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Media Literacy and the English as a Second Language Curriculum: A Curricular Critique and Dreams for the Future

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Graduate Program in Media Studies
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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MEDIA LITERACY AND THE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
CURRICULUM: A CURRICULAR CRITIQUE AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

by

Clara Madrenas

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Media Studies

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Abstract

This thesis investigates whether or not the Ontario English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development (ESL/ELD) curriculum imparts the critical literacy skills necessary for students to deconstruct the multimedia messages with which the contemporary world is saturated, in order to function as informed, agentic citizens of Ontario society. Using foundations of cultural theory, radical critical pedagogy, and critical race theory, particularly the work of James Paul Gee, Henry A. Giroux, Paulo Freire and Michael Apple, this thesis explores the ways in which the current ESL/ELD curriculum can be found lacking due to its enforcement of the banking model of education, which devalues student experience and enforces dominant Western ideologies. The final chapter recommends an experiential, media literacy-based curriculum that validates student experience and empowers students to become both critics and producers of media texts and culture writ large.

Keywords

Critical Pedagogy, English as a Second Language, English Literacy Development, Giroux, Freire, Apple, Gee, Critical Race Theory, Pedagogy, Media Literacy.

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Chapter 1

1 Introducing the Research Question and Reviewing the Literature

According to recent demographic projections, the population of foreign-born Canadians stands to increase four times faster than that of Canadian-born citizens in the coming decades. Nearly half of the population in Canada will likely consist of first-generation immigrants by the year 2031 (Statistics Canada). On average, 36 per cent of immigrants to Canada with Permanent Resident status are young people under 24 (slightly under half of these youth being over 15 years of age), with an approximately 4 in every 5 of these young people hailing from countries where English is not the first language of the majority of residents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Facts and Figures 2011”). Since 2008, an average of nearly 50% of all immigrants arriving to Canada make their homes in the province of Ontario (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Preliminary Tables”). In light of these statistics, it is reasonable to extrapolate that Ontario is approaching a time when a significant proportion of our emerging adults—the citizens who will take on the future of our social, political and economic institutions—will have been educated to some degree through the Ontario Ministry of Education’s English as a Second Language curriculum for grades 9 to 12.

Many of these newcomer students—as well as groups of Canadian-born young people who, for various reasons, enter high schools while still developing standard English speaking skills—move through their high school educations while facing additional economic and social challenges common in newcomer families. It is imperative that these young people are empowered to affirm and assert their human agency in democratic society to the same degree as their English-speaking peers. English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development (ESL/ELD) curricula, and the teachers and school environments these curricula guide, have an important role in encouraging these developments. However, current educational practices embodied by the Ontario ESL/ELD curriculum utilize a “banking model” (wherein students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge; empty heads waiting to be “filled” with information,

as a bank account) (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) of education geared towards amorally reproducing the status quo in Ontario with regard to dominant economic, social and cultural norms. Through this banking model, the importance of history and of students' material lived experience is downplayed by standardized, positivist methods of purportedly "neutral" instruction and evaluation.

Additionally, since 2007, Ontario curricula for English and the Language Arts have emphasized multimedia literacy as a crucial component in the effective education of young people who live in an increasingly media-saturated world. Ontario suggests that multimedia texts' "significant influence on the students' lives," and "the power and pervasive influence these media wield in our lives and in society" give media products and messages a "special significance" (The Ontario Curriculum, "Language," "Grades 9 and 10 – English", "Grades 11 and 12 – English"). However, identified English language learners streamed through the ESL/ELD program will spend at minimum one school term and up to seven terms before entering mainstream English courses, if they are even given the option, or afforded the time, to enter these mainstream courses at all prior to high school graduation (The Ontario Curriculum, "Grades 9-12 – ESL and ELD"). For these ESL/ELD learners, a much smaller emphasis is placed on media literacy of any kind. The mainstream English curriculum features an entire curricular strand devoted to Media Studies, with a thorough three-page written section *per course and grade level* outlining the strand's goals and expectations. Meanwhile, "demonstrate[ing] an understanding of, interpret[ing] and creat[ing] a variety of media works" is but one bullet point of four in the summary of the "Socio-cultural Competence and Media Literacy" strand in the ESL/ELD curriculum. The other bullet points in this strand focus on procedural skills such as communicating appropriately in different social contexts, understanding Canadian citizenship, and adapting to the Ontario education system (The Ontario Curriculum, "Grades 9-12 ESL and ELD" 20). In fact, *all* specific discussions of "media literacy" in the entire ESL/ELD curricular document could be condensed into fewer than three pages of material.

Studies examining future success of newcomer youth, including security in employment and overall positive self-image, have indicated that while academic progress

and achievement in education, regardless of the specific curriculum, is one of the key factors in predicting overall success (Anisef), students' own motivations and interests in their education are often driven by their level of what Baffoe calls "cultural adaptation," or the degree to which the youth feel included in and well aware of the popular cultural and social life of their communities in Canada (Baffoe "Navigating Two Worlds"). Engagement with mass media is no doubt a large part of this "acculturation" process. Furthermore, the average North American young person over the age of eight "spends the equivalent of a full work week—an average of 6 ¾ hours per day—in front of a screen of some kind of electronic media" (Goodman 1), and this likely includes a proportion of newcomer youth. According to critical pedagogy scholar Henry Giroux,

It is [in popular culture]'s diverse spaces and spheres that most of the education that matters today is taking place on a global scale. Electronic media, the vastly proliferating network of images that inscribe themselves on us everyday, and the hybridized sounds of news technologies, cultures, and ways of life have drastically altered how identities are shaped, desires constructed, and dreams realized. (Giroux *Disturbing Pleasures* x)

However, the ESL and ELD curriculum seems to gloss over this viewpoint by not incorporating media literacy as intentionally as the mainstream curriculum. In North American society, many scholars (bell hooks, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said, etc.) agree that a great deal of mass media seems to comfortably portray immigrants, ethnic minorities and especially non-white communities as culturally backwards, pathologically criminal (Said *Orientalism* 40), dangerously hypersexual (Myrdal 48, Gilroy *Between Camps* 22) or merely oblivious, confused and vaguely less-than (Goodman 23-24)¹. With ethnic minorities being statistically underprivileged in North American economic and political spheres, hooks has argued the existence of a "dominator culture," whose messaging "would have little impact if it were not for the power of mass media to seductively

¹ See also: Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) for discussions of representation (and the psychological effects of colonialism vis-à-vis cultural representation), Said, *Orientalism* (1978) for more in depth discussions of the limited representations available for racialized subjects in Western culture, bell hooks *We Real Cool* (2004) for specific discussions of black masculinity and sexuality and *Yearning* (1990) for discussions of racialized stereotypes in general.

magnify that message” (hooks *Teaching Community* 12). If identity formation and mass media messaging are truly intertwined—as the mainstream Ontarian English curriculum openly states—and if these mass media messages are so often identified as problematic and even damaging, it seems all the more important to acknowledge that, in the words of Goodman, “failing to distribute critical literacy skills equally to all children—regardless of their race, class, gender and ethnicity—only reinforces and perpetuates the inequalities in knowledge and power that marginalized groups already face.” (Goodman 7).

The American National Association for Media Literacy Education defines this media literacy as “a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages” (name.net). My project will alter and consciously politicize this definition by combining it with Freire’s notion that literacy is never “simply a mechanical process, which overemphasizes the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills” (Freire *Literacy* viii), but is in fact “a vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to re-appropriate their history, culture, and language practices. It is, thus, a way to enable the oppressed to reclaim ‘those historical and existential experiences that are devalued in everyday life by the dominant culture in order to be both validated and critically understood’” (Freire *Literacy* 157). Taking into account the contemporary immersion of young people in media environments through all of their activities (not merely the literal acts of watching television or using the Internet) these holistic definitions of literacy as more than technical acquisition but instead lived experience in the world and reclamation of oppressed identity suggest a need for a similarly holistic investigation of the ESL/ELD curriculum from the media and cultural studies perspective in order to study crucial questions of newcomer youth subjectivity in contemporary Ontario.

In the following chapters, I will use a media and cultural studies lens to lay out the justifications for analyzing ESL/ELD curricular materials from the perspective of media theory, critical race theory and radical critical pedagogy theory. Then, I will perform an analysis of four key curricular texts—the programmatic curriculum itself, the procedural

guidelines for evaluating and streaming ESL/ELD students through the Ontario high school system, a supplementary guide on ELD learners, and a manual on cultural sensitivity in the classroom—using James Paul Gee’s frameworks for discourse analysis². This analysis will focus merely on the programmatic curriculum, that is to say, the published Ontario curricular materials, rather than the enacted curriculum or the curriculum as it plays out in the actual ESL/ELD classroom. This content analysis will interrogate the ways the programmatic ESL/ELD curriculum provides, or fails to provide, a model for developing empowered citizens capable of democratic dialogue inside and outside the classroom. By demonstrating the ways the programmatic ESL/ELD curriculum upholds the banking model of education and the accompanying reification and naturalization of historically problematic notions of communication and culture, I propose a more ethical model of “border pedagogy” based on Giroux’s scholarship. In particular, I focus on the following research questions:

- How are media and cultural studies important for the analysis of educational curricula, especially in the education of marginalized groups?
- Are the current pedagogical methods endorsed by the Ontario government likely to support youth in developing the toolkits necessary to pull apart representations, messages and myths in the multimedia world around them (a world in which, experience indicates, they are already immersed in at every moment of every day)?
- How do the Ontario curriculum and other teacher training and education materials work with, or against, students and teachers in growing as critical, self-possessed, socially responsible citizens actively contributing to Canadian democratic and cultural life?

² Discourse analysis is here defined as the study of language-in-use; in other words, language as it is written as well as how it is born from the real world and is, or can be, enacted in the real world. The specific framework for discourse analysis is outlined more clearly in chapter two.

- What might a curriculum for ESL/ELD learners, guided by the above questions, and focused particularly on imparting mass media literacy in the classroom, look like?

Finally, I integrate the theoretical foundation of critical pedagogy and my content analysis to propose an “alternative” media literacy-focused curriculum for ESL/ELD learners.

The literature relevant to this research project falls into two main categories: 1. the practical information to be gleaned from previous studies of literacy education of immigrant youth; and 2. broader theoretical discussions surrounding pedagogy, ideology and critical race theory. By including the second category and focusing on some of the key ideas that affect the scope of this project, I make clear my own theoretical biases in entering the research. I also use this discussion to justify my intentions to approach this discussion of education from a cultural studies perspective, with heavy reference to radical critical pedagogy theory—with the Marxist lens this implies—as well as theories and discussions of student subjectivity, postcolonialism, racial oppression and humiliation, and ideology in state education. I believe these perspectives allow the research process to create space to challenge, in critically important ways, some of the basic assumptions embedded within current educational practices.

I will begin with a review of similar studies to my own, tracing them through those that discuss newcomer “acculturation” as a systematized psychological process (Chuang et al., Berry et al., Boyd and Dobrow, Cooper et al.) to those that create more space for an approach that considers mass media as a factor in acculturation (Campey) to those that take a more holistic approach to “culture” and positive youth development (Share, Goodman, Haneda, de Genova). These latter studies also treat youth as agents in their own development and choices to “assimilate” (or not) to a new language and culture, selecting elements to which they adapt in varying degrees. The assertion that students are drivers of their own learning will be central to my study, a notion that necessarily leads to a discussion about the value of approaching my work from the cultural studies and media theory perspective, instead of a more traditional instrumental

approach that focuses on psychological study. Scholars central to the cultural studies field such as Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu emphasize that education is crucial to the determination of cultural hegemony, while pedagogical theorists such as Michael Apple and Peter McLaren focus on the mass media as a pedagogical tool further enforcing dominant ideologies. The above theorists, and others in their field (Donaldo Macedo, Gloria Ladson-Billings, bell hooks, Steven Goodman, Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux et al.) discuss the myriad ways both schooling and the mass media are structured so as to simply reproduce labour and class divisions in a capitalist economy through schooling that reduces literacy and learning to the acquisition of tangible labour-market skills.

This element is important to my inquiry because of the ways subjectivity, power and history are played out in the ESL/ELD classroom in particular as labour and class divisions supported by hegemonic structures particularly disenfranchise the racialized youth who typically comprise the ESL/ELD classroom. Centuries of scholarship (W. E. B. DuBois, Gunnar Myrdal, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Paul Gilroy) emphasize an extensive racist and colonial history across national and ethnic borders that indicates the importance of representation and visibility of non-white, colonized or otherwise racially and ethnically marked groups as it relates to political struggles and lived oppressions³. To earnestly study media literacy engagement in the ESL/ELD classroom there must be some acknowledgement of racist and colonialist ideologies still at play in contemporary North America. Most crucially, this involves the rejection of what Freire refers to as “banking” models of education, as the rejection of models of research that do not adequately respect the agency of ESL/ELD students and teachers while still interrogating their subjectivity within historical contexts.

³ DuBois’ foundational article, “Strivings of the Negro People” (1897) coined the term “double consciousness” to describe “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” continuously present for the racialized subject dealing with the particular ills of representation in a colonialist world. In *An American Dilemma* (1944), Myrdal discusses the importance of broader representation for repairing some of the damages done by centuries of racism and the slave trade. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Fanon discusses colonialism from the global perspective and the lived consequences of damaging language and representation, issues also discussed in Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Contemporary writing such as Gilroy continues this legacy of scholarship, in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), *Between Camps* (2000) and *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987).

Finally, scholarship (Freire, Macedo, De Genova, Ladson-Billings, Giroux, Goodman, et al.) pertaining to pedagogical strategies that *do* work to question and critique capitalist hegemony, racism and neo-colonialism, and the “banking” model of education will comprise a large part of my literature review. This theoretical foundation will undergird my research in approaching curriculum and its enablers, enactors and “recipients”/learners in analytically productive ways. There is much useful theory and research (McLaren, Ladson-Billings, Goodman) on the topics of “culturally relevant” education that draws upon students’ expertise, as subjects with agency, to learn through the lived realities they already know best. I will also draw upon on what Freire calls “problem-posing education” and Giroux calls “border pedagogy”, which seek to destabilize dominant ideological assumptions teachers and students make.

I have found latter pedagogical formulations, which draw upon much of the same literature I have outlined thus far, to be the most useful for the task of approaching contemporary curricula from the media and cultural studies angle. Freire’s status as one of the original, foundational critical pedagogy theorists, with a strong basis in post-colonial anti-oppression thought and action make his work essential for the study I propose⁴. Giroux’s more recent writings and his more practical discussions of contemporary racism, popular culture, multiculturalism, hegemony and pedagogical practice are equally important in order to round out perspectives drawn from Freire. Finally, to ensure a material basis to my thinking, I have found Michael Apple’s work on political economy, ideology and curriculum crucial for grounding some of the more abstract elements of Freire and Giroux’s cultural discussions⁵. All three of these theorists draw heavily on all of the broad theoretical underpinnings discussed above, from critical race theory to discussions of cultural capital and beyond, laying out the nexus of critical pedagogical thought with histories of thought that will be outlined in this first chapter.

⁴ Necessarily, discussions of Freire will require heavy reliance as well on his colleague Donaldo Macedo, with whom he collaborated on in many of his writings (see Works Cited).

⁵ Because both Giroux and Apple have collaborated at length with Peter McLaren on relevant topics such as discussions of “revolutionary multiculturalism” and so on, some discussion of McLaren’s work will necessarily be pulled into the second chapter as well.

For this reason, I will draw mainly on these three theorists when I perform the content analysis of Ontario ESL/ELD curricular materials in the second chapter.

Much of the recent scholarship on newcomer youth literacy has come from a sociological standpoint, or the standpoint of researchers in education and policy (Cooper et al.). The focus this previous research takes on empirical information and statistical imperatives, and the fact the research is situated within the historically well-established disciplines of educational psychology and sociology, may lend the studies outward legitimacy for their apparent tangible, factual basis. However, the cultural studies field, with its diverse and interdisciplinary canon of literature, provides a vital space to widen and deepen our understandings of pedagogical problems related to critical literacy in contemporary, media-saturated culture for a number of reasons.

Firstly, there is a strong basis in the literature of cultural studies identifying the importance of popular media in society beyond that of sheer diversion or petty entertainment, with mass media stories being identified as “the sites where a pedagogy of power is used to produce particular narratives, representations, and stories about who is authorized to speak, under what conditions, and in whose interest” (Giroux *Disturbing Pleasures* 44). Alluding to a need to acknowledge texts not only as peripheral to, or vaguely reflective of, the realities of life, but as central to our understandings and action within power structures that guide social behavior, Antonio Gramsci writes,

Each time that in one way or another, the question of language comes to the fore, that signifies that a series of other problems is about to emerge: the formation and enlarging of the ruling class, the necessity to establish more ‘intimate’ and sure relations between the ruling groups and the national popular masses, that is, the reorganization of cultural hegemony. (qtd. in Freire *Literacy* 1)

The importance of media texts in the material world of social activity is further emphasized by Bourdieu, who in discussion of the cultural industries states the importance “of understanding works of art as a manifestation of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated.” (Bourdieu 37) Media texts, then, present distilled hegemonic messages drawn from the material world while simultaneously reinforcing the

guiding assumptions of material life under capitalism throughout their very production, sale and consumption.

Additionally, there is the potential that “texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (Said *Orientalism* 94, emphasis author’s). Especially with an ESL/ELD curriculum that does not emphasize media literacy, texts in the English language may be raised to particularly elevated statuses, noting that the English classroom is often a newcomer youth’s first and most immersive exposure to state authority and that, systemically, the option of critical inquiry beyond passive reception are ignored and therefore effectively not provided by the curricular structure. Intentionally or otherwise, consciously or not, the classroom can become subtly complicit with a guiding principle that “people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality that it describes” (Said *Orientalism* 93). This reification of the text enables “cultural institutions and cultural arbiters”—who, as above, all too often reflect and reinforce dominant capitalist hegemony through their production process as well as in their messaging—“to present their histories as seamless, disinterested, and authoritative, and their hierarchies of value as universally valid, ecumenical, and effectively consensual” (Solomon-Godeau xxii). This in turn can secure these histories and hierarchies in students’ minds and lives as objectively “real” and therefore actionable.

The cultural studies lens provides the theoretical background to indicate that the apparent neglect of media literacy in ESL/ELD curricula is not merely a values-free choice of which types of texts to include in the classroom and which to lay aside as frivolous or irrelevant. Although the media studies field may not ground itself in measurable, statistical evaluations of the material world, this cultural theory background gives us the tools, in a way that psychology and sociology of education do not, to link media and popular culture reciprocally with lived conditions of existence. Additionally, this research will aim to break free from the “singular avoidance of literature” and self-expression from racialized communities that Said identifies as characteristic of American social science. Said argues:

What seems to matter far more to the regional expert are “facts,” of which a literary text is perhaps a disturber. The net effect of this remarkable omission in modern American awareness [is to keep] people conceptually emasculated, reduced to ‘attitudes,’ ‘trends,’ statistics: in short, dehumanized. Since an Arab [i.e. racialized] poet or novelist—and there are many—writes of his experiences, of his values, of his humanity (however strange that may be), he effectively disrupts the various patterns (images, clichés, abstractions) by which the Orient [by inference: non-white communities] is represented. (Said *Orientalism* 291)

This “remarkable omission” in awareness and “singular avoidance of literature” is present both in the scholarship on ESL/ELD students as well as in the curriculum itself, which is one of the problems my research will investigate.

The field of cultural studies also provides the theoretical background and vocabulary to interrogate the ways issues of media and hegemony play out in schools specifically. Michael Apple argues that the role of the state in contemporary education under capitalism is that of reproducing labour, class and cultural inequalities through the school system (*Ideology and Curriculum*). This analysis is deepened with reference to Bourdieu, who identifies not only state education’s role in reproducing labour, but also in perpetuating the status quo within the cultural industries, “legitimiz[ing] the dominant cultural capital through the hierarchically arranged bodies of school knowledge in the hegemonic curriculum” and “perpetuating cultural privileges” by prizing certain modes of speech, dress and physical behavior over others (qtd. in Giroux *Reader* 14)⁶. Apple concludes that “while these projects seem neutral, helpful, and may seem aimed at increasing mobility, they will actually defuse the debate over the role of schooling in the reproduction of the knowledge and people ‘required’ by society” (qtd. in Giroux *Reader* 25), instead of promoting education as a means to encourage an informed democratic citizenry.

⁶ Worth noting here is that modes of speech and physical behavior comprise a portion of the ESL/ELD curriculum under the “Socio-Cultural Competence” segments of the Socio-Cultural Competence and Media Literacy curriculum, which require students’ mastery of certain social conventions such as speech volume, handshakes, and use of humour in different contexts (The Ontario Curriculum, “Grades 9-12 ESL and ELD”).

This in turn plays a role in how literacy, especially media literacy is (or is not) taught under the “notion that literacy is simply a mechanical process which overemphasizes the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills” (Freire *Literacy* viii). Ladson-Billings adds that “alternative constructions [of literacy] are either remote or invisible, and so literacy becomes a seemingly self-evident personal attribute that is either present or absent” (Ladson-Billings 112). This practical, skill-based definition of literacy enables what have alternately been called the “banking,” “factory” or “assimilationist” models of education (Freire, Goodman, Ladson-Billings), where education is perceived as being funneled into the minds of students by way of an assembly-line process that emphasizes conformity and obedience. Under this model, “the person is not a conscious being [...] he or she is rather the possessor of *a* consciousness: an empty ‘mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 75). This model’s effect on newcomer youth specifically as it relates to their interactions with mass media can be twofold. First, it denies the roots and contexts of these young people’s unique experiences with education, media texts, and daily life from their positions as racialized, and often economically disenfranchised or otherwise socially alienated young people. Dominant education theory and practice act as “immobilizing and fixating forces” that “fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 84) which can have the effect of being “a way of adjusting young people to the inevitability of [...] inequalities rather than motivating them to claim their own historical agency by struggling against them” (McLaren and Ovando 27). Second, this pedagogical method is complicit with the “odd congruence between two very different systems: the system of global media that wants young people to be spectators and consumers rather than social actors, and a factory system of schooling that wants young people to be passive and willing vessels for a prescribed set of knowledge and skills” (Goodman 2). In this way, educational institutions adhering to this “banking” model of pedagogy behave much like Bourdieu’s assessment of media critics, who he argues secure their own employment and cultural capital by defending the ideological interests of the dominant class (Bourdieu 94-95). This is at the same time that popular culture notoriously exploits the novelty and rebellion attributed to youth culture as a marketing tool (*cf.* Bourdieu 105-106). This is important

to this project's approach as it is necessary to recognize the articulations found in previous scholar's work suggesting that "until the factory model of schooling is radically transformed, there is little hope that engaging students in the analysis of media [...] will ever become a meaningful part of the teaching and learning process" (Goodman 18).

Academic literature in the field of cultural studies indicates that the marginalized and racially marked youth who often comprise the ESL/ELD classroom stand to appreciate and make use of media literacy education in especially important ways. Television, films and so on abound with representations of race and ethnicity that can be sorted into depictions of racialized people as "something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual)" (Said *Orientalism* 40) and other such reductive or dehumanizing forms of representation. Racialized young people are in many cases inculcated with the belief that their role in media texts should be that of, if not athletes or entertainers, sites of pity or fear (Goodman 23-24). Long before the advent of most dominant forms of contemporary mass media, W.E.B. Dubois was writing of "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" ("Strivings of the Negro People") and Gunnar Myrdal observed representations of blacks in America as "criminal and of disgustingly, but somewhat enticingly, loose sexual morals [with] a gift for dancing and singing [...] they are the happy-go-lucky children of nature who get a kick out of life which white people are too civilized to get" (Myrdal 48). Likewise, Said notes the representations of large swaths of the underdeveloped global South "as always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences" (Said *Orientalism* 287) and Fanon points to instances where the "perverted logic" of the overdeveloped world "turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it," thus "devaluing pre-colonial history" (Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* 149).

Though the above analyses relate to specific historical and political contexts that may seem detached from that of contemporary Ontario classrooms, centuries of

scholarship (DuBois, Myrdal, Fanon, Said) emphasize an extensive racist and colonial history across national and ethnic borders that indicates the *particular* importance of *representation* and visibility of non-white, colonized or otherwise racially and ethnically marked groups as it relates to political struggles and lived oppressions. In fact, Macedo and Bartolome write that in contemporary North America “the mass media educate more people about issues regarding ethnicity and race than all other sources of education available to U.S. citizens” (2) and that media’s “language-based racism has had the effect of licensing institutional discrimination, whereby [...] immigrants materially experience the loss of their dignity, the denial of their humanity and, in many cases, outright violence” (4).

The banking model of education and the capitalist leaning towards skills-imparting methods of pedagogy occlude the creation of space for discussions of historical and social contexts in pedagogy. Through encouraging young people to “extract” meaning from texts in and of the texts themselves, positivist pedagogy then decontextualizes semiology, “ignoring the systems of social relations within which symbolic systems are produced and utilized [and] disregarding the social conditions underlying the production of the work and those determining its functioning” (Bourdieu 140). This is particularly relevant to newcomer youth: together, capitalism’s effects on education and “factory” models of pedagogy prime us culturally to instrumentalize and decontextualize literacy and meaning-making, and by extension, so too are “race” and racism instrumentalized and decontextualized. Cultural theory lays a foundation for us to view how capitalist economic and pedagogical systems weave together to contribute to a “business as usual” state in mass education and mass media: wherein there is an overall “reconceptualizing [of] racism as a private—as opposed to a deeply political and structural—phenomenon [...] safely beyond the reach of public policy intervention” (Giroux *Take Back* 208). This reconceptualizing plays out pedagogically in the dual realms of formal state education and mass media simultaneously.

To earnestly study media literacy engagement in the ESL/ELD classroom, then, there must be some acknowledgement of racist and colonialist tensions still at play in contemporary North America. Pedagogical traditions in North American capitalist

cultures particularly take a stance where educators are subjects—“those who know and act”—and students are objects, “which are known and acted upon.” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 36). This subject/object dichotomy is all the more prevalent in a context where, for the duration of each ESL/ELD class period, students’ languages—not forgetting the saying that “a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks* 18)—are fundamentally, perhaps unavoidably, secondary to the language and authority of the teacher. If the problems of disparaging mass media and popular culture representations of race or ethnicity, *and* the controversy innate in literacy education of a dominant language within a dominator culture are not given room for serious interrogation—by the curriculum, teachers, students or otherwise—then perhaps this warrants the investigation from a perspective grounded in the theoretical foundations above.

There is also a documented belief in “the role that devaluation and degradation, or all strategies of shaming, play in maintaining racial subordination, especially in the arena of education” (hooks *Teaching Community* 94), whether this “shaming” is specific and intentional or rather embedded institutionally, making it at times functionally inevitable. Giroux writes of a “politics of humiliation, defined as:

The institutionalization and widespread adoption of a set of values, policies and symbolic practices that legitimate forms of organized violence against human beings and lead inexorably to hardship, suffering and despair [...] The politics of humiliation also works through symbolic systems, diverse modes of address, and varied framing mechanisms in which the targeted subjects are represented in terms that demonize them, strip them of their humanity, and position them in ways that invite ridicule and sometimes violence. (Giroux *Education* 14)

Under the “politics of humiliation,” students from marginalized social groups, subject to so much past institutional violence (subtle or overt) often habitually approach the classroom context with preemptive frustrations and antagonistic behaviours; they acutely feel as well as directly act upon senses of inequality, insecurity, embarrassment, inferiority and rage, even if the students themselves feel they “know better” than to behave in this way (hooks *Teaching Community* 101). They operate under a system that, deep in its historical and functional roots, “reproduce[s] in children and youth the profile

that the colonial ideology itself [creates] for them, namely that of inferior beings, lacking in all ability” (Freire *Literacy* 143), a system where students from the global South are historically but “an Oriental first and second a man” (Said *Orientalism* 231). It is because of the detailed theoretical background outlined here that my research must look not only at the directly observable written curricula, behaviours, and statements of teachers and students. The research must be grounded a literature review that takes into account aspects of student and teacher subjectivity that are not always immediately visible on the surface level of what goes on in the classroom. As hooks writes, “until the power of shaming is taken seriously as a threat to the well-being of all students, particularly individuals from marginalized and/or subordinated groups, no amount of support staff, positive programming, or material resources will lead to academic excellence” (hooks *Teaching Community* 101).

The final key segment of literature contributing to the theoretical bases of this research is scholarship pertaining to pedagogical strategies that *do* work to question and critique capitalist hegemony, racist and colonialist histories, and the “banking” model of education. This basis of literature will assist my research in approaching curriculum and its enablers, enactors and “recipients”/learners in analytically productive ways. There is much useful theory and research on the topics of “culturally relevant” education—which draws upon students’ expertise, as subjects with agency, to learn through the lived realities they already know best—as well as on what Freire calls “problem-posing education” and Giroux calls “border pedagogy”.

Goodman’s research in particular points to a particular skepticism of contemporary schooling processes among “low-income minority teenagers with underdeveloped reading and writing skills”—which most ESL/ELD students are, at least when operating in the English language—as they “[feel] the power of the library to be quite intimidating. Their deep discomfort with reading and writing [leads] to conflicting feelings about the value and reliability of the printed word.” (Goodman 48) Whether these feelings are due to practical discomfort with literacy as actual skills, or broader discomforts and senses of exclusion brought about through the politics of humiliation, subsequently many “students claim to distrust information reported by any sources—

including the electronic and print news media—other than someone in their neighbourhood” (Goodman 48). Information delivered through schooling, which, as outlined above, so often acts representatively and in service of dominant cultural capital, is “removed from the immediate context of personal experience” (Goodman 49) for youth who are not necessarily welcomed into the dominant culture: “if it is too decontextualized in terms of language and culture, then [...] information [is] suspect.” (Goodman 50) But it is perhaps exactly this distrust of information that is not congruent with lived experience that could make critical media literacy discussions so eminently valuable in the ESL/ELD classroom. In the words of one teacher of low-income minority children, “my kids are naturally skeptical because their lives don’t match what they see on TV or in their textbooks. I have to work to make sure they understand that it’s okay for them to challenge what’s in the book” (Ladson-Billings 101). This “natural skepticism” seems an excellent space to exercise young people’s critical capacities.

Through this, it is clear that “the importance of relating classroom knowledge to the everyday lives of students cannot be overemphasized” (Giroux *Disturbing Pleasures* 121) and every day lives will necessarily include mass media consumption. “Educators need to understand how different identities among youth are being produced in spheres generally ignored by schools” (Giroux “Slacking Off” 74), and media and cultural literacy work is one way to begin this understanding. Gloria Ladson-Billings’ work with teachers of African-American children in the early 1990s identifies how this kind of understanding can be fortified through a process she calls “culturally relevant teaching”, which

is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture, they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (Ladson-Billings 20)

She later adds:

culturally relevant teaching involves students in the knowledge-construction process, so that they can ask significant questions about the nature of the

curriculum. The ultimate goal is to ensure that they have a sense of ownership of their knowledge—a sense that it is empowering and liberating. As co-constructors in the knowledge-building process, they are less alienated from it and begin to understand that learning is an important cultural activity. (Ladson-Billings 84)

A similar model of education was posited decades earlier by Paulo Freire and named “problem-posing education,” which entails the “posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 79) where “students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teachers” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 81) to “see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 83). Giroux then extends these concepts specifically to apply to a globalized world where cultures are perpetually mutable especially in diasporic contexts such as the ESL/ELD classroom. Giroux calls his proposition “border pedagogy,” expounding that:

Students cross over into borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations and values that are increasingly being negotiated and rewritten as the codes and regulations which organize them become destabilized and reshaped [...] A theory of border pedagogy needs to address [...] how representations and practices that name, marginalize, and define difference as the devalued Other are actively learned, interiorized, challenged, or transformed [and] how an understanding of these differences can be used in order to change the prevailing relations of power that sustain them. [Border pedagogy should] acknowledge and critically interrogate how the colonizing of differences by *dominant* groups is expressed and sustained through representations: in which Others are seen as a deficit, in which the humanity of the Others is either cynically posited as problematic or ruthlessly denied. At the same time, it is important to understand how the experience of marginality at the level of everyday life lends itself to forms of oppositional and transformative consciousness. (Giroux *Reader* 51-59)

For effective culturally relevant, problem-posing border pedagogy, arguably media literacy must be a central element as it helps to

link cultural texts to the major social problems that animate public life. Texts in this instance would be analyzed as part of a ‘social vocabulary of culture’ that points to how power names, shapes, defines and constrains relationships between the self and the other, constructs and disseminates what counts as knowledge, and produces representations that provide the context for identity formation. (Giroux

Reader 239).

The focuses on production, deconstruction, contextualization and student experience and participation would combat positivist, instrumental forms of education and, ideally, representation that alienate newcomer youth as young people's "intellectual function itself [is] part of the discourse of invention and construction, rather than a discourse of recognition whose aim is reduced to revealing and transmitting universal truths" (Giroux *Reader 286*).

Central to this entire project is the belief that "education is fundamental to democracy [...] no democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of creating the conditions for producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way" (Giroux *On Critical Pedagogy 3*). It takes the perspective that mass media and media literacy are vital elements of pedagogy that cannot be ignored, especially in a classroom comprised of youth who so often represent racial, cultural and socioeconomic minority groups. The process of analyzing curricular and teacher training texts and making recommendations for the future will also lay foundations for future research at the PhD level and beyond that inquires, through discussions with teachers and students as well as ESL/ELD classroom participation, how media literacy education plays out not simply in textual materials but in the actual classroom itself.

Chapter 2

2 Investigating the Current Curriculum

This chapter will use the work of theorists Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux and Michael Apple to interrogate the ways the ESL/ELD curriculum in Ontario works as a political document, embodying specific ideologies and encouraging specific pedagogical methods. My analysis suggests that this curriculum, and its supporting documents as published by the Ontario government, not only fails to provide a model for developing empowered citizens capable of democratic dialogue in and outside the classroom, but also perhaps poses some basic problems in terms of its actual efficacy in imparting literacy skills. Guided by Giroux and Apple, I will use this chapter to demonstrate some of the shortcomings I identify in these curricular documents. It is evident in this analysis that current educational practices embodied by the Ontario ESL/ELD curriculum utilize a “banking model” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) of education geared towards amorally reproducing the status quo in Ontario with respect to dominant economic, social and cultural norms. Through the banking model, the value of history and of students’ material lived experience is downplayed by standardized, positivist methods of supposedly “neutral” instruction and evaluation. By demonstrating the ways the ESL/ELD curriculum upholds the banking model of education and the accompanying reification and naturalization of historically problematic notions of communication and culture, I will posit a suggestion of a more ethical model of “border pedagogy” based on Giroux’s work in order to lead us into the third chapter. The ultimate goal here will be to lay the groundwork for a final chapter that will reintroduce the importance of multimedia literacies as a starting point for revitalizing the ESL/ELD classroom pedagogically and politically.

My main methodology in this study is discourse analysis, guided by the work of James Paul Gee and, to a lesser extent, Paul Gilroy. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use, which Gee elaborates “is about saying, doing and being” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*). Any given text, curricula included, is not merely about what the words alone state, but what they drive the sender and receiver of the

message to enact, as well as how they address both the sender and receiver as members of a specific group, subculture, or institution. Therefore, to Gee, in using language “we also sustain these social groups, cultures, and institutions” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 16)—that is to say, written curricula can play an active role in creating the feel of a classroom environment in addition to dictating the learning objectives therein and so on. Not only does Gee outline this basis for believing language-in-use has the capability to actively create and sustain social contexts, he adds:

Any use of language gains its meaning from the “game” or practice of which it is a part and which it is enacting. [...]Such “games” or practices inherently involve potential social goods and the distribution of social goods, which I have defined as central to the realm of “politics.” Thus, any full description of any use of language would have to deal with “politics.” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 9)

It is this view that validates the study of curriculum from a particular political perspective; that is to say, a perspective grounded in radical critical pedagogy and the Marxist, anti-racist, anti-colonial leanings of the core theorists I will use here. The language itself, when looking at these curricular documents, has a political context and aims that are, intentionally or otherwise, political; they are political because they involve the presumption of a common “game” or practice being enacted by their audiences and the distribution of social goods evident therein. The critique, then, necessarily takes a political position regardless of whether the politics of the critic are as explicit as I will make them here.

Gee outlines not only the theoretical foundation for discourse analysis, accepting and interrogating texts as political, but the actual practice of discourse analysis which, at its core, “involves asking questions about how language, at a given time and place, is used to engage in [...] seven building tasks” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 121). The following seven building tasks will specifically guide much of the analysis below: first, *Significance*, or “How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 17). This building task will be most prescient in discussions of language in the curriculum that highlights quantitative measurements of student achievement over

qualitative measurements. Second, *Practices* (Activities), or “What practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as going on)?” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 18), as when I discuss the political economy evident in elements of the curriculum that encourage particular labour practices in teachers, students and their communities. Third, *Identities*: “What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as operative)? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his or her own identity?” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 18) as when I delve into the question of how the curriculum characterizes the ESL/ELD teacher and (or versus) the student. Fourth, *Relationships*: “What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 19)—similar to the above⁷; Fifth, *Politics*: “What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (i.e. what is being communicated as to what is taken to be ‘normal,’ ‘right,’ ‘good,’ ‘correct,’ ‘proper,’ ‘appropriate,’ ‘valuable,’ ‘the way things are,’ ‘the way things ought to be,’ ‘high status or low status,’ ‘like me or not like me,’ and so forth)?” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 19). Politics is perhaps the largest of the seven building tasks and discussed the most through this analysis. Sixth, *Connections*: “How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things, how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 19)—as with when assessment is linked to learning throughout curricular documents, thus reifying these particular assessment tools. Seventh and finally, *Sign Systems and Knowledge*: “How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical language vs. everyday language, words vs. images, words vs. equations, etc.) or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief (e.g. science vs. the Humanities, science vs ‘common sense,’ biology vs. ‘creation science’)?” (Gee *An*

⁷ Additionally, questions will remain regarding how curricular documents characterize relationships between teachers and their school boards and the State, which is not the focus of this particular study, but bears mentioning nonetheless.

Introduction to Discourse Analysis 20) (this building task will be addressed least directly as it deals with questions outside the scope of this study, which critiques curriculum as it relates to practice rather than epistemology). The seven building tasks are evidently interwoven throughout most texts and as such may not always be specifically alluded to in the analysis below, but instead lay the practical background for the questions that have been asked throughout the analysis of the documents.

Gee also states, “anyone engaged in their own discourse analysis must adapt the tools they have taken from a given theory to the needs and demands of their own study” (Gee *How to do Discourse Analysis* ix), which has informed this study as well. Although Gee’s theory and practical recommendations relate specifically to discourse analysis that takes a text in and of itself as an object of study, my particular study places texts in dialogue with cultural theorists to enhance the validity of the ideas posited. As a supplementary model for methodology, I also turn to Paul Gilroy’s qualitative analyses of news coverage and state-ordained anti-racist media texts in *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*. In Gilroy’s writing, texts from varying sources and perspectives are placed in dialogue with one another, with Gilroy’s commentary and analysis linking this dialogue to concrete material and social conditions. For Gilroy, texts are taken as discursive representations inextricably representative and reinforcing of structures of race, class and domination, while at the same time also acknowledging the “discontinuous and unevenly developed” nature of these processes (Gilroy *Ain’t No Black* 43) and therefore the need for qualitative research that takes a position on these issues while still leaving open space in the methodology for this discontinuity. Gilroy indicates the importance of acknowledging that language, representation and individual texts are valid objects for the study of lived social relations and practices. Additionally, these texts, while being both influential on and reflective of these relations and practices, need not be accepted as wholly illustrative of entire societies. Finally, it is not necessary for a media text—state-sanctioned or otherwise, disseminated widely or only to select groups (i.e. one or two individual classrooms)—to be accepted as legislative policy, per se, for it to have concrete political significance. With a looser methodology, Gilroy leaves more room for speculation and somewhat less structured interrogation of the text, which lays the

foundation for choosing to put theorists in dialogue with curricular materials rather than analyzing these materials alone using Gee's more traditional discourse analysis tools.

There are, admittedly, limits to my chosen methodology which aims only to “generat[e] some hypotheses [...] based on mutual considerations of context and language-in-use” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 25) rather than making specific truth claims about the text and its political connotations. This study examines only four curricular documents using only three primary theorists, which leaves room for not only a great deal of further study but a great deal of disagreement as well. This document is only engaged in the work of building a very small group of hypotheses which. According to Gee, “if we see these hypotheses further confirmed in other sorts of data [...] then our confidence will rise yet more. If, in the end, no equally good competing hypotheses are available, then we accept our hypotheses, at least until disconfirming evidence appears, and work on their basis” (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 25). Gee also proposes four tools for checking the validity of discourse analysis: Convergence (where the research findings are internally valid and answers to questions posed for each “building task” support each other through the textual analysis); Agreement (other researchers involved in the field accept its validity-- hence the theorists I have pulled in to support hypotheses here); Coverage (the analysis can be applied to related data with similar findings—this remains to be seen in future research); and finally, Linguistic details (where the analysis is more valid the more tied it is to grammatical structures and the language itself) (Gee *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 123). Though the scope of this analysis is small, it should have some level of validity using the criteria above as effort was made to keep the analysis internally consistent, with external references (to Freire, Giroux, and Apple and their extensive backgrounds in the field) as well as consistent reference to the language of the original texts.

The texts I will examine in this chapter are the four core materials published by the Ontario Ministry of Education for use by teachers of ESL/ELD and in schools where ESL/ELD students are in attendance. One document is the high school curriculum itself, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9-12: English As a Second Language and English*

Literacy Development, published in 2007. The other three are the texts presented as “Resource Documents Specific to this Subject” at the high school level by the Ministry of Education website (*The Ontario Curriculum: Secondary*): the ELD-specific resource guide *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling: A practical guide for Ontario educators (Grades 3 to 12)* from 2008; the policy document outlining specific school procedures such as ESL placement and grade progression, *English Language Learners / ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*, from 2007; and the more qualitative guide to the multicultural classroom *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom*, published in 2005. It is worth noting that in these documents, learning “outcomes” are mandated by the programmatic curriculum and meant to be upheld by teachers in their enacted work. However, the pedagogies mentioned in the documents and critiqued below are merely recommended and not mandated or required by teachers.

Apple writes that “the overt and covert knowledge found within school settings, and the principles of selection, organization, and evaluation of this knowledge, are value-governed selections from a much larger universe of possible knowledge and selection principles” (Apple *Ideology* 43), which, as I continue with the analysis of these documents below, will become clearly apparent as a focus of this analysis. Apple also states that “the language of learning tends to be apolitical and ahistorical, thus hiding the complex nexus of political and economic power and resources that lies behind a considerable amount of curriculum organization and selection” (Apple *Ideology* 28). In drawing in both curricular documents and radical critical pedagogy theorists, I will attempt to politicize and historicize this “language of learning” through this theoretical lens before moving into the third chapter’s practical task of politicizing and historicizing the learning itself through curricular changes. As state-sanctioned documents, curricula function not merely as practical guides for teaching students English, but as documents that codify particular relations of power. As Henry Giroux argues, “the main functions of schools are the reproduction of the dominant ideology, its forms of knowledge, and the distribution of skills needed to reproduce the social division of labour” (Giroux *Reader* 3); that is to say, the curriculum works, consciously or unconsciously, to preserve a status

quo that in Canada has been brought into being by histories of racist and classist exclusion and categorization that enshrines a dominant (mostly white, standard-English-speaking) economic class as subjects—“those who know and act”—and others as objects—“which are known and acted upon” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 36). In contrast, pedagogy has the power to “influence how and what knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations” (Giroux *Education* 67), thus radically transforming this status quo. Curriculum can and should mediate between democratic pedagogy and State power as “a battleground over whose forms of knowledge, history, visions, language, culture, and authority will prevail as a legitimate object of learning and analysis” (Giroux introduction to Freire *Literacy* 20). It is for these reasons that curricular documents are taken as a valid point of study moving forwards, and they are taken not only at face value in this analysis but as representative of all of the above.

One of the ways in which the Ontario ESL/ELD curriculum could be said to disenfranchise students as subjects is through what Paulo Freire refers to as the “banking model of education,” where

the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing [...] the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it [...] the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students [...] the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 73)

Under this model, the student is “an empty ‘mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 75). Adherence to this “banking” view of education is evident throughout the ESL/ELD curriculum and the three supporting documents. Particularly, the defined role of teachers and the positivist modes of evaluation as outlined by the documents exemplify this model. As I will demonstrate, this banking model propagates an instrumentalist view of education geared towards preparing students for life in a market-driven society. Additionally, the banking view has a tendency to reify and to naturalize fluid concepts such as literacy and culture such that “banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and

fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 84).

The role of teachers as defined by the Ontario Curriculum is to create the “practice,” “application” and “assessment” of learning in the classroom, and, according to the document on supporting English language development, to “model and explicitly teach the academic skills and social expectations required for success in school and work” (“Supporting” 37). Teachers must develop “appropriate instructional strategies to help students achieve the curriculum expectations for their courses” so that students can “acquire proficiency in English, as well as subject content knowledge.” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 8) Revealing, here, is the lack of any mention in the document of the fallibility of the instructor—in fact, teachers must “provid[e] excellent models of the competence a first-language speaker would demonstrate in listening and speaking for both academic and social purposes” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 17). There is an implicit assumption here that the teacher-as-professional is inherently capable of effectively transferring their presumably “excellent” knowledge into the minds of the students. Despite having necessarily spent their lives thus far learning from material and intellectual interaction with the world around them and acting upon that learning, the students are assumed to be uninitiated in the inception, processes, and outcomes of learning goals and therefore wholly uninvolved in the development of “practice,” “application,” and “assessment” of their own education, beyond “select[ing] and using effective learning strategies” and a vague, unqualified mention of the “higher-order thinking skills” to be transferred to them accordingly with the “role” of the teacher (“The Ontario Curriculum” 4-8). The rigid one-page curricular description of the teacher’s role as authority necessitates that the teacher teach *at* and not *with* her students, and is an example of the ways teachers are often “stripped of their worth and dignity by being forced to adopt an educational vision and philosophy that has little respect for the empowering possibilities of either knowledge or critical classroom practices” (Giroux *Educaion* 3).

This attitude is further exemplified by teacher training documents such as the “Many Roots, Many Voices” guide that use an instrumentalist, banking-model style as

they attempt to guide the teachers themselves—making the document “useful” and “accessible” by filling the guide with “icons”: small images that alert the teacher when the guide is presenting “Insight: Facts, Concepts and suggestions backed by solid research”; “Effective practice: effective instructional strategies that have been shown to achieve positive results;” and “Try it now! Practical techniques and activities that you can use immediately in the classroom or school” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 5). As far as “Many Roots, Many Voices” is concerned, insight, effective practice and practical techniques can all be condensed into several small sentences beside these “icons.” Even the use of the word “icons” here calls to mind a computer, as if information is unlocked and transferred seamlessly into the mind of the instructor.

It is worth noting that some of the supporting guides for the ESL/ELD curriculum do reference the teacher’s responsibility to learn from the students (“Supporting” 11), which Freire suggests is crucial with his concept of teacher-students and student-teachers, who learn from each other through dialogue (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). However, learning from the students is condensed into simple, arguably hollow and obvious tasks such as “learn the student’s name and how to pronounce it, and greet the student by name at the beginning of each class. Express interest in the student’s background and family” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 20) or “recognize that newcomers from all backgrounds have a wide variety of interests and skills” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 41). As much as teachers are recommended to “value what students bring with them, including their prior learning, international experience, cultural insight and curiosity. Help students discover their own strengths” (“Supporting” 36), earlier in the same document a hypothetical student is quoted as thinking, “my teacher is as foreign to me as I am to him (or her)” (“Supporting” 9), outlining a prior set of assumptions of “foreignness” on the teacher and school board’s part.

The hegemony of banking model classroom politics is exacerbated by suggested lessons about communication development that, on the surface, appear to be based on classroom dialogue but instead are often based on lines of questioning that shut down dialogue by incorporating answers into questions themselves. For example, the curriculum speaks of a “Language-Experience Approach,” where concrete and tactile

real-world experiences can drive student expressions through writing and speech; however, these supposedly “real-world” experiences are, in fact, teacher-generated activities—a “school tour, art lesson, science experiment or field trip” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 44) that may or may not have any relevance to the student’s life outside of the school environment. The “Anticipation Guide” activity encourages teachers to begin comprehension units with a discussion of students’ pre-conceived biases, but aims to tease out these biases with “teacher-generated statements” that must assume, prior to the activity, what students’ reaction will be (“The Ontario Curriculum” 39). Activities like the “Cloze Procedure” asks students to perform rote filling in of blanks for every seventh word from assigned passages, while the “Dictogloss” asks students to listen to, and then rewrite, spoken passages presented by the teacher (“The Ontario Curriculum” 40-41). Another writing exercise in a higher level of the ESL/ELD program suggests incorporating forms of media youth appear to already be interested in, by inviting students to “write longer texts to express ideas and feelings using a variety of forms (e.g. poems, song lyrics/raps, journals or diaries, e-mails or letters, text messages, narratives, descriptions, class graffiti walls)” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 158), a suggestion presented without acknowledgement of the notable contradiction of asking students to write “longer” texts in media that are intrinsically not long-form.

The supporting documents for the curriculum share this type of approach, where although it is stated that teachers must “Understand that students learn best when the learning is meaningful to them and relevant to their individual contexts”, this understanding is supposedly achieved via “pre-writing and pre-reading discussion”, “post-writing and post reading [structured] to include evaluation of the work”, “collaborative learning”, and “employ[ing] information technology” (“Supporting” 38)—mostly teacher-guided activities in response to teacher-chosen texts and experiences. Even collaborative learning between ESL/ELD students is treated by these documents as something to be largely teacher-directed, as with the suggestion that “in some contexts, you may choose to simply monitor the guided reading group, offering assistance only when needed; in other contexts, such as when working with English language learners, you may be much more involved, and the students much more dependent on your assistance” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 26), where a certain level of dependence on the

students' part is assumed for the teacher by the document. Again, the documents suggest using the richness of students' prior experiences outside the ESL/ELD classroom but do so in narrow ways that collapse student personalities and experiences into shallow, rote activities, such as in a story where a teacher, "recognizing that [her student] perseveres and is willing to try new things" has her student "create a personal picture dictionary" ("Supporting" 14), or another suggestion called the "Language Experience Story", where instead of tying language into students' deeper histories students are asked to "find five words in the story that name things in our classroom" ("Supporting" 30). Although individual teachers can and do find numerous ways to subvert these curricular requirements and suggestions in order to reassert student agency and choice within these curricular standards, arguably, the time constraints and bureaucratic challenges of teaching in Ontario today can hinder these attempts such that a "pedagogy of answers" is created—"the questions are questions which already contain their answers. In that way, they are not even questions!" (Freire *Learning to Question* 40)

In terms of the seven building tasks presented by Gee, there is so much *significance* in these documents placed on *practices* that encourage enactment of the *identity* of the "excellent" teacher as infallible guide, independently drawing out of their students "strengths which are as yet unidentified" by the student or anyone else around them ("Supporting" 8), with the student's identity being characterized as simply that of a vessel who says, "show me what it is [...] show me how to do it [...] help me to do it" before finally conceding "let me try it on my own" ("Supporting" 40). The *relationship* this encourages between teachers and their students is then a *politically* charged one: teachers are the subject (knowing, acting) of these documents, students are the objects (known, acted upon) (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 36), and this is simply unquestioned by the documents as being the appropriate order of things.

In addition to the teacher's prescribed role, the banking model is further enforced by positivist evaluation methods. A student first arriving in an Ontario school is placed in the ESL/ELD program and grade deemed appropriate by the school, a process that can arbitrarily range from a single interview to a multi-day assessment involving the student and their family ("Policies and Procedures"). However the assessment goes, final

decisions regarding placement are made by the principal rather than—albeit “in consultation with”—the ESL/ELD teacher, student or family (“Policies and Procedures” 21). Subsequently, a student’s “progress is monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure consistent progress” as well as “continued success” and “timely transitions to suitable programs and courses” (“Supporting” 53). Further, the policy states that “the amount of integration [with English-speaking peers] should increase over time as students become more proficient in English.” (“Policies and Procedures” 21).

According to the curriculum, after a student is placed in an ESL program, “evaluation refers to the process of judging the quality of work on the basis of established criteria, and assigning value to represent that quality.” Evaluation hinges on assigning a number between one and four to student work, which “helps teachers determine students’ strengths and weaknesses in their achievement of the curriculum expectations” as well as helping teachers with “the development of high-quality assessment tasks and tools” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 31-33). In this way, evaluation according to the Ontario curriculum shows itself as oddly tautological: the numbers determine a students’ strengths and weaknesses in terms of their ability to achieve future numbers, and the assessment guides the development of future assessments. Learning goals such as knowledge and understanding, thinking, communication and application are described in sentence fragments (“The Ontario Curriculum” 33) rather than acknowledged as representative of an extensive range of possibilities. Numbers are ostensibly fortified by “descriptors” to make them more helpful, with 1, 2, 3 and 4 corresponding to “limited,” “some,” “considerable” and “a high degree of” achievement respectively (“The Ontario Curriculum” 34). In their strict ties to accompanying numerical values these verbal signifiers are emptied of any substantial meaning to instead take on the exact same positivist function as the numbers themselves.

These positivist evaluation methods extend to the way ESL/ELD programs and students are evaluated at the broader school-board level. It is the role of schools with ESL/ELD to “Analyze data gathered about ELLs with limited prior schooling from all schools and use it to inform board planning for programs and services for these students” (“Supporting” 71). This is done by “collect[ing] student data—for example, Education

Quality and Accountability Office (EQAQO) results, data on credit accumulation and course types taken, graduation rates, and other indicators of student success—in order to track student progress and monitor the academic achievement of English language learners” and then “us[ing] information gathered from assessments to set benchmarks for English language learners in Ontario” (“Policies and Procedures” 11). These benchmarks, then, all are drawn from quantitative material that is decontextualized through the data collection process to help schools, principals and teachers make assumptions about groups of people. Teachers also are provided, in the curriculum, a list of more qualitative proven “factors” in student success such as personal interest and supportive family lives (“The Ontario Curriculum” 10-11), however, these are discussed as a straightforward and achievable checklist rather than a complex series of relationships between the teacher, the student, the community and the material world.

Turning back to Giroux, it is arguable that through these mechanical forms of evaluation, knowledge is “treated as an external body of information, the production of which appears to be independent of human beings [...] it becomes universalized, ahistorical knowledge” (Giroux *On Critical Pedagogy* 36). This is unhelpful for the development of students as democratic agents as “in the objectified forms of communication that characterize positivist public school pedagogy, it is difficult for students to perceive the socially constructed basis of classroom knowledge” (Giroux *On Critical Pedagogy* 39). Overall, with repeated words like “authentic” to describe learning, meaning, literacy and classroom experiences (mentioned 25 times in “The Ontario Curriculum”, 5 times in “Supporting”, 3 times in the further reading recommendations in “Many Roots, Many Voices”), multiple mentions of “achievement” of learning skills (mentioned 71 times in “The Ontario Curriculum”, 7 times in “Supporting”, 7 times in “Policies and Procedures”, 7 times in “Many Roots, Many Voices”) and assumptions of “extracting” meaning from texts (mentioned 45 times in “The Ontario Curriculum”, once in “Many Roots, Many Voices”) it is all the more apparent that Ontario ESL/ELD materials privilege specific sign systems and knowledge that lie in the positivist, quantitative field of evaluation, disassociated from nuance, context and historicity, that is endemic to the practice of banking model of education.

This view of knowledge helps present the objective conception of the world as value-free, priming students not to question the aims of State education as impressing dominant ideology. Aiding in this inculcation of acceptance of the status quo comes the ways “the State attempts to win the consent of the working class for its policies by making an appeal to three types of specific outcomes—economic (social mobility), ideological (democratic rights) and psychological (happiness)” (Giroux *Reader* 23). The curriculum subtly abets this vying for consent through the “role of the student” section, which states, “taking responsibility for their own progress and learning is an important part of education for all students, regardless of their circumstances” and “students who are able to make the effort required to succeed in school and who are able to apply themselves will soon discover that there is a direct relationship between this effort and their achievement, and will therefore be more motivated to work” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 7). Throughout the rest of the curriculum, references are made to how the “student centered Ontario classroom” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 20) will aid young people in developing job and social skills. In the promise of job skills we see economic outcomes, in the claim of a “student-centered” environment where the young person is master of their own destiny we see ideological outcomes, and in the suggestion of self-made social success and happiness we see the promises of psychological outcomes. These promises help to “inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 149) as opposed to binding students together in solidarity for positive social change.

This appetite for success could appear apolitical, despite the fact that the descriptions of positive student mindsets serve a dual role of helping students achieve prescribed goals, while also allowing the State to take on the expense of training young people with the skills and outlooks necessary to succeed in a market-driven society. In this way, we see what Apple refers to as “the State’s role in capital accumulation” guiding educational practices (qtd. in Giroux *Reader* 24). Throughout the ESL/ELD curriculum are suggestions of employment training being performed at the expense of the State and the student rather than employers. Student “cooperative learning” is to be strengthened by “self-evaluation checklists” pertaining to task completion (“The Ontario Curriculum” 40), health and safety and diversity training relevant to workplace

environments is incorporated into the curriculum (“The Ontario Curriculum” 54-56), and the curriculum is committed to promoting the “Ontario Skills Passport” (OSP), an online employment resource. The OSP allegedly “enhances the relevance of classroom learning” and “strengthens school-work connections” by providing “descriptions of important work habits, such as working safely, being reliable, and providing excellent customer service.” Employers can, using this resource, “assess and record students’ demonstration of these skills and work habits during their cooperative-education placements” while students can “use the OSP to identify the skills and work habits they already have, plan further skill development, and show employers what they can do” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 55). It is unclear exactly what employers’ involvement is in the OSP, or particularly, how this .gov website is funded or maintained. An uncritical acceptance of this type of overt inculcation of the students into the capitalist market is strengthened by major curriculum goals and evaluation markers that use headings such as “Study Skills and Strategies” to influence students in using agendas to meet work deadlines (“The Ontario Curriculum” 139), or “Strategies for the Cooperative Classroom” to encourage board-room good behavior: “listen actively; clarify directions; share ideas; plan and delegate tasks; offer constructive criticism” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 103).

This kind of “good” behavior recalls the goals of early curriculumists of the turn of the century who, according to Michael Apple, intended for the curricula to foster “social integration” and “large group consciousness” in the industrial era in order to have people commit to factory-friendly standards of behavior, acting as a cog in an industrial wheel (Apple *Ideology* 66). Apple highlights concerns about teamwork and consensus as being extremely valuable for effective labour in industrial contexts, but counterproductive for learning and citizenship that thrive on challenge, dissent and dialogue. Even the broad school community is expected by one of the curricular supporting documents to always agree and work together, with “a shared understanding of [students’] backgrounds, and where all educators share a vision of high expectations for every student” (“Supporting” 5) enforced by the market-research-like “in-depth exploration of the English language learner” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 4) provided by curricular materials. The reality of extreme differences in students’ backgrounds is not taken into account here, nor are the

conflicting expectations for each student coming from home, school, peers and so on that actually build a student's overall identity.

The supplementary documents to the curriculum continue to use language to create an identity of the learner as corporate subject who self-regulates and self-evaluates as s/he builds “metacognitive skills—the ability to understand oneself as a learner, to reflect on the personal process of learning, and to identify and set personal learning goals[:] critical components of learning which empower students to take ownership of their learning and increase their engagement and control of their success” (“Supporting” 28). The document goes on to state, “Every ELL with limited prior schooling needs to see himself of herself as a learner, with a place and a contribution to make in the classroom and the school community” (“Supporting” 5). Though these statements seem benign or even very helpful in aiding students to take ownership of their learning, the language is political because throughout these documents, significance is placed largely on the student's efficacy as a successful “learner”, not as a citizen, agent, or otherwise. Again, there is a limiting tautology that recalls the corporate world, when being a learner is largely important in order to continue to be a learner, in the same way that being an effective labourer expands ones ability to labour effectively. Even outside of school personal behavior such as “first language maintenance and continued development” is stressed not as identity development but “as an asset in the global economy” (“Supporting” 25).

These claims are supported by Michael Apple's work, which traces the history of curriculum as a history of social control. He writes specifically of the scholarship of the American Sociological Society in the 1900s, when mandatory public schooling was on the rise. During this time, the original curriculumist scholars such as Charles C. Peters, Ross Finney, and David Snedden were interested mainly in ideas of how to control citizens in ways enforced by the ideals of the burgeoning business community during the industrial revolution. The very first curriculumists, Franklin Bobbitt and W. W. Charters were in fact heavily interested in scientific management and eugenics as “progressive” social forces. (Apple *Ideology* 44-45). Although contemporary ESL/ELD curricular documents appear to be more student-friendly than this history indicates, there are still a number of

concerns in the way the curricular documents support standardization, efficiency, consensus and ultimately, alienation.

The supplementary documents also identify throughout certain specific skills students should develop through the curricula ranging from “confidence in approaching new tasks, positive attitude, initiative, team work, effective use of time, reliability, and organization skills” (“Supporting” 65) to “develop[ing] their talents, meet[ing] their goals, and acquir[ing] the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to Ontario society” (“Policies and Procedures” 7). These enumerated skills are all to be achieved with help from “the possibilities of technology” (“Supporting” 31), especially the OSP but also the “increased opportunities to use technology in developing proficiency in English” and “online support” (“Policies and Procedures” 23) heavily encouraged by these documents. Apple suggests, “the State’s role in capital accumulation is very evident in its subsidization of the production of technical/administrative knowledge” with “emphasis on competency-based education, systems management, career education [etc.]” (qtd. in Giroux *Reader* 24). He goes on to add that “while these projects seem neutral, helpful, and may seem aimed at increasing mobility, they will actually defuse the debate over the role of schooling in the reproduction of the knowledge and people ‘required’ by society.” (qtd. in Giroux *Reader* 25). Not only this, considering this emphasis throughout all of these documents on the development of technological skills, “when we examine how educators and employers produce workers and literacies ‘necessary’ for the currently constituted global economy, we must see this production as bound up with—*indeed, dependent upon*—the exploitation of billions of women, men and children around the world” (Apple *Global Crises* 27).

Although Apple is referring more to exploitation inherent in the production of the technology so lauded by curricular materials, it is worth mentioning briefly here a minor form of exploitation evident in the supporting curricular materials: that of ESL/ELD students’ families and communities. Throughout “Many Roots, Many Voices,” teachers are encouraged to “use multilingual communities as a resource,” (45) such as with the “telephone tree” where a bilingual parent is encouraged to do the work of the school

board in contacting other parents with important school information by calling around to the rest of the community (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 45). Parents are asked to work at home in “demonstrat[ing] teaching techniques (such as student-centered learning)” and “home activities (such as establishing routines for doing homework, household chores, going to bed)” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 46). Generally it is emphasized that “[Parents] and their ethnocultural communities may represent substantial resources that schools can draw on to assist English language learners and to enrich the cultural environment for everyone in the school” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 44), as if they are handy cultural puppets and not adult citizens working to raise children, provide for their families and participate in their own chosen recreational activities rather than work as free resources for the school board. Combined, these examples reveal a curricular system where the state takes on the expense of market training and subjects of the curriculum—students, teachers, and even families—are arguably treated as cogs in an educational-industrial wheel.

Together, the positivist, instrumentalist, market-oriented goals upheld by the ESL/ELD curriculum serve as denial of students’ critical thinking not only by lending unquestioned value to authoritative evaluation and ascribed definitions of success, but by reifying complex historical concepts such as literacy, dialogue, culture and citizenship. Throughout the curriculum, terms inferring ownership of language and knowledge, such learning to “extract meaning from texts,” (45 instances) are frequent. Also notable in supporting documents are claims to “accelerate learning” (“Supporting” 13), “activate prior learning” (“Supporting” 37), “promote improved learning” (“Supporting” 68), as if learning is a concrete, obtainable “thing”. Much like orientation into culture, it can apparently be achieved “effectively” or ineffectively (“The Ontario Curriculum” 82 instances, “Policies and Procedures” 14 instances, “Supporting” 21 instances), as with the claim “effective use of human resources facilitates effective orientation” (“Policies and Procedures” 16). When “literacy skills” (“Supporting” 54) are an attainable thing rather than a series of complex relationships leading to broader awareness, knowledge and critical thinking, literacy education can then be condensed, simplified and deprived of deeper understandings—for instance, for “extending the learner’s language” one must “concentrate on accelerating learning” by “focusing on essential concepts for student

success” and “chunk[ing] material” into small bite-sized pieces (“Supporting” 38). This deprives ESL/ELD students of the richer learning experiences mainstream students are exposed to.

Further reifying the attainment of learning and literacy, reading is suggested to exist for “purposes”—“to follow directions, to get advice, to obtain information, to build vocabulary, to obtain access to subject knowledge, and for personal interest and enjoyment” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 19), and writing is presented as an evaluable technique independent of written meanings, as when it is suggested teachers evaluate incoming students’ writing skills in their first languages even if the teacher does not speak that specific first language—“how simple or complex does the writing appear?” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 24). Here is, in action, the “notion that literacy is simply a mechanical process, which overemphasizes the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills” (Freire *Literacy* viii) and, as Freire writes, “the exclusion of social and political dimensions from the practice of reading gives rise to an ideology of cultural reproduction, one that views readers as ‘objects’” (Freire *Literacy* 145).

Methods of dialogue suggested by the curriculum continue this bent towards reproduction of current culture and the view of students as objects. The ESL/ELD curriculum admits that “active, responsible citizenship involves asking questions and challenging the status quo,” and, despite few lesson plans to support this claim, states that “the ESL and ELD program leads students to look at issues of power and justice in society, and empowers them by enabling them to express themselves and to speak out about issues that strongly affect them” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 51). However, “critical thinking” activities actually suggested by the curriculum are dominated by somewhat hollow directives such as “Identify the source of information used” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 63), and activities geared towards drawing out student self-expression and engagement with issues they care about are mostly “Personal Purposes” writing activities where the “personal purpose” is chosen by the teacher, often containing implicit class biases (“write a letter of complaint to a business” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 88). The idea of dialogue or critique is in this way reified: as long as literal asking of questions and written or verbal expression occurs, it is assumed that dialogue

has taken place. However, the real “goals” of ESL/ELD are openly stated by supporting documents as being mostly survival within the established system, and little beyond that, stating openly that “the goal is to make a successful transition to secondary school and to make important decisions about their academic future” or that “the goal is to be successful in secondary school [and] be prepared for further education and careers” (“Supporting” 13) rather than to be active, responsible citizens challenging the status quo. Here, “teaching collapses in this case into a banal notion of facilitation, and student experience becomes an unproblematic vehicle for self-affirmation and self-consciousness” (Giroux *Reader* 49-50).

As literacy and dialogue are objectified in this way, so too is the concept of “culture.” The ESL/ELD curriculum emphasizes the importance of awareness regarding newcomer youth’s “acculturation process” which is neatly divided into four steps, “initial excitement”, “culture shock”, “recovery” and “acculturation/integration” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 175) that all newcomers will supposedly pass through. Through this “process”, the aim supported by the curriculum of becoming “bicultural” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 7) is presented as measurable and concrete. Canadian culture, too, is seen as mostly static and knowable through activities such as “surveys” about seemingly arbitrary “cultural studies such as current popular Canadian names for babies or new slang terms popular with peers” which are said to “increase [students’] cultural knowledge of Canadian society” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 46). The curriculum’s “Socio-Cultural Competency” stream upholds assumptions of definitive and coherent Canadian “culture,” stating:

Through the expectations in this strand, students will also demonstrate their understanding that the Ontario school system expects all students to treat each other with respect, dignity and understanding. Students are entitled to receive equitable treatment in Ontario schools, regardless of differences in race, gender, place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, or class and family status. (“The Ontario Curriculum” 21)

The true complexity of defining and upholding this supposed “equitable treatment” is not acknowledged, merely the claim that this treatment is a solid right. This history of this right is not addressed, it is merely presented as if it is an enduring Ontarian custom, and

“custom [...] constructs subjects within a discourse of continuity in which knowledge and practice are viewed as a matter of inheritance and transmission” (Giroux *Reader* 57). Of course, “only those who have power can generalize and decree their group characteristics as representative of the national culture” (Freire *Literacy* 52), and ideas of national culture tied to inheritance and transmission are clearly problematic when considering the reality of newcomers to Canada.

The stated value of upholding certain cultural “expectations” and “entitlements” bear echoes of what Rogers Smith terms “ascriptive” nationality, where citizenship is seen by virtue of *being* a certain way, through biology, customs and perceived “culture”, rather than *doing* one’s best to function as an engaged citizen (qtd. in Giroux *Take Back* 137). In this way, reification of culture and of citizenship goes hand in hand. “Teacher prompts” such as “how are the values of Canadian society demonstrated in our government institutions and policies?” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 114) and “Canadian Citizenship” lesson plans such as “identify some basic rights such as education and healthcare” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 126) suggest pre-ascribed notions of how citizenship functions in Canada, dereferentialized from the inequalities and injustices that could be unveiled by critical inquiry without the assumption of a tangible, monolithic Canadian identity or culture⁸. Additionally, Apple writes of the ways this reification of culture simultaneously assumes and engenders a status quo where humans simply receive the world around them, rather than actively generate social conditions, and how this ties into global capitalism. As Aronowitz suggests, “there is an ‘internal tendency of capitalism to increasingly give relationships between *people* the character of relationships between *things*. Commodity production intrudes into all corners of the social world” (Aronowitz qtd in Apple *Ideology* 145).

Through this reification and naturalization of processes of learning and acculturation, the curriculum is able to present itself as the neutral provider of realistic

⁸ Note that the ESL curriculum does not expect students to begin learning to “participate in Canadian society as informed citizens” until the fourth year of instruction (“The Ontario Curriculum” 95). To this, perhaps Freire could respond that people “cannot enter the struggle as objects in order *later* to become human beings” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 68).

approaches to learning acquirable facts. However, as Freire writes, “what is my neutrality, if not a comfortable and perhaps hypocritical way of avoiding any choice or even hiding my fear of denouncing injustice?” (*Pedagogy of Freedom* 101). Presumed realities of culture, citizenship, democracy and so on in Canada are materially based on historical and contemporary conditions rife with injustice, conflict and, at the very least, complexity. In the words of Giroux,

the current emphasis on the standardization of curricula, knowledge, teaching and social relations does an injustice to the different narratives, issues, histories, and experiences students bring to schools. Such outside forces operate in classrooms within different cultural, economic and political contexts, and it makes no sense to ignore them given the unique resources, insights and opportunities they present for teachers. (Giroux *Education* 68-69)

In failing to “take the people’s historicity as their starting point” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 84) the current model of pedagogy in the Ontario ESL/ELD curriculum document does a disservice to students by at best obfuscating and at worst denying matrixes of injustice, oppression, and irresponsibility tied up in issues of class, race, culture and language as they appear in the classroom environment.

One facet of the evidence supporting this claim is the assumptions made about ESL/ELD student populations by curricular supporting materials. The curriculum suggests that ESL/ELD students are struggling with “adjustment factors,” such as “I am getting used to speaking to and sitting beside people of the opposite sex” and “I am learning that a variety of people can live together peacefully, even though they may disagree or have different beliefs” (“Supporting” 9). The same document also claims, “the content of the reading material [in classrooms] is often culturally inappropriate for students who were not raised and educated in an English-language environment in Canada” (“Supporting” 32). These notions are presented by the material first as concrete truths about students’ backgrounds and abilities—as if gender equality and ideological tolerance are unique to English-speaking Ontario, and as if literary engagement is limited entirely by cultural background—and second, as problems to be fixed, rather than as opportunities for discussion, dissent and ultimately, learning in the classroom. The document also states, “schools must find creative ways to help these students bridge the

large gaps in academic learning caused by their life experiences” (“Supporting” 51). The concern here is that life experiences are characterized as alternative, or even antagonistic to, rather than complementary to and supportive of academic learning. This discourages teachers from working to creatively integrate life experience into classroom learning in ways that make said learning more applicable or honest for the students, especially when assignments proposed by curricular documents demonstrate a lack of integration of serious, age-appropriate social and cultural experiences into academic subjects, as with the directive, “organize students into small groups and give each group a different survey task, or encourage them to think of one of their own. Examples include favourite sports, the amount of television watched per week, or countries lived in or visited by students” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 29). These ostensibly hollow, surface-level topics are characteristic of the many missed opportunities in curricular documents to integrate school subjects, lived learning and sociopolitical consciousness or citizenship.

Another key denial of historicity in the curricular documents is the lack of reference to issues of racism in Ontario. The curriculum states, “English language learners naturally want to develop a grasp of the language for social, as well as academic, purposes” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 8), so a teacher should “help them get to know their classmates, and give them a chance to use English in a non-threatening environment” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 22). The assumption of the school as a non-threatening environment does not take into account the realities of discrimination and ostracism of non-English speakers in high school environments. There is a discussion in “Many Roots, Many Voices” of “the silent period” that occurs when newcomers first arrive in Canada, where they supposedly speak little in the classroom (22), that is presented without any discussion of alienation from peers that cause students to feel uncomfortable speaking up and thus deepen this silent period. Teachers are directed to “Communicate positive attitudes towards newcomers and their cultures” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 21), not necessarily to genuinely educate themselves or to necessarily even *hold* these “positive attitudes” that should be “communicated”; additionally, this very phrasing indicates an element of condescension, with “positive attitudes” reminiscent of empty, patronizing “cheerleader” behavior rather than person-to-person interaction. Throughout the entire curriculum and supporting documents, there is one

single reference to racism: a suggestion to start a “Unity and Diversity Club” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 41) to include newcomer students. The overly optimistic writing, particularly in “Many Roots, Many Voices” which purports to discuss cultural differences, acclimatization, and diversity in the classroom, denies the harsh realities of the violence that is racism and that still deeply pervades Ontario society at large.

As Giroux writes:

Knowledge and authority in school curricula are organized not to eliminate differences but to regulate them through cultural and social divisions of labour. Class, racial, and gender differences are either ignored in school curricula or are subordinated to the imperatives of a history and culture that is linear and uniform. (Giroux *Slacking Off* 65)

Schools stream newcomers into different ESL/ELD programs and, often, apprenticeship and work force training rather than course trajectories with more intellectual engagement with the humanities. ESL/ELD students “may need support to investigate post-secondary options and opportunities that they might otherwise overlook” (“Supporting” 67). In other words, “their level of proficiency in English and their experience in Canadian society must be considered to place them appropriately in cooperative education, work experience, and community service programs” (“Supporting” 63) rather than more rigorously academic options. Finally, the document states, “students who are sufficiently mature and have developed skills that allow them to enter the workforce should be regarded as having reached a significant milestone in their education. They need to realize that there may be multiple opportunities to further their formal education in the future” (“Supporting” 67). Not only does this language condescend openly—“they need to realize”—but this actively edges out strong critical voices from diverse ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. Apple writes that in contemporary education,

some groups have access to knowledge distributed to them and not distributed to others [and] the *lack* of certain kinds of knowledge—where your particular group stands in the complex process of cultural preservation and distribution—is related, no doubt, to the absence in that group of certain kinds of political and economic power in society. (Apple *Ideology* 14)

The issue of accessibility is clearly visible in the Canadian political sphere today. Apple continues: “just as in the ‘economic market place’ where it is more efficient to have a

relatively constant level of unemployment, to actually generate it really, so do cultural institutions ‘naturally’ generate levels of poor achievement” (Apple *Ideology* 35). It is unfortunate to consider this “natural” distribution of knowledge falling along racial lines. The concern of racist class stratification undercurrents running beneath the curriculum also ties into the banking model: “contemporary schools that are run on the industrial model of individuated and standardized work”, which Apple claims “fail to prepare students for employment in *any* level of the [current] informational economy. Indeed, even in the ‘low skills’ routine service sector, employees are called upon to work in shifting teams and to commit their hearts and minds to performing the affective labour that helps firms engage niche markets of customers” (Apple *Global Crises* 38).

Furthermore, the sections on identifying learning “exceptionalities” or “special education” needs in ESL/ELD students (“Supporting” 18-19, “Policies and Procedures” 18) is vague and leaves much to instructor discretion. The official policy states that “school boards will develop a protocol for identifying English language learners who may also have special education needs” (“Policies and Procedures” 18), with no other information on how this policy is to be developed. There is, instead, a section in the “Supporting English Language Learners” document outlining how the activities and behaviours of students learning English may mirror those of students with learning “exceptionalities”—for example, English language learners may exhibit short attention spans due to mental exhaustion (“Supporting” 18). The concern here is twofold: first, the categorization of students into those with and without “exceptionalities” is deemed necessary, but arbitrary and left to discretion; second, ESL/ELD needs are themselves indicated to be “exceptionalities” to be categorized, then treated. Apple addresses similar concerns when he writes,

The categories by which we differentiate ‘smart’ children from ‘stupid,’ ‘academic’ areas from ‘non-academic,’ ‘play’ activity from ‘learning’ or ‘work’ activity, and even ‘students’ from ‘teachers’ are all commonsense constructions which *grow out of the nature of existing institutions*. As such they must be treated as historically conditioned data, not absolutes. (Apple *Ideology* 127, emphasis author’s)

He continues:

If an educator may define another as a ‘slow learner,’ a ‘discipline problem,’ or other general category, he or she may prescribe general ‘treatments’ that are seemingly neutral and helpful. However, by the very fact that the categories themselves are based upon institutionally defined abstractions (the commonsense equivalent of statistical averages) the educator is freed from the more difficult task of examining the institutional and economic context that caused these abstract labels to be placed upon a concrete individual in the first place. (Apple *Ideology* 127)

Thus, under the ESL/ELD policies outlined above, the student’s “entire relationship to an institution is conditioned by the category applied to him. He or she *is* this and only this” (Apple *Ideology* 128). In other words, ESL/ELD students are not only already stratified by race and class but by the categories applied to them by schooling institutions, which are mostly abstractions that serve to inhibit understanding of the historical and material conditions that affect a learner’s behaviours and practices.

In addition, many towns in Ontario function on a “congregated school” model for ESL/ELD programs (“The Ontario Curriculum” 29), where specific “magnet schools”—the only regional schools equipped with ESL/ELD resources—draw in and segregate newcomer students in the region, more often than not in low-income areas with high newcomer populations. Although it is an extreme claim to make, Freire’s suggestion that “it is in the interest of the oppressor to weaken the oppressed still further, to isolate them, to create and deepen rifts among them” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 141) seems to ring true here. Additionally, when “*Macleans Magazine* reports in Canada ‘people aged 15 to 24 are currently facing unemployment rates at more than 20 percent, well above the national average’” (qtd. in Giroux “Slacking Off” 66), a rate likely higher among newcomers, Freire’s suggestion that “the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 95) is all the more prescient. It is difficult to focus on educational goals when concerned about immediate material concerns such as employment, adequate food, and shelter. However, the current banking model system continues to “develop a series of methods precluding any presentation of the world as a problem and showing it rather as a fixed entity, as

something given—something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt” (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 139).

The downplaying of students’ material concerns and situations extends beyond issues of class to those of global awareness as well. The ESL/ELD curriculum, discussing “students with limited prior schooling,” explains to teachers the global concerns influencing access to schooling in vague terms of “economic, political, ideological or geographic reasons” such as how “in some countries, gender, social class, religion, or ideology may limit access to schooling” or how some students have spent “several years in transit” before entering Canadian schools (“The Ontario Curriculum” 6). These concerns are fully abstracted from any questions of globalization, neoliberalism or histories of colonialism, and Canadian responsibility on the global scale certainly not acknowledged. For instance, the reality that the “several years in transit” may have been necessitated by administrative delays in immigration and asylum seeking claims from specific, usually racialized, regions where fewer immigration offices are accessible, or the realities of Canada’s roles in global conflicts and war, are apparent non-issues. Specific countries are not named but merely implied, reinforcing the “abstraction” of a perceived “third world” (Freire *Learning to Question* 31) where Ontarian “rights” such as education are denied. Furthermore, students’ own global cultures within the classroom, in the curriculum’s terms, are to be expressed through shallow signifiers such as “naming customs, forms of address, relationship to elders, responsibilities within the home, celebrations” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 66) rather than broad systems with histories of social and political struggle that students may have, in their home countries, identified with and participated in as active and empowered citizens. Students are asked to

Analyze and outline some benefits and challenges of living in a society made up of diverse linguistic and cultural groups (e.g. benefits and challenges of maintaining or not maintaining particular forms of ethnocultural or religious dress at school or work, or of accommodating or not accommodating various religious practices/traditions at school or work). (“The Ontario Curriculum” 102)

This task is seemingly independent of the histories of racism and prejudice implicit in this evaluation of “benefits and challenges.” In this lesson plan, these histories are presented through the lens of individual student opinions. Thus, “by reconceptualizing racism as a

private—as opposed to a deeply political and structural—phenomenon” this kind of lesson plan displaces “tensions of contemporary racially charged relations to the relative invisibility of the private sphere—safely beyond the reach of public policy intervention” (Giroux *Take Back* 208).

As culture and racism are abstracted from colonialist history, so too is the very basis of ESL/ELD curriculums: what Freire calls the “pedagogy of exclusion that views the learning of [standard] English as education itself” (Freire *Literacy* 155). Although according to the curriculum, “the role of the school is to encourage students to value and maintain their own linguistic and cultural identities while enabling them to enter the larger society as bilingual and bicultural individuals” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 22), and the classroom plans outlined by the curriculum still emphasize the importance of standard Canadian English as the focal point of a young person’s education. The ESL/ELD curriculum mandates that students who speak “non-Standard English” be placed in ESL/ELD classrooms as they “may require instruction in some of the vocabulary and grammatical forms of standard Canadian English in order to succeed in Canadian schools” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 22). Furthermore, students are expected by the curriculum to adapt speaking patterns to “the appropriate language register” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 102), and teachers are encouraged to “explicitly teach” the “hidden” curriculum of social behavior (“Supporting” 11) with curricular evaluations in place for students’ abilities to “use common social greetings and courtesies with peers and teachers, obtain a teacher’s attention in an appropriate manner, take turns with peers in conversations and classroom discussions, conclude a brief conversation in an appropriate manner” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 66). The idea of being academically evaluated on forms of address recalls Bourdieu’s discussion about schools:

Schools legitimize the dominant cultural capital [...] by rewarding students who use the linguistic style of the ruling class. Certain linguistic styles, along with the body postures and the social relations they reinforce (lowered voice, disinterested tone, non-tactile interaction) act as identifiable forms of cultural capital that either reveal or betray a student’s social background. In effect, certain linguistic practices and modes of discourse become privileged by being treated as natural to the gifted, when in fact they are the speech habits of dominant classes and thus serve to perpetuate cultural privileges. (qt. in Giroux, *Reader* 14)

If we accept Freire's statement that "Language is the mediating force of knowledge; but it is also knowledge itself" (Freire *Literacy* 53), we must be very wary of "language that negate[s] [students'] reality and attempt[s] to eradicate their own means of communication" (Freire *Literacy* 115), because "linguistic code not only reflects [people's] reality, but also their lived experience in a given historical moment" (Freire *Literacy* 127). In discussing the dominance of Portuguese language in formerly colonized Cape Verdean society, Freire posits

The sad reality is that while [the dominant language] may offer access to certain positions of political and economic power for high echelons of [...] society, it holds back the majority of the people, those who fail to learn [the dominant language] well enough to acquire the necessary level of literacy for social, political and economic advancement. (*Literacy* 117)

So while promulgation of the "appropriate register" of "standard Canadian English" may appear to innocently inspire class mobility for newcomer students, it can also be identified as "manipulative strategies that support the maintenance of cultural domination" by Canadian dominant social classes. This linguistic "cultural conquest leads to the inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders." (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 152-153).

There are elements of the curriculum and supporting documents that ostensibly seek to affirm learners' identities as they are taught standard English, for example "Many Roots, Many Voices" discusses the importance of maintaining first language proficiency and learning (14-16) and "Supporting English Literacy Development" adds "students whose language and culture are valued gain confidence in their abilities to succeed in learning" ("Supporting" 12). However, sections about identity affirmation are riddled with assumptions about students, like the chart of students' supposed thoughts that include such sunny and even jingoistic expectations "I want to become Canadian without losing who I am", "I'm hopeful about the possibilities of my life in Canada", and "I always wanted to go to school" ("Supporting" 9). Another section states that "affirming the identity of the learner" involves "reach[ing] back to where the learners are" to "teach to the cognitive level and prior learning of students by differentiating instruction"

(“Supporting” 36), a practice that affirms not the identity of the learner but the presumptions of the teacher.

At the same time that notions of appropriate standard English are imposed by the curriculum, simplifications of language in the ESL/ELD classroom suggested by the document bear equally damaging ramifications. The first years of ESL/ELD learning is to be focused mostly on “adapted texts,” which are “written so that the reading level is easier and students can more easily make connections to prior knowledge and determine meaning. Adaptations to text may include simplifying and/or defining relevant vocabulary [and] using short, relatively simple sentences” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 175). This is as opposed to non-adapted “authentic text” in “authentic English” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 176). The assumption that easy reading levels are more relevant to students’ prior knowledge and ability to determine meaning is not only condescending; Judith Butler might suggest that this approach to presenting language “‘serves to shut down thought,’ [and that] ‘learning how to deal with difficult language is essential for developing a critical attitude towards the world.’” (qtd. in Giroux *Education* 103). Supporting documents for the curriculum are equally encouraging of a pared-down approach to academic learning, suggesting in the “Get Ready to Teach” section that teachers “Reduce the topic to the most basic essential understandings (no more than three)” (“Supporting” 41), and be sure to “make the key learnings transparent” (“Supporting” 41). Since ESL/ELD students may never take a mainstream English language course as the ESL/ELD “Policies and Procedures” encourage taking an “Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course” instead of grade 12 English after completing ESL/ELD courses (“Policies and Procedures” 24-25) they may only ever be exposed to this abridged version of arts & humanities education, where teachers are even told to “give English language learners positive feedback on their efforts” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 19). The implicit belief of the efficacy of adapted texts, condensed lessons, and positive feedback regardless of intellectual rigour as teaching tools arguably “presumes that language is a transparent medium for the seamless transition of existing facts that need only be laid out in an agreed upon fashion.” This avoidance of intellectual challenge and even discomfort ties in as well to earlier concerns where consensus and agreement in the classroom is overemphasized “rather than seeing conflict and

contradiction as the basic ‘driving forces’ in society” (Apple *Ideology* 81). Also, much like the previously discussed elements of the curriculum’s approach to learning, “such a position runs the risk of fleeing the politics of culture by situating language outside of history, power and struggle” (Giroux *Education* 112). In a world where youth are already “incessantly” presented simplified, “prepackaged,” “instant,” “infantiliz[ing]” messages by the popular culture around them (Giroux *Education* 107), it seems unhelpful for formal education to take this same approach.

Weighed together, all of the above instances of banking-model education, inculcation of young people and teachers with dominant societal values, and condescension to both students and teachers through curricular materials that discourage critical inquiry can be said serve as components of what Giroux calls the contemporary “politics of humiliation.” He identifies the politics of humiliation as

the institutionalization and widespread adoption of a set of values, policies and symbolic practices that legitimate forms of organized violence against human beings and lead inexorably to hardship, suffering and despair [...] The politics of humiliation also works through symbolic systems, diverse modes of address, and varied framing mechanisms in which the targeted subjects are represented in terms that demonized them, strip them of their humanity, and position them in ways that invite ridicule and sometimes violence.(Giroux *Education* 14)

The ESL/ELD curriculum upholds these politics for students through means ranging from institutional guidelines that redirect student learning and goals (“the practical and interactive nature of some courses in the arts, health and physical education, and technological education makes them especially suitable for English language learners” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 14)) to blatant condescension such as year-end ESL milestones of “understanding [...] when and how it is appropriate to use humour in social interactions” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 14), “showing equal respect for male and female classmates” (“The Ontario Curriculum” 114) or grasping “appropriate” physical conventions such as the handshake (“The Ontario Curriculum” 138). Teachers, too, who might find places to subvert, challenge or reappropriate the curriculum for more critical aims can be said to be objects of the politics of humiliation as well, as “anyone who does not believe in the pursuit of material self-interest, unbridled competition, and market-driven values is a proper candidate to be humiliated” (Giroux *Education* 25). Accepting

Freire's argument that "the role of the dominant ideology is to inculcate in the oppressed a sense of blame and culpability about their situation of oppression" (Freire *Pedagogy of Freedom* 78), the politics of humiliation present in the ways the ESL/ELD curriculum aims to define the parameters of teacher and student behavior support Freire's claims.

However, when students and teachers choose not to internalize this sense of culpability, attempting to exercise their human agency within their prescribed roles, Freire suggests that often results can be just as damaging as the politics of humiliation. He states, "there is a quality that is hidden," in "programmatic components of the school system" as discussed above, "that gradually incites rebelliousness on the part of children and adolescents. Their defiance corresponds to the aggressive elements in the curriculum that work against the students and their interests" (Freire *Literacy* 121). Thus, there are see examples such as rebellious UK working class youths discussed by Giroux where "the counter-logic embodied in the families, workplaces and street life that make up *their* culture points to a different and more convincing reality" (Giroux *Reader* 29), resulting in partial or total rejection of the very school system that should work to empower these young people in their real-world action. Rebellion within, or rejection of, even the inspiring and positive elements of the school system is exacerbated by oppressive frameworks of the banking model: "refusal to read the word chosen by the teacher is the realization on the part of the student that he or she is making a decision not to accept what is perceived as violating his or her world" (Freire *Literacy* 123). Teachers, too, can refuse to accept these violations of their autonomy and creativity as instructors and inspirers of learning, often resulting in issues such as teacher burnout or lack of effort. Many teachers recognize that "teacher preparation should never be reduced to a form of training. Rather, teacher preparation should go beyond the technical preparation of teachers and be rooted in the ethical formation both of selves and of history" (Freire *Pedagogy of Freedom* 23). It is the tendency of the current system to deny this ethical formation of self and history that indicates a clear necessity to instate a new pedagogical model for ESL/ELD that incorporates more critical dialogue, challenge, and inquiry into historicity. This model would aim to result in what Giroux might call a "border pedagogy" of unsettlement and of problematizing naturalized assumptions, taking advantage of ESL/ELDs global awareness as marginalized or newcomer youths whose

lived experiences often already promote a consciousness incorporating ideas of porous borders, histories of oppression and resistance, and citizenries working for radical social change.

This new model for ESL teaching would have to begin with Freire's concept of "problem-posing education": "posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world" where "students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teachers" (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 79-81). Teachers would be entrusted with challenging their students to "see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 83), which would also necessitate a sense of vulnerability on the part of the teachers to allow the students to challenge their authority as well. Instead of merely attempting to instill in the students the desires and skills of dominant Canadian culture such as employment training and standard English, "empowerment should also be a means that enables students 'to interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order'" (Freire *Literacy* 152). Both students and teachers would be asked to understand that "to teach is not to *transfer knowledge* but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge" (Freire *Pedagogy of Freedom* 30). Problem-posing education would necessarily have to emphasize the importance of political histories of tension, dialogue and radical change and how these histories construct and work within the current material conditions of students and teachers. After all, "neither language nor thought can exist without a structure to which they refer. In order to communicate effectively, educator and politician must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed" (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 96). From there, the problem-posing model would have to inspire and to allow students to use their education as praxis to incite social transformation. Evaluation methods would move away from positivist models into more holistic, quantitative considerations of pedagogical success, necessarily taking into account that "a person is literate to the extent that he or she is able to use language for social and political reconstruction" (Freire *Literacy* 159). It would be recognized that "learning is not about processing received knowledge but about actually

transforming it as part of a more expansive struggle for individual rights and social justice” (Giroux *On Critical Pedagogy* 72). The banking model would be dissolved in the hopes that “discourse of invention and construction, rather than a discourse of recognition whose aim is reduced to revealing and transmitting universal truths” (Giroux *Reader* 286) would be realized.

This problem-posing model would then become the basis for what Giroux terms “border pedagogy.” For Giroux,

These are not only *physical* borders, they are *cultural* borders historically constructed and socially organized within maps of rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms. In this case, students cross over into borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations and values that are increasingly being negotiated and rewritten as the codes and regulations which *organize* them become destabilized and reshaped. (Giroux *Reader* 51)

The ESL/ELD student, living as a young person quite literally on the borders of languages, cultures and identities shaped by process of migration, education and emerging adulthood, is particularly primed to destabilize and reshape these very borders. Schools should also integrate ESL/ELD students in a more serious way with “mainstream” learners to facilitate this conceptualization of porous borders for two key reasons. First, Apple writes of the importance of diversity and border pedagogy due to the realities of the neoliberal “information economy” where to secure livelihoods for all citizens in this new economy it is crucial “for diverse learners to collaborate in developing powerful literacies necessary both for securing productive, rewarding labour in fast-moving informational economies and for reshaping socio-economic orders according to principles of justice and strong democracy” (Apple *Global Crises* 29). Second, according to Apple, border-crossing is simply an effective learning tool:

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a classroom resource just as powerfully as it is a social resource in the formation of new civic spaces and new notions of citizenship. This is not just so that educators can provide a better ‘service’ to ‘minorities.’ Rather, such a pedagogical orientation will produce benefits for all [...] When learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles and approaches, they gain substantively in metacognitive and metalinguistic abilities

and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions. (New London Group qtd. in Apple *Global Crises* 43)

At the same time, Giroux suggests:

It is also imperative that such a pedagogy acknowledge and critically interrogate how the colonizing of differences by *dominant* groups is expressed and sustained through representations: in which Others are seen as a deficit, in which the humanity of the Others is either cynically posited as problematic or ruthlessly denied. At the same time, it is important to understand how the experience of marginality at the level of everyday life lends itself to forms of oppositional and transformative consciousness. (Giroux *Reader* 59)

Under this model, the lived realities of ESL/ELD students would take a forefront in their educations, without the devolution into tokenism or into what amounts to diversity lip service in asking for student opinions and experiences without challenging and critiquing them. As the newcomer students of the ESL/ELD classroom adjust to new conceptions of “home,” their experience leaves them open to inquiry into how “‘home’ is safe by virtue of its repressive exclusions and hegemonic location of individuals and groups outside of history” (Giroux *Reader* 287). As “home” is redefined, students will be asked to

leave home, as it were, since our homes are often sites of racism, sexism, and other damaging social practices. Where we come to locate ourselves in terms of our specific histories and differences must be a place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and made anew. What we gain is a reterritorialization: we reinhabit a world of our making (here “our” is expanded to a coalition of identities—neither universal nor particular). (Giroux *Reader* 60)

If, in the words of Theodor Adorno, “it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” (qtd. in Giroux *Reader* 290), ESL/ELD students’ life experiences create in them subjectivities necessarily synthesized with the idea of “illuminat[ing] that which is no longer home-like, *Heimlich*, about one’s home” (Giroux *Reader* 291). Ultimately, it is patently irresponsible to continue inculcating citizens with the banking model of education and its accompanying politics of humiliation. Instead, if the aim of education is to encourage knowledgeable, self-aware, critical democratic agents committed to bettering the world around them, we must begin pursuing the generative pedagogical

avenues presented by the concept of “border pedagogy” as it relates to the experience of the ESL/ELD student in Canada.

Part of this process, I will propose in the third chapter, is the incorporation of fulsome media education for ESL/ELD students that engenders “abstraction, system thinking, experimentation and collaboration and by engaging diverse technologies to create texts that speak to wide audiences and mobilize support for justice-oriented projects” (Apple *Global Crises* 52-53). Even in curricular supporting documents the importance of media literacy, technological engagement and media representation are mentioned several times, as with the directives to “incorporate images and examples of linguistic and cultural diversity into all subjects in the curriculum, and celebrate diversity in all aspects of your practice” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 40) and “be inclusive: reflect your community” (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 41) with classroom materials. Multimedia learning is encouraged, with the repeated mentioning of using personal “picture dictionaries” to work on vocabulary (“Many Roots, Many Voices” 9, 40; “Supporting” 14, 42, 48, 56; “The Ontario Curriculum” 45, 135), or the story of Aimal, a hypothetical student whose engagement with technology helps her learn more quickly and holistically (“Supporting” 27). Multimedia literacy better positions ESL/ELD students in terms of class mobility in the “information economy” where “value is added in labour processes increasingly through the generation, assessment and application of new knowledge and disparate aspects of production are reorganized accordingly” (Apple *Global Crises* 26). At the same time, simply re-skilling young people in mass media is not enough without the critical capacity to deconstruct globalization, neoliberalism, and this very “information economy”, as “leaving untouched economic structures while (re)training every student and worker for employment in the ‘high skills’ sector is based on a number of faulty assumptions, including both overestimations of the number of high-paying knowledge jobs available in presently constituted labour markets and underestimations of the abilities of employers to weaken knowledge workers’ labour power through the routinization of knowledge work” (Apple *Global Crises* 40). Students should be trained to question economic, social and political structures in ways relevant to their life experiences, a process that not only facilitates learning but also encourages

students not just to receive but to actively work on restructuring dominant social orders.

Apple writes of the successes of students who do just this:

Students who use digital tools to participate in the pro-immigration movement—whether through digital storytelling or by using mobile phones or networked computers to disseminate information about rallies and walkouts—acquire and further develop aspects of the general intellect of technologically advanced socio-economic systems and enlist this knowledge in a project that challenges these systems in part by exposing their dependence on the waged and unwaged labour of immigrant groups and other marginalized communities. In pursuing such strategies, then, immigrant students and other activists exploit key tensions in high-tech global capitalism so as to advance causes of social justice. (Apple *Global Crises* 53)

It is this kind of learning that the third chapter will consider as its core project.

Chapter 3

3 Imagining Future Directions for the ESL/ELD Curriculum

The core question of this chapter is how the curricular documents critiqued in chapter two could be improved with the addition of elements of multimedia, experiential learning that takes student experience as its root. The previous chapter took as its core project the identification of limitations and concerns with the current ESL/ELD curricular materials. I began with a discussion of the banking model of education and positivist methods of evaluation evident in this curriculum. The banking model and accompanying modes of evaluation lead to an education that is decontextualized from historical and material conditions of students and bears a lack of relevance to students' lived experiences. It also has a tendency to decontextualize capitalist ideology from historical circumstances and treat business acumen and employability under the current regime as tantamount to student success, without questioning dominant ideology. I suggest that this approach to education contributes to an overall reification of the concept of culture—Canadian and international—that unfairly categorizes students and ideologies as within or outside an acceptable norm, leading to a stereotyping of ESL/ELD students. As culture is reified, so too is the concept of literacy, which, like culture, is treated as an accumulation of tangible skills and attitudes rather than a malleable cultural and historical process. This reification promotes a lack of critical dialogue in the classroom, and an environment where social control takes precedence over social justice. This pattern contributes to social stratification and cycles of poverty and racism outside the classroom because students who are already marginalized are inculcated with belief systems that are designed to accept the way things are rather than contribute, collectively, to the way things could be. Finally, I identified how the projects of colonialism are furthered by the ESL/ELD curriculum through imposition of values and simplification of complex concepts and histories.

In this chapter, I will return to the core concerns of the previous chapter vis-à-vis three categories: 1. Teaching *methodology*, which encompasses issues with method

promoted by the curricular documents such as the banking model of education, the positivist evaluation methods, the lack of dialogue and the simplification of reality through the simplification of language; 2. Teaching *content*, including the denial of historicity, the reification of culture and the colonialist imposition of values; and 3. *Systemic* issues, those that extend beyond the classroom itself such as the treatment of student as capitalist subject, the prioritizing of social control over social justice, and the cycles of poverty and racism. I explore how all three of these areas can be addressed, and ameliorated, through the adoption of a curriculum that places multimedia literacy and production at its core. It is important to note here that all of the pedagogies and methods I propose are not precluded by the current programmatic curriculum—the methods discussed here are all currently possible under the current curriculum. However, the current programmatic curriculum does not encourage the kinds of methods I propose and in some ways, as my argument in the second chapter implies, actively discourages these types of methods in the programmatic curriculum's current incarnation.

To fortify my discussion of pedagogical methods I will return to the theoretical work of James Paul Gee, Paolo Freire and Henry Giroux and engage their critiques of traditional schooling in favour of learning and literacy that is situated in the contexts in which students already live and learn in and outside the classroom. Gee articulates the fundamental question that this chapter aims to answer:

If you want to design a learning environment, don't start with content, start with the following sorts of questions: 'What experiences do I want the learners to have? What simulations do I want them to be able to build in their heads? What do I want them to be able to do? What information, tools and technologies do they need?' Another way to put these questions is: 'What games do I want these learners to be able to play?' (Gee *Situated Language* 118)

In my first chapter, I addressed the importance of media literacy to fulsome education, particularly for ESL/ELD students. The mainstream English curriculum for non-ESL/ELD students is heavily invested in developing media literacy skills in young people, stating:

Media Studies explores the impact and influence of mass media and popular culture by examining texts such as films, songs, video games, action figures,

advertisements, CD covers, clothing, billboards, television shows, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and websites. These texts abound in our electronic information age, and the messages they convey, both overt and implied, can have a significant influence on students' lives. For this reason, critical thinking as it applies to media products and messages assumes a special significance. Understanding how media texts are constructed and why they are produced enables students to respond to them intelligently and responsibly. Students must be able to differentiate between fact and opinion; evaluate the credibility of sources; recognize bias; be attuned to discriminatory portrayals of individuals and groups, such as religious or sexual minorities, people with disabilities, or seniors; and question depictions of violence and crime. (The Ontario Curriculum, "Grades 9 and 10 – English" 18)

Here, the definition of "text" is broadened in ways not present in the ESL/ELD curriculum—a text "can be understood to include any work, object, or event that communicates meaning to an audience" (The Ontario Curriculum, "Grades 9 and 10 – English" 18). The document also explores the influence and value of these texts—they have a "special significance"; they "can have a significant influence on students' lives"—as well as is the importance of critically analyzing these texts from an anti-oppressive perspective. The curriculum goes on to state,

Students' repertoire of communication skills should include the ability to critically interpret the messages they receive through the various media and to use these media to communicate their own ideas effectively as well. Skills related to high-tech media such as the Internet, film and television are particularly important because of the power and pervasive influence these media wield in our lives and in society. Becoming conversant with these and other media can greatly expand the range of information sources available to students, and enhance potential career opportunities in the communication and entertainment industries. (The Ontario Curriculum, "Grades 9 and 10 – English" 18)

Here, the importance of students creating their own media messages is highlighted, as is the "power and pervasive influence" of new media. In this curriculum there is assumed value in expanding the range of information available to students as well as providing them with broader future career options.

Gee states: "In the modern world, print literacy is not enough. People need to be literate in a great variety of different semiotic domains [...] Furthermore, and more important, people need to be able to learn to be literate in new semiotic domains throughout their lives" (Gee *What Video Games* 20), here noting that media literacy is not

simply a career booster or way to access more sources of information, but a lifelong learning commitment and perhaps even a matter of brain chemistry: an inability to dive into diverse semiotic domains that exist currently limits one's ability to adapt to new semiotic domains as they emerge in the future, and, if the last 20 years are any indication, they will continue to emerge. Giroux adds to Gee's claims that "culture offers both the symbolic and material resources as well as the context and content needed for the negotiation of knowledge and skills. Through these negotiations, culture enables a critical reading of the world from a position of agency and possibility." In other words, the transferable skills developed through media literacy education are part of a pedagogical project, but they are also part of a political project. In addition to the importance of media literacy for broadening career options, expanding students' adaptability to diverse semiotic domains, and being an important political project, Giroux highlights the importance of popular culture and media to students' lives *already*, and the reality that

the popular cannot be ignored because it points to a category of meanings and affective investments that shape the very identities, politics and cultures of the students we deal with. Subjectivity and identity are in part constituted on the ground of the popular and their force and effects do not disappear once students enter school, (Giroux *Border Crossings* 196)

Because popular culture is so important to students' lived experiences already, to ignore it is to "run the risk of complicitly silencing and negating" student identities (Giroux *Border Crossings* 181).

To reaffirm student identities is to affirm popular culture as central to student experience and learning, remembering that the popular is "a site of negotiation for kids, one of the few places where they can speak for themselves" (Giroux *Stealing Innocence* 13). Giroux writes of the many ways that when young people are disempowered by society at large (including the current education system), they turn to popular culture and media as sites where they can create their own worlds and disseminate counter narratives to those imposed by broader society (Giroux *Stealing Innocence* 29). It is this media creation that a new ESL/ELD curriculum would take at its heart, giving students voice not only to interpret diverse semiotic domains but to express themselves as well. According to Freire, curricular materials' authors "do not recognize in the poor classes

[or in marginalized groups, such as many of the students streamed into ESL/ELD] the ability to know and even create the texts that would express their own thought-language at the level of their perception of the world” (Freire *Cultural Action* 17-18). But it is this level of perception that could be given voice in the ESL/ELD classroom in order to pursue true literacy and English language proficiency: “when men and women realize that they themselves are the makers of culture they have accomplished, or nearly accomplished, the first step towards feeling the importance, the necessity, and the possibility of owning reading and writing. They become literate, politically speaking.” (Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers* xi).

Finally, the mainstream curriculum includes the following directive:

To develop their media literacy skills, students should have opportunities to view, analyse, and discuss a wide variety of media texts and relate them to their own experience. They should also have opportunities to use available technologies to create media texts of different types (e.g. computer graphics, cartoons, graphic designs and layouts, radio plays, short videos, web pages). (The Ontario Curriculum, “Grades 9 and 10 – English” 18)

This paragraph describes precisely the type of learning that I propose the ESL/ELD classroom take as its root. These aims are also echoed by Giroux, who states:

Critical education demands that teachers and students also must learn how to read critically the new technological and visual cultures that exercise a powerful influence over their lives as well as their conception of what it means to be a social subject engaged in acts of responsible citizenship. In addition, they must master the tools of these technologies, whether they are computer programming, video production, or magazine production, in order to create alternative public spheres that are actively engaged in shaping what Gramsci referred to as new and oppositional culture. (Giroux *Stealing Innocence* 133)

By beginning with students’ own experiences in the diverse multimedia world, I propose that a new ESL/ELD curriculum give students the opportunity to “view, analyse and discuss” these experiences as the mainstream curriculum states, guided additionally by Giroux’s writing that “students must be offered opportunities to read texts that both affirm and interrogate the complexity of their own histories” (*Border Crossings* 30). Giroux adds “they must also be given the opportunity to engage and develop a counter discourse to the established boundaries of knowledge” (*Border Crossings* 30). In other

words, the interrogation of extant multimedia texts would lead to opportunities to create their own wide variety of media texts that interpret and critique the world around them. In this way, students' own experiences, both related to media and related the content of media they analyse and produce, are placed centrally in the learning process.

Additionally, a media-based ESL/ELD curriculum would work to place students outside of the classroom throughout their learning experiences, for example, shooting on-location videos or visiting community events or art openings. This experiential element would be youth-driven and take place within the diverse communities that youth already inhabit.

The goal of experiential, media literacy based learning would be to work towards a replacement for -- or at minimum an augmentation of -- current *methodology* of teaching and evaluation, leading to a strengthening of learning *content*, and finally, to real *systemic* student-driven changes within and outside the classroom.

The banking model of education is the first element of teaching methodology that would be affected by a shift to experiential media-based education. Gee writes of three types of learning processes that can contribute to building literacy in young people: natural, instructed, and cultural learning processes. The first, the natural learning process, occurs as the very young child “acquires his or her native language through immersion in talk and activity. No instruction is needed or helpful” as, theoretically, “acquiring a first language is biologically supported in human beings” (Gee *Situated Language* 10-11). The second, the instructed learning process, is a “virtual assembly line” where overt, “sequential, skills-based” instruction models are used—for instance, in learning to read, “first there is instruction on ‘phonemic awareness’ [...] then on phonics [...] then on comprehension skills. Each stage is supposed to guarantee the next” (Gee *Situated Language* 10). In many ways, this instructed learning process mirrors the banking model as students are seen as knowing nothing and in need of “overt instruction” (Gee *Situated Language* 10) that fills their heads with knowledge that will eventually, down the line, result in meaning-making, rather than beginning with meaning or experience as a starting point. The final learning process discussed by Gee is what he terms a “cultural learning process,” and it is this process that an experiential media curriculum would emulate. This process “involves ‘masters’ (adults, more masterful peers)” who “allow learners to

collaborate with them on projects that the learners could not carry out on their own.” Gee writes:

Learners work in a ‘smart’ environment filled with tools and technologies, and artifacts store knowledge and skills they can draw on when they do not personally have such knowledge and skills. Information is given ‘just in time’ when it can be put to use (and thus better understood) and ‘on demand’ when learners feel they need it and can follow it. Extended information given out of a context of application [...] is offered after, not before, learners have had experiences relevant to what that information is about. (Gee *Situated Language* 12-13)

In a cultural learning process, “people learn in the world, in their homes, in society, in the street, in the neighbourhood, in school [...] socially” (Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers* 81). In addition, “learners see learning [...] as not just ‘getting a grade’ or ‘doing school’ but as part and parcel of taking on [an] emerging identity” (Gee *Situated Language* 13). In the case of ESL/ELD instruction, this “emerging identity” would be one of an English speaker and analyst and creator of English multimedia texts, working in a “smart” environment of multimedia technology and text to discuss and create their own texts taking student experiences as a starting point. Freire writes, “authentic thought-language is generated in the dialectical relationship between the subject and his concrete historical and cultural reality” (*Cultural Action* 7), indicating that students cannot generate literacy skills without connecting them to real-world meaning and engaging in dialogue with the real world. Students would be invited, by a new ESL/ELD curriculum, to interrogate a diversity of multimedia texts from their standpoints as embodied subjects, and to interact with those texts in the world, treating the world itself as a text as well. “Central to such a project is the need to begin at those intersections where people actually live their lives and where meaning is produced, assumed, and contested in the unequal relations of power that construct the mundane acts of everyday relations” (Giroux *Stealing Innocence* 170). In the case of a new ESL/ELD curriculum, one example assignment of such a project would take an everyday piece of student existence (the clothes they wear or the food they buy) and interrogate the cultural and political significances and histories of those everyday materials through engagement with multimedia texts and experiential learning. For example, they might be asked to spend time in clothing or grocery stores, engaging with advertisements for these commodities,

interviewing one another about these everyday choices and the meanings behind them, and researching the industries that produce these commodities and the potential inequalities therein. Finally, the assignment would ask students to create their own expressions of this embodied learning. In the case of an assignment centered around food or clothing, they might design their own clothing line or create a socially responsible meal plan or menu. Throughout this exercise, English language would be necessary but intermingled with visual, experiential and first-language learning in order to meet students where they are in terms of the knowledge of the world they already bring to the classroom.

This approach counters the banking or instruction-process model by bringing embodied experience back into the learning process and giving learners an identity and mastery to aspire to that can be made to appeal to their personal goals and desires. As Gee writes, “one good way to make people look stupid is to ask them to learn and think in terms of words and abstractions they cannot connect in any useful way to images or situations in their embodied experiences in the world” (Gee *What Video Games* 72). Not only does the banking model of ESL/ELD education work to make people “look stupid”, it also asks them to forfeit their held identities as masters in their first languages with diverse experiences, dreams, desires, knowledges, personal values and philosophies, and so on, in order to accept identities as empty vessels waiting to be filled with English and, more often than not, academic English. Gee writes of a similar situation—in this case, losing everyday language, with its accompanying “concrete things [...] and empathy [and] changes and transformations as dynamic ongoing processes; telos and appreciation” in favour of academic language, i.e. “abstract things and relations among them; traits and quantification and categorization of traits; evaluation from within a specialized discipline” etc.—and asks, “*Why would anyone—most especially a child in school—accept this loss?*” (Gee *Situated Language* 93).

Gee’s answer to these questions is to help students accept the loss as a potential gain in a number of ways. The first is to have students “recognize and understand the sorts of socially situated identities and activities that recruit the specialized language”; next, “they value these identities and activities, or at least understand why they are

valued”; and finally, “they believe they (will) have real access to these identities and activities, or at least (will) have access to meaningful (perhaps simulated) versions of them” (Gee *Situated Language* 93). Multimedia literacy learning contributes to this process by introducing students to the “socially situated identity” of being a creator of media content, an identity presumably students are able to see the value in already. Again, statistics demonstrate that students are already spending great amounts of spare time interacting with multimedia texts, and “the new electronic technologies allow kids to immerse themselves in profoundly important forms of social communication, produce a range of creative expressions, and exhibit forms of agency that are both pleasurable and empowering” (Giroux *Stealing Innocence* 13) in ways that the classroom could exploit. The multimedia ESL/ELD classroom would also work to give students real-world access to the identities and activities of creating and engaging deeply with multimedia content. This might include allowing students to find ways to share their multimedia creations outside the classroom and even to monetize these creations, perhaps through a classroom film festival, art show, or the like. These sorts of incentives would give students agency in planning such events and allow them to create learning scenarios themselves in ways that they themselves might find pleasurable. In the words of Freire:

If studying were not almost always a *burden* to us, if reading were not a bitter obligation, if, on the contrary, studying and reading were sources of pleasure and happiness as well as sources of the knowledge we need to better move around in the world, we would have indexes that were more indicative of the quality of our education. (Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers* 24)

Additionally, according to Giroux, “what is being advocated here is that teachers [...] learn to confirm student experiences and voices so that students are legitimated and supported as people who matter [and] as people who can participate in the production and acquisition of their own learning” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 245).

While incorporating student experiences as a central element of pedagogy is a popular theme among critical pedagogy texts, Giroux suggests that “they have generally failed to consider how such experience is shaped by the terrain of popular culture” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 181). Therefore, multimedia creation could not be the only element of a new ESL/ELD curriculum; intensive critique of extant media texts would

have to be included as well. This type of critique continues to affirm student voice and positionality in the classroom, “defining voice not merely as an opportunity to speak, but to engage critically with the ideology and substance of speech, writing, and other forms of cultural production” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 136). Finding this “voice” means “engaging in rigorous discussions of various cultural texts, drawing upon one’s personal experience, and confronting the process through which [...] power can be rethought as a political narrative [...] as part of a broader struggle to democratize social, political, and economic life” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 136).

An in-class example of this type of learning process could involve the interrogation of Internet memes: simple examples of images with text overlays that allow students to form various interpretations that vary based on personal standpoints and backgrounds due to the open-ended nature of many of these memes, in a context where “the learners, rather than receive information about this or that fact, analyze aspects of their own existential experience represented in the codification” (or meme) (Freire *Cultural Action* 23). These types of images allow students to question the ways culture produces meaning that functions beyond the word and image alone, as to understand a meme, one must develop an understanding of context first, and this cultural context is perhaps more important than basic linguistic or phonemic understandings, allowing students to learn and practice English skills while placing meaning and not word first. Additionally user experience or audience response is an enormous part of meme culture, allowing students to take their own experiences and identities and use them as a starting point with which to analyze memes, and later attempting to express them through meme. This type of assignment would take as its inspiration Giroux’s suggestion that:

A critical pedagogy of representation recognizes that we inhabit a photocentric culture in which the proliferation of hegemonically scripted photographic and electronically produced images and sounds serves as a form of multi-media catechism through which individuals ritually encode and evaluate the engagements they make in the various discursive contexts of everyday life. It is an approach that understands media representations—whether photographs, television, print, film, or another form—as not merely productive of knowledge but also of subjectivity. [...] students are encouraged to examine how the way in which they are ensconced within webs of significance and assumptions created by the world of media representations helps to constitute the meanings by which they

not only come to understand and negotiate reality but are constituted as political subjects. (Giroux *Border Crossings* 219)

To further break away from the banking model of education would necessarily involve experiences outside the classroom that draw on students' current interests and experiences (i.e. "this phenomenon exists in my neighbourhood, and I care about it") to encourage future learning (i.e. "I can create a multimedia story outlining this neighbourhood phenomena through on-location research and media creation"). As Gee suggests, "people learn (academic or non-academic) specialist languages and their concomitant ways of thinking best when they can tie the words and structures of those languages to experiences they have had" (Gee *Situated Language* 4). Gee continues:

School learning is often about disembodied minds learning outside of any context of decisions and actions. When people learn something as a cultural process their bodies are involved because cultural learning always involves having specific experiences that facilitate learning, not just memorizing words. (Gee *Situated Language* 39)

A new curriculum would incorporate embodied experience out in the community, perhaps through volunteering (with "masters" of English) or co-operative learning experiences, to replace the banking model. Freire suggests that an embodied experience reveals for the student "my presence *in* the world, *with* the world, and *with* other people implies my complete knowledge of myself. And the better I understand myself in such completeness, the more it will be possible for me to make history, knowing that I too am made by history" (Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers* 52). He goes on to state the ways the space of the classroom, the play yard and the world at large must be seen as texts to be read by students and teachers. Placing students in co-operative learning spaces not only encourages them to learn by *doing*, but also allows them to gain better context for the historical construction of the world around them and begin to learn the specialist languages and specific English literacy skills to express that learning in a real-world context.

Additionally, this new curriculum and the cultural learning process would allow for opportunities to augment positivist evaluation methods with qualitative student self-evaluation options. Gee posits three core components of "active learning": "*experiencing*

the world in new ways, forming new *affiliations*, and *preparation* for future learning” (Gee *What Video Games* 24, emphasis author’s). The first, experiencing the world in new ways, would be incorporated into a theoretical new curriculum through experiential, outside-the-classroom learning as well as engagement with new technologies and mediums through media literacy. The second, forming new affiliations, would be incorporated through a heavy reliance on group work to create and discuss media texts, giving students an opportunity to exercise oral English skills persistently through their education. Affiliations, too, would be formed between students and “masters” of English and media text creation that they associate with through active learning and co-operative work placements. Affiliations also would be incorporated into new evaluation models that work to augment or replace the positivist evaluation present in the current curriculum. Students would peer- and self-evaluate in qualitative ways throughout their learning, evaluating themselves based on perceived readiness for future learning—the “preparation” aspect of Gee’s core components of active learning. Finally, Gee adds:

For learning to be critical as well as active, one additional feature is needed. The learner needs to learn not only how to understand and produce meanings in a particular semiotic domain but, in addition, needs to learn how to think about the domain at a ‘meta’ level as a complex system of interrelated parts. (Gee *What Video Games* 25)

Peer and self-evaluation through qualitative introspection and discussion groups would aid in thinking about English language and media literacy on this “meta” level. Another element of avoiding positivist evaluation models evident in the old curriculum is to recognize that “the literacy process, as cultural action for freedom, is an act of knowing in which the learning assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator” (Freire *Cultural Action* 20). In other words, evaluation would be conducted by student and teacher together in dialogue, discussing what learning is taking place in and outside the classroom and coming to agreement regarding fair grading practices. Of course, according to Freire, “to evaluate almost always implies readjusting and reprogramming. For this very reason, an evaluation should never be considered the final step of a particular practice” (Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers* 7). Using Freire’s model, student and teacher both would take responsibility during the evaluation process for using

the evaluation as a starting point from which to “readjust and reprogram” teaching and learning practices to better align with student and teacher needs and goals.

By eschewing the banking model and positivist evaluation models, attitudes would shift about what exactly English language proficiency and literacy are, moving away from the reification of literacy evident in the current curriculum. Gee suggests, “in schools, too often, skills are decontextualized from the system [...] and from each other” (*Situated Language* 64), such as with the Cloze procedure and other such curricular examples that treat English literacy as a set of acquirable, tangible skills to be named and performed on cue rather than learning that “allows learners to see how these basic skills fit into the game as a whole system and how different skills integrate with each other” (Gee *Situated Language* 64). By extending into new semiotic domains through this new media-literacy focused curriculum, students would be encouraged to make connections between different semiotic domains—images, sound, text—in their first languages as well as in English, while also linking semiotics to real-world phenomena. This way, a new curriculum would better support Gee’s model as students would take a “whole language” (Gee *Situated Language* 10) approach when learning English while, for example, adding subtitles and B-roll images to video interviews with relatives in first language and exploring family history through translating found footage and documents and sharing and discussing old images in the classroom to explore personal histories. By creating the word and the world and not merely receiving it, whether or not that creation exists primarily in English or if it includes other languages and semiotic practices, learners can “expand both their vocabulary and their capacity for expression by the development of their creative imagination” (Freire *Cultural Action* 31).

In this type of ideal classroom, dialogue would be a principal method of learning rather than, as in the current curriculum, secondary to processes of memorization and regurgitation of information. Instead of dialogue being largely teacher-driven through manipulated classroom experiences, the teacher would take on a role as a learner themselves, allowing students to guide the experiential learning process by sharing their situations and desires. The identity of the student as creator of multimedia texts would be respected first and foremost. As Gee suggests:

When students are learning a content area in school—such as some area of science—this domain could be seen as a special world of its own: the world of doing science in a certain way and acting with certain values. Students could be encouraged to take on identities as scientists of a certain sort, to see and think about themselves and their taken-for-granted everyday world in new ways. In this case, school would be functioning more like a good game than traditional schooling which stresses knowledge apart from action and identity. (Gee *Situated Language* 61)

In the case of learning English, the same rules apply: knowledge, action and identity can be tied together through persistent, open dialogue where students opinions, backgrounds, life experiences and dreams are valued as not just learning experiences and learning tools, but additionally as tools for teaching and creating dialogue with others. This type of learning can be a source of tension in the classroom because true dialogue is not necessarily concomitant with the teacher-driven, consensus-based, knowledge-as-tangible-facts forms of learning prevalent in the current curriculum. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, tension and discomfort can be a prime source of learning that counters the colonialist, social control based simplification of language and silencing of dissent that historically is present in Western curricula.

The placement of tension and discomfort at the centre of the learning process assuages the concern that, by emphasizing students' personal experiences and backgrounds as important to learning, teaching would become a "banal notion of facilitation" and student experience an "unproblematic vehicle for self-affirmation and self-consciousness" (Giroux "Border Pedagogy" 44). Although "educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of school and how they know it" (Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers* 72-73), it is still "important for teachers to help students find a language for critically examining the historically and socially constructed forms by which they live" (Giroux *Border Crossings* 141). This involves "tak[ing] seriously what all students say by engaging the implications of their discourse in broader historical and relational terms. Equally important is the need to provide safe

spaces for students to critically engage teachers [and] other students” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 33). Speaking more concretely in terms of classroom practices, a new ESL/ELD classroom that values tension, discomfort and true dialogue would provide opportunities for students to engage in debate and disagreement in diverse forms that appeal to diverse learning styles, language and literacy levels, and opinions. This might include holding debates and discussions over media works orally, but also allowing students to write questions and concerns anonymously in a classroom “ideas box”, as well as finding kinesthetic ways to express ideas, for example, standing in various areas of the classroom to indicate various levels of agreement or disagreement with certain statements. Teachers would be responsible for encouraging depth of discussion in students by asking students to occasionally take on positions they would not initially place themselves in, for example, asking a student to take on a role or character in a discussion that is contrary to their normal discourse, and providing students with a diversity of texts with different standpoints and styles of expression to encourage students to diversify their own opinions and modes of expression. Throughout the process, teachers should be cognizant that critical pedagogy “must be constructed as part of a struggle over assigned meanings, the viability of different voices, and particular forms of authority. It is this struggle that makes possible and hence can redefine the possibilities we see both in the conditions of our daily lives and in those conditions that are ‘not yet’” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 102).

The final aspect of teaching methodology that would be altered by this theoretical new curriculum is the simplification of language present in the old curriculum, which assumes students must work with simplified words and texts in order to fully understand and gain the supposedly tangible skills of English literacy with simple work first. As discussed previously, this simplification of language can be seen as part of the colonialist task of negating complex identities and silencing the complexity of thought, particularly of diasporic and oppressed communities with nuanced, complicated ideas that want expressing. In the multimedia, experiential ESL/ELD classroom complexity of thought and language would be encouraged throughout by melding English literacy with images, first language texts, and so on. The expectation to teach as well as learn and to be fully immersed in language-in-use in the ESL/ELD classroom could be perceived as

excessively challenging to the student tasked with learning English for the first time. It is for this reason that multimedia work is valuable to immerse students in semiotic domains they already can work in easily—images, music, and so on—at the same time as they are learning English. Gee writes “good games cycle through times where they operate at the outer edge of (but within) the player’s competence and times where they allow players to consolidate their skills [...] Games cycle through periods of pleasurable frustration and routine mastery” (Gee *Situated Language* 71). Focusing on multimedia literacy would allow “players” of the English-learning “game” to “consolidate their skills” by working with images or first language texts while also operating “at the outer edge of” their skills by creating original multimedia texts with prominent English-language elements. As the “player” progresses in the ESL/ELD classroom, more and more English writing, speaking and reading based initiatives would be incorporated but always with an eye to allowing students to express complexity of thought in various semiotic domains rather than simplistic reading and writing that only operates within a student’s presumed English skill level.

With these adjustments applied to *methods* of teaching, issues with *content* in the curriculum—the denial of historicity, the reification of culture and accompanying stereotypes, and the colonialist imposition of supposedly “Canadian” values—would also be adjusted. By incorporating media, experience and dialogue into the ESL/ELD learning process arguably places “content”—that is to say, the literal content of ESL/ELD learning which should be learning the language itself, its grammar, vocabulary and so on—as secondary to learning as a cultural process. This is a view of learning is supported by Gee who states

The problem with the content view is that an academic discipline (or any other semiotic domain, for that matter) is not primarily content, in the sense of facts and principles. It is primarily a lived and historically changing set of distinctive social practices. It is in these social practices that the ‘content’ is generated, debated and transformed via distinctive ways of thinking, talking, valuing, acting and, often, writing and reading. (Gee *What Video Games* 22)

I posit that it is useful for Gee’s view to be recognized as valid in order to bring history back into the cultural learning process of ESL/ELD education. Currently, learning is

treated as “primarily content, in the sense of facts and principles” as with the banking model and models of ESL/ELD teaching that place grammar and vocabulary and phonics, not message and dialogue and language-in-use, at the forefront of learning. The histories and the social practices that “generate, debate and transform” that content go unexamined and unquestioned. When the histories and social practices of a content area such as the English language are deep rooted in histories of racism and colonialism, learning that focuses solely on language as tangible skill sets and denies historical circumstances becomes racist and colonialist itself and thus has the potential to alienate the ESL/ELD learner. Experiential, media-based learning with consistent self-reflexivity on the part of the learner invites questioning of the real-world history behind semiotic systems as the learning is situated in the real world itself.

Moreover, the group work necessary in a curriculum that focuses on multimedia analysis, discussion and production would work to create what Gee terms “affinity spaces” in the classroom. An affinity space is a space, virtual or physical, where groups of people work towards common goals in a content area. In an affinity space, “newbies and masters and everyone else share common space” in working towards a common goal where “race, class, gender or disability” are secondary to common endeavor, though can be used “strategically” to advance the common endeavor (Gee *Situated Language* 85) if, for example, creating a media text about racism. In affinity spaces “dispersed” knowledge, that is to say, knowledge of areas not directly inside a content area, is considered important and valid, for example, in the case of ESL/ELD literacy, knowledge of first-language idioms or fables; in the case of multimedia work, knowledge of semiotics of a medium not currently being used as is “tacit” knowledge, or practicable knowledge that cannot necessarily be put into words, yet; for example, an ESL/ELD learner who has great technical skills with a camera but does not yet know the English names of camera parts is also “encouraged and honoured” (Gee *Situated Language* 86). Affinity spaces allow for “many different forms and routes to participation” and “lots of different routes to status”, creating spaces where “leadership is porous and leaders are resources” (Gee *Situated Language* 87). In the multimedia experiential classroom, group work would allow for many roles to be filled by learners at different levels and many areas in which students with different skills would have the opportunity to develop and

prove learning driven by and in dialogue with peers and “masters” of the language (teachers, more advanced peers, etc.).

Turning the classroom into an affinity space would have three major goals. First, creating a fun, cohesive, accepting community in the classroom that values students of diverse backgrounds and abilities would make the classroom a more compelling world, as, in the words of Gee “people learn new ways with words, in or out of school, only when they find the worlds to which these words apply compelling” (Gee *Situated Language* 3). Second, and perhaps more importantly, it would work to, over time, reintroduce historicity into the learning process by validating students’ personal histories and once again situating knowledge as a malleable social practice and not as a collection of deliverable skills. Finally, it would counter stereotypes and the previously discussed reification of culture by bringing students, and teachers, to get to know each other on more intimate levels rather than on the shallow planes of what is presumed to be culture by the current curriculum. Students need these opportunities “to form supportive communities around their interest in and use of digital media, just as the schools need to make media literacy and media production central to the learning process for young people” (Giroux *Stealing Innocence* 30). Group work and supportive communities for media production and expression construct “a hybrid pedagogical space where students do not need the colonizer’s permission to narrate their own identities, a space where individual identities find meaning in collective expression and solidarity with other cultural workers” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 226).

In his work, Gee references a study in which empirical evidence was provided to support the negative impact of cultural stereotyping: when highly educated students were exposed to negative stereotypes prior to taking a test they performed less well than students of the same education level who were not exposed to the negative stereotypes (Gee *Situated Language* 37). The reification of cultures and therefore stereotyping present in the current curriculum is additionally damaging for ESL/ELD students as there is “a feeling of opposition or hostility between the new identity they are being asked to assume” (in this case, the identity as empty mind passively waiting to receive the English language and Canadian culture) “and other identities they are already comfortable with”

(Gee *Situated Language* 94) (complex identities already developed in home countries). Group based work in an experiential, multimedia-based curriculum reinstates these diverse and complex identities by allowing students to excel in various areas and to reach back into personal histories for messages to relay through multimedia. Cultures and identities will be resituated by this curriculum as shifting, historically and socially mediated processes and no longer stable, monolithic things. Students will have the opportunity, in groups, to “creat[e] new forms of knowledge” through “classroom practices that provide students with the opportunity to work collectively and to develop needs and habits in which the social is felt and experienced as emancipatory rather than alienation,” and students will be encouraged to “reclaim the social as a precondition for collective engagement and struggle” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 224).

Subsequently, the colonialist imposition of values present in the current curriculum could begin to fade as a broader range of values, identities and skills are validated by a new curriculum. Gee writes of “Almon”, an ESL student who was stigmatized by the ESL curriculum as a “low-achieving student” and worried about how his “career” would be held back by his current schooling and lower level of English language development (Gee *Situated Language* 106). Almon starts a GeoCities page to discuss Japanese pop music and through multimedia interactions online begins to develop his English while interacting with peers in an affinity group from all over the world. This way “he gains his most important skills, experiences, and identities, including even school-based skills, outside of school (indeed school stigmatizes and deskills him)” (Gee *Situated Language* 107). In online affinity groups Almon “learns to shape-shift: to enact different social roles by designing representations of meaning and self through language and other symbol systems, e.g. music, graphics, emoticons” (Gee *Situated Language* 107). A curriculum that values this alternative kind of development could help to begin to dismantle the traditional, banking-model-based classroom values that restrict student achievement and self-discovery. Gee writes,

in the midst of our new high-tech global economy, people are learning in new ways for new purposes. One important way is via specially designed spaces (physical and virtual) constructed to resource people tied together, not primarily via shared culture, gender, race or class but by a shared interest or endeavor.

Schools are way behind on the construction of such spaces. Once again, popular culture is ahead here (Gee *Situated Language* 4)

The new affinity space of the multimedia experiential ESL/ELD classroom should provide room for students to explore common endeavors outside of the artificial categories assigned to them by the school systems thus dismantling the values imposed by this categorization.

Finally, alterations in *methodology* and *content* of learning in the ESL/ELD classroom should ideally lead to broader social, *systemic* changes for the ESL/ELD student. The systemic issues broadly defined in the previous chapter include the treating of the student as capitalist agent, the prioritizing of social control over social change, and the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty through curricula and systemic practices that deskill and stigmatize ESL/ELD students. These systemic problems are naturally the hardest to address via curricular changes, particularly when two changes could be seen as directly contradictory: to, in the short term, affect the cycle of poverty is to better prepare students for high-skill careers and therefore treat the student as career-oriented capitalist cogs. However, it is the conceit of this project that short-term career-based skills can be achieved through this new affinity space multimedia experiential classroom initiative while affecting long-term systemic changes as well.

Gee posits in *Situated Language and Learning* the many ways that working in multimedia affinity spaces better prepares students to take on complex, high-skills job prospects in the current economy. He writes,

Affinity spaces are common today in our global high-tech new capitalist world [...] Businesses in the new capitalist era of cross-functional, dispersed, networked teams and project-based work often seek to create affinity spaces to motivate, organize and resource their [staff]. (Gee *Situated Language* 87)

Students primed to work in these project-based affinity spaces and in shifting teams and networks that utilize multiple semiotic systems are better prepared to succeed in the “global high-tech new capitalist world” Gee writes of. He adds,

Much work in the new capitalism involves teams and collaboration, based on the idea that in a fast-changing environment, where knowledge goes out of date

rapidly and technological innovation is common, a team can behave more smartly than any individual in it by pooling and distributing knowledge. (Gee *Situated Language* 97)

In this fast-changing market of pooled, distributed knowledge and consistent technological innovation, there are skills beyond English language execution that affect a student's ability to succeed outside of school. A curriculum that plays to these skills is crucial to enforce the reality that ESL/ELD students are capable of succeeding in a diversity of fields outside of the classroom and that in fact, having the experience of shifting between languages, cultures and identities they are perhaps even better primed to exist as agents in a perpetually shifting globalized world. Media literacy focused teaching methodology that allows students room for self-expression, experiential learning, technological practice and consistent teamwork, as well as a change in the content-view of learning to a broader view of social and historical systems that create knowledge as we know it, ideally works to undo current policies and practices that assume the lowest of ESL/ELD students, stream them into low-skills sectors and ultimately socially stratify newcomers to Canada by class and race.

Longer-term systemic changes in a capitalist, social-control focused system in and outside the school are more difficult to qualify. However, I argue that there are ways these changes could be effected in the long term. After all, as Giroux states:

Curriculum [is] a historically specific narrative [and] what must be asked about these specific narratives is whether they enable or silence the differentiated human capacities that allow students to speak from their own experiences, locate themselves in history, and act so as to create liberatory social forms that expand the possibilities of democratic life. (Giroux *Border Crossings* 90)

I argue that all of the above possible changes in the Ontario curriculum lead to a classroom where more and more power is placed into the hands of the student as agent of their own learning and development, with that learning and development being consistently tied to real-world embodied experiences. As students are given more opportunities to express their own experiences, "the more the alienated culture is uncovered, the more the oppressive reality in which it originates is exposed" (Freire *Cultural Action* 9). In the ESL/ELD classroom, this approach results in a space where

historically oppressed groups—young people, racially stigmatized people, people of lower socioeconomic class, etc.—are given opportunities to investigate and critique the world around them as well as imagine alternative worlds, worlds where their skills and abilities are respected, their voices are heard, and they are politically empowered. To learn within real-world systems and to learn about those systems as social and historical constructs is necessarily to pull apart and critique those same systems, particularly when those systems are uncovered to often disadvantage the student doing the critiquing. Additionally, a multimedia-based curriculum invites students not only to discuss and critique current social systems but to actively produce new texts and new dreams for a world that could or should be rather than simply adapting to and regurgitating the world that supposedly “just is.” Additionally, finding new forms of expression through multimedia allows students to create “oppositional paradigms [that] provide new languages through which it becomes possible to deconstruct and challenge dominant relations of power and knowledge legitimated in traditional forms of discourse” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 21). Finally, as these students leave the ESL/ELD classroom they should be more prepared to participate in the world as empowered citizens who feel they are agentic, active producers of the cultures around them leading to a society that incorporates a broader diversity of voices in what constitutes the dominant culture—as Giroux writes, “those designated as Other must both reclaim and remake their histories, voices and visions as part of a wider struggle to change the material and social relations that deny radical pluralism as the basis of democratic political community” (Giroux *Border Crossings* 33), and it is this reclaiming and remaking that all of the proposals above aim to initiate.

Literacy is, according to Freire “a vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to reappropriate their history, culture, and language practices. It is, thus, a way to enable the oppressed to reclaim ‘those historical and existential experiences that are devalued in everyday life by the dominant culture in order to be both validate and critically understood.’” (Freire *Literacy* 157). Giroux expands on this, stating

Literacy is a discursive practice in which difference becomes crucial for understanding not simply how to read, write, or develop aural skills, but to also recognize that the identities of Others matter as part of a broader set of politics

and practices aimed at the reconstruction of democratic public life [...] Literacy means making one's self present as a part of a moral and political project that links the production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action. Literacy means more than breaking with the predefined. It also means understanding the details of everyday life through the larger categories of history, culture, and power (Giroux *Border Crossings* 244-245).

Critical media literacy learning, incorporating experiential learning, multimedia production, and the classroom as affinity space, should enable this reclamation of experience and build foundations for transformative social action, leading to a status quo where education is seen as not merely as absorption of dominant ideology but as the practice of world-building.

Chapter 4

4 Concluding Thoughts

I first started working with newcomer youth in the fall of 2010 with the YMCA of Western Ontario's YMAP (YMCA Mapping the Way for Newcomer Youth) program. It was a program that focused on leadership, integration and community engagement among newcomer youth. As the facilitator of the program, I led daily interactive two-hour sessions on broad topics such as teamwork, job readiness, multiculturalism, decision-making and goal-setting. My role also involved individually counseling the young people as they worked through their adaptation to Canadian life, navigated the school system, attempted to find jobs, applied for scholarships and prepared for future leadership opportunities and life outside the Ontario school system. Furthermore, many of these youth had passed through the refugee system and they also had to overcome the trauma of past experiences and reorient themselves as Canadians. During my years with YMAP, over two hundred youth passed through the program in some way or another, some for several weeks, others for several years.

Many of the sessions that I led with YMAP involved engagement with media, such as discussing sexism through the lens of popular music videos, using art projects to express questions of identity and race, or any number of other related sessions and assignments. The levels of engagement with popular culture and mass media among the demographic I was working with were extremely high, as was their ability to develop alternative readings of popular texts and to create their own media messages when prompted and given the tools—be those tools technical, like cameras for photography, or verbal, like vocabulary to critique video work—to do so. Significantly, the youth reported a lack of engagement with media texts at school, along with a lack of ideas (hegemonic, alternative, or otherwise) about the world.

Moreover, the treatment they reported receiving at school was often derisive. They talked about being condescended towards, they reported incredibly low expectations of them on the part of school teachers and administrators, and they reported

a lack of engaging learning methodologies and content running through their education on the whole. These youth were an incredibly literate bunch, able, despite varying English language levels, to critique and deconstruct media messages and the culture of the world around them and eager to learn the tools with which to do so in more complex and intellectually stimulating ways. However, school culture treated them as functionally illiterate, incapable of demonstrating creativity, unable to build on past experiences for advanced future learning and, as many of the youth specifically reported, incapable of becoming contributing citizens with fulsome careers in diverse areas. They were expected, instead, to passively receive English instruction until they were able to enter the workforce at an “appropriate level” based on their absorption of the English language.

Many of the youth I worked with were driven to “check out” of the system that they perceived as disempowering them, treating ESL/ELD as a wasted accumulation of classroom hours, losing interest in English literacy development on the whole and taking refuge in their first languages, and, in a few cases, dropping out of high school altogether. The implications of this on Canadian society, particularly as a larger and larger segment of our population is comprised of newcomers to Canada who are funneled through this system, are enormous. The current system has the potential to effectively stream out a large quotient of emerging adults from fulsome citizenship by turning them off English literacy and, as many do not continue first language literacy instruction upon coming to Canada, in many cases they are turned off higher learning literacy writ large, with all that turning off entails: in a world with less literacy learning, there is less intellectual engagement with ideas of all kinds, less interrogation of cultural norms, less diversity of dialogue (*especially* given the specific demographics being shut out in this way), less critique of the world around us, and less capacity for positive social change. The more literate, more diverse, more equitable world that the ESL/ELD classroom is an (often missed) opportunity to build is the inspiration for the work done throughout this thesis.

In the first chapter, I articulated a number of research questions: first, how are media and cultural studies important and relevant to the study of ESL/ELD curricula in Ontario? Second, does the current curriculum support and empower youth to develop critical literacy skills necessary to deconstruct the media texts within which the world

around them is saturated? Third, how does the curriculum work with or against students in preparing them to be active, agentic citizens participating in democratic and cultural life in Canada? Fourth and finally, what might a new ESL/ELD curriculum look like if guided by the above questions and focused on experiential media literacy learning?

I worked to answer these questions in three parts, beginning with a literature review tracing my theoretical underpinnings through a few main camps of scholarship. In the literature review, I examined previous work on newcomer youth acclimatization, acculturation and education, and identified the space left in this work for scholarship from a critical cultural studies perspective rather than an education, youth development or psychology background. I summarized some scholarship on the relevance of popular culture to material and social life, specifically in the case of young people and newcomers or racialized individuals, and thus outlined an argument for the relevance of adding a media and cultural studies perspective to this work that normally would be done by scholars of education or other fields. I turned to critical race theory to explore where mass media falls short in representing newcomers and including them in the production of texts, and why media literacy is relevant specifically to the newcomer population. I also examined current work in critical pedagogy theory focusing on how to improve education, better include students in their own learning and better include the concrete world and historical conditions around the students in the learning process.

My second chapter turned to core theorists Henry A. Giroux, Paulo Freire and Michael Apple to critique the current ESL/ELD curricular documents in Ontario using a discourse analysis framework taken from James Paul Gee's work. This chapter analyzed the ways the curricular documents focus on a banking model of education that treats students as "empty heads" passively waiting to be "filled" with instruction, or, alternately, like programmatic capitalist cogs. The chapter critiqued the ways the curricular documents decontextualize education from student experience and historical circumstances and thus furthers the projects of colonialism by simplifying and de-historicizing complex concepts, ideas and literacies while also de-skilling newcomer youth through this simplification. Essentially this chapter explored the ways the

curricular documents are more focused on social control than social possibility and do not in fact teach young people to be critical, agentic citizens.

Finally, the third chapter posited solutions to the problems posed in chapter two. These solutions lie in using critical media literacy, production and experiential learning with a heavy focus on dialogue and student agency to teach English, rather than the banking model endorsed by current curricular documents. Again turning to Gee, Freire and Giroux, chapter three worked through each problem posed in the second chapter, separating these problems into the categories of teaching methodology, teaching content and systemic issues, and positing solutions in each of these categories based in experiential media literacy learning, including assignment examples such as creating multimedia documentary work, examining Internet memes, working through everyday phenomena such as clothing or food through diverse multimedia exploration, and so on. Through theoretical explanations as well as specific assignment examples, this chapter explored ways of doing English education that work to situate things historically, give back agency to the student, and generally work against the banking model.

Throughout this document, I explored the relevancy of the media and cultural studies perspective to this work through theory that is invested in the importance of popular culture to student and teacher life. Elements of critical race theory and pedagogy theory touched upon throughout highlighted the importance of media production and representation to newcomer youth specifically, as they are often specifically marginalized by mass media texts. This document worked through the importance of adding the media and cultural studies perspective to discussions of the ESL/ELD curriculum by drawing attention to the gaps in this area left by the current curricular documents as well as using media and cultural studies work to fill these gaps.

Throughout my work it became apparent that current curricular documents do not necessarily support newcomer youth to develop the critical media literacy skills necessary to receive and decode mass media messaging in complex ways. The curriculum is more focused on imparting English literacy as a concrete set of phonemic, grammatical and vocabulary skills rather than defining literacy more holistically as a process of

meaning-making necessary to interact with complex ideas and realities of the material world. Perhaps in this way the curriculum works against students in becoming active, agentic citizens as they are treated instead as passive receptors of literacy skills. It is for this reason that the fourth and final research question, that of how to improve the current curriculum through media and cultural literacy work, became the most important question of this document, thoroughly explored in the third chapter.

One of challenges of this project, of course, is in the lack of in-depth research in the field—in the ESL/ELD classroom, with the students and teachers and creators of curriculum, in the actual world—to support the claims made. Therefore, my future doctoral work will focus on this exact kind of field research, using a participatory action research model to investigate how the ESL/ELD curriculum actually works in the lived classroom. Taking research and ethnographic theory and practice from Gloria Ladson-Billings, Steven Goodman and Clifford Geertz, my doctoral work would blend classroom observation, teacher and student individual interviews and teacher and student group interviews to bring together a thick description of how the curriculum plays out in lived experience and how teachers and students work with or against the curriculum to develop broader learning and literacies perhaps not currently endorsed by the curricular documents themselves. Future research would also investigate how the recommendations in this document bear out in practice rather than merely on the theoretical bases posited here. This future work would necessarily incorporate past work done on the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cazden et al.) which are in many ways consistent with the work done in chapter three. Finally, future research would ideally include interviews with the creators of curricular materials, attempting to understand the intents and backgrounds of the documents from the creators themselves. Having said that, the purpose of this project was first merely to examine the curriculum as the root of classroom practice and to engage in a theoretical critique of these curricular materials in order to form a basis for this future doctoral work.

Until then, this document stands as a testament to the fact that educators and curricularists can do better and ESL/ELD students deserve better when it comes to the documents that guide their educational experience in Ontario, especially when it comes to

language and literacy. As Freire writes, “Language is also culture. Language is the mediating force of knowledge, but it is also knowledge itself” (Freire *Literacy* 53). It is absolutely crucial that educators recognize this reality. Curriculum must work to teach language and culture more seriously and holistically to empower students to not only use and understand language and culture but to themselves become mediating forces of knowledge and culture through this use and understanding. Only then can Ontario society live up to the rich potential offered by the influx of newcomer youth in the province.

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