specifics but expressed that, "I see the logical reasoning and I see how you got there, but it just doesn't connect with me (p. 19). Freud's disengagement with ELAP appeared to be based on his interests and preference for certain kinds of ideas and ways of thinking; he was not always interested in exploring material outside his comfort zone.

Simone expressed disengagement when examining a unit on logic and argumentation, which is a central focus of Philosophy. “I was not engaged during the logic and argumentation thing,” she stated emphatically (p. 12). She went onto explain, saying, “I just found it a bit like—I was just like a bit bored with it after awhile. I was just kind of like, ‘Ugh. I don’t want to do this anymore’” (p. 4). She also acknowledged that her disengagement with these concepts resulted from difficulty in fully understanding them, and from a desire to examine and discuss other things:

The, like, fallacies and the logic and argumentation—some of that stuff went over my head because I was just like, I was just like, “I don’t understand why we can’t just talk to one another.” Or like, “I get it, but I didn’t get it.” (p. 8)

However, even though Simone was disengaged by her experiences with logic and argumentation, she still recognized that the unit was important to the class. “Though I wasn’t like super into the logic and argumentation thing,” Simone stated, “I understand why it was necessary, because it’s like part of Philosophy and so I understand why it was included in the course” (p. 9). Where Freud had expressed disengagement through a lack of interest with certain ideas, Simone communicated the same, adding the caveat that her disengagement was also linked to struggling with difficult ideas.

Plato and Soren described their disengagement towards methods in the class rather than content. They both highlighted “Harkness Discussions” as being moments of disengagement for them. The Harkness method can be thought of in the following manner:

It's a way of learning: everyone comes to class prepared to share, discuss, and discover, whether the subject is a novel by William Faulkner or atomic and molecular structure. There are no lectures. It's a way of being: interacting with other minds, listening carefully, speaking respectfully, accepting new ideas and questioning old ones, using new knowledge, and enjoying the richness of human interaction. (Phillips Exeter Academy, 2016)

The Harkness method was developed at Phillips Exeter Academy in 1930 as a way to transform schooling; it is a student-led group discussion on a pre-determined topic, which centers around an idea, text, or film (Phillips Exeter Academy (2017). Students are responsible for leading the discussion, while the teacher observes and “maps” the students’ dialogue. This mapping involves the teacher using a pre-determined rubric to create a real-time visual diagram of the discussion;

the resulting diagram shows how students engaged with each other, how they analyzed and synthesized the material, as well as the overall quality of dialogue. These diagrams can then be used by students to self-assess and peer-assess each other, as well as to judge if they met the criteria. The end goal of the Harkness method is to not only have students take ownership over their learning, but construct their knowledge and understanding through a collaborative and critical process.

Plato did not report being disengaged with ELAP's content. When asked what he enjoyed least in the class, Plato responded, "I didn't really have a least favourite" (p. 3). When asked for an example of disengagement with ELAP, he recounted his experiences with Harkness discussions. Plato said, "Um, the first group discussion, I wasn't really engaged at all" (p. 10). He did not explain what disengaged him about the experience, so whether it was the method itself, the topic of conversation, or something else entirely is difficult to know. However, it must be stated that Plato only expressed disengagement with his first Harkness experience. With regards to the rest of his experiences, he stated, "Then, the second and third—I think we stopped at the third one—I was a little more engaged than the first" (p. 10). Even though he was not as engaged with his initial exposure to the method, Plato did confess that his engagement grew over time with subsequent discussions.

Soren also explained that she also experienced disengagement with the Harkness discussions, at times, because it did not always interest her, or she felt like she did not have much to contribute. She stated:

I was going to say, sometimes during a Harkness my mind might drift a little but, especially if, I don't know, if the conversation was headed in a way where I didn't feel I had a lot to contribute to it. Um, either I just sort of disagreed, or just didn't think people were talking in a way that was very productive, then I would kind of disengage a little bit. (p. 16)

Soren also reported that, "The first time we did a Harkness, I was really nervous and like did not... I don't know if 'not enjoyed' is the write word, but that kind of stressed me out" (p. 6). However, like Plato, Soren also stated that she came around to Harkness discussions as she came to understand their purpose:

But as we did more of them, I came to sort of enjoy that part of the class—the discussion and prepping for the discussions. Um, and I liked how it was focused on kind of letting

everyone speak, or get a chance to speak... I thought that was cool, and kind of seeing the class' progression with that. (p. 6)

Soren's disengagement with the Harkness method seemed to originate with a lack of interest in the discussion at hand, frustration with the resulting discussion and its usefulness, as well as from nerves. In my experience, it is not uncommon for a self-described introverted student to be disengaged, disappointed, or overwhelmed by large group discussions that take place in classes with 30 or more students.

That being said, all the student-participants in this study reported being engaged by ELAP's content and methods. This engagement seemed to be largely based on a wide range of student preferences and interests, and also because so much of ELAP's content was new material.

Many of the student-participants noted that they had favorite units, concepts, and ideas that reflected their own personal likes and dislikes. Frida stated, "Epistemology and Metaphysics and Existentialism were probably my favorites," because "it was kind of interesting because you were looking at yourself and your life in ways that you weren't really thinking before," which encouraged her to "question your beliefs" (p 5). Simone communicated that she was engaged by some of Philosophy's historical figures and their ideas, stating, "I enjoyed the Greek philosophers' things as well, because I found the just the classical sort of element of it interesting" (p. 4). Freud reported being engaged by exploring questions about the existence of God in the book *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky and he was fascinated by the antagonist, Ivan, and his ideas on God and the problem of evil:

I really liked the way the author portrayed him. Because, like, it's not that he fully rejects the idea of God, but he rejects the idea of God being good. And, therefore, he doesn't want anything to do with it. And I always thought—I found that fascinating. (p. 8)

It seemed that ELAP's content and methods had something for everyone when it came to interesting and engaging experiences.

Several students articulated individual interest and preferences while speaking about engagement; yet there were some common engagement pieces. Students frequently reported being engaged through the exploration of Epistemology and Existentialism. They were absorbed with the foundational epistemological question: "How do you know what you know?"

As students are exposed to Epistemological theories—Skepticism, Rationalism, Empiricism, Constructivism, Subjectivism, and Indigenous Philosophy—they start to learn, understand, and appreciate different ways of knowing. Freud stated:

Epistemology really engaged me. The idea of how you know what you know. And, like, a lot of—I'm really into the idea of perception, like the idea that we can only learn so much from our own perceptions. And that's why Epistemology engaged me the most, because it was literally just learning about how our brains process ideas and thoughts. And I thought that was really interesting. (p. 20)

Frida echoed some of Freud's thoughts about how Epistemology got her thinking differently and deeply, which increased her engagement:

Like, with Epistemology, it's kind of like the general questions like might ask yourself in a really bad time, like you know, "Why am I here?" That kind of stuff. But when you really look into those concepts, you find out a lot more and it kind of gives you a bit of closure. (p. 5)

Soren, Nietzsche, Plato, and Freud explained that they had been engaged by the Allegory of the Cave, which is a specific part of the Epistemology unit in ELAP.³ I remember the first time I encountered Plato's Allegory of the Cave was in a first-year Philosophy class in university; it forever changed my perspective and encouraged me to really question everything that I thought was true in my life. I am always excited to expose students to new ideas, and the Allegory of the Cave is one of my favourites. Soren said that she had been interested in the Allegory of the Cave, stating, "I find that it's an interesting way to think" (p. 27). Nietzsche said, "It was kind of just really interesting to me" (p. 5). Plato agreed, saying "that was an interesting subject" (p. 3). Freud also stated, "I also liked the Cave Allegory" (p. 7). Experientially, I have found that it is rare in ELAP to have a group of students who does not react with similar interest when they encounter and begin unpacking this philosophically dense allegory.

When asked what interested them or engaged them about the Allegory of the Cave, Soren said that "it did get me to question things in general." Nietzsche stated:

I really liked learning about that, because it was just like... it was something about like a guy who didn't really know anything. And then he expanded his mind because he had

³ Plato's Allegory of the Cave appears in *The Republic*. It is a metaphor that explores how human beings come to "know" the world around them.

learned about something new, and it just like opened up his world. Like, he didn't know about it, and it's like just really interesting to me, I guess. And then he goes back to his friends and he like tries to explain it but they don't understand because they haven't seen it and they don't, like—they won't understand unless they see it. So, I don't know. It was just kind of—that's one thing that I really liked. (p. 5)

Plato stated that “it opens your eyes to the fact that what you see isn't necessarily what there is” (p. 4). Freud's statement is indicative of many other student responses that I have heard over the years teaching ELAP; he stated that he thought it was interesting:

Just because, like, thinking about the idea that there is more beyond our perspective—beyond like what we can see and feel and touch—I think is a cool thought. Some people thought it was terrifying. I thought it was pretty cool. (p. 7)

From these student-participants' feedback, it appears that Epistemology acted as a catalyst for student engagement, because it encouraged students to think in new and divergent ways, potentially challenging their preconceived ideas and beliefs about knowledge and knowing.

Finally, every student-participant—except Nietzsche—explicitly reported being engaged by his/her experiences studying Existentialism. With regards to interest levels with Existentialism, student-participants stated the following: Freud said, “I really liked the Existentialism unit” (p. 7); Soren stated, “I really liked the unit we did with Kierkegaard” (p. 6); Plato responded, “It was interesting looking at Existentialism” (p. 4); Frida stated that “It would probably be the best part” (p. 6); and, Simone stated, “I enjoyed the Existentialism unit and stuff like that, because, yeah, it was like validating and interesting to me” (p. 4) and “I liked that it was just very relatable for me and like very like inspiring, so to speak, for me” (p. 26). More than any other content, Existentialism seemed to speak to students and engage them in thinking about and questioning how they live their lives. Whereas participants reported that Epistemology got them interested because it got them to think about different perspectives, they explained that Existentialism connected to them more on a personal level. I think that it also speaks volumes about Existentialism that three participants chose existentialist philosophers as their pseudonyms.

It appeared that participants' engagement gravitated towards Existentialism because it provided a practical approach to living out Philosophy and/or it validated a lot of what they had already been thinking in their lives up until that point. Simone, a self-proclaimed atheist, seemed

to engage with Existentialism because she found it closely connected to beliefs and feelings she already had:

I kind of really related to that on a personal level, and like the ideas behind it and things like that. And so, I found that I was really happy that I was like, “Oh, there’s like a theory behind some of the things I’ve like thought before and some of the feelings I’ve had before.” (p. 7)

At the same time, Soren—a self-proclaimed theist—found a similar connection and engagement with Existentialism because it seemed to validate her lived experience:

I don’t know, something about that type of Philosophy, I was kind of like, “Yeah, I can kind of see that,” like I sort of liked it. And it sort of lined up with some things that I thought, too, so that was kind of cool. Whenever we would talk/discuss things—I don’t have a lot of concrete examples necessarily—but whenever we discussed things, and it kind of would reaffirm...it would be like things, like, I had kind of thought about that before. (p. 7)

Other student-participants communicated that their experiences with Existentialism connected to them personally, and that they could identify either personally or practically with the different theories within the Philosophy. In the end, aspects of ELAP’s content have played a significant role in the student-participants’ engagement levels.

Student Engagement in ELAP in Comparison to Other Disciplines

All participants reported that ELAP engaged them more than many of their other high school experiences. Frida stated, “I’d say so. Yup” (p. 9). Plato responded, “Quite a bit more” (p. 9). Nietzsche also replied, “I think it engaged me a lot more than most classes would... it made me pay attention more because I wanted to understand the concepts that we were learning and talking about” (p. 12-13). When asked if ELAP engaged them more than their other classes, some students responded with a few encouraging words, while others provided detailed examples.

Freud went on at length, explaining that his experiences with ELAP engaged him similarly or more than some of his passions, like English and Music:

It engaged me more. It definitely engaged me more. Partly, again, because it’s an English course and I’m really engaged with English courses. And, the other part, because it’s so different from other courses. No other course, I’d say, had me more talking, or more

interacting, or more like, just the idea of rustling ideas in my head than Philosophy had. Besides maybe, like, English, or Music—being a music student. (p. 19)

He provided the following example:

I'd say it definitely engaged me more. Like, in a Math class, I... find that I'm only engaged because I'm sort of forced to be with a few of them—not all of them. Like, some parts of Math I really like, like the idea, ah, finding out an answer, solving and proving, and stuff like that. That's really enjoyable. But, like, that's only one part. While with Philosophy, I always felt engaged. I always felt like, oh, like when I woke up in the morning I was happy to go to Philosophy class. While with other classes, I would be like, "Uhh, I have to do this again." (p. 19)

It appeared that Freud felt consistent intrinsic engagement with ELAP, rather than inconsistent or extrinsic engagement in some of his experiences with other disciplines.

Soren spoke of being “more personally engaged” with ELAP in comparison to her other classes. She expressed how her engagement manifested in the form of internal reflections that could not be seen by her peers or teacher:

I maybe didn't speak as much in this class as I would have in other classes, because—like I said—I would want, like I didn't want to just spew out an answer, because the content was more complicated. Or, I felt like it deserved to be thought about more. (p. 15)

She went onto say how she might not have appeared as engaged on the outside as in other classes, but that she was internally thinking about and grappling with ELAP's content and questions. “But, inwardly, I did a lot more thinking in class,” she reported, “internally, I definitely was thinking more, and I was more engaged” (p. 15).

Simone reported that her experiences with ELAP engaged her more than her other classes in terms of ideas, concepts, and content, while it was equal in terms of engaging assignments. She stated “more in the areas of like ideas and, um, like just concepts and content and things like that” and “kind of equally in terms of some assignments” (p. 11).

It is remarkable and unexpected, I believe, that all six student-participants expressed that ELAP provided them with engaging educational experiences, motivated by interest, competence, challenge, and/or content. Six vastly different students—males and females with unique personalities, disparate interests, and varied academic careers—described being engaged by the class. I understand that when they say that they were engaged by their experiences, that it

probably means “more often than not”; that is, that their engagement was heightened by the class, but most likely not constant. I also recognize these six student-participants represent their own stories and experiences, and not those of other students who have taken the class. But after hearing their stories and experiences I was encouraged. I never expected to hear that all the student-participants felt this way. I thought that maybe a student or two might have enjoyed the class more than their other classes, but never in my wildest dreams did I think that every student-participant would report not only being engaged by the class, but also being engaged by their experiences in ELAP more than their other classes. As a teacher of ELAP, I feel like these students’ experiences support many of my observations. As a researcher, I believe their stories and experiences lend support to existing literature and research.

Closing Thoughts on Student Engagement and ELAP

This study examined the question: Do students feel that an interdisciplinary approach to ELA and Philosophy is academically, emotionally, and socially engaging? And while it is unreasonable—and probably unrealistic—to expect any course to engage all students all of the time, these six students’ responses demonstrated that ELAP definitely provided them with a variety of engaging experiences. Students reported their general interest in ELAP as fostering their academic and emotional engagement. Students declared increased competence levels, felt challenged through the course, and connected to the content, thereby, heightening their engagement with learning through ELAP. These six participants’ experiences with ELAP provide much to contemplate regarding the relationship between Philosophy, students, and increased academic and personal engagement.

ELA and Philosophy: Nurturing a Sense of Autonomy

Since the advent of ELAP, my observations and conversations with students have led me to believe that their experiences with Philosophy help to nurture their sense of autonomy. Students frequently reported feeling more confident in their beliefs, more competent in their decision-making, and more in control of their lives after having taken ELAP. However, I had never formally examined students’ experiences until this study—everything I surmised was largely based on anecdotal evidence. After conducting the interviews with student-participants in this study, it appears that students who have experienced ELAP do feel a heightened sense of autonomy, as a number of reoccurring themes connected to autonomy were expressed. Student-participants reported feeling a heightened sense of personal autonomy through feeling that they

were better able and prepared to make choices in the present and for their future. They also connected this heightened sense of autonomy to an increased confidence and/or validation of their values and beliefs.

Before going into student-participants' responses, it is necessary to revisit the working definition for autonomy in this study. Dewey (1916/2009) and MacIntyre (2002) stated that human beings' personal and intellectual freedoms were important in progressive societies, although they understood that individuals' freedoms to act and choose would always be in tension with the limitations that society imposed on individuals in favor of the collective good. Wringer's (1995) definition of autonomy captures Dewey and MacIntyre's ideas, as he defined autonomy as "both the right and the capacity to conceive personal goals in the light of the possibilities the world offers and the necessary constraints it imposes" (p. 49). It was of interest to learn if the student-participants in this study felt that their experiences with ELAP had increased their capacities to think about and choose their values and beliefs and/or act on their desires, even though they might have been constrained and/or influenced by factors outside their control.

Definitions of Autonomy

I quickly found that the student-participants in this study did not understand what was meant by "autonomy." Almost all of them—except for Simone and Plato—struggled articulating their own definitions of autonomy because they were unfamiliar with the term. All participants demonstrated a practical understanding of autonomy that revealed itself when the concept was unpacked collectively through dialogue (Freire, 1970/2011). I found it amazing how flustered students got when asked to formally define the word, but how when they were asked for examples they could easily draw on their experiences. Most identified that "autonomy" involved individuals' choices and actions, but they did not always include how these choices or actions might be limited by the world around them.

Freud, Frida, and Nietzsche asked to have autonomy defined for them. Soren expressed a partial understanding of the term, but then seemed to hesitate out of nervousness or a lack of confidence—even though her definition was on the right track. Instead of defining autonomy for these students, I questioned them further to try to prompt them, asking them: Do you think you are more or less able to make choices about your life after having studied ELAP? Even though this question did not deal with all of "autonomy's" nuances, it did stimulate students' memories

and understanding and we were quickly talking about the student-participants' choices, beliefs, values, and actions.

Plato defined autonomy as something or someone "acting on its own" (p. 11). When asked for more detail, he explained that "autonomy" was the ability to make authentic choices. Rather than acting to avoid making problematic choices, Plato saw "autonomy" as being able to make choices for one's self, while being comfortable with the consequences—positive or negative. When faced with a problem in life, Plato explained that "autonomy" enabled a person to "just go through it and try to deal with it" rather than "acting to try to avoid the problem" (p. 11). Plato acknowledged that he thought human beings could have or develop "autonomy".

According to Simone, "autonomy" was the "freedom to make your own decisions" (p. 13). She was pretty matter of fact about her definition, explaining that "autonomy" was the ability to choose the things that a person wanted in the moment. She likened it to making choices about "what job to have" and "what to eat for dinner" (p. 13). She also linked "autonomy" to the idea of "trust" (p. 13). She explained that people who are trusted by others—like teenagers who are trusted by their parents—have more freedom to make the choices that reflect who they are and what they actually want in life. Simone stated that "autonomy is just me living my life, doing what I feel like doing" (p. 13). In the end, "autonomy" for Simone was the freedom to act and do the things she wanted in order to be the person she wanted to be. However, she did acknowledge that "autonomy" existed on a scale, where some people have more and some people have less, which alluded to the notion that people's individual degrees of "autonomy" were largely dependent on their personal circumstances and the world around them.

When asked about their personal sense of autonomy, many student-participants replied positively, qualifying their responses based on their current circumstances and realities as teenagers and students. Plato believed that he had autonomy in life, but said, "Sometimes it's questionable" (p. 11). He felt like he had the most autonomy when he was given freedom to make decisions and choices, while also being given the freedom to deal with the consequences of those decisions and choices.

Simone expressed that she thought she had autonomy in her life, adding "as much as you can kind of expect" (p. 14). She was referring to still being a teenager who had to deal with parents and teachers and other authority figures in life. On the whole, Simone felt like she was lucky compared to her peers, stating, "I found out that a lot of people's parents don't trust them,

and they have, like, very limited autonomy, so to speak. And, it very much boggled my mind” (p. 13). Simone alluded to Wringer’s (1995) assertion that autonomy needs to be measured “in light of the possibilities the world offers and the necessary constraints it imposes” (p. 49). She expressed that she thought her parents placed a lot of trust in her in comparison to her peers, which, in turn, resulted in her being given more freedom over her actions and choices.

Soren also reported having a strong sense of personal autonomy, equating it closely to the notion of “free will.” And even though she had originally hesitated with her definition of “autonomy,” she ended up giving me the most complete explanation of the concept of all the student-participants. When asked if she had “free will” or felt like an autonomous person, she responded confidently, “I don’t really care if I actually am or not. I’m going to act as if I am” (p. 18). Soren stated, “I still make my own decisions” but, like Simone, she also acknowledged that her heightened sense of autonomy resulted from her place in the world. According to Soren:

Well, not everyone is born into the same position, so, you know, you don’t have that choice. And that’s true. And I try to recognize that, like, I’m a really, really lucky person... And that’s not to say that people who aren’t in as good of a place as me—as good of a place as I am—have made bad decisions. (p. 18)

Soren recognized that her personal sense of autonomy was contingent on her lived experiences, and that other people’s own personal sense of autonomy would differ depending on their lived experiences.

Each student-participant felt like they had become a more autonomous person through their experiences in ELAP. Their responses varied, but they centered around two main themes: feeling that they were better able and prepared to make choices in the present and for their future; and, increased confidence and/or validation of their values and beliefs.

Choice: Better Decision-Making

One of my hopes for ELAP was that it would help students to become better decision-makers. In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, students require the skills and abilities to judge and evaluate their own ideas and values, as well as those of others. It is important that they can make informed, confident decisions in the face of a multitude of competing interests. Students who can make their own decisions are less likely to be manipulated by those in power; the same can be said about coming to their own conclusions with regards to other’s ideas and perspectives (Apple, 1984, Freire, 1970/2011; Giroux, 1981).

A central theme that emerged from the interviews was that all the student-participants felt that ELAP increased their sense of autonomy by helping them to identify and/or make better choices in their lives. Students frequently reported that they felt like they could choose for themselves instead of going along with the crowd. They felt like they could distinguish between external choices that were being imposed on them, and how their own decisions might be affected by outside factors.

Freud stated, “I can identify choices better” (p. 20). He attributed this ability to better decision-making to the fact that he felt that he understood his own beliefs, value and perspectives more clearly after his experiences with ELAP, stating “I’d say, I understand my self more than I did before the class” (p. 20). When asked to explain what he meant, Freud replied:

It makes my, like, decisions that I make more rational, while before like a lot of your life is a lot of people telling you to do a certain thing because they did it and whether it didn’t work or did work for them, that’s just how they did it and that’s how you should do it. But, then, when I took ELAP, it really helps you get away from that and actually, I guess, make yourself more of a person—more disconnected from what everyone else wants you to think, and more what you want to think... Like, the fact that like, “Oh, I want this, and this is what I want.” That, like that means that that’s truly a decision that I made through my lo—like my logic breakdown—instead of someone else telling me, “Oh, this is how you should do it.” Or, “This is how... what you should do for your life.” (p. 20-21)

It is interesting to note that not only did Freud connect better decision-making to his experiences with ELAP, but he also believed that better decision-making enhanced his sense of personhood (Sartre, 1947/2007). He felt like because he was more comfortable with his own thoughts, values, and perspectives, that it was easier to apply them to his life when faced with a choice.

Soren also agreed that she could make better choices after having studied ELAP, although she also believed that her choices were now more difficult. And although she did attribute her better decision-making to ELAP, she also acknowledged that it was probably coupled with her also getting older and more experienced with life. “It just kind of opened my eyes in some ways,” and, “Um, but you realize, like, life is a lot more complicated than you kind of thought, and there’s a lot more going on in everyone’s minds and, like, the whole world than you sort of realized” (p. 19). But even though she felt her choices were more difficult because ELAP had widened her perspective and thinking, she went on to state:

Um... yeah, so it's more complicated to make choices, but I'd say my choices are better. They're more thought out. Again, I can't tell if this, like, from my Philosophy class, or like generally—I feel like in Grade 12, you kind of have a lot of like little epiphanies, or you're like figuring out the world, so. But, I mean, it probably had a lot to do with Philosophy class, if I think about it... it feels more thought out, so even though they are more complicated, and I may be even less sure of them in general, but I still think they're better. But it's kind of like you say, "Ignorance is bliss," right? So, less of that ignorance makes the choice harder, but I still think in the long run it's better.

Soren's responses highlighted many adolescents' transition from innocence to experience in life. And even though she believed that her choices were becoming more difficult because of her development, she clearly acknowledged that ELAP played a role with her decision-making, by providing her with new avenues of thought as well as new ways to process these thoughts, perhaps resulting in better choices.

Nietzsche believed he developed better decision-making largely because he felt ELAP had provided him with new tools to use when faced with choices, although he did not go into as many specifics. He thought ELAP had given him more insight into ideas and his own desires and understanding, stating,

I think it will help me make better life choices, because I understand more ideas and more—like, it helped me actually understand things that I actually want in life...I made better choices because I wanted to focus more on school, and this class made me focus better on different kinds of school subjects and stuff like that." (p. 14)

In the end, Nietzsche attributed his time in ELAP to concrete changes in this decision-making processes, believing the experience to have helped him not only make better choices in an abstract sense, but in his actual day to day life.

Plato also expressed that his experiences in ELAP helped him to alter and improve his decision-making skills. When asked if he was more or less able to make choices about his life, Plato responded, "I'd say more" (p. 12). He then elaborated:

Because rather than having the same mindset as everyone else thinking, "Just go with it and things will work out," it's more of a: "How can I do this differently?"; and "What can be changed? What can't?" rather than just going with it. (p. 12)

Plato felt that ELAP provided him with the necessary tools to break away from groupthink and, instead, be confident in his own abilities to come to rational conclusions on his own, which is a hallmark of autonomy (Apple, 1984, Freire, 1970/2011; Giroux, 1981; McLaren, 1998; UNESCO, 2007). As a teacher, to hear students say that they feel more confident in their own skin—that they feel more able and empowered to be themselves and navigate the world around them—is satisfying and a testament to the power of adolescents’ exposure to and experiences with Philosophy.

Frida gave concrete examples of how ELAP impacted her confidence in making choices for herself, leading to an increased sense of autonomy. When asked if she felt more in control of her thoughts and actions, she responded, “Yes” (p. 11). While she acknowledged that she thought her ideas were not always her own—that they could be learned, inherited, or imposed upon her—Frida believed that her choices were her own, and that ELAP helped her come to this realization. She stated:

Because, when we were talking a lot about how, like your thoughts and ideas are not your own but like a lot of the times your choices are your own, it kind of made me think how like everyday you’re making choices, like what you wear to school, which route you take to get there. Like that kind of stuff. So, especially since we’re graduating, it kind of helped that you know these are your choices. (p. 11)

After explaining how she had come to understand that she was the arbiter of her own choices, Frida then gave an example of how she had taken control of her choices in her own life. She explained how her parents had been encouraging her to continue on with her education and schooling directly after graduation, even though she wanted to take a break. She stated, “...my parents were more, like, encouraging me to go to school right afterwards, but it was my choice to stay home. And finally, after a bit of convincing, they said that it was alright” (p. 11). I asked Frida if she felt confident in exercising her own autonomy when making this important life decision, and she replied, “I’m good with it for right now, because I know what I’m doing afterwards. So this is the choice I’d say I’m more comfortable with” (p. 11). Now I don’t know if Frida is making the right choice in taking a year off and not going along with her parents’ advice and desire for their daughter. As a teacher, I rarely get to see the results of my students’ decisions after they leave my classroom. However, whatever Frida’s future might hold, I am glad she felt

comfortable and confident in advocating her own desires, and I think it is noteworthy that she acknowledge that ELAP played a role in enacting her own autonomy with this choice.

Simone always seemed to take a measured approach with all her responses. She was never one to answer in binaries or either/or constructs. Instead, she really took the time to try to communicate her thoughts and feelings in an effort to explain her encounters with ELAP. When asked if she felt like a more autonomous person after her experiences with ELAP, she replied, “Like, maybe I’ve been more autonomous in the way that I’m like more able to like identify some things, and I’m like, ‘I very much don’t believe in that,’ or, ‘I very much do believe in that’” (p. 14). Simone’s belief that ELAP related to a better understanding of her own beliefs, values, and perspectives echoes the sentiments of Soren, Plato, and Nietzsche. Whether this translated into more autonomy or better choices on her part is debatable, and she seemed to recognize this point. Simone felt that any increased sense of autonomy probably only extended to her understanding, stating, “So maybe like more autonomous in the way, like, understanding what I believe. But like, not necessarily in my life” (p. 14). I questioned her further, asking if she felt like she was more or less able to make choices about her life after studying ELAP. After some reflection, she replied, “I think it gave me perspectives that were factors when I make choices” (p. 14). Although she did not come out and say that ELAP made her decision-making better, she acknowledged that it influenced her foundationally with how she went about making her choices—specifically by being more aware of her own ideas, values, and perspectives. That being said, she was cognizant that it was difficult to explain or measure her autonomy in day to day life. In the end, Simone’s honesty helped me to understand her experience with ELAP and autonomy. However, she also opened up my eyes to ideas I had not previously considered with regards to ELAP and whether or not it nurtures students’ autonomy: increased confidence and self-validation.

Increased Confidence and Self-Validation

I was surprised by these emergent themes, as I had originally only focused on how ELAP might affect students’ ability to make choices. I had researched and examined how students are able to develop their own meanings, understandings, and conclusions through an increased sense of autonomy, resulting in them being able to better navigate the world as thoughtful citizens (Bleazby, 2011; Gasee, 1998). But now, after conducting these interviews, the connection between students’ personal sense of autonomy and their confidence and self-validation is clearer.

In order for students to feel like they are confident in their decision-making, they first need to be confident in their own ideas, beliefs, and perceptions. In short, they need to be confident in themselves. Yet, there are many variables that work to make a student confident in his/her knowledge and understanding. It was surprising to see that many student-participants reported that learning different philosophical concepts was one of these variables; they felt more confident in their beliefs, values, and perceptions when they saw that other people—in this case philosophers—shared similar thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. ELAP’s focus on exposing students to philosophical history, thinking, and theories seems to have impacted students’ sense of autonomy. At the same time, I recognize that adolescents are already at a stage of trying to work out and figure out their beliefs, values, and perspectives, which is certainly also another reason for an increased sense of autonomy (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). A majority of the student-participants expressed that their experiences with ELAP had resulted in an increased sense of confidence and/or self-validation in their values and beliefs.

Because Simone’s responses led me to this realization, I will begin outlining her experiences. As already mentioned, Simone believed that ELAP did not necessarily lead to her making better decisions, rather she felt that it helped her to uncover and appreciate the foundations of her own thinking and understanding. She believed that this new knowledge and understanding led to increased confidence and validation in her decision-making. She stated:

I think it helped like validate the choices I was making in my life. Like, I kind of already—I don’t necessarily think that it made my choices different, but it... I felt like I was more validated in choices, because I felt like there were other smart people who were like, “That’s a thing. That’s a thing that you can think, and live.” (p. 15)

Simone discussed how her experiences with ELAP gave her a sense that her own ideas were rational and credible because other thinkers that she had been exposed to in ELAP—philosophers and her peers—felt and thought in similar ways. Simone went on to state, “And so, I think maybe it like helped me like to be validated in my choices, and maybe be more confident in my choices... But I don’t think it necessarily changed my choices” (p. 15). In the end, Simone’s experience still has the hallmarks of autonomy. She had already identified and defined many of her beliefs, values, and perspectives independent of philosophical theorists; yet, she felt that various philosophers—as well as her peers—affirmed many of her preconceptions. ELAP seemed to have provided her with the tools to reconstruct and support her own knowledge,

understanding, and meaning, which helped her to satisfy her own thoughts and feelings (Bleazby, 2011).

Freud, Nietzsche, and Soren also stated that they felt like their experiences with ELAP led to increased confidence and self-validation regarding their knowledge and understanding. Freud spoke of similar connections he made to philosophical theories that he studied in ELAP, which he believed helped him to communicate his own ideas more clearly. He stated:

Like, the schools of thought we learned, I was able to connect with one of them and be like, “Yes, this is what I always thought about. This is what I always had in mind.” It’s just that I never had the words. Or, like, the ideas to express them. And then, as we learned more schools of thought, I was able to connect more and more with them, and be like, “Alright, here is like a little portfolio. Here is what I think.” And now I can pull out these names and be like, “Here, I’m more into Epistemology than Empiricism,” and stuff like that. (p. 30)

At the same time, Nietzsche stated:

I guess it kind of helped me validate what I already believed. It kind of helped me—like this class helped me talk to other people and validate why I believe this as well. Because other people might not have understood why I believed this kind of, like why I believe these things. But this class helped me expand my ideas, I guess. (p. 19)

Soren also expressed that she had had a similar experience feeling supported with her own ideals and modes of thinking, stating, “‘Oh, wow, other people actually think like this.’ That kind of thing. That happened to me a lot in Philosophy, I think. Even with discussions with other people, it was like, ‘Oh, other people think like this’” (p. 7). Each of these student-participants echoed Simone’s statement that she felt more confident and validated in her beliefs because of ELAP.

While these responses may, at first, seem counterintuitive to the idea of autonomy—because students are actively embracing others’ ideas and theories—these students actually stated that they now felt more comfortable and confident with their existing beliefs because of their experiences with ELAP, which I believe is significant. Whether this confidence and self-validation translated into better choices is certainly up for debate. That being said, it appears that ELAP lent support to many of the student-participants’ beliefs, values, and perspectives. Many, but not all, student-participants linked this confidence and self-validation to their ability to make decisions about their own ideas, as well as those of others. And while I recognize that these

comments are not directly connected to Wringer's (1995) definition of autonomy that was used for this study, it does connect with Dewey's (1916/2009) notion of education and schooling providing students with an environment to explore their own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives in relation to others and the world.

Research already supports the notion that Philosophy encourages autonomy (Bleazby, 2011; Gasee, 1998; UNESCO, 2007). I had my suspicions that ELAP might be able achieve similar outcomes. After hearing student-participants' responses, I was elated to see that many of my observations and thoughts concerning ELAP and students making better choices seemed to reflect at least some students' experiences. Moreover, I was happy to discover new insight into why students felt more comfortable and confident in their knowledge and understanding. It was revealing to hear that some students felt that their confidence and self-validation—which I believe are necessary foundations for autonomous human beings—were enhanced or solidified by their exposure to philosophical history, theory, and thinking.

ELA and Philosophy: Cultivating a Sense of Empathy

Up until this point, I have largely explored ideas that already have existing bodies of research. There is substantial evidence supporting the idea that Philosophy encourages engagement and autonomy, and I have endeavored to see if this knowledge applied to an interdisciplinary approach to teaching ELA and Philosophy. However, over the years that I have been involved in teaching ELAP, I have also noticed—through observations and conversations—the class' impact on students' abilities to explore and understand other people's perspectives. I observed students opening their minds and hearts to their peers. During classroom discussions, rather than simply discounting their peers' ideas, I have witnessed students trying to explain their own understanding while, at the same time, attempting to understand their peers' views. I have watched students actively inquire into how other people view and experience the world. I have seen students openly accept their peers' beliefs even though they might be diametrically opposed to each other. I have observed students making an effort to avoid offending their peers. It is observations like these that made me wonder if ELAP might be predisposed to encouraging perspective-taking and empathetic thinking.

I was aware of how ELA lends itself to building students' ability to explore and understand others' perspectives and build empathetic dispositions (Buganza, 2012; Cress & Holm, 1998; Hammond & Kim, 2014; Jamieson, 2015; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). I

started to wonder whether or not Philosophy might be able to achieve the same. Past ELAP graduates had repeatedly explained that they enjoyed how ELAP exposed them to an array of different perspectives and ways of thinking and knowing. These statements got me thinking about the extent to which this exposure to others' ways of viewing, experiencing, and acting in the world translated into students' abilities for perspective-taking and empathetic thinking. When asked if they felt that an interdisciplinary approach to ELA and Philosophy cultivated their sense of empathy, students responded overwhelmingly that they believed it had made them more able to appreciate, understand, and imagine others' perspectives. They also all responded that these abilities allowed them to actively feel for others, which resulted in an increased sense of empathy. Whether it resulted in tangible changes in their actions was more difficult to ascertain.

Krznaric's (2015) definition of empathy was used for the purposes of this research study. He outlined empathy as beginning with an act of imagination in order to attempt to understand another's lived experiences. However, this act of imagination and attempted understanding is not enough on its own to qualify as empathy. It also requires meaningful action on the part of the one imagining the other's feelings, ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Empathy is not a passive endeavor of pitying or feeling sorry for someone else. It is an active expression of a person trying to understand, connect, and feel for another being in an attempt to know them better.

Definitions of Empathy

When student-participants were asked to define empathy, some of them often confused it with sympathy, while others latched on to aspects of Krznaric's (2015) definition. It must be stated that sympathy and empathy are similar, and oftentimes confused, but they are not the same. According to Wispé (1986) "sympathy refers to the heightened awareness of another's plight as something to be alleviated. Empathy refers to the attempt of one self-aware self to understand the subjective experiences of another self" (p. 314). Wispé went on to state, "Sympathy is a way of relating. Empathy is a way of knowing" (p. 314), which I think is a meaningful and clearer way to distinguish between the two. I would add, that empathy is a way of knowing through feeling.

Much like when they were asked to define "autonomy," Soren and Frida seemed unsure of how to define "empathy." Soren defined both terms, but confused their definitions:

Well, one of them means that you understand what somebody's going through, like their emotions and things because you, yourself, have been through the same experience, I

think... I want to say that's sympathy. I'm not really sure. And then the other one is that you—even though you haven't had that experience you can understand what they're going through. (p. 20)

In the end, she unpacked these terms and she came to an understanding of each concept. Frida also confused “sympathy” for “empathy,” stating:

I think about, like, feeling—I guess it's more like sympathy—but I think about, like, feeling sorry for people... Like if someone is... here's a good one that I can use. If someone in your grade is doing really bad in classes, it's like you feel like empathy for them. Like, you want to help them, but in a lot of ways you know that you, like, can't. (p. 13)

Soren and Frida had a clearer vision between empathy and sympathy through their examples further on when it came to giving concrete examples, rather than through abstract definitions.

Plato and Freud both defined “empathy” as the cliché of “putting yourself into another person's shoes,” which qualifies as the imaginative act that Krznaric (2015) believed empathy required. When asked to define “empathy,” Plato stated, “Um, empathy is understanding someone else's situation and putting yourself in their shoes so you experience what they experience” (p. 13). Plato's definition involved an imaginative act of trying to understand another's experience, but he did not mention acting on this newfound knowledge. At the same time, Freud explained:

The best way to describe it would be... the idea of just putting yourself into someone else's shoes. Quite simply, like, being able to see why a person thinks the way they do, and being able to be ok with that. Not for extremes, or like these horrendous events, but like, just being like, “I can see where the logic came from.”

Aside from involving an act of imagination, Freud also connected “empathy” to trying to know another person's thoughts in order to understand them more completely, which coincides with Krznaric's (2015) definition. Both Plato and Freud stopped short of requiring “empathy” to involve meaningful action. They viewed it simply as an imaginative act that help one understand the lived experience of another—thoughts and feelings—in order to get a better understanding of that person.

Both Nietzsche and Simone connected “empathy” to feeling for others and acting on those feelings, much like Noddings' (2010) explanation of what empathy looked like in action:

Empathy should help us to recognize the hurt feelings and pains of others even if we have had no part in causing them. Moral sensitivity is not merely a matter of not causing pain, it should lead us to relieve pain whatever its cause. (p. 8)

Nietzsche and Simone invoked the idea of “feeling with” others rather than imagining their circumstances—although it could be argued that in order to “feel with” another person, you must first imagine their unique circumstance and perspective. When asked to define “empathy,” Nietzsche invoked the ideas of “feeling their feeling,” which seemed a profound statement:

...when you're like feeling empathy, I guess it's like feeling for someone else. That's kind of what I think when I think of empathy. It's like, like I'm feeling empathetic—or whatever—of someone else. Like, I'm feeling their feeling. You know? Like when someone's feeling down, I guess I feel empathy, and I feel upset for them, and I want to like do something for them, I guess. (p. 16)

Nietzsche clearly connected his definition of empathy to not only feeling for others, but acting on those feelings in order to improve the other person's situation, good or bad.

Simone defined “empathy” similarly to Nietzsche, but she explicitly included the ideas of an empathetic act involving “caring” and leading to “compassion,” whereas Nietzsche only alluded to them (Lipman, 1995a; Lipman, 1995b, Lipman, 2007; Noddings, 1995; Noddings, 2010). When asked to define “empathy,” Simone replied:

It means caring about other people. It means, you know, though you can't experience what another person is experiencing, you can feel for them, and you can try and help them, and you can be compassionate towards them. (p. 16)

I thought Simone's definition was not only astute, but clear and succinct. I was also surprised at how closely it connected to Krznaric's (2015) definition. She captured all the elements required for empathy: an imaginative act of feeling, an attempt to understand the other's experiences, and action that results in compassion.

I have outlined each student-participants' definition of “empathy” to clarify and better understand their experiences with ELAP and empathy. Not every student defined empathy in the same manner. Some students' understanding of empathy was clearer than others, which is necessary in order to understand their examples of whether or not ELAP cultivated their sense of empathy.

Students' Personal Identification with Empathy

Before I asked student-participants if ELAP increased their abilities to be empathetic, I asked them if they felt like they were empathetic people. Without hesitation, each student-participant replied “Yes.” Their reasons for thinking that they were empathetic individuals were instructive when examining whether they felt like their sense of empathy had been heightened by their experiences in ELAP. Soren stated that she was empathetic because she had “cried for other people before” and she felt like “that’s kind of like an empathetic thing. Like I really care if other people are happy or not” (p. 21). Plato, Nietzsche, and Frida also attributed their empathetic nature to wanting to understand, help, and make other people happy. Plato stated, “I want to help people because I understand that not everyone has a good upbringing. They’re not necessarily in the best situations, and I feel like that’s something that I could help” (p.13), while Nietzsche and Frida expressed that they actively wanted to understand others and help them in whatever way they could. Freud also viewed himself as being empathetic; he acknowledged that others had a “mind process and they still need to be respected in some way” (p. 25). Each of these five students’ experiences with empathy will be explored at length, but it is evident that they all viewed themselves as empathetic people prior to their experiences with ELAP.

Perhaps the most interesting—and in my mind the most profound—response about being an empathetic person came from Simone. Where other students gave brief examples, she provided a powerful example of her empathetic nature in action. I will let her words speak for themselves:

Um, like I feel very bad for refugees trying to get into Europe right now. And, I felt so bad about it that I wrote a short story about it for Creative Writing. I like read a newspaper article probably about a year ago; it was in the *Globe and Mail* and it was about this woman who—this is a real story, like it was in the newspaper; it was in the newspaper it must be true (laughing). She, she was this minority of like Royhinga Muslims. Sorry, this is a bit of a tangent... But she, she was this minority—like these type of Muslims that were from Bangladesh but they live in Malaysia, or no, Myanmar. Sorry. Myanmar. And, um, they’re like very hated there because like the majority of people in Myanmar are Buddhist and so they’re like very hated there and like shoved into these virtual concentration camps. And so, they were in these horrible situations. And so, she was a single mother—how? I don’t know—of three children. And so, she was going

to try to escape on a boat, because they had been taking boats to like Thailand and things like that. And it's like very similar to the refugee boats that come from like Libya or things like that where they're very unsafe, and they're very like dubious. And so, um, she decided that not her and all of her children would survive, so while her children were sleeping, she left one of her children there, and just took two of her children... And, she has no idea like whatever happened to him or anything, and it just was like the most heart-breaking, like, upsetting thing—like I'm getting emotional just talking about it. Like, it was just the worst thing I could ever imagine, like a human having to go through... And it just like affected me so much, and I ended up writing a short story about it. And it's like probably the most empathetic I've ever felt for someone because I was just like, "That's the worst thing. Like, humans should never have to make that kind of a choice. Like, that's just the worst thing..." I think it was definitely cathartic for me. Like, it—it helped me like feel at peace with it. Like, I felt when I was writing it, I kind of felt like doing this woman justice by telling her story. And so, it was important to me that I wrote it well. And, like even if no one reads it, it doesn't matter if no one reads it. It's not like—sigh—I'm not like an amazing writer or anything like that. I'm not under any impression of that... But, like, I think it was cathartic for me to just like feel like... you know, I was like sending a message through the unknown to this lady. Like, "I feel you. Your story is important to me." (p. 17-18)

Simone fought back the tears as she recounted this tragic and harrowing news story that she had turned into a short story. In my mind, her response exuded empathy. I had the privilege of reading her short story, and I can say in all honesty that Simone is not only a gifted writer, but that her story evokes feelings and emotions deep inside her reader that give testament to this Royhinga woman's experience. I read Simone's story to my wife one evening and she wept. Simone's story was empathy in action. It was an attempt to feel and know another's experience and to act on that knowledge; to bare witness to another's life and suffering. For an eighteen-year-old student to imagine another person's life that is so different from her own, in an attempt to understand and feel what another woman on the other side of the world went through, in order to acknowledge another's suffering, is quite simply astounding. Simone recognized that her story did not do justice to this woman's plight. But she wanted to do something, even if it was never known, which is a powerful expression of empathy.

ELAP and Increased Empathy

Two themes emerged through student-participants' experiences with ELAP and empathy: different points of view as a way to engage in perspective-taking, and the importance of understanding and accepting others' perspectives. Student-participants repeatedly expressed that ELAP had increased their ability to see different points of view and engage in taking perspectives other than their own. They also acknowledged that ELAP not only helped them to take other's perspectives, but to try to understand them as well. A few students discussed the idea of acting on the newfound knowledge and understanding of these perspectives, but they were divided in their approaches: some left their understanding and practice of empathy at imagination and understanding; some discussed acceptance as a tangible action that resulted from empathy; while others discussed an obligation towards social justice.

In the end, every student-participant expressed that their experiences with ELAP had nurtured and/or increased their capacities to be empathetic people at some level—some reported that it significantly altered their understanding and practice of empathy for the better, while others explained any change had been to a lesser degree. Much of what the student-participants viewed and identified as empathy did not necessarily coincide with this study's working definition, which will be addressed and discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Frida believed that ELAP had impacted her empathetic capacities, stating, "I think it almost made me more empathetic, just because you can realize your own empathy but still have the feeling of being able to control it" (p. 15). I was uncertain as to what Frida was trying to convey and asked her to expand on her response, but she struggled to clarify her thoughts with an example, which left me wondering if she understood the question. It must be remembered that Frida already self-reported as having an empathetic nature, so I wanted to be sure that she was being honest with me. After talking with her a bit more, Frida tempered her original assertion, stating more realistically that, "I think that it [ELAP] enhanced it a little bit" (p. 16). Frida later credited an increased ability to take and see other people's perspectives to ELAP, as well as the importance of trying to understand others and accept them, which Plato and Simone also acknowledged.

Plato replied, "Yes," when asked if he thought ELAP had enhanced his empathetic capacities. He went on to say that this was because he was increasingly concerned about understanding other people's perspectives and lives, and desired to make positive changes for

their lives and his own. When asked for an example, Plato talked about equality and understanding people's circumstances, stating that ELAP helped him to come to the realization that, "It's more an understanding of not everybody is equal, and that's something that needs to be changed" (p. 13). Simone responded similarly, explaining that her experience in ELAP might have nurtured her empathy because she could now better understand and, perhaps, accept and value people with views and opinions contrary to her own. She explained:

I was talking about sort of like those people who have opinions that are very different than mine. Maybe it helped me feel more empathetic towards them just in the way that I'm like, "Ok, I understand that like just as I feel very confident about my beliefs, you feel very confident about your beliefs." So, I feel it helped me maybe see them less as like an enemy and more of like a person who is also a person.

Both Plato and Simone discussed the importance of perspective-taking and trying to understand others' minds as potential reasons for their increased sense of empathy.

Freud was convinced that ELAP had affected his capacity for empathy by changing his empathetic responses into deeper experiences. He stated, "I'd say before Philosophy, I was empathetic in an off-hand way" (p. 24). When asked what he meant, he clarified:

...instead of condemning a person for an action or two, I'll look at them and be like, "I can see why you did what you did. And even though I don't agree with it, or if it hurt me in some way, or like if it was just like a bad thing in general, I can still see a way of forgiving you." (p. 24-25)

Freud's experience with ELAP seemed to have helped him develop a better understanding of others' perspectives, which translated into an increased open-mindedness, compassion, and willingness to forgive.

Soren responded that she felt ELAP made her more empathetic, although she also attributed her increasing ability to empathize with her own development and maturation as an adolescent. When asked if her experiences in ELAP cultivated her sense of empathy, she stated:

I feel like, while—again I don't know like—yeah, over the course of taking the class, I felt like I kind of became a more empathetic person. I don't know if that's because of like situations or things that just happened to happen while Philosophy was going on... or, if I, you know—I just did become more empathetic because of the class. (p. 22)

Soren's response got me thinking about empathy's connection to adolescent development, although I think that this idea is probably outside the scope of this study and could be an area of future research. For the time being, I have taken her at her word that ELAP was partially responsible for a change in her understanding and practice of empathy.

Finally, Nietzsche discussed that ELAP changed the way he thought about responding to his empathetic experiences. He focused on the idea of acting on his understanding after trying to feel for another:

This class kind of helped me learn that like maybe you should just go fix it, and help them to try and get better, and feel better, instead of going around and just asking why and then not even helping them. (p. 16-17)

Nietzsche's claim that ELAP helped trigger a desire was significant. He was one of the only student-participants who explicitly acknowledged wanting to act on his empathetic feelings in order to change another's circumstances, which is necessary for empathy to come full circle from initially imagining another's mind and feelings, to trying to understand it, to acting on that new knowledge in a meaningful way.

Nietzsche's belief that ELAP helped to cultivate his capacity for empathy rounds out the student-participants' responses. Each believed that he/she were more empathetic as a result of taking ELAP, some to a greater degree than others. Collectively, their responses centered around the following two themes: perspective-taking and the importance of understanding other's.

Different Points of View: The Road to Perspective-Taking

Perspective-taking involves the imaginative act that Krznaric (2015) believed was required for an empathetic experience to occur. According to Krznaric (2007), perspective-taking involves the ability of an individual to imagine what it is like to be another person, actively trying to understand that person's ideas, values, and beliefs; perspective-taking focuses on understanding "where a person is coming from" (p. 10). It is significant that each student-participant spoke of an increased ability to take other people's perspectives through their experiences with ELAP, as it is central to having a "cognitive" empathetic experience (p. 10).

Freud provided profound insight into perspective-taking. His description was instructive, because it showed an adolescent's ability to understand what is involved and necessary when one person attempts to imagine and inhabit the mind of another. Freud's statement showed that

perspective-taking did not come easy to people, but that it was a struggle that required practice and hard work:

You really have to disconnect yourself. Like, literally disconnect from your identity...and try to meld with their identity. Like, you have to really disconnect your thoughts and feelings and then try to understand their thoughts and feelings. You almost have to, like, become—it's like, I'd actually describe it as "acting." Like, where actors have to disconnect themselves from their own ideas, morals, and have to inhabit a character... And while these characters are like—some characters can be like you with a grin and be very human—at the end of the day they are characters; they are written for a plot. Where in real life, it's the same idea, the same concept, where you have to disconnect yourself. And it's a lot harder, because they're a human being and there's a whole bunch of things you could never know. But part of the point of being, I'd say, like having empathy is having to do some work. It's having to actually go out of your way and be like, "Oh, hey, I can see where you're coming from. I can disconnect myself from me and see you. And see me actively becoming you." That sort of thing. That's how I'd say you have to go about being empathetic. (p. 23-24)

Freud's "acting" metaphor was profound because it conveyed the difficulty and practice that is required when trying to understand another person's perspective. One needs to work at inhabiting another's mind; it does not come easily to all people. And while this kind of perspective-taking can surely be learned under different circumstances, Freud linked his heightened ability to the different "schools of thought" he learned in ELAP (p. 26). Freud stated that after taking ELAP he was better able to engage in perspective-taking because he practiced exploring so many different ways of knowing—just like an actor might practice a role—in class. As a result, he reported that he was able to better see where another person's "thought process could begin" and "actually be able to see people's perspectives and be like, 'Oh, that's why you think that way'" (p. 26). Freud's acting metaphor was an apt way to explain and explore how others engage in perspective-taking, and while other student-participants did not use the same comparison, they also explained that their experiences in ELAP enhanced their ability to take other people's perspectives.

Frida, Plato, and Nietzsche all shared Freud's belief that ELAP helped them to see different points of view and take other people's perspectives. Frida, who believed that she was

already adept at considering other's perspectives reported that she thought ELAP had enhanced her ability "a little bit," and like Freud, she too acknowledged that "it is very hard sometimes" (p. 16). Plato also acknowledged that his experiences with ELAP had enhanced his "ability to take in other people's perspectives" (p. 5). While Nietzsche stated that "seeing other people's different perspectives" was "one thing that I took away from this class" (p. 17). Frida, Plato, and Nietzsche also all discussed how their ability to see and take others' perspectives led them to a deeper understanding of others and of themselves—which is the next theme being discussed.

Soren brought up the existence of God when discussing perspective taking, as ELAP explores the age-old debates for the existence and non-existence of God or gods. When asked if she felt that ELAP enhanced her ability to take other people's perspectives, Soren responded that the debates and discussions on the existence of God helped her "in kind of seeing different perspectives" because "we'd talk about different perspectives" that allowed her to "see why people think God exists or why people think God doesn't exist" (p. 23). Soren stated that she believed that because she had studied a bunch of different perspectives in ELAP that the class "intensified" her ability to take and see other people's perspectives (p. 11). She explained how she could now apply perspective-taking to her life in a tangible way:

So, I could now have a discussion with somebody and—whereas before I might not have understood where they were coming from—Philosophy kind of helped me, because we had looked at so many different points of view. And, I feel like I'm better at seeing other people's points of view now, maybe. Or in debates and things like that more open to, "Oh, you know, maybe this is why they think like that." My mind is a little more open that way. (p. 11)

Soren believed that ELAP nurtured her ability to take others' perspectives, which she believed resulted in increased open-mindedness.

Simone echoed Soren's response, stating that ELAP opened her mind to other points of view, which encouraged her to try to see different ways of viewing and interpreting the world:

And I was, like, "What?" I was like, "I've never thought of that before." And, I guess I just feel like, like it kind of opened my mind to like, "Wow. There are like all these different things that you could think and you could believe." But, like, I had never really thought of that before. (p. 7)

Simone referred to how ELAP's different units—Epistemology, Logic and Argumentation, Metaphysics, Ethics, Aesthetics, and Existentialism—introduced her to different ways of knowing and different philosophical theories, which aided in her ability to identify other's perspectives. Simone also drew on the existence of God debates as an example of how she engaged in perspective-taking, stating that after ELAP she found herself more inclined to value people who opposed her views:

... if I ever talk to people who like have very extreme religious views, I'm like, "This is hard for me right now. This is very hard for me." But I think, yeah, definitely it [ELAP] helped me like kind of value that a bit more and be like, "Ok, we need some people like that to keep us in check." (p. 20)

Like Soren, Simone reported that her experiences with ELAP exposed her to different points of view. When asked if she felt that ELAP enhanced her perspective-taking, she stated, "Yeah, I think so," which coincided with any of the other student-participants' experiences (p. 20).

The Importance of Understanding and Accepting Others' Perspectives

As already reported, the student-participants all explained that ELAP helped them see different views and take others' perspectives. However, they also expressed that ELAP helped them recognize the importance of trying to thoroughly understand those perspectives as well. According to the student-participants, this attempt at understanding others and differing perspectives led to an acceptance of their way of knowing and interpreting the world, which they all thought was important.

When asked if they thought understanding others' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives was important in life, Frida and Freud stated that one of the benefits of understanding other's perspectives was the potential new learning and insight that might result. Frida responded, "Yeah, absolutely. Because if you only know what you believe, how can you see what other people—you, like, might be missing out on something that you don't know" (p. 17). After being asked why she thought it was important to know why others value what they value, Frida went on to state:

Because we have our own values and beliefs and that's what we've grown up with. And, we would never think the way other people would so I think it's pretty valuable that, even if you may not understand it, you get to see and experience what they do. (p. 17)

Freud believed that understanding others was essential in order to avoid viewing them

through stereotypes and generalizations—what he termed “cut-outs”—rather than getting closer to understanding who they really are as individuals with diverse experiences, values, and beliefs. Freud stated:

Like, without understanding beliefs, personalities, like backstories, that sort of thing, you lose a lot of what a person is made of, and you’ll just start seeing cut-outs of people. Like, just like people in the moment, what they are now and not how they got there. And, like, that can really sour—not even in a negative way—but also like, you can make these people and put them on pedestals and be like, “This is the epitome of what people should be.” And then, you take a look back and realize, “Oh, wow. That’s a little, that’s not good stuff that they did back then.” Like, that every person has a flaw beneath them, and even if they did some, like, amazing things that they could still have... like they’re not that perfect human being. And I’d say that knowing backstories, knowing beliefs, understandings, and like thought-logic... thought-processes really helps make a person a full person instead of just like that cut-out... That way, you see them not as this shining pinnacle of humanity, or you don’t see them as this lowly scumbag, but you see them as a human—as like you, as like me, as like everyone—that we’re all on the same playing field. And that not only helps—I’d say it helps everyone be more humble, and that like you think less about yourself and more about the world around you. (p. 27)

According to Freud, his experiences with ELAP—exploring different ways of knowing and understanding—helped him to go beyond stereotyping and generalizing toward a deeper understanding of not only others, but also the wider world, which revealed others’ humanity.

Other student-participants discussed the idea of the importance of understanding and accepting others in practical terms, explaining that it would enable them to navigate relationships and the world better outside of high school. Nietzsche explained, “I think that it’s actually pretty important. Like, if you don’t understand how other people, like, think and work, then you’re never really going to get far in life” (p. 18). Simone expressed that understanding and accepting others led to less close-minded thinking, which helped individuals navigate an increasingly multicultural world:

I think it’s important, like, just, yeah—I think it’s really interesting learning other people’s kind of like beliefs and things like that. And, I think, yeah, I guess it’s important just to like—also, we live in a very multicultural world, like and that’s how it’s moving.

So, I feel like in your life if you are just very close-minded, like, I feel like in the long run that's really not going to get you anywhere. You're going to be a bit of a pariah. (p. 21)

Plato shared a similar notion, stating:

Because no matter what you do for a job, or in general, you're going to run into people who have different beliefs than you, and they have different worldviews than you, and you have to be able to understand and accept that. (p. 15)

Both Nietzsche, Simone, and Plato seemed to believe that understanding and accepting others would enable individuals to deal with conflicts, confrontations, and differences between themselves and others in a practical way. They believed that ELAP had provided them with the opportunity to explore other ways of thinking and knowing that would tangibly affect their day to day lives and interactions with others outside of high school.

Plato also brought up the idealistic notion that understanding and acceptance had the potential of "making everything equal" (p. 15). Simone and Soren spoke about how they thought understanding and accepting others was important because it not only helped an individual to better navigate conflict and relationships in the world, but that it did not simply lead to increased tolerance but, potentially, to transformative action. Simone approached understanding and acceptance as having the power to affect culture. She stated:

I think all you can really do for somebody is teach them about other people. You can't make somebody feel empathetic for someone else, or like care about someone else's beliefs. But, I think it's important to be exposed to other people's, like, beliefs and other cultures. Yeah, because, yeah, I think the world's changing, and, like, I don't think you're ever going to walk into an office anymore and it's just a bunch of white people. Like, that's never going to happen. Like, it probably doesn't happen anymore. I don't think so. Not in Canada. So, um, yeah, I think it's important to be like an open-minded person. I think more so especially with my generation, it's like a very not cool thing to be racist or to be like not accepting of other people. Like, it's very like, "You need to leave." Like, I think more so than generations before us, it's like, "That's really not good." And, I think if you're in, if you're kind of in that mindset of being very close-minded to other people, you're kind of going to get left behind. (p. 21-22)

Simone expressed that through understanding and accepting others that individuals—and society—could become more inclusive and less oppressive to minority perspectives and

experiences—that dominant systems and ways of seeing the world could, potentially, be challenged and changed (Freire, 1970/2007).

Soren also spoke of transformation, but focused on the idea of privilege. She reported that understanding and accepting others' perspectives and ways of knowing could lead to not only self-examination, but also seeing the structural inequalities built into society. Soren believed that trying to understand others' experiences and perspectives had enhanced her realization that she was privileged compared to many others. Moreover, she also explained that understanding others could lead to a desire to change:

We have to recognize that we're lucky, but a lot of people aren't. And if we weren't able to, to sort of, I guess, to recognize that then, you know, why would we try to change anything? Because, "We're good so there's nothing wrong..." (p. 24)

Soren went on to state that, for her, understanding others led to an awareness of deep-seeded inequality and struggle. It not only led to her acceptance of their perspectives and experiences, but to a deeper understanding of her own perspectives and experiences. Soren believed that understanding and accepting others was "what keeps the world moving forward in a way" (p. 24). Her statement shares similarities with Paulo Freire's (1970/2007) notion of praxis, as being "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Soren concluded with an example of homelessness from her city, stating, "Well, if I was homeless, I would want some help because I didn't do anything wrong to get put in that situation, that's just where I am..." (p. 24). Soren's statement seems empathetic at face-value, but whether she would actually act on this abstract attempt to understand another's experience in order to transform their circumstances is the missing piece.

Change and Action as a Result of ELAP

Student-participants all expressed that they believed their experiences with ELAP led to a better understanding and acceptance of others' values, beliefs, and perspectives. Whether that increased understanding and acceptance lead to empathetic experiences that elicit action was another story altogether. When asked if ELAP had changed their actions, student-participants were not as certain. Soren admitted:

It changed my thoughts, but maybe not my actions... But I've thought a lot more about—I mean, because it's a lot easier to think about making changes than to actually do it... So I'd say I've done the steps of thinking but not doing, yet hopefully I will. (p. 25)

Soren added:

I mean, I don't know for sure. I would like it to, I guess. I'm sort of committed to letting it do that. I can't say, like I can't speak for myself in like twenty years or whatever. But, um... yeah, I think it could—again I've sort of resolved myself to try to be more open-minded and stuff because of this class, in part, and to me open-mindedness means like taking action and things like that. Again, I'm an inherently not a taking-action-type-person. (p. 30)

Whether Soren's actions are affected in the future could only be known with follow-up, which is outside the scope of this study. However, the fact that she believes her thoughts changed and that she is committed to open-mindedness speaks volumes.

Frida also believed that ELAP had changed her thoughts by making her more aware of the world around her, which gave her optimism to take action in the future. She explained, "It makes you more, like aware, and urgent to go and do something. Because when we did that course, like, I know for sure a lot of us it stuck with us in a big way" (p. 23). Feeling a sense of awareness and urgency is wonderful, but it does not necessarily result in any action or change.

Freud provided an anecdote about how he felt his actions had changed and might go on into the future:

I had—have a friend who I told something to, and I told him to tell no one, and they told everyone, as high school tends to be. And, before, I probably would have gotten really angry. I probably would have been like, "Dude, what the heck? Why would you do that? You—you're dumb." (p. 32)

He attributed this change in mindset and action to his ability to take other people's perspectives, which he believed resulted in increased open-mindedness. Whether Freud's open-mindedness will continue into the future is hard to say.

Plato and Nietzsche were also hesitant to claim that their actions changed or would be changed in the future. Plato stated that he had seen some changes in his own actions, stating, "Normally I just would have been quiet and kept to myself a lot in day to day life. And now I feel like I can talk with people a little more openly and I can have full on conversations" (p. 19). However, when asked if he believed that ELAP would have any influence on his future, he stated, "If you start questioning things part way through your life, it's not necessarily going to stick as easily as if you do it your entire life" (p. 21). Even though Plato was honest that he did

not know, he did state that he hoped he would continue being critical and question the world around him. Nietzsche stated much of the same. He was uncertain whether his actions would be transformed outside of high school because of the class, stating, “I think it will transform actions, but I don’t really know what actions it will transform yet. Because, I don’t know, you can’t really, like, predict what’s going to happen later on in life” (p. 22). Simone was more hesitant, explaining that her actions had changed, but that a lot of these changes probably had to do with many factors, one being her continued development as an adolescent.

ELAP had a positive affect on these six students. Their engagement, autonomy, and empathy did increase as a result. The larger question now addresses the sustainability of these changes and moving forward into the future with action, compassion, wonder, and expanded thinking skills as students. Naturally, that would be my hope for them.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, reflections on the methodology and research are discussed. The study's findings are then examined in relation to the existing literature on interdisciplinary programs and teaching Philosophy in high schools—specifically concerning Philosophy's ability to foster engagement, autonomy, and empathy. Implications for the future of teaching Philosophy in high schools are also discussed. All findings and conclusions were informed by and reflect the experiences of the six student-participants who graduated from this particular ELAP program and school.

Reflections on Methodology and Research

Having never conducted research prior to this study, I have to say that the entire process was an enjoyable learning experience—personally, academically, and professionally. I had never conducted formal interviews with students before undertaking this study, and was pleasantly surprised by these interactions. Seventeen and eighteen-year-old students never fail to amaze me with their maturity, knowledge, and wisdom. The goal of my research was to find out students' experiences in the ELAP classroom, and throughout the research process I found myself learning so much from them.

These interactions between researcher and student, and teacher and student, harken back to Paulo Freire's (1970/2011) notion of “problem-posing education” (p. 80). Freire states:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 80)

Due to the open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews, the dialogue that took place was largely driven by each student's willingness and desire to participate and respond. While I recognize that I held a position of power over these participants—as a researcher, interviewer, and former teacher—I also quickly realized that each student had his and her own power. I may have decided upon the questions and led the questioning, but they decided on the responses. They decided what questions would or would not be explored. They decided to branch off down new avenues of thought and how much or how little they would share. They provided the examples, the insight, and the experiences. Ultimately, I found that semi-structured interviews

worked to break down barriers that might have existed between my position as researcher and former teacher. I believe the fact that I had already built a meaningful student-teacher relationship with each participant led to a more open relationship between students as participants in this study and my new role as researcher. After listening to each interview multiple times—before and after the transcription process—it felt, sounded, and even appeared on paper more like a dialogue between “teacher-student” and “student-teacher” than a formal interview between disparate individuals. There was levity in these dialogues. Laughter. Earnestness. Even Tears. As a researcher, the informal give-and-take within a supposedly formal process not only surprised me, but was an experience that I will not soon forget. I will remember these student-participants and their insight, authenticity, and thoughtfulness. My perception of adolescents and their understanding and willingness to give of themselves will inform my own practice, and my interactions with students going forward from now on.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for the openness that I think was required to explore this study’s themes—autonomy, engagement, and empathy—while also providing each student-participant the opportunity to respond to questions and articulate their individual experiences in the ELAP classroom in their own unique manner. It is true that each student-participant was asked many of the same structured questions, but their responses opened up avenues for new questions that shed light on their experiences. I was happy to see how the research instrument allowed for individual student-participants to explore and recall their own experiences with ELAP. While interviews shared similarities across themes and content, no interview felt the same. It was refreshing and intriguing to see how each interview had a dialogue all its own. Students’ individual personalities and experiences provided each interview with its own distinct feeling and tone. Even through all the differences between student’s personalities, experiences, and responses, it was heartening to see that there was significant repetition amongst themes and responses—which is a sign of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Prior to engaging with the research, I had debated the number of interviews that would be required to provide Patton’s (1990) notion of “information rich cases” when it comes to purposeful sampling (p. 169). It was difficult to find agreement within academia on the number of interviews that were necessary for valid and reliable findings and data saturation. Some researchers suggested conducting many interviews, while others suggested few. But, in the end, I took comfort in Fusch and Ness’ (2015) statement that, “There is no *one-size-fits-all* method to

reach data saturation” (p. 1409). Throughout the interviews, students shared many similar experiences and examples when responding to questions that, I believe, validated the research questions and many of my assumptions and prior observations as a researcher and ELAP teacher. After participating in a few interviews, I could already see repetition in responses and themes overlapping, which made me feel confident that the decision to undertake six interviews provided the necessary information rich cases, as well as data saturation for the purposes of this study. At the same time, because of the nature of the semi-structured interviews, student-participants not only reiterated experiences with autonomy, engagement, and empathy, but added new and enlightening information that I had not anticipated.

While I was thankful to gain “rich” and “thick” data through the interviews, analyzing the data was not a simple process by any means. I first had to familiarize myself with *Nvivo*, the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). I am lucky enough to be relatively comfortable and competent with computers and their applications, so it was not long before I got started using *Nvivo* to interpret the data. All interview transcripts were quickly uploaded and I was ready to use *Nvivo* to code, assess, and analyze the interview data to explore students’ feelings and experiences in the ELAP classroom.

However, I then had the difficult task of choosing what data was relevant and what data was not, which was not an easy undertaking. As I read and combed through the interview transcripts, I was a bit overwhelmed by how much data had accumulated. It was relatively simple to apply the “structural coding” that Saldana (2010) outlined, analyzing the transcripts based on the inquiry concepts of autonomy, engagement, and empathy. Because the research instrument had specific questions that focused on each of these concepts, choosing relevant data was fairly straightforward during the initial phase of coding—simple word searches helped to analyze and isolate pertinent data. While I was pleased with this initial phase of the coding process, because it was reduced to what Creswell (2012) called “broad topics,” I cannot say that the second cycle of coding was as clear-cut. As both Creswell (2012) and Saldana (2010) stated, new themes and descriptions emerge during the second cycle of coding. Even though I felt overloaded with information, at times, I was glad to see that this second round of focused coding exposed many of the similarities and differences between student-participants’ data, as well as new connections and patterns. Yet, because of *Nvivo*’s ease-of-use, I found that I was prone to over-coding—that is, I could create new codes with ease that did not necessarily add anything to the research. It was

difficult to even keep track of the second cycle of coding, because it felt more like it morphed into a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth cycle without any intention to do so. The experience is comparable to using a word-processor rather than pen and paper; with a word-processor, it is easy to edit and revise—deleting and moving words around—whereas pen and paper can provide more raw and concrete thoughts. It was hard to know when to stop coding. It seemed that I could go on and on, breaking up themes into sub-themes—exploring, connecting, and contrasting the nuances in the data. It was so easy to switch between interview transcripts and add new codes—after re-reading and reflection—that it probably did not enhance the process of making sense out of the textual data. In the end, I had some codes that were far too similar in nature to provide any new information that might add relevance or validity to this research study, and some that were disconnected from the research. Thankfully, this process made me even more aware of my subjectivity as researcher. With each new emerging theme, I was forced to reassess my reasons for my choices and the organization of the data. I am pleased with the themes that emerged during the coding process, but, at times, it was a bit too haphazard for my liking.

This research study examined whether or not ELAP students felt that an interdisciplinary approach to Philosophy and ELA impacted or transformed their education and schooling, with particular focus on whether or not they felt ELAP cultivated autonomy, engagement, and empathy. I was relieved to find that the results and findings from the six interviews that were conducted—which will be explored at length in this chapter and the next—seemed to validate much of my initial observations and intuitions as teacher-researcher. I was happy to see that student-participants also highlighted a number of other enlightening ways that ELAP has impacted and transformed their education and schooling. Certainly, individual student-participants shared many differences from their peers concerning their experiences in the ELAP classroom, but they also collectively discussed, repeated, and reported many of the same themes that had not been anticipated or thought about. I was happy to learn that my own observations and intuitions missed some of the ways student-participants were impacted by ELAP. This entire process gave me an opportunity to think and reflect more about all the different ways that students—individually and collectively—experience the ELAP classroom.

ELAP and the Students' Experiences with Engagement, Autonomy, and Empathy Encouraging Engagement

ELAP engaged the six students in this study both academically and emotionally. Students' academic and emotional engagement in ELAP coincided with Dewey (1938/1997) and Whitehead's (1967) notions that interdisciplinary learning improves students' education and schooling because it acknowledges and uses their own experiences to explore and extend learning. Although ELAP was not derived directly from students' ordinary life experience, it validated students' experiences which allowed them to feel valued, inviting them to explore their own beliefs, values, and perspectives in different ways than their traditional classes. While these students felt connected to some of the methods and assignments found in typical ELA classes, they overwhelmingly spoke about feeling engaged by the unique crossover between ELA and the philosophical aspects of ELAP. They felt part of the experience, rather than passive observers.

ELAP's interdisciplinary approach seems to have enabled students to engage their education and schooling differently; as Frida stated:

In a traditional ELA class, you are very... it's very by the book. It's very curriculum based, and you have to kind of follow things through a textbook or a novel or, you know just a certain way of doing the class. In this class, it was very broad, and you got to think more for yourself. (p. 6)

Students, like Frida, felt they were a central part of the class; their values, ideas, and questions were not only encouraged but validated. Students also expressed that ELAP helped them to make connections between ideas, perspectives, and experiences in ways that meaningfully impacted their lives (Burton, 2001; Ellis & Fouts, 2001).

The philosophical aspects of ELAP engaged students because it gave them a feeling that they were actively involved in their learning rather than simply being inculcated with knowledge. Instead of learning resulting in Whitehead's (1967) notion of "inert ideas" that are "merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (p. 1), students expressed that their engagement came from Philosophy's focus on encouraging the exploration and questioning of ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and values, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. Rather than experiencing "inert ideas," students reported the opposite; they felt like they were not only active participants with the knowledge they explored in ELAP, but also co-creators who could take and use the constructed knowledge elsewhere in their lives.

ELAP seems to have allowed for the “improvisation” in students’ learning that prevented their ideas from becoming “stereotyped and dead” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 78).

The students also reported being academically and emotionally engaged with ELAP because they felt interested in the subject matter (Gasee, 2010; Jopling, 2002; Norris, 2015). They all expressed feeling a sense of wonder and curiosity with regards to the ideas that were explored in ELAP and their enjoyment, interest, and attention were all elevated by their experiences with its philosophical thinking, questioning, and discourse (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Students also expressed increased engagement because they felt a sense of competence and/or challenge by the philosophical content and ideas in class, which corresponds to similar findings (Colter & Ulatowski, 2013; Gasee, 1998; Jopling, 2002, Norris, 2015). Moreover, it was not simply a case of students feeling that ELAP was an “agreeable” experience, they also felt that it was “educative” (Dewey, 1938/1997). They consistently expressed that ELAP’s philosophical elements provided the necessary “romance” that Whitehead (1967) outlined. These students were affected by ELAP; they enjoyed their experiences and learned from them.

According to Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi (2008), students feeling appropriately challenged and competent in their education and schooling affects engagement. Students experience engagement when they feel that their “skills are neither overmatched nor underutilized to meet a given challenge” (Shernoff, et al., p. 160). Moreover, Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi (2008) stated, “Students experienced greater enjoyment, motivation, self-esteem, and overall engagement when they perceived themselves to be active, in control, and competent” (p. 134). Examples of these feelings were summed up by Soren, when she stated, “I would always find myself really engaged in that class, which to me means that it was a good, like, difficulty level” (p. 13). Frida also acknowledged, “It gave us, like, the right amount of challenges, but it also kept to the side of, ‘Like, we’re still in high school,’ but it made you think at a bit of a higher level” (p. 8). Plato believed the class’ concepts and ideas “were in the middle area where it was, if it wasn’t too difficult—where it wasn’t too difficult—for me to understand, but it wasn’t too simple, at the same time” (p. 7). What is more, ELAP engaged Nietzsche and Plato who were typically disengaged—who self-reported as struggling students—in their education and schooling because they felt emotionally validated. ELAP shows the possibilities that arise when students’ minds and curiosity can be ignited and focused in different ways.

Nurturing Autonomy

The six students in this study clearly indicated that they felt their experiences in ELAP had nurtured their sense of autonomy. The literature supports Philosophy's connection to an increased sense of autonomy (Bleazby, 2011; Gasee, 1998; UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2011; Vasieleghem & Kennedy, 2011). While students were shaky with their own definitions of "autonomy," it was apparent that their lived experiences and examples connected with Wringer's (1995) definition of autonomy as "both the right and the capacity to conceive personal goals in the light of the possibilities the world offers and the necessary constraints it imposes" (p. 49).

Whether the six students who participated in this research study can actually make better choices as a result of their experiences with ELAP is debatable. What constitutes an improved choice? What, specifically, makes for better decision-making? This study makes no claim that the students' feelings coincided with some sort of measurable standard. That being said, students' feelings and perceptions about their choices and decision-making should not be dismissed solely on a lack of objective evidence. Students' feelings matter, especially regarding their choices and decision-making. When students report that their experiences with ELAP made them feel like they could make better choices because they felt like they had better decision-making tools, then we need to stop, listen, and reflect on these important personal claims. As teachers, we teach because we believe in learning. As students demonstrate changes in behaviour, thought processes, expanded ideas and greater conscience in decision-making, we should be excited by that. We hope that these changes are sustained as they move into adulthood and bigger decision-making challenges. It would be interesting to reconnect with these students in five years to revisit their experiences with ELAP and learn if, in fact, they carried their new ideas into their tomorrow.

Gasee (2010) believed that students did not develop high levels of autonomy through their natural development. Even though there are those who maintain adolescents are naturally starting to question their worlds and work out their values, beliefs, and perspectives (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971), Gasee (2010) asserted that Philosophy enhanced this transformation, invoking Freire's (1970/2011) notion that autonomy can only be enhanced "by conquest... It must be pursued constantly and responsibly" (p. 29). While there is little doubt amongst the students that ELAP enhanced this transformation from students being less autonomous to more autonomous in their lives, many students in this study were keenly aware of their own maturation as

adolescents. It seems likely that these students' development as adolescents, in conjunction with ELAP, were part of the reason they believed they had become more confident people and better decisions makers.

The six students in this research study felt they were better decision-makers after their experiences in ELAP. Gasee (2010) argued that Philosophy helped students not only be more confident, curious, and open-minded, but that it also provided them with the tools to “hold their beliefs more rationally” (p. 86). It is significant that the six students in this study felt that they made more “rational,” “thought out,” and “informed” decisions. ELAP made them feel more confident in their abilities to come to rational conclusions about their own ideas—as well as others’—which affects how they act within the world (Wringe, 1995). Their beliefs about increased confidence, self-validation, and more rational, informed decision-making, are the hallmarks of autonomy (Apple, 1984; Freire, 1970/2011; Giroux, 1981; McLaren, 1998).

Like engagement, increased autonomy is also linked to student confidence. Students need to feel a sense of confidence in their own ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences before they can be confident in their own choices and decisions. If students are to embody Wringe’s (1995) definition of autonomy, they first need to be able to value their “personal goals” before they can hope to meaningfully act on them (p. 49). Students’ confidence and self-validation emanate from many facets of their lives: family, friends, life experiences, socio-economic status, education, schooling, as well as others. ELAP is not solely responsible for students’ increased confidence and self-validation. However, these six students repeatedly stated that being exposed to the philosophical ideas, concepts, and questions in ELAP were significant factors to building their confidence because they felt their beliefs and experiences were validated by the class. It allowed them to feel comfortable with their existing ideals and values, which encouraged them to test, reflect, criticize, and evaluate these ideas and values for accuracy, consistency, and reasonableness in comparison to others. Students also took comfort in the ideas, beliefs, values, perceptions, and experiences of others, because—although they oftentimes challenged their own lived experiences—they realized that the ideas explored in ELAP were similar to their own.

These shared ideas seem to have built students’ confidence in their own ideas and experiences. Freud expressed, “Yes, this is what I always thought about. This is what I always had in mind. It’s just that I never had the words. Or, like, the ideas to express them” (p. 30).

Freud not only felt a sense of validation, but also felt that the class gave him a context and the necessary vocabulary to better express his values, beliefs, and experiences. Frida concluded:

...you never really stop and like take a step back and look at what you value and believe. You just do. So when you get to kind of analyze it, it helps you understand yourself and everything around you a little bit better. (p. 19)

This notion that increased confidence stemmed from being exposed to different philosophical schools of thought corresponds with Gasee's (2010) statement that:

One of the things that was shown, for example, is that in a well-taught and well-designed philosophy course students would come to appreciate how their ideas and beliefs have been influenced by the great thinkers who lived before them. They would come to learn from whom and whence much of our knowledge and many of our basic philosophical beliefs originated as well as how our knowledge and philosophical beliefs have evolved over the course of history. (p. 85)

ELAP does not simply immerse students into larger philosophical narratives, but it gives students permission to hold their existing values and ideals. Students start to see their own values, ideas, and experiences mirrored in those of the different people and philosophers, those who have come before them, as well as their contemporaries.

Cultivating Caring-thinking, Perspective-taking, and the Possibility of Empathy

The students in this study demonstrated ELAP's connection to caring thinking by showing how they started to value their own beliefs and those of others, expressing that they increasingly learned to value the world outside themselves (Lipman, 1995a; 1995b; 2007). They not only started to better recognize and understand where others were coming from—others' ideas, feelings, and experiences—but also began to better understand the reality, importance, and necessity of others holding different beliefs, feelings, and perspectives than themselves. Simone summed this notion up when talking about people with opposing viewpoints from her, stating:

You know, if I ever talk to people who like have very extreme religious views, I'm like, "This is hard for me right now. This is very hard for me." But I think, yeah, definitely it helped me like kind of value that a bit more and be like, "Ok, we need some people like that to keep us in check." (p. 20)

As Lipman (1995a) stated, caring thinking is "thinking that values value" (Lipman, 1995a, p. 6) and these six students believed they were better able to value their own beliefs and those of

others after having taken ELAP. Caring thinking manifested itself through the statements of students, like Plato, who explained their understanding and acceptance of others' belief systems by stating things like, "To them, they see it as valuable. And to me, if they find it valuable then it has value" (p. 14). It is evident that the six students involved not only felt like they were better able to imagine others' ideas and analyze their perspectives, but that they were also able to better value these ideas and perspectives. Students expressed how ELAP got them to think abstractly through paradigmatic and narrative modes of thinking (Bruner, 1986; 1991; 2004), and they also expressed how they were able to value these modes of thinking, which is the embodiment of caring thinking, and, potentially, a step towards more empathetic and caring individuals.

All students described themselves as empathetic individuals. Their descriptions did not always align with the definition of empathy which requires three components: 1) the act of imagining another's experiences; 2) an attempt to understand the feelings and perspectives—causes and effects—that coincide with this other's experience; and, 3) using this newfound insight to inform future action (Krznicaric, 2015). It is important, however, to honor their experiences and beliefs regardless if they had the correct definition of empathy or a perfect understanding of the concept in action.

Not only did each student acknowledge that perspective-taking was an important ability, but they collectively acknowledged that ELAP helped them to see how others viewed the world differently than they did before taking the class. Breslin (1982) supported this idea of Philosophy cultivating perspective-taking because it asks students to observe different perspectives and examine how they interact with others; students do not simply see a new, different, or competing perspective, but are then encouraged to qualify, complement, and/or critique these perspectives. Gasee (2010) supported Breslin's (1982) claims, concluding that perspective-taking could lead students to "become more open-minded" through examining "competing and conflicting ideas" (p. 91-92). Bleazby (2011) agreed, believing Philosophy fosters open-mindedness through students' capacities for enhanced perspective-taking, because it not only asks students to take into account their own viewpoints, but those of others.

ELAP seemed to increase each of the six students' capacities for perspective-taking, as they all expressed their experiences in the class had led them to not only actively seek out others' perspectives and try to understand them, but, as Soren stated, they also believed they were "more open to other people's points of view" (p. 5). Freud also stated that ELAP made him better able

“to see people’s perspectives, and be like, ‘Oh, that’s why you think that way’” (p. 25). Frida expressed that ELAP made her “try to see where their kind of view is coming from,” even though it was difficult to do (p. 16). Plato stated that ELAP “introduces different ideas so that you can understand different people’s ideas” (p. 20). Nietzsche stated that after his experiences with ELAP, “I understand kind of why they, like why they follow these beliefs, and stuff. It’s just kind of—it helped me understand better reasons” (p. 18). Finally, Simone stated that ELAP has encouraged her to understand opposing beliefs, stating that her exercises in perspective-taking “helped me maybe see them less as like an enemy and more of like a person who is also a person” (p. 19). These six students’ experiences with ELAP support Daniel and Auriac’s (2011) notion that Philosophy helps students to learn to respect differing perspectives and think more critically about others’ viewpoints, as well as their own. They believed that perspective-taking could lead to new learning and insight (Bleazby, 2011; Breslin, 1982; Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Gasee, 2010); decreased stereotyping and generalizing; navigating relationships and the world better outside of high school (Krznicaric, 2015; Norris, 2015); bringing about equality (Freire, 1970/2011; Krznicaric, 2015); decreased personal conflict (Noddings, 2010); and, increased tolerance (Noddings, 1995).

In the end, these students were realistic about the impact of ELAP in their future lives, as they universally acknowledged that it was difficult to know whether their actions had changed or whether their future actions would follow-suit. That being said, the following statements about increased perspective-taking and open-mindedness demonstrate that some form of future action or transformation on their part is a possibility as a result of their experiences in ELAP. Soren outlined the following scenario:

I imagine when I’m older that some new revolution is going to come along—not revolution, but some new thing is going to come along—and I really hope that I’m not like, “Oh, whatever, like I don’t have to deal with that.” I want to be able to think about it and realize like, “Oh, yeah, that’s not right” and be able to adapt as well... I’ve sort of resolved myself to try to be more open-minded and stuff because of this class, in part, and to me open-mindedness means like taking action and things like that. (p. 29-30)

Soren linked her desire to change her future thoughts and actions to the open-mindedness that her experiences with ELAP encouraged. Plato acknowledged a similar understanding, stating,

“As you get older you tend to settle on specific ideas that you have rather than questioning those ideas, or questioning other ideas, or accepting other ideas” (p. 21) and he, too, expressed that he had hope that the skills, abilities, and dispositions he enhanced through his experiences in ELAP would continue in his life. Nietzsche also expressed hope that his actions would change in the future, although he took a more practical viewpoint, stating, “I think it will transform actions, but I don’t really know what actions it will transform yet, because, I don’t know, you can’t really, like, predict what’s going to happen later on in life” (p. 22).

Conclusion

This study tried to answer the following question: What are the outcomes of secondary students’ experiences with engagement, autonomy, and empathy as a result of studying through an integrated English Language Art and Philosophy program? There are many variables as to why students’ engagement, autonomy, and empathy increased, and ELAP was not solely responsible. Like the whole of education and schooling, it is difficult to narrow in on specific causes because there are simply too many variables at play—education is equal parts art, science, technique, and alchemy. That being said, these six students had overwhelmingly positive experiences and outcomes in ELAP with regards to their engagement, autonomy, and empathy.

ELAP fostered interest as these students encountered new ideas; it built competence as they grappled with these new ideas and they realized they were capable of understanding and acting on their newfound knowledge, skills, and abilities; and, it challenged them to examine their own beliefs, as well as those of others, digging deep for understanding and new meaning. ELAP’s content and methods also nurtured student-engagement, as students were able to latch onto philosophical ideas that spoke to them; moreover, they also felt that ELAP gave them a chance to voice their own ideas, as well as hear those of others, through philosophical discussions. These students expressed engagement, rather than disengagement, from their experiences in ELAP, oftentimes expressing that the course engaged them more than their other experiences with schooling.

ELAP also nurtured these six students’ sense of autonomy. According to students, better decision-making was a result of their experiences in ELAP as it encouraged them to examine and evaluate not only their own ideas but those of others, resulting in increased confidence and self-validation.

ELAP cultivated these six students' dispositions and abilities for perspective-taking, offering the possibility of creating more empathetic and caring human beings. From this study's findings, it is safe to say that ELAP fosters caring thinking, which lays the groundwork for empathy and caring human beings who are interested in not only understanding the world for themselves, but understanding and valuing it along with others in order to make it better.

ELAP demonstrates ELA and Philosophy's potential to work together to enhance students' learning experiences. It is no wonder Lipman's (2007) P4C program centers around literature as the vehicle to explore philosophical questions. Philosophy, literature, and language not only complement each other, but extend each other. Combined, students are exposed to the analytical sides of the human experience as well as the existential realities of what it means to be human. Nussbaum (1990) captures this notion well:

...there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it—views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty—that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder—but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. Not perhaps, either, in the expository structure conventional to philosophy, which sets out to establish something then does so, without surprise, without incident—but only in a form that itself implies that life contains significant surprises, that our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing. If these views are serious candidates for truth, views that the search for truth ought to consider along its way, then it seems that this language and these forms ought to be included within philosophy. (p. 3-4).

Nussbaum's notion that Philosophy, literature, and language need to be unified to explore the human condition describes ELAP and its possibilities for transforming students' education and schooling.

And so, ELAP's interdisciplinary approach provides the opportunity to expose students to Philosophy in a practical way. No laws need to be changed or amended. The class offers the possibility of transforming and reinvigorating student learning. The philosophical questions and themes fit naturally within the ELA curriculum (Noddings, 1994). ELAP's interdisciplinary

approach allows students to experience “literature” and the “power and beauty of great writing” that they would experience in a traditional ELA class, but its philosophical component also enables them to meaningfully connect to big ideas and “search for meaning in their own lives” (Noddings, 2013, p. 402). ELA can engage students on its own (Benson, 2013; Cress & Holm, 1998; Freire, 1970/2011; Hammond & Kim, 2014; Jamieson, 2015; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Manitoba Education, 2015; Trebbi, 2008). However, these six students have shown how ELAP can reignite students’ academic and emotional engagement in their education and schooling in a meaningful way. Each student in this research study believed ELAP, specifically its philosophical component, was a cause—and not a correlation—for increasing their academic and emotional engagement, nurturing their autonomy, and cultivating their capacities for caring-thinking, perspective-taking, and empathy.

Future Considerations

After interviewing the six students in this research study, the following considerations concerning Philosophy in schools could be examined for future curriculum development, policy-making, research, or teachers’ professional practice.

1. ELAP has already expanded to another high school in the same city and this expansion could easily expand to other high schools in the city, province, country, and elsewhere, as it only requires interested students, teachers, and administrators. Another teacher has taken over the existing ELAP program at the researcher’s school in his absence, showing how easily the program can continue once firmly in place.
2. While students’ perceptions were the central focus of this study, it did not examine connections between the students’ personal beliefs about their experiences in ELAP and whether they were true (i.e., a student may have believed that s/he became a more critical thinker as a result of her/his experiences in ELAP, but that does not necessarily make it so). Research into whether students’ beliefs about ELAP measure up to students’ actual skills and abilities after having studied ELAP could clarify findings.
3. As there is now another high school offering ELAP in the same school division—with a different location and socio-economic demographics—it would be significant if this research study’s findings could be replicated in that environment.
4. Interdisciplinary courses make it difficult to isolate the effects of individual disciplines, especially when considering research showing that ELA and Philosophy both have the

capacity to build engagement, autonomy, and empathy. A research study comparing ELA, Philosophy, and ELAP could examine whether the findings are uniform across all disciplines, or if they are more closely related to one of the disciplines or an interdisciplinary approach.

5. ELA could easily be merged with other courses, and the same could be said about Philosophy. With countries like Finland venturing into interdisciplinary curriculum, this method of organizing and integrating subject-matter and learning could be a central focus to anyone interested in creating engaging and effective curriculum for 21st century learners (FNBE, 2015). The possibilities for integrated curriculum are almost endless.
6. Philosophy, as a subject unto itself, could be introduced into the curriculum much like it has been in Ontario and Quebec as research shows the many positive and desirable outcomes for students moving into the 21st century (Ontario, 2000; UNESCO, 2007). British Columbia has also created a draft Philosophy curriculum and seems to be in the process of embracing the discipline as a branch of the Social Studies (British Columbia: Ministry of Education, 2016).
7. In lieu of ELAP or Philosophy courses, The Philosophy for Children (P4C) model could be implemented throughout elementary and secondary schools to achieve some of the potential positive benefits and outcomes of students studying ELAP or Philosophy. P4C encourages students to collectively examine and question literature, each other, and their world, through learning communities (Lipman, 2007). Philosophy departments in many Canadian universities are involved with the P4C movement, creating connections with progressive school divisions, teachers, educational institutions, and governments (Brila Youth Project, 2017; University of Alberta, 2017; Vancouver Institute of Philosophy for Children, 2017; The Canadian Philosophical Association, 2016; University of Saskatchewan, 2017). Significantly, a recent study shows how P4C enhances elementary students' abilities across disciplines, specifically in literacy and numeracy (Gorard, Siddiqui, & See, 2015). With the push for increased literacy and math, interested educators—and others—should take note.
8. As Philosophy benefits students' skills, abilities, dispositions, and educational outcomes, a "Philosopher in Residence" program that enables students to encounter and experience Philosophy across disciplines could be explored (Lukey, 2012). Much like P4C,

“Philosopher in Residence” programs use trained educators to integrate Philosophy across the curriculum, providing mini-lessons connecting to students’ studies in collaboration with other teachers.

9. Weber and Schonert-Reichl (2017) are conducting a quantitative study of 11-13-year-old children and how philosophical inquiry impacts their capacities for perspective-taking and empathy, titled *Engaged Inquiry with Children: Fostering Empathy and Perspective-taking*. While this study deals with elementary students, its findings could shed light on Philosophy’s connection to perspective-taking and empathy. At the same time, Norris, et al., (2017) are undertaking a study titled *The High School Philosophy Project* that explores teachers’ perspectives and experiences teaching Philosophy, how Philosophy affects secondary students, and the dynamics of Philosophy classrooms in relation to teachers and students’ perspectives and experiences. Although both of these research studies deal with Philosophy, and not ELA, their results may shed light on this study’s and the role of Philosophy in public education and schooling.

Final Words

There is nothing more satisfying to a teacher than to hear that a student has been engaged in one’s class. It is the reason I teach. I want nothing more than for students to wonder and be curious and love learning. As a teacher, I am immensely heartened by these former students’ responses. As a researcher, the value in understanding students’ experiences has become increasingly clear and significant. Their descriptions, reflections, and thoughtful sharing leads to a greater understanding of the influence of this integrated program and the possibilities for students to think beyond their imagined capacity. Through the broadening of topic, issue, scope, and philosophy, they developed an understanding that they were barely skimming the surface of thought before ELAP. Their empathy grew from their experiences. Their minds opened and became more flexible and they began to realize that they had limited their inquisitions and wonders previous to engaging in philosophical thinking.

On a personal level, it was refreshing and relieving to find out that such a diverse group of students reported being satisfied with their experiences in ELAP. I had fully anticipated that there would be students who were not satisfied by their experiences with ELAP, but it seems that these six students enjoyed their time in the class. I recognize that this does not apply to all students who have ever taken ELAP, and that it cannot be generalized to all student experiences,

but it is reassuring nonetheless. These students' stories give me energy and resolve to continue developing this Philosophy program, as well as a tremendous sense of personal satisfaction that we are on the right track with exposing students to Philosophy and philosophical thinking in combination with ELA.

I cannot thank Freud, Soren, Plato, Frida, Nietzsche, and Simone enough for their participation and for opening up and sharing their experiences and stories with ELAP. Their experiences with ELAP have laid the groundwork for future research and conversations about Philosophy's role in high schools. I will leave the last words about ELAP to them, as this research study was about them and would not have been possible without them. Freud ended his interview by stating the following about ELAP, "It's [ELAP] enhanced my life in a number of ways, and I'd say that it definitely did enough" (p. 33). Soren finished off by stating:

I really appreciated the class while I was taking it. Like I said, I was always pretty engaged and stuff... like I would often find myself thinking about the class. Or yeah, just, I guess thinking a lot more in general. (p. 31)

Frida shared, "I really liked the course," (p. 23) while Plato said, "It's a good class" (p. 22).

Nietzsche added:

I just think this class was actually a really well-taught class, I guess. Like you did teach it really well and it did help me expand my ideas more and understand new things compared to a regular English class, which I'm in right now where I just kind of sit there and I just learn certain ideas, and then I just don't even think about it really. This class actually helped me push and understand more. (p. 22)

And finally, Simone concluded:

I feel like this class definitely helped to like guide me to some of those things and things like that. And, I think I'll take with me some of the things that I learned, for sure. And, whether that will affect my future choices, like who's to say? But, I think that there are definitely things that I'll sort of remember and take with me from the class. You know? (p. 29)

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Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Instrument

1. Can you briefly describe yourself as a student and your high school experience with schooling (i.e., How do you feel about school, your classes, and your education?)?
2. Why did you choose to take *Language through Philosophy* in high school instead of a traditional English Language Arts (ELA) class?
 - Are you glad you made the choice or do you regret your decision? Why or why not? Can you explain whether or not your experience with Philosophy was academically satisfying?
 - Can you explain whether or not your experience with Philosophy was emotionally satisfying?
 - Can you explain whether or not your experience with Philosophy was socially satisfying?
3. Explain and briefly discuss the parts *Language through Philosophy* you enjoyed or did not enjoy
 - (i.e., What was your favourite unit of study? What was your least favourite? Why?).
 - In your experience, how was *Language through Philosophy* different from a traditional ELA class? How was it similar to regular ELA class?
 - Did you like this type of integrated approach? Why or why not?
 - Please identify the top skill(s) or disposition(s) that you think you've sharpened or enhanced by studying Philosophy.
 - Explain whether *Language through Philosophy* provided appropriate challenge for you. Were you challenged by the ideas? Were they too complicated? Too simplistic?
 - Can you provide me with any insight as to how the course might be improved, added to, or changed?
4. What does **engagement** mean to you?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Do you feel that this course engaged you?
 - More or less than your other classes?

- Can you give me some examples of how you were or were not engaged in this class?
5. What does **autonomy** mean to you? Can you give me an example?
- Do you feel like you have autonomy? Do you feel that you have become a more autonomous person through your experiences in this class? Can you give me some examples?
 - Do you think you are more or less able to make choices about your life, after having studied *Language through Philosophy* in high school?
 - What was the most profound insight you gained by studying Philosophy? Explain whether or not you think that insight will influence your life beyond high school.
6. What does **empathy** mean to you? Can you give me an example?
- Do you believe that you have empathy or are an empathetic person? Did your experiences with the class change your views, understanding, or practice of empathy? How? Can you think of some examples?
 - After taking *Language through Philosophy*, do you feel you have a better understanding of other people’s perspectives and experiences—of why they believe and value the things they do?
 - Do you feel that understanding others’ experiences, beliefs, and perspectives is important in life? Why or why not?
7. Has *Language through Philosophy* changed the way you **act and/or think** in your day to day life?
- Do you feel *Language through Philosophy* helped support your existing beliefs and experiences? Do you feel like you understand what you believe and value more clearly? Explain.
 - Did *Language through Philosophy* encourage you to question your existing beliefs and values and change or amend them accordingly? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
 - Can you explain whether or not you think your experience with Language through Philosophy was relevant to your life in and outside school?

Appendix B: Assent for Student Participants

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project that I am doing as part of the requirement for my Master's degree in Curriculum Studies. My research is concerned with students' perspectives and experiences with an integrated approach to teaching Philosophy and English Language Arts, and whether it is a meaningful way to nurture and promote engagement, autonomy, and empathy. As such, I am trying to gather as many student experiences with Language through Philosophy as possible—positive, neutral, or negative. I would like you to consider sharing your perspectives and experiences with *Language through Philosophy* as a part of this research. Please read the following information carefully. Please contact me if you have any additional questions.

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Brenda Kalyn: (306) 966-7566
Department of Curriculum Studies
University of Saskatchewan
brenda.kalyn@usask.ca

Graduate Student:

Brad Gibault (306) 683-7750
M. Ed. Student—Curriculum Studies
University of Saskatchewan
gibaultb@spsd.sk.ca

Purpose and Procedure: This research project will give you the chance to reflect on your experiences and perspectives with Language through Philosophy, and the effects it had on your schooling and education. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; you do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you choose not to participate, your ongoing schooling and education will not be affected in any way.

I hope to interview six students who have graduated from the Language through Philosophy program. You are being contacted because you have recently graduated from the Language through Philosophy program. These interviews will, hopefully, allow me to better understand students' experiences when English Language Arts is integrated with Philosophy. Other research studies have spent a lot of time looking into students' experiences with Philosophy and critical and creative thinking. However, this research study is interested in whether or not you feel

Language through Philosophy nurtured or enhanced your engagement, autonomy, and empathy. The Saskatoon Public School Division is aware of this research and has given me their full support. If you agree to be a part of this study, you will take part in one interview with me (the researcher). This interview will take place at your school during a time of your choosing—a time that is least disruptive to your education and schooling. The interviews should take about 45-60 minutes and will be recorded using an audio-recorder.

Confidentiality: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, your identity will remain anonymous. No one will be able to link your responses to the study, as you will be given a pseudonym (a fake name) to protect you from any harm. Your school will also not be identified. Your anonymity is paramount.

Right to Withdraw: Participation in this research study is voluntary. At the same time, if you choose to participate in this study, you can also choose to withdraw from the study at any time. You can terminate the interview and the recording at any time of your choosing. The interview recording will be transcribed; however, if you choose to withdraw from the study, this transcript will be destroyed. Your educational standing will not be affected if you choose to withdraw. Your right to withdraw from this research study will be in effect until November 30, 2016. After this date, it is probable that your research data will have already been disseminated, which means that it might not be possible to withdraw your data.

Data Storage: I will safeguard all information to insure your confidentiality for this study. I will be the only person who will have access to any of the information you share, along with any of the resulting data. All of your information and resulting data will be stored on password protected computers and devices. When this study is finished, all data will be secured at the University of Saskatchewan, for a period of five years, by Dr. Brenda Kalyn, in the Department of Curriculum Studies according to ethics guidelines of the University of Saskatchewan.

Potential Benefits: The most important benefit of this study is that you will be providing important information about your learning experiences with Language through Philosophy. As a student, you are in the best position to describe, define, elaborate, explain, and share what

learning means to you and how the class has shaped your experiences. I cannot know this without your stories of experience, so you are the most valuable piece to my research study. The resulting data from this study will be used in a number of ways. Firstly, it will help me with my thesis so I can complete and obtain my Master's of Education degree in Curriculum Studies. Secondly, it will be published and become part of the University of Saskatchewan's library collection. Thirdly, it will be shared with Saskatoon Public School Division, to hopefully improve and expand the Language through Philosophy program into other schools. Finally, it may be shared with other educators or universities through presentations or publication in scholarly journals. I will provide you with the link to the online thesis which will be housed at the University of Saskatchewan Library upon the successful defense of my thesis.

Questions: You can contact me at any time, if you have questions or concerns about this research study and your participation. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Brenda Kalyn. Our phone numbers have been provided for your convenience. This study has been approved by the Saskatoon Public School Division, and the Behavioural Research Ethics Boards, University of Saskatchewan on _____. If you want to know your rights as a participant, or my duties and obligations as a researcher, you can direct your concerns to the Ethics Office—locally at 306-966-2975 and toll free at 1-888-966-2975. You can also call the Saskatoon Public School Division: 306-683-8200.

Consent to Participate: I have been read and explained the above information, and I understand the nature of participation in this research study. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions, and have them answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in this research study, with the knowledge that I can withdraw participation at any time, without affecting my education and schooling. I have been given a copy of this consent for my own records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix C: Consent for Parents or Guardians of Student Participants

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in a research project that I am doing as part of the requirement for my Master's degree in Curriculum Studies. My research is concerned with students' perspectives and experiences with an integrated approach to teaching Philosophy and English Language Arts, and whether it is a meaningful way to nurture and promote engagement, autonomy, and empathy. As such, I am trying to gather as many student experiences with *Language through Philosophy* as possible—positive, neutral, or negative. Please read the following information carefully. Please contact me if you have any additional questions.

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Graduate Student:

Brad Gibault (306) 683-7750
M. Ed. Student—Curriculum Studies
University of Saskatchewan
gibaultb@spsd.sk.ca

Purpose and Procedure: This research project will give student participants the chance to reflect on their experiences and perspectives with *Language through Philosophy*, and the effects it had on their schooling and education. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary; they do not have to participate if they do not want to. If your son or daughter chooses not to participate, his or her ongoing schooling and education will not be affected in any way.

I hope to interview six students who have graduated from the *Language through Philosophy* program. Your child is being contacted because he or she recently graduated from the Language through Philosophy program. These interviews will, hopefully, allow me to better understand student participants' experiences when English Language Arts is integrated with Philosophy. Other research studies have spent a lot of time looking into students' experiences with Philosophy and critical and creative thinking. However, this research study is interested in

whether or not student participants feel *Language through Philosophy* nurtured or enhanced their engagement, autonomy, and empathy. The Saskatoon Public School Division is aware of this research and has given me their full support. If your child agrees to be a part of this study, he or she will take part in one interview with me (the researcher). This interview will take place at your child's school during a time of his or her choosing—a time that is least disruptive to his or her education and schooling. The interviews should take about 45-60 minutes and will be recorded using an audio-recorder.

Confidentiality: Your son or daughter is under no obligation to participate in this study. If your child chooses to participate, his or her identity will remain anonymous. No one will be able to link your child's responses to the study, as he or she will be given a pseudonym (a fake name) to protect him or her from any harm. Your child's school will also not be identified. Your child's anonymity is paramount.

Right to Withdraw: Participation in this research study is voluntary. If your child chooses to participate in this study, he or she can also choose to withdraw from the study at any time. He or she can terminate the interview and its recording at any time of his or her choosing. The interview recording will be transcribed; however, if your child chooses to withdraw from the study, this transcript will be destroyed. Your child's educational standing will not be affected if he or she chooses to withdraw. Your child's right to withdraw from this research study will be in effect until November 30, 2016. After this date, it is probable that your child's research data will have already been disseminated, which means that it might not be possible to withdraw your child's data.

Data Storage: I will safeguard all information to insure your child's confidentiality in all aspects of this study. I will be the only person who will have access to any of the information your child shares, along with any of the resulting data. At the same time, all of your child's information and resulting data will be stored on password protected computers and devices. When this research study is finished, all data will be secured at the University of Saskatchewan, for a period of five years, by Dr. Brenda Kalyn, in the Department of Curriculum Studies according to the ethics guidelines of the University of Saskatchewan.

Potential Benefits: The most important benefit of this study is that your son or daughter will be providing important information about his or her learning experiences with *Language through Philosophy*. As a student, he or she is in the best position to describe, define, elaborate, explain, and share what learning means to him or her and how the class has shaped your child's experiences. I cannot know this without their stories of experience, so they are the most valuable piece to my research study. The resulting data from this study will be used in a number of ways. Firstly, it will help me with my thesis so I can complete and obtain my Master's of Education degree in Curriculum Studies. Secondly, it will be published and become part of the University of Saskatchewan's library collection. Thirdly, it will be shared with Saskatoon Public School Division, to hopefully improve and expand the Language through Philosophy program into other schools. Finally, it may be shared with other educators or universities through presentations or publication in scholarly journals. I will provide you with the link to the online thesis which will be housed at the University of Saskatchewan Library upon the successful defense of my thesis.

Questions: You can contact me at any time, if you have questions or concerns about this research study and your participation. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Brenda Kalyn. Our phone numbers have been provided for your convenience. This study has been approved by the Saskatoon Public School Division, and the Behavioural Research Ethics Boards, University of Saskatchewan on _____. If you want to know your rights as a participant, or my duties and obligations as a researcher, you can direct your concerns to the Ethics Office—locally at 306-966-2975 and toll free at 1-888-966-2975. You can also call the Saskatoon Public School Division: 306-683-8200.

Consent for your Child to Participate: I have read the above information, and I understand the nature of participation in this research study. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions, and have them answered to my satisfaction. I consent to my child's participation in this study, with

the knowledge that he or she can withdraw participation at any time, without affecting his or her educational standing. I have been given a copy of this consent for my own records.

(Name of Parent or Guardian)

(Date)

(Signature of Parent or Guardian)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix D: Intersection of Critical, Creative, and Caring Thinking (Davey, 2005, p. 39).

