

**“English literature doesn’t only have to be about
English words”: multilingual immigrant and
refugee young adults interpret literature using
reader response and critical literacy**

by

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Abstract

This research documents multilingual immigrant and refugee young adults' engagement with literary works by Canadian authors who are immigrants, refugees and people of colour. I facilitated workshops in which eight participants interpreted poetry and short stories using reader response theory, critical literacy and theories engaging difference and power, e.g., coalition politics theory and critical race theory. Interweaving the participants' insights with the theoretical framework, I discuss the conditions that supported their meaningful engagement with literature. Key findings include 1) Reader response pedagogies that encourage intertextual analysis and collaborative meaning-making can create space for multiliteracies and experiential knowledge to be validated as legitimate interpretive practices; 2) Critical literacy and theories of difference are essential for creating "safe" spaces in which different interpretations may inform one another; 3) Immigrants and refugees mobilize their multiple languages and identities as critical lenses for challenging exclusionary discourses in English-medium educational settings and Canadian literary criticism.

Keywords: reader response theory; critical literacy; multilingualism; immigrant and refugee youth; Canadian literature

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Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Research

Before I would just think of English literature as being in English . . . but there are some parts of me and my identity that English just can't express. So I thought it was very liberating how she [Rahat Kurd (2011), author of the "Surplus Knowledge" suite of poems] didn't let that limit her, she just put it in a different language. And I think that speaks a lot to me because it's showing what's happening in the world. Which is the fact that we might all have this one language in Canada, which is English, but we can add to it. There's nothing that says that we can't add to it. English literature doesn't only have to be about English words. (Lila¹, Interview, July 17, 2012).

I chose this insight from Lila, one of the research participants, to begin this thesis because her words speak to the complexities, challenges and possibilities of engaging with literature in Canada, a society which is (and has always been) plural, multicultural and multilingual, yet which is also marked by the historical and contemporary hegemonic structures of a European settler-colonial society. Although she refers specifically to language, Lila's statement also evokes many other aspects of multivocality in Canadian literature, including the diverse cultural heritages, literary and oral traditions, and epistemologies of all the people who now live in this land. Her words raises questions about what kind of works are understood to make up the category "Canadian English literature", whose voices speak in our literary landscape, and to whom they speak, and who listens. These questions also have implications for what studying literature may mean for people who are immigrants and refugees in Canada. By claiming the power to shape English and read literature according to her own desires, experiences, and identity, Lila affirms that she and other multilingual people bring unique and enriching voices to Canadian society and its literature. This thesis represents my evolving efforts to learn what it means to create critical, equitable educational spaces for studying

¹ All the participants chose pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

multicultural Canadian literature with multilingual immigrant and refugee students. A close analysis of the participants' views and experiences forms the core of this research, yet their stories are always in dialogue with empirical and philosophical scholarship.

1.2. Development of the research focus and goal

I began my graduate studies with the intention of doing a research project that would provide a forum for immigrant and refugee youth to speak to the educational and literacy issues which they consider most significant in their lives. This intention was motivated by the personal and professional relationships that I developed over the course of the six years that I worked as a youth worker in a community organizing program with immigrant and refugee youth in the BC Lower Mainland. The program uses a social justice framework, and is based on a peer facilitation model, in which the youth pursue training and organize projects in order to address issues of importance in their lives and communities. In particular, this research was inspired by my relationship (first as a staff liaison, and later as a volunteer supporter) with the Youth Network², an independent group formed by immigrant and refugee youth wishing to continue their work as community organizers. The goals of the Youth Network are 1) to raise awareness among service providers and the general public about the interests, concerns and contributions of immigrant and refugee youth; and 2) to pursue peer-led organizing with immigrant and refugee communities in order to challenge systemic barriers. My connection to the Youth Network has been the impetus for some of my most important learning about working as an ally with immigrant and refugee communities.

One of the Youth Network's current undertakings is a peer-led research project which seeks to document immigrant and refugee youths' experiences in the local English Language Learning (ELL) system. This project has been a major influence on my research because I have been directly involved as a volunteer supporter of the project, and have gained insights into issues facing ELL students through my participation. I developed the central concern of this research in response to an issue that came up time and again, across the ELL project focus groups, the Youth Network members'

² A pseudonym

discussions, and my conversations with youth during my work in schools, community centres and the program workshops. The issue is this: based on their experiences in both ELL and mainstream settings, immigrant and refugee youth rarely found classrooms to be places in which “learning” meant engaging with the full range of their knowledge, experience and identities as multilingual people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Rather, these classrooms were places in which they felt pressure to assimilate into knowledge and ways of learning legitimized by dominant Anglo-Canadian cultural and linguistic educational discourses, or as one research participant said, to re-define themselves in order to fit into “the English world” (Sofia, Workshop, June 11, 2012). I connect these experiences with the critiques of scholars such as James (2010), Schick (2000), and Taylor (2006), who call into question the assumptions inherent in the Canadian liberal multicultural education paradigm. They argue that liberal multiculturalism accommodates difference only to the point that it does not disrupt the notion of white settler-colonial identity and culture as the ideal norm into which cultural and racial “others” should integrate. Consistently, the youth and young adults with whom I worked expressed their desire for educational opportunities that would allow them to pursue meaningful language and literacy development, while also critically analyzing issues of power and identity in their educational contexts and in their lives.

In response, I became interested in the possibilities of studying literature as a way of creating such a space for immigrant and refugee youth to challenge the exclusionary discourses they encountered, and to re-centre their identities, experiences and knowledge as educational resources. Sumara (1996) argues that engaging with literary fiction, including forms such as novels, short stories and poetry can create the kind of complex, self-reflective and emergent thinking which is necessary for the interpretation of human experience. Literary fictions, he writes, “give permission for the human subject to imagine herself or himself differently” (Sumara 1996, p. 41) This position has also been advanced by Bruner (1986), who claims that stories engage readers in the exploration of possibilities beyond their lived experiences by situating them in a “dual landscape” of both action and consciousness, providing a “map of possible roles and possible worlds in which action, thought and self-determination are permissible or desirable” (cited in Labercane, 2002, p. 103). In seeing literary interpretation as an important practice for critically engaging difference and power, I am

building on van der Wey's (2001, 2012) pedagogical use of Indigenous literature with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, in which the interpretation of such texts opens up possibilities for re-centring Indigenous perspectives, and disrupting dominant, oppressive narratives about the relationships and histories of Indigenous and settler people. I am also informed by hooks' (1991) work on "critical fictions", the stories that speak of, and to, the social, political and material experiences of people and groups who have been underrepresented in mainstream literary venues and other cultural spaces. She writes,

In the process of transformation, of moving from object to subject, I learned how to use knowledge in the service of liberation. Poetry and novels brought me closer to myself, helped me to overcome the estrangement that domination breeds between psyche and self. Reading, I could vicariously experience, dare to know and feel, without threat of repression, retaliation, silencing. My mind became a place of refuge, a sanctuary, a room I could enter with no fear of invasion. My mind became a site of resistance . . . And if the mind was a site of resistance, only the imagination could make it so. To imagine, then, was a way to begin the process of transforming reality. (pp. 54 - 55).

These perspectives oriented me toward literary interpretation as an important practice for engaging with the youths' expressed desire to make connections between language, literacy, self-determination and equity. This project became the primary goal of my research.

1.3. Research questions

This study builds on previous work by researchers and educators who have explored the interconnections between lived and literary experiences in the interpretive process by using reader response theory (Sumara, 1996, 2002; van der Wey, 2001, 2012). Originally articulated by Rosenblatt (1978), reader response theory locates the production of meaning within the relationship between the reader and the text, so that readers, texts, and contexts of reading collaborate in the continued co-creation and interpretation of knowledge. Significant research has been conducted using reader response theory and pedagogy in connection with issues of race, cultural difference and "multicultural" or "ethnic minority" students and texts (See for example Cai, 2008; Lewis,

2000; Möller and Allen, 2000). While scholars such as Kooy and Chiu (1998) and Mohammadzadeh (2009) have written theoretical reflections about using reader response theory in ELL or mainstream classrooms with multilingual students, I found no major qualitative studies focused on students' experiences of reader response pedagogies in such settings. There is also a need for more research exploring the confluence of reader response theory and critical literacy (See for example, Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000; van der Wey, 2012) for working with multilingual students. The goal of this research is to explore how reader response and critical literacy pedagogies may provide a space for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth's perspectives to inform questions about difference, multi-vocality, power and inequity in Canadian education and literature. I am also interested in how theory and pedagogy may in turn be informed through the research participants' experiences and insights. In response, I developed the following research questions:

- How may engaging with relevant literary genres using reader response methods impact opportunities for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to critically analyse important issues in their educational contexts and in their lives?
- What pedagogical conditions and approaches may facilitate immigrant and refugee youths' ability to mobilize their multiliteracies (e.g., their experiences, identities, communities, cultures, languages, histories, and geographies³) as they interpret literature?

These research questions shaped the design of this study, which involved a group of eight multilingual immigrant and refugee youth from the Youth Network in exploring their relationships with literary texts using reader-response methods and critical literacy. The research consisted of two stages: 1) a series of four Literary Engagement Workshops (hereafter referred to as "the workshops") over the course of which participants engaged with reader response and critical literacy methods to interpret three short literary texts, and 2) follow-up semi-structured group interviews in which participants reflected on their experiences in the workshops and the issues which emerged as significant for them. Through this research design, I hoped to work with the

³ This phrase is influenced by Sumara's (2002) assertion that literary engagements may be enriched when they are juxtaposed with historical, philosophical and theoretical intertextual resources "concerned with interpreting the relationships among of history, memory, culture, geography, language and identity" (p.73).

participants in creating a space in which they could explore issues of significance in their own lives. I also aim for this research to be a place for the participants' narratives to co-exist and inform one another, offering sometimes complementary, sometimes contrasting views on the research questions.

1.4. My positionality as the researcher

van Manen (1997) articulates an important position for phenomenological research: a critical part of such work is to maintain a recursive dialogue with oneself as both an agent and a subject in the research process. All aspects of this research, from its conception to the writing, are informed by my experiences, first as a youth worker and as a member of groups working for the rights of immigrants and refugees, and later as a student researcher. I align myself with LeCompte and Schesnul (2010) in recognizing that it is not only my experiences as an individual which inform my research, but also my positionality, that is, how I am implicated in the workings of power and privilege. Of particular relevance for this research are the positions of privilege that structure my relationship to the research participants: namely that I am white, born in Canada, and grew up using Canadian "standard" English. I will explore the layers of privilege embedded in these aspects of my identity in Chapter Two, when I discuss issues of power, race and language in Canada. It is essential to name my positionality, following feminist scholars such as Narayan (1988) and hooks (2000), who argue that locating oneself within always asymmetrical power relations (Young 1997) is essential to recognizing and resisting, rather than reproducing, the forms of oppression that can structure research relationships across difference, as well as recognizing the limitations of knowing across difference.

I come to this research with the experience of working across difference, as a white person committed to working with immigrant and refugee people toward a more equitable society. I believe that such a project implicates all people living in Canada, but that coalition work must recognize that experiences, stakes, investments and roles are different for white people than they are for immigrant and refugee people, or people of colour. During my time as a youth worker, I learned much of what has informed my approach to difference, power and privilege in this research from my colleagues in the

field and the youth with whom I worked. First as a youth worker and later as a graduate student, I also engaged with the work of feminists and critical race scholars who have pioneered much of the philosophical and empirical research about difference, power and privilege in social justice work, educational settings and other work concerned with transformative social change. Through these engagements, I have come to believe that working as a white person in movements or professions oriented to social justice implies a life-long process of learning. One of the most important responsibilities I have in this work, in coalition with immigrant and refugee people, is the duty to constantly examine the implications and impacts of my positionality.

For this research, it is important to name my positionality for three specific reasons: 1) To recognize that my presence as a white researcher will impact the dynamics of the research participants, who all identify as immigrants or refugees of colour; 2) So that I may clearly identify my lens as that of an outsider to many of the experiences of the participants, recognizing that this thesis, like all representations, is the lens of one particular person; and 3) To commit to constantly considering how my positionality may shape what I observe or fail to notice, what I highlight, or what I skip over. I name my positionality to call on myself to always interrogate where I am coming from, so as to not forget that knowing is always partial, always socially constructed (see, among others, Razack, 1993; Narayan, 1988).

1.5. Theoretical framework

This research is informed by a combination of theoretical lenses because I aim to explore both the individual and social dynamics of literary engagements. I draw on reader response theory and critical literacy to inform the design, facilitation and analysis of the research participants' literary engagements. Through these two lenses, I also ask what implications the participants' experiences and insights may have for other educational contexts involving multilingual immigrant and refugee youth. In order to develop a critical understanding of the research context and wider issues of migration, multiculturalism, language, literature and education in Canada, I am guided by scholarship from the fields of critical socio-linguistics and critical race theory. Within critical race theory, I particularly focus on the concept of intersectionality, and make

connections with the related theoretical approaches of coalition politics theory and critical multiculturalism. Broadly speaking, I view human experiences from a post-structuralist perspective, particularly as articulated by feminist and critical race scholars in their work on revealing and deconstructing power in processes of representation, and the social construction and performativity of identity, experiences and relationships. For me, their work is vital because although it seeks theoretical understanding of social processes, it is anchored in concern for the real lives of real people, and how we may live together in a more just society. In Chapter Two, the literature review, I elaborate on how these theoretical lenses connect to one another in the context of my research. In Chapter Three, the research methods, I review hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry and critical discourse analysis, the theories that inform my methods of analysis.

1.6. Overview of the thesis

This thesis is composed of seven chapters. In Chapter Two, I review the literature on the educational conditions and outcomes for multilingual immigrant and refugee students in Canada in order to contextualize the research. I examine this literature in light of critical race theory (including its articulation in theories of critical multiculturalism and critical socio-linguistics) so as to raise questions of how power, identity and social location impact educational opportunities for immigrant and refugee youth. I also argue that although literature foregrounding the experiences of immigrants, refugees and people of colour should be re-centred as an essential part of the Canadian literary canon and educational curricula, any initiatives for doing so must be informed by scholarship capable of critically engaging with the complexities of difference, multi-voice and power in Canadian literature as it reflects on and is informed by the broader society. For this research, I review critical literacy and reader response theory as the two pedagogical approaches that I believe can support such critical engagement. I describe the research methods and context in Chapter Three, examining the consequences of my decisions about the design of the workshops and interviews with respect to issues of equity and participatory practice. I provide an account of my procedure for data collection and analysis in the interest of being transparent about how I identified the core themes of the research, and how I chose to represent the participants' contributions.

Chapters Four, Five and Six tell the story of my interpretation of the data, and my analysis of the core themes that emerged. In Chapter Four, I focus on examples from the workshops and interviews to show how the participants moved from conceptualizing literary interpretation as an individual product to thinking of it as a community process and a collaborative meaning-making project. To do so, I draw on Sumara's elaboration of Bleich's (1978) concept of "interpretive community" (cited in Sumara 1996, p. 132) which argues that individual responses to literature both shape, and are shaped by a web of interpersonal and intertextual experiences, so that these relationships themselves become an important site for creating meaning. I argue that for the participants, the process of coming together in an interpretive community included such factors as attending to multiple perspectives, either through intertextual analysis or group discussion, recognizing the value of sharing in-progress interpretations, and engaging the literature through lenses drawing on their languages, cultures and lived experiences. I also argue that coming to see interpretation as an ongoing process in which different people have unique insights because of their different perspectives helped the participants to see themselves as contributors of important linguistic, cultural and political funds of knowledge, and to resist flawed and discriminatory discourses which cast multiple languages and identities as disruptions to the homogeneity of English-medium educational settings.

Chapter Five focuses on a core theme to emerge from the data, which was how the participants and I grappled with contextualizing our personal interpretations of the literary works through the exploration of the political, social and historical construction of our perspectives. Through examining the issues of positionality, insider/outsider readings and the limits of knowing, I explore the possibilities and the challenges we faced in naming and engaging with the ideologies informing our perspectives. I argue that this process was a powerful way to find a common space in which different individual interpretations could overlap, challenge and even change one another, and that such a space for multiple voices is essential when the goal is to challenge dominant, exclusionary discourses in Canadian education or literary criticism. This chapter also explores how the participants drew on critical literacy to blur the boundaries between interrogating meaning in the text and in their own lives, and in doing so, transformed the workshops into a powerful space for engaging with identity issues.

In Chapter Six, I recognize that the experiences identified by the participants as intellectually and emotionally productive in the research (as discussed in the two preceding chapters) cannot be assumed to occur naturally in all pedagogical settings. It is not enough for educators or researchers to simply desire to create an inclusive and critical interpretive community. I explore this strong theme in the participants' feedback, arguing that the conditions for supporting meaningful literary engagements should not be uncritically assumed, but rather understood as dependent upon pedagogical approaches capable of recognizing, deconstructing and contesting inequity, both in educational settings and in the broader society. This chapter outlines the participants' feedback about what conditions, actions and standpoints are necessary for supporting meaningful literary engagements for themselves and for other multilingual immigrant and refugee youth.

In Chapter Seven, I summarize the core line of argumentation in the research, looking at how the main themes developed in relation to the research questions, and also at where unexpected results emerged. I discuss the significance that this particular study, which prioritized the in-depth exploration and interpretation of the experiences of eight participants, may have for the interests of other multilingual immigrant and refugee students. I examine the implications for theory, research and practice in the fields of English Language Learning, and mainstream educational contexts for English or literature teaching. I address the scope and limitations of this study, as well possibilities for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I review and critique the literature from the key five fields which have informed my approach to this research. I begin with an overview of the recent scholarship about the experiences and educational outcomes of multilingual immigrant and refugee students, with a particular focus on Canada and British Columbia. Next, drawing on theory from critical sociolinguistics and critical race theory (including the related lens of critical multiculturalism), I argue that language and education in Canada must be theorized in relation to broader social, political and economic processes. I show how these critical lenses can be used to analyse power and inequality in institutional discourses, and to examine how multilingual people's experiences, identities and opportunities for learning are impacted. Because this research uses literature by Canadian authors who identify as immigrants, refugees and people of colour, I include a discussion of issues of difference and power in Canadian literature. I review the literature on critical literacy and reader response theory in order to discuss how these two bodies of scholarship shaped the pedagogical framework I used for the research process. I also examine some of the theoretical debates within each field, and the connections I see between the two. Finally, I emphasize the key role that theories engaging difference, power and identity have played in shaping my understanding of what it means to do research with immigrant and refugee youth. I focus on critical race theory, the concept of intersectionality and coalition politics theory.

2.2. Migration, multiculturalism, language and education in Canada

The rapid growth in the number of students whose primary languages are not English is a significant change that has impacted Canadian English-medium education

over the past three decades. These changes in student populations reflect the concurrent patterns of immigration in Canada, whereby immigrants⁴ are coming from increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and immigration plays a significant role in shaping the country's population growth and social landscape (Statistics Canada, 2006). In British Columbia's lower mainland, the context of my research, these changes have had particular impact because, like many other urban areas, it is home to a high concentration of recent immigrants⁵ whose primary languages are other than English (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999; 2009).

An in-depth discussion of the many aspects of multilingualism in education and English Language Learning (ELL)⁶ is beyond the scope of this research. However, I provide an overview of the existing research I have found significant in orienting me to the need to focus on enhanced literacy opportunities for multilingual youth. There is a growing body of Canadian research showing that the educational repertoires and experiences of multilingual students in both ELL and mainstream education contexts are unique, and that their needs are not being met (see, for example, (Early & Marshall, 2008; Gaztambide-Fernández, Guerrero, & (w/ West-Burn, Larrabure, Velasquez, Granados-Ceja, Guerrero), 2011; Gunderson, 2007, 2008; Marshall, 2010; Pirbhai-Illich, 2005; Toohey & Derwing, 2006). My review of the literature found that most research in the field focuses on the K-12 public school system, while fewer scholarly resources exist for examining post-secondary contexts in BC. Studies based in particular post-secondary settings provide important insights (see, for example, Marshall, 2010), but because post-secondary institutions are not subject to centralized oversight as are public schools, there are fewer sources of comparative or comprehensive research.

⁴ I will examine the political and theoretical implications of terminology I use (immigrant, multilingual, English Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learning (ELL)) in greater depth later in this literature review.

⁵ Cultural and linguistic diversity have longstanding historical significance for education in British Columbia's Lower Mainland and it is important to recognize that the patterns and experiences of contemporary migration are part of the broader, complex histories of this region, including those of Indigenous peoples whose histories and claims to the land pre-date all others, of colonial settlement and oppression, and of previous generations of migrants. For an in-depth discussion of these histories and contemporary issues, see Stanley 2009.

⁶ English Language Learning (ELL) is the current terminology used by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. See http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2009-2013/2011EDUC0094-001523.htm.

Nevertheless, the research from public schools provides the opportunity to ask questions which can have broad significance at all levels of education, and connections can be made through the trajectories of students who continue into post-secondary studies, or face barriers to doing so.

Understanding the educational outcomes of multilingual students is complex and should be approached with a critical eye to the data sources, research designs and their social contexts. Quantitative data which portrays ELL students as a homogenous group can be misleading and should be disaggregated to reveal and question underlying relationships. For example, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has reported that in the late 1990s and early 2000s ELL students graduated at rates higher than students whose first language is English (cited in Toohey & Derwing, 2006). Yet local studies such as Pirbhai-Illich's (2005), Toohey and Derwing's (2006) and Gunderson's (2007) provide more nuanced views by investigating connections between ELL students' socio-economic and immigration status and their outcomes in secondary schools in Vancouver. Toohey and Derwing argue that students who entered Canada through the family and refugee classes and students in low-income catchment areas showed lower levels of graduation and enrollment in provincially examinable courses, which are gatekeepers to post-secondary education.

Gunderson (2007) found that when data from the Vancouver School Board about ELL students' academic achievements, high-school completion rates, and registration in provincially examinable courses was disaggregated, outcomes varied across linguistic groups, with first-language Mandarin and Cantonese speakers showing outcomes equivalent to or higher than first-language English speakers, while first-language speakers of Spanish, Tagalog and Punjabi faced the most adverse outcomes. He speculates that family income, including the ability to employ multiple tutors, and other socio-economic factors may impact different outcomes across and within linguistic groups, but makes no firm claims because his methods were not structured to examine such relationships. Further research is needed to investigate the factors influencing outcomes for multilingual students in Vancouver, and to examine other regions where student populations are different. Significantly, both Gunderson's (2007) and Toohey and Derwing's (2006) studies found that overall, ELL students avoided provincially examinable text and language-heavy courses, and when they did take such courses,

they showed higher failure rates, or they scored lower in those areas than in other subjects. Pirbhai-Illich (2005) documented a sustained drop in ELL students' grades in English and Social Studies throughout grades 8 – 12, especially after they left ELL support classes in grade 10. Such research suggests that multilingual students face multiple and complex barriers to achievement within existing educational systems, particularly in subjects requiring higher literacy competencies in English.

Gunderson (2008) reports that in two studies decades apart (1985 and 2007), he found that beliefs about multilingual students' learning potential and contributions to the learning environment were persistently framed by deficit narratives among secondary school teachers in British Columbia. Preece and Martin (2010) provide an overview of recent research demonstrating that multilingual students also face marginalization in English-medium post-secondary contexts, including Marshall's (2010) research, which documents multilingual students' experiences of deficit constructions of their identities in a BC post-secondary context. He writes, "despite bringing a diverse and rich range of languages and cultures to the university, multilingual students are regularly confronted with a deficit 'remedial ESL' identity which positions their presence in the university as a problem to be fixed rather than an asset to be welcomed" (p. 41). Duff's (2001) in-depth study of two mainstream secondary humanities classrooms in Vancouver, found that the teachers made few adjustments in their teaching for multilingual students. These students were not supported to develop the specific linguistic and cultural knowledge required to interpret English texts, and teachers often spoke as if such contextual information should be common knowledge. Further, multilingual students' own cultural and academic knowledge was rarely included in the curriculum. Duff also observed that in classroom activities, the first-language English students dominated, and although the multilingual students had contributions to make, the pace of classroom discussion was too fast for them to do so. A major concern to emerge from these studies is that a lack of understanding regarding multilingual students' complex educational repertoires and experiences persists at various levels of education in Canada.

Marshall's (2010) study aims to value multilingual students' own accounts of their experiences learning and using English. In his review of the literature, he highlights the discrepancy between the large pool of scholarly research focused on the concerns of institutions, teachers and researchers, such as curriculum, pedagogical strategies,

assessment, and linguistic theory, and the much smaller pool of research which elicits the perspectives of multilingual students about their own educational experiences or the educational issues they find significant. Despite its smaller size, the body of research concerned with developing a holistic understanding of multilingual students' educational experiences and concerns provides important insight into gaps in theory and practice in the field. Research by Smythe and Toohey (2009), Cummins (2000) and Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, (1992) has shown that schools and teachers must enhance their knowledge of the lives of their students beyond the classroom if they are to build upon students' 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al.) in order to develop pedagogy that is more responsive to the realities of the diverse communities they are mandated to serve. Similarly, Han (2011a) argues that researchers must look beyond school settings to understand how immigrants learn language and lead multilingual lives in a variety of alternative spaces. She argues that such spaces can offer important insight into policies, practices and conditions which are conducive to furthering social inclusion and multilingual development. The research outlined above informed my decision to focus my study on creating an informal, community-based space for immigrant and refugee youth to explore their relationship with literature, and to speak to the educational and literacy issues which they consider most significant in their lives.

Recent research reported by Gaztambide-Fernández and Guerrero (2011) provides an important example of the possibilities opened up by holistic, participatory. A 2008 report by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) showed that test scores for Latino/a students were consistently among the lowest across core school subjects and standardized literacy assessments. The TDSB also reported that roughly 40 percent of Latino/a students were not completing their secondary school graduation requirements (Gaztambide-Fernández & Guerrero 2011, p.1). In response to these troubling findings, collaborative meetings between leaders from the Latino/a community, educators, researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's Centre for Urban Schooling and the TDSB led to the creation of "Proyecto Latin@". This is a long-term research project which seeks to better understand the experiences of Latino/a students within the TDSB by engaging students themselves in identifying the ways in which schools can engage them in their own educational process and support their success. The study's preliminary findings gather the perspectives of sixty students who spoke to a

range of complex and interrelated issues from which the researchers identified four overarching themes: navigating access to dominant forms of English and education within students' own cultural and community practices, the impacts of social class and racism on students' opportunities and experiences of marginalization, and the important impact of both supportive and non-supportive adult relationships. The project's action research phase is currently in the process of building on early findings, as reported on the website created by youth participants:

Now in 2012 comes the third phase of Proyecto Latin@ where we focus on ACTION always using YPAR methods (Youth Participatory Action Research). This third phase is focused on making a change, renewing the minds of Latinos, society and the education system. Making web pages, invisible theater and documentaries. Putting in our effort, time and passion. (Proyecto Latin@, 2012)

Another study from which I have drawn inspiration is Smythe and Toohey's (2009) collaborative project in which researchers, teachers and Grade 4–5 ELL students conducted research about the local Canadian Punjabi-Sikh community's funds of knowledge in order to make the classroom more responsive to the sociohistorical practices in which the students participate. Finally, the Youth Network's community research project called "the ELL (English Language Learner) Project" has been a major influence on my research because I have been directly involved as a volunteer supporter of the project, and have gained insights into local issues facing ELL students through my participation. The ELL Project's goal is to engage and support ELL students with their adaptation process by providing a space for local youths' accounts of the realities they face in ELL classes and how these influence the rest of their academic and social lives (Youth Network, personal communication November 11, 2012). Although at the time of my research the findings of the Proyecto Latin@ project are preliminary, and the Youth Network's ELL project is still in progress, future findings from these initiatives may prove important for contextualizing research focused on the concerns of institutions, teachers and researchers by highlighting students' lived experiences.

I have drawn on the above scholarship about multiculturalism, language and education in Canada to contextualize my own experiential perspectives which I explored in Chapter One, and which originally prompted my research concerns. Together, they

point to the need for further research concerned with the educational experiences and outcomes of multilingual immigrant and refugee students in BC. I now move to investigating how language and education in Canada may be contextualized within broader social, political and economic processes. Lippi-Green (1997), Norton (1997), and Han (2009, 2011b) have shown that power relations such as race, gender, immigration status and class continue to structure multilingual people's experiences, identities and opportunities for learning. These scholars argue that research and pedagogy in English language and literacy education must include analysis of the power relations negotiated by learners, teachers and other actors. Drawing on their work, I argue that such an analysis can engage with why multilingual students' experiences are often marginalized or treated as problematic by dominant discourses in Canadian education. In the next part of this section, I explore the relevance of critical race theory for connecting discourses about language and education with broader patterns of power and inequality. My discussion includes scholarship drawing on critical race theory, particularly critical multiculturalism and critical sociolinguistics.

Critical race theory can be described as a movement that includes activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power. The movement is considered to have originated in the United States in the mid-1970s, with major contributors including legal scholars and activists, Black feminists and feminists of colour, and the American civil rights and radical traditions. It also develops concepts articulated by European philosophers and theorists of the post-structuralist movement (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, pp. 4 - 5). Most contemporary articulations of critical race theory conceptualize power and identity from a post-structural or post-essentialist perspective, as exemplified by Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) concept of intersectionality, meaning that race and racism are seen to intersect with other axes of power including gender, class, sexuality and ability. Han (2011b) summarizes Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) discussion of the major tenets of critical race theory:

- (1) that racism is ordinary and ingrained in the everyday experiences of most of the people of colour in the society;
- (2) that racism benefits White elites materially and psychically and working class psychically, which means there is little incentive for the majority group to eradicate racism;
- (3) that 'races are categories society invents, manipulates and retires

when convenient'; (4) that the dominant society racialises different minority groups in different ways at different times in response to the majority group's shifting needs, or the 'differential racialisation' theme; (5) recognising the intersectionality of different social categories and the importance of anti-essentialism to value diversity within and across minority groups; and (6) the recognition that various marginalised groups share a unique voice of colour (see also Ladson-Billings 1999; Lawrence et al. 1993 for slightly different but largely similar articulations). (p. 65)

Critical race theory, including the concept of intersectionality, has been elaborated in other fields. Major areas of study and activism are being undertaken by communities in North America including Latina/o, Indigenous, Asian, Middle Eastern and South Asian, African, Caribbean, immigrants and refugees and Queer-crit. Such work is developing not only in the United States, but in many other countries and regions (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, pp. 4 - 5). For example, in the Canadian context from the critical multiculturalism perspective, James (2010) draws on critical race theory to critique liberal discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism with respect to their erasure of continuing structural racism in Canadian society and education. Adopting a critical socio-linguistic approach, Han (2011b) uses critical race theory, emphasizing the concept of intersectionality, to engage with the experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada with respect to racism, social exclusion, language and religious affiliation. I draw on these and other developments in critical race theory in order to engage with critical issues in doing research with multilingual immigrant and refugee participants.

In order to better understand the educational experiences and contexts of multilingual immigrant and refugee youth, I need to unpack the layers of assumptions (my own included) which structure notions of multicultural education and English⁷ language learning in Canada. James (2010) documents the increasing desire to value "diversity" by mainstream discourses about education in Canada, for example in government policy, curricula and teacher education programs. He argues that although these mainstream discourses position diversity as a fundamental and enriching

⁷ I focus on policies and discourses of English as an official national language in Canada. Although similar issues are also associated with the relationship between French and non-official national languages (such as Aboriginal languages or the languages of immigrant communities), I do not deal with them, because 1) my research context is Western Canada, in which English is dominant, and 2) the specific socio-historical context of French in Canada requires a separate investigation.

component of the educational experience, the majority do not engage with critical questions of power, privilege and inequity. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2009) argue that this desire to celebrate diversity, and yet to simultaneously deny that relations across race, class, gender and other social locations are structured by systemic power and oppression, is a feature of “liberal” and “pluralist”⁸ diversity discourses (p. 4).

In deconstructing the maintenance of such narratives, Steinberg and Kincheloe (2009) ask questions such as, “What are the forces that shaped this agenda? Who was involved in its creation? To whom is it addressed? Who does it serve?” (p. 3). In response, I draw on Carr and Lund’s (2009) argument that because public education in Canada has been, and continues to be, shaped by dominant social interests, such as the normalization of whiteness and middle-class values, any critical analysis must interrogate their role in shaping how diversity and multiculturalism are conceptualized and practiced. bell hooks’ (1990) examination of the roles of racism and whiteness in pluralist multiculturalism provides an essential critical framework for such a project. hooks argues that without critically examining discourses of white supremacy, there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the “other”. hooks’ work has been taken up by many scholars using critical race theory (e.g., James 2010; Nieto 2000, Richardson & Villenas 2000; Schick 2000; Steinberg & Kincheloe 2009; Taylor 2000) who critique the assimilationist discourses underlying pluralist multiculturalism, which position whiteness as a privileged yet invisible norm against which the multicultural “other” is measured, thereby deracializing whiteness and racializing non-whiteness. Such critical perspectives lay bare the flaws inherent in the claims of equality across difference and ideological neutrality common in pluralist diversity discourses. Critical race theory thus becomes an essential lens for analysing language, race and “culture” in Canadian education. I will draw on critical race theory, and the elaborations of critical

⁸ Steinberg and Kincheloe (2009) describe “pluralist” diversity discourses as overlapping and extending the “liberal” position. Liberal conceptions focus on the natural sameness of individuals and explain inequality as a lack of individual opportunity which can be remedied by assimilating the knowledge and behaviors of “success”. The pluralist position maintains many of the liberal assumptions, but celebrates differences as apolitical, positive characteristics which can be used to achieve “success” in an increasingly globalized economy, and which somehow make a society “richer” by their mere existence. However, the two discourses overlap in articulating “success” only within the standards of dominant groups (such as the white middle/upper class) which are universalized and normalized, and in avoiding analyzing issues of power and oppression across difference. Following Steinberg and Kincheloe, I will use the term pluralist to refer to the current mainstream discourses about diversity in Canadian education.

multiculturalism outlined above in my analysis of the research participants' narratives about their educational experiences. I will also circle back to these frameworks in an effort to maintain a critical reflective practice for deconstructing the discourses of multiculturalism and diversity that I, as the researcher, use in analysing and representing the data.

Any critical analysis of English language learning (ELL or ESL) in Canada must be connected to the framework of critical race theory and critical multiculturalism that I discuss above. This is an important project of critical sociolinguistics, which seeks to theorize the ways in which language is imbedded and involved in social practices. For critical sociolinguists, language is not an autonomous object, nor is linguistics an autonomous discipline. Further, situating linguistic forms or practices in a social context always implies a critical potential (Block, 2003). Among the major areas of inquiry in the field is the study of social inequalities produced or supported by particular linguistic forms, processes, and practices (Han, 2009). Han (2009) builds on Bourdieu's (1977) discussion of language and symbolic capital to argue for a re-definition of the notion of 'correct' language, in favor of the terms "legitimized language" and "legitimized speaking position", which she claims more accurately reflect how the language associated with power in a society becomes uncritically accepted as "correct". In fact, when we speak of "Standard English", or any "standard" language, we are not referring to any essential quality of language, but actually to a hierarchy of socially constructed values about language, and the institutions which sustain them (Block, 2003). In my view, Han's arguments are important in framing issues of power and language within the broader context of multiculturalism in Canada. Scholars including, but not limited to Block (2003), Lin and Luke (2006), Luke (1997), Pennycook (2001) and Shin (2006) have established that English language and literacy education is implicated in historical and contemporary systems of imperialism, colonialism and globalism. Haque (2005) argues that in Canada, issues of language are central to official policies of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework", which amounts to legitimizing the maintenance of a white settler hegemony by excluding Aboriginal languages and those of non-English or non-French speaking immigrant peoples from holding official significance for national identity. These policies purport to promote multiculturalism, and yet do not problematize the assumed necessity of linguistic assimilation for non-English speaking communities. The

hegemonic discourses that constitute the official language policies are also embedded in broader civic discourses of Canadian identity (James 2010; Taylor 2006).

Liberal and pluralist multicultural visions of English language learning and literacy in Canada can be connected to still-influential imperialist discourses of modernity, in which “to be modern is not just a state of being but a position in Eurocentric history, a powerful position of superior knowledge and humanity” (Bhabba, 1994, cited in Taylor 2006, p. 103). As such, English is positioned as the natural language of civic, economic and social participation in Canada, a discourse which judges failure to embody the primacy of English as irrational, backward, and even threatening to social cohesion (Taylor, 2006). Scholars such as Canagarajah 2004, Cook 1999, Han 2009, Kubota & Lin 2006, Lippi-Green 1997, and Liu 1999 have exposed hierarchies of legitimacy and authenticity which position multilingual people and users of non-standard English or “World Englishes” (Canagarajah 2004) as second-order speakers who will never have complete access to some form of original, uncorrupted English. Such hierarchies have been discredited by the aforementioned scholars as constructions of imperial and colonial world views, in which forms of English used by dominant groups are inscribed as “correct” by practices of domination, then cleansed of their social construction and presented as naturally superior and uncorrupted. Further, Canagarajah (2004) and Kubota and Lin (2006) connect hierarchies of English with racism, demonstrating how such discourses also equate the ideal native-speaker of English with whiteness, essentializing language as a characteristic of race. Language and race are also connected to broader processes of inscribing the primacy of Eurocentric discourses of progress and civilization. Non-European epistemologies, ways of organizing social life, understanding natural phenomena, or aesthetic traditions continue to be essential to many peoples, yet Eurocentric ways of knowing have not engaged with them as equal and complementary, but rather as inferior and thus in need of being translated into the terms of reference of universalized European disciplines (Canagarajah, 2004; Smith, 1999).

Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1994), Delpit (1995), Cummins (2000), Nilles, Alvarez and Rios (2006) and Taylor (2006) articulate a vision of critical multiculturalism and multilingualism in education that not only challenges existing inequitable social structures, but also proposes transformative action whereby all students’ learning can be

enriched by breaking down deficit conceptions of non-dominant language identities. I draw on critical multiculturalism because it is capable of engaging with the complexities of power and legitimacy in multicultural, multilingual contexts. This is vital for addressing my research question about the ways in which immigrant and refugee youths' intersecting identities, and multiple languages, knowledges and experiences may be explored as pedagogically relevant for literary engagement and interpretation. I find Delpit's position particularly inspiring: she calls for educators to balance a complexity of roles: supporting learning that draws on students' knowledge and understanding of the world; developing students' abilities to critique the way the culture of power affects their lives and the larger society; and explicitly teaching the codes of power so that students may challenge gate-keeping practices. Finally, Ladson-Billings provides an important caution for multicultural education when she argues that notions of achievement or success must not be normalized as synonymous with assimilation into the norms of the dominant culture, but must rather be based on supporting students' identities and knowledge as socially responsible members of their own communities and the broader society.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that "among the most radical, surest and best hidden censorships are those which exclude certain individuals from communication (e.g. by not inviting them to the places where people speak with authority, or putting them in places without speech" (p. 649). I argue that opportunities for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to critically analyse issues of importance in their educational contexts and in their lives are vital for working toward equity in education. My interest in opening up a space for critical inquiry through literature study is motivated by Lippi-Green's (1997) assertion that language is an important site for enacting resistant subjectivity and agency. I also draw inspiration from Han's (2011a) call for educators to adopt "a materialist and processual view of multilingualism" (p. 385) as a framework for pedagogy which takes into account the role of power in shaping linguistic production and circulation and which values the contribution of "minority" languages and cultural knowledge. The analysis above, as applied to my own experiences as a youth worker, has informed my decision to pursue a research project that seeks to engage with multiple languages, experiences, and forms of knowledge as a critical counter-narrative to Eurocentric practices of literature study. Any such engagement calls for ongoing critical reflexive

work on my part, particularly given the limits of my own world-view and capacity to understand the realities of the research participants, with whom I connect across asymmetries of power (Young, 1997).

2.3. Issues of terminology

Following hooks (2000), who signals that naming is always a political act, whether it is an act of oppression or resistance, I recognize that the practices of naming and categorizing I use in my research are inseparable from the social and political dynamics of the contexts which I attempt to analyse. Therefore, I must be critical of the very terminology I employ, by recognizing how it has been shaped, and what connotations it carries.

The terms associated with immigration (e.g., immigrant, refugee, New Canadian, and new immigrant) in Canada need to be deconstructed and linked to historical and contemporary conceptions of who can be “Canadian.” Taylor (2006) provides the following critique:

The figure of ‘New Canadians’ should be contextualized within hegemonic mythologies of ‘founding nations’ and ‘Heritage’ discourses of multiculturalism (Walcott, 1995) which represent Canada as an immigrant meritocracy based on the ‘original’ prototype of 17th and 18th Century European settlers arriving at the bottom and earning their way to the top. Within this national chronology, racialized ‘multicultural’ Canadians are positioned as guests and “newcomers” invited to emulate hard-working European settler/immigrants, while bilingual, white settler ‘Canadian culture’ is prioritized as the foundational authority and generous host in this nation. (p. 107).

It is important to link Taylor’s critique of the ‘founding nations’ discourse to the work of Aboriginal scholars in Canada who have articulated comprehensive critiques of settler hegemonic mythologies, showing that Canadian settler society is inextricably tied to the history of the subjugation of Aboriginal peoples, while at the same time basing its claims to legitimacy on erasing this history (Dion, 2007). Contemporary experiences of immigration must be understood within the context of Canada’s colonial legacy, and thus are in relation to Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary realities. Because the

research participants use the terms “immigrant” and “refugee” to identify themselves, these are the primary terms that I use in this research. However, even as I use them, I remain conscious of their problematic history.

Further, Han (2011a) makes an important distinction between the bureaucratic meaning of “immigrant” and the connotations of the folk version of the term. In the Canadian bureaucratic system, “immigrant” is a transitional category that refers to “those who arrive under certain immigration selection categories and are entitled to apply for citizenship after three years of consecutive residence” (p.384). I follow Han in using the folk version of the term, which “refers to individuals and groups who are minoritized on the basis of race, class, occupation, English proficiency and religion, among other factors” (p.384) in order to acknowledge the concrete impacts that this social category has in people’s lives.

The BC Ministry of Education defines English language learners (ELLs) as “those whose primary language, or languages, of the home are other than English” or those who “speak variations of English that differ significantly from the English used in the broader Canadian society and in school” and thus “require additional services in order to develop their individual potential within British Columbia’s school system” (2009, p.9). ELLs, “English Language Learning” (ELL) and “English as a Second Language” (ESL), are the most prevalent current terms in the BC public education system and post-secondary institutions, yet these are all contested terms. Norton (1997) argues that ESL is an inaccurate term, as many learners speak more than two languages. She suggests using the term “English as an Additional Language” (EAL), which has been coined in response to such critiques. Similarly, other terms such as “English Language Learner” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011) require examination for issues of language agency (Norton 1997) and native speaker bias (Cook 1999), prompting such questions as: when, and in what contexts, does a multilingual person cease to be a “language learner”? Marshall (2010) further exposes the complexity of describing multilingual people’s identities by examining instances of growing up speaking more than one language simultaneously, code-switching, and multiple forms of English among research participants in his study. He argues that people’s language repertoires can’t be reduced to “first language” and “second language”, and that although such categories

may be convenient for institutional purposes, it is important that they continue to be deconstructed.

Sociolinguists such as Block (2003) contend that language terminology is both constructed by, and constructs how language is theorized. He argues that a major problem with Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is that the concept of language has not been problematized, that is “notions of L1 and L2 [first language and second language, respectively] are essentialized and there is not adequate attention to individuals having any identity other than that of learner or non-native speaker” (p. 43). At the heart of the contested nature of terminology for multilingualism is a tension between the complexity of lived language experiences, and the constraints and ideologies that structure naming practices in educational institutions. Marshall (2010) signals the risks of using unexamined terminology:

Describing a student as ESL thus juxtaposes deficit with multiplicity. ESL is not only a linguistic state, a course, an abbreviation, appreciated by many, disliked by others; it is also as an institutional and learner identity that some students associate with non-acceptance, deficit, and even non-recognition of their multilingual and multicultural knowledge and competence. Inherent in the remedial deficit use of the term ESL, therefore, is a lack of recognition in educational settings of sociolinguistic diversity and multiplicity. (p. 52).

In response, I use the term “multilingual” whenever possible, following Marshall (2010), Han (2009) and Reyes (2007) to refer to a conception of language education that is additive, in that it recognizes the important simultaneous knowledges and unique speaking positions that come from being multilingual, rather than a conception that is subtractive in regarding multilingual speakers as merely deficient English users. Han (2011a) defines multilingualism as:

The ability to speak, at some level, more than one language’ (Edwards 1994, 33), which recognizes that all multilingual individuals have varying degrees of ‘linguistic balance, dominance, and fluency’ (ibid: 3) in their linguistic repertoires because of differential conditions of and access to learning multiple languages. I see multilingualism as a cluster of ideologies that recognizes and validates multilingual individuals with diverse forms, degrees and compositions of proficiency in their linguistic repertoires, and further supports them to maintain and develop their competencies as they need and/or desire. (p. 385).

Nevertheless, in the interest of clarity, it is sometimes necessary to use the terms “ELL” and “ESL” because they still reflect the most commonly-used terminology by students, teachers and institutions in BC.

2.4. Difference, multi-vocality and power in Canadian literature

In choosing a project which involves studying literature with multilingual immigrant and refugee youth, I was confronted with difficult questions. What does it mean to study literature in Canada when using critical frameworks about language, culture, race and pedagogy? What makes literature “Canadian”, anyway? To address these questions, I turned to scholarship which explores issues of difference, multi-vocality and power in Canadian literature.

Episkenew (2002) calls for literary criticism to be concerned with producing theories of agency by which literary texts may be interpreted in ways which critically examine power and difference to resist reproducing hegemonic ideologies. She names this practice “socially responsible criticism” in which,

Scholars examine the ideological baggage they bring to their readings and counter it by looking outside the texts into the contexts in which they were written to glean some kind of understanding of the ideology of the people whose works they interpret. (p. 57).

Episkenew is writing as an Aboriginal scholar commenting specifically on the context of Aboriginal literature in Canada, yet I believe her work provides important insight into the critical perspectives I need to incorporate in order to engage immigrant and refugee youth in socially responsible interpretations of multicultural literature in Canada.

Episkenew’s concept of socially responsible criticism has attuned me to the ways in which the pluralist paradigm of multiculturalism also influences how difference is positioned in mainstream approaches to teaching and critiquing Canadian literature. Such discourses argue that “recognizing diversity” in English departments and other sites of literature study can be achieved by broadening the canon beyond European and European-Canadian (colonial) works, to include texts which are variously referred to as

“postcolonial”, “multicultural” and “minority” literature (as described and critiqued by Mukherjee 1994). While this is an important step, it does not respond to Episkenew’s challenge to critically examine the power relations which structure *how* literature is interpreted and evaluated. Episkenew joins other scholars including Blaeser (1993), Cheung (1994), Mukherjee (1994, 2004), Dudek (2006) and Mohammadzadeh (2009) in arguing for the ongoing need to deconstruct and de-centre Western literary theory’s assumed authority to measure the worth of a work according to its adherence to established theoretical or aesthetic norms.

In *Oppositional Aesthetics*, Mukherjee’s (1994) work on “third world” and minority writers in Canadian literature, she argues that works by such writers “challenge the unitary notions of national identity and assert that being different by no means equates with being un-Canadian” (p. *xiii*). She affirms the value of multiple voices speaking from and to the differences and cultural specificities in Canadian literature, saying,

For I believe that writers of one’s own ethnic group have something special to say to one. I do not make this argument on essentialist notions of “blood kinship” but on the basis on shared social experience and historical memory. As a Canadian who originated in India, I read works of South Asian Canadian writers to learn about our community’s experience in Canada and its different migrations from India to Africa, the Caribbean and North America. That is a knowledge that no other body of literature can provide for me. [...] While I believe that all learning must start with learning about one’s own background, it must not stop there, but go on to include one’s fellow beings in enlarging concentric circles. (p. *xiv – xv*).

Seiler (1998) grapples with the question of what kinds of theories and practices may direct teachers, critics and readers from different social locations toward critical ways of hearing the diverse literary voices in contemporary Canada. She conceptualizes literature in Canada as being “multi-vocal”, in that there is no one set of voices that may claim cultural or national authenticity, but that the social construction of the nation-state and national identities are necessarily engaged and contested by many different voices. Seiler argues that post-structural and post-colonial methods and reading strategies are essential for engaging with the cultural expressions of people and groups across differences of power (p.48). However, I use the term “multi-vocality” tempered by Mukherjee’s (1996) caution that post-structural and post-colonial methods are empty exercises if one does not also struggle with the problems that power, inequity, cultural

borders and communication gaps bring to any exchange across difference. She goes on to argue against using Western literary norms as universal criteria for interpretation and aesthetic judgement, and calls for critics to familiarize themselves with the social, cultural and political context of a work before they seek to claim an authoritative interpretive position. In an anecdotal example, she notes that although Commonwealth literature was taught in several Canadian Universities at the time of her writing, few of them subscribed to any Indian or African journals in the field. Without engaging with what is being said about a work by “insider” readers, writers and critics, any interpretive project will be missing a vital lens, that which sees a literary work through its relationship with the other discourses going on in the society which produced it.

Mukherjee’s (1996) critique of the limits of literary interpretation across difference can be connected with other important critiques by scholars concerned with issues of power in Canadian Indigenous literature. Both Episkenew (2002) and Eigenbrod (2005) have argued that unequal power relations in Canadian society reinforce the authority of white academics’ and teachers’ outsider readings of Aboriginal literature, even when these readings fail to engage with the ideologies of the people whose works they interpret. In response, they propose that any ethical outsider effort to “re-present Aboriginal culture [must take] an approach that clearly marks it as a representation: viewed from the outside” (Eigenbrod 2005, p. 44). Blaeser (1993) seeks to re-centre analyses of Indigenous literature through intertextual methods of critical inquiry in which Indigenous texts “in their richness quote and comment on one another” (cited in Dudek 2002, p. 94). In response, Dudek (2002) re-conceptualizes the place of post-colonial theories in teaching and critiquing Indigenous literature. She proposes that any approach must “begin with the text” (p. 89) and its specific location and concerns, then move to dialogue with other similarly located texts, and finally draw on post-colonial theory in ways that work against homogenization by recognizing the cultural and socio-political specificities of the work. There is a need for similar approaches to negotiating knowledge across asymmetries of power in interpreting literature by immigrants and other writers of colour in Canada.

Mukherjee (1996) argues that texts situate readers either as “cultural insiders” or “cultural outsiders” through many signifiers such as language, code switching, or culturally shared memories and meanings. She believes that one can ask interesting

questions from both reading positions (see also Möller and Allen 2000), but that it is essential to recognize the limits of knowing across difference, particularly from an outsider position: "What, then, can readers not familiar with the cultural universe of the text do? I suggest that they ask. Information is all around us" (p. 42). Mukherjee's call for readers to seek out interpretive resources from within their own social environments opens up possibilities for more democratic approaches to literary interpretation and critique, which may complement or contest interpretation based on the guidance of trained critics. She also argues that insider and outsider positions are fluid: "If I am a "cultural insider" reading a South Asian Canadian text, I lose that position when I read a Native Canadian or a Chinese Canadian, or, for that matter, an Anglo Canadian text" (p. 42). According to Mukherjee, the most rewarding interpretations happen when several readers, both outsiders and insiders, come together in a reading community.

Cai (2008) discusses the possibilities and challenges of using multicultural literature in mainstream classrooms, arguing that teachers' lack of knowledge about how to support critical analysis often results in pedagogical approaches that risk reinforcing misconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices. Mohammadzadeh (2009) and Mukherjee (1996) both propose using post-colonial theory as a critical framework to support students in understanding multicultural texts as "historical and social constructions marked by the weight of a range of inherited and specified readings [...which] can be read by focusing on how different audiences might respond to them, thus highlighting the possibilities of reading against, within, and outside their established boundaries" (Giroux, 1992 in Mohammadzadeh, 2009, p. 30). Despite the challenges, Mohammadzadeh (2009) argues for the importance of teaching multicultural literature in English Language Learning contexts so that students may "demonstrate critical awareness of a range of literatures in English; [...] acknowledge a broader appreciation of nonstandard varieties of English and other world varieties of English; [...] and] recognize issues related to World Englishes and to the sociopolitics of English language teaching" (p. 27).

These theories of socially responsible literary criticism guided my decisions about which texts might be relevant for the immigrant and refugee youth who participated in my research. They also challenged me to constantly deconstruct assumptions about Western literary theory's authority, and to recognize the limitations of my own interpretations of literary works to which I am an outsider, in an effort to listen more

carefully to, and learn from the interpretations of participants who have insider perspectives.

2.5. Critical literacy

The literature upon which I drew in the previous sections turned me toward critical literacy as a pedagogical framework for the research process because it is able to value difference as enriching and strengthening while at the same time providing tools to critically analyze how power is implicated in structuring difference in language and literature in Canada. Yet as I studied critical literacy in more depth, I found multiple and sometimes contested expressions of its meaning and practice. Educational theorists and practitioners from different philosophical and political orientations have contributed to a body of work which is continually asking what critical literacy means, and how it ought to be practiced. Critical literacy can be linked to movements including Marxism and the Frankfurt School of critical theory (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux & McLaren, 1994), post-structural theory (Gee, 1990) and subsequent critiques concerned with developing critical literacy's relevance with respect to race, gender and sexual orientation (Ladson-Billings & William Tate, 1995; Luke, 2004, 2007; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2004; Sykes 2011). Luke (2004) emphasizes that understandings of critical literacy fall across a broad spectrum, from those which envision radical redistribution of power and capital, to those which seek to improve individual achievement within the status quo. Nevertheless, common to these various understandings is the notion that social worlds and social relations are discursively constructed and that power is differentially embedded in all discourses. Consequently, those concerned with critical literacy seek out spoken, written, and visual texts as both sites of study and spaces for social action.

Writing about the role of teachers in making literacy education socially just, Edelsky (1999) envisions critical literacy as an ongoing engagement with the tensions of competing voices. I find her words evocative, because they suggest pedagogical practices capable of recognizing the complex issues I raised in the previous sections: immigrant and refugee youths' multiple sources of linguistic and cultural knowledge and issues of multi-vocality in Canadian literature, as well as the tensions that emerge as

these multiplicities are enacted across differences in identity, social location and power. For a discussion of how pedagogically engaging with multiple knowledges may play out in practice, I turn to research in “multiliteracies” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Lotherington, Sotoudeh, Holland, & Zentena, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Smythe & Toohey 2009), “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), “hybrid literacies” (Bhabha 1994) and “culturally responsive pedagogy” (Orellana and Reynolds 2008). I refer to these related concepts as “multiliteracies” hereafter in the interest of brevity. These scholars, among others writing in this body of literature, argue that school literacy education should be linked to the literacies that people develop in their lives outside school. However, as I argued earlier in my review of the literature about multilingualism and education in Canada, there is still a lack of research about the outside-school lives and knowledges of multilingual people. The capacity to translate this already limited research into pedagogical applications that may actually impact the lives of students and teachers is even more tenuous (Smythe & Toohey 2009). This gap in research and practice reinforces my belief in the need for a project which prioritizes immigrant and refugee youths’ funds of knowledge and multiliteracies as legitimate, valuable ways of engaging literature.

Moll et al. (1992) define ‘funds of knowledge’ as ‘historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being’ (p. 133). This may include knowledge grounded in work inside and outside the home, material and social conditions, and ethical, artistic, spiritual and healing practices. In later work, Moll (2000) calls for funds of knowledge research to investigate how power across gender, sexual orientation and class may impact the ways in which cultural resources are distributed and valued within communities. The concepts of hybridity, and ‘hybrid literacies’ (Bhabha 1994; Guitierrez et al. 1999; Moje et al. 2004, as cited in Smythe & Toohey 2009) and “multiliteracies” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996) refer to the spaces in which “people find themselves ‘in-between’ different and sometimes competing knowledge, literacies and cultural practices. This ‘in-between’ or hybrid space, also referred to as a ‘third space’, is one in which new knowledge and literacy practices become available to students as resources for learning and critical analysis” (Smythe & Toohey 2009, p.40).

Multiliteracies research explores “the growing significance of two “multi” dimensions of “literacies” in the plural—the multilingual and the multimodal”, arguing that in the past several decades of educational research, multilingualism has emerged as “an increasingly significant phenomenon that required a more adequate educational response in the case of minority languages and the context of globalization” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 166). Orellana and Reynolds’ (2008) “cultural modeling” research provides a rare explicit description of how the integration of cultural resources actually played out in a classroom setting. The authors used ethnographic methods to document the literacy practices that Spanish-speaking children in the United States engaged in outside of school, and then mapped these onto school academic processes. They provide the example drawing on children’s bilingualism and their daily practices of translating and transcribing oral and print texts for family members as resources for teaching the writing of academic summaries and reviews. In a Canadian context, Lotherington et al. (2008) report on a multiliteracies project which developed out of a school community’s grassroots concerns about the exclusive curricular focus on English and French. The project responded to what they saw as the suppression of community languages by creating a third space for multilingual literacy in the school which focused on language awareness, appreciation of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and pride in community languages.

My review of research about multiliteracies found that the bulk of such studies were focused on young children, with fewer in secondary and post-secondary settings. My review was not exhaustive, but the relative ease of finding research focused on younger students versus the difficulty of finding examples for young adult students is telling. There seems to be a need for more research engaging with the multiliteracies of students at higher levels of education. In pursuing this goal in my research, the theoretical frameworks and accounts of practice I cited above were important in my reflective process as I observed how the participants in my research drew on multiple sources of knowledge, and the responses this elicited (including my own). I return to examples of this in greater detail in the discussion the research findings.

Research about multiliteracies is an important aspect of critical literacy in that it is concerned with the vast bodies of knowledge that are positioned outside the boundaries of what is legitimized by academic institutions. It is the responsibility of researchers and

practitioners in education, as well as students, to learn about multiple forms of knowledge and ways of knowing (especially those different from their own) because such a view makes visible the ways in which usual school practices and knowledge are associated with the cultural inheritances of particular groups (Ladson-Billings 1994, Moje 2000) and thus have socially constructed value, rather than inherent merit. By recognizing that multiliteracies ought to be engaged in ways that are equally as rigorous as those which are already legitimized in academic contexts, new school practices and learning activities can be conceived (Smythe & Toohey 2009). I also connect the issues raised by multiliteracies research to my later discussion of reader response theory, in that both have helped me develop awareness of how, in Sumara's (2002) words, "the relationships among of history, memory, culture, geography, language and identity" (p.73) may shape literacy practices and experiences.

Critical literacy is also about questioning how texts work ideologically and taking up alternative reading positions which push the boundaries of the status quo (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Luke (2000) particularly emphasizes the importance of critical literacy for people who face marginalization from dominant social and educational power structures. Critical literacy is, he writes, "principally about building access to literate practices and discourse resources, about setting the enabling pedagogic conditions for students to use their existing and new discourse resources for exchange in the social fields where texts and discourses matter" (p. 449). Thus, it is not only important for people to be able to redefine the boundaries of which knowledge counts as legitimate in their educational spaces, as argued by scholars of multiliteracies and funds of knowledge, but it is also necessary to interrogate the already legitimized "genres of power" as a means of both accessing powerful discourse positions within existing social systems, and contesting oppressive systems (Luke, 1996). Other scholars have also made similar arguments, notably Delpit (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1994) in their work with African-American students and teachers.

Freirean notions of the role of pedagogy and literacy in transforming social conditions (Freire and Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1999) continue challenge critical literacy pedagogy to be relevant for the real lives of people. Shor writes,

Critical education cannot feed the hungry or raise the minimum wage; it can only invite people into action to achieve these and other humane goals. [...] though language is fateful in teaching us what kind of people to become and what kind of society to make, discourse is not destiny. We can redefine ourselves and remake society, if we choose, through alternative rhetoric and dissident projects. This is where critical literacy begins, for questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane. (Shor 1999)

As I made decisions about my research design, and later as I went about the daily activities and interactions of the research, Shor's words challenged me to think about the concrete impacts of my choices and actions in the lives of the participants. I drew on Freire and Macedo's notion that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 35). In believing that reading and responding to literature through prioritizing participants' experiential and critical lenses could also open up possibilities for them to develop insight into issues of importance in their lives, I was inspired by Freire and Macedo's call for literacy to be "laden with the meaning of the people's existential experience" (p. 35). Freire's (1970) pedagogical practice of problem posing has also informed my understanding of the role of the facilitator or teacher in critical literacy, and I have sought to apply this in my research. Developed as an alternative to the "banking" model of education, in which the teacher as an authoritative expert "deposits" knowledge into the student-as-vessel, problem posing calls for teachers and students to approach one another as fellow dialoguers, each grounded their own individual experiences and circumstances, yet connected through their historical and social locations. Problem posing does not deny the need for the teacher or facilitator to bring a high level of expertise and preparation to the educational dialogue. The teacher/facilitator's role entails the primary responsibility and the time required to develop a structure upon which both parties in dialogue may build. I share Freire's concern for mutuality in critical literacy, and drew on his writings as I struggled with questions of how and when to intervene in discussion or introduce resources so as to promote, rather than to silence, participants' agency.

2.6. Reader response theory and pedagogical applications

My experiences working with multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to explore issues of identity and belonging in their education, as well as the scholarship on critical literacy which I reviewed above, have oriented me toward theories of reading and interpreting literature that may account for the complex relationships between a text, a reader's own subjectivity and context, and broader historical and social milieus. I found that reader response theory provided both a theoretical framework and pedagogical approaches consistent with these aims.

Reader response theory's development is primarily attributed to Rosenblatt (1976, 1978) and Iser (1978), whose works focus on the relationships involved in reading. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of the relationship between the reader and the text established reader response theory as a major alternative to new criticism (which minimized the role of the reader in constructing meaning) in literary criticism and pedagogy, and it continues to inform various contemporary approaches in the field. Rosenblatt (1978) theorizes the relationship between the reader and the text as a site for the production of meaning, in which readers, texts, and contexts of reading collaborate in the continued co-creation and interpretation of knowledge. She is interested in the distinction between ways of reading, asserting that literary fiction is not distinguished by some essential quality of the text, but rather by the way readers approach the text. Similarly, Iser (1978) argues that "the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity, but, if anything, a dynamic happening . . . Literary texts initiate 'performances of meaning' rather than actually formulating meaning themselves" (cited in Sumara 1996, p. 253). Rosenblatt (1978) distinguished between efferent reading (from the Latin *effere* meaning "to carry away"), which seeks conceptual knowledge, and aesthetic reading, which is "a special kind of lived-through experience" (p. 27), which disrupts the convenient dichotomy of art/life. This position also recognizes that the imagined experiences and possible worlds of fiction make significant contributions to humans' conceptualizations of the "real" world, and thus are important sites for study. While Rosenblatt's efferent/aesthetic distinction is useful in drawing attention to the importance of understanding and fostering aesthetic reading, many subsequent scholars have built upon it to recognize the complexity of the reading experience (See for example, Lewis

2000; Sumara 2002). Rather than categorizing types of relationships between reader and text, I seek to understand the phenomenon of reading as a complex interaction between interwoven literary experiences.

I draw on Sumara's (1996; 2002) work to develop my understanding of the application of reader response theory to pedagogy and the important learning possibilities presented by literature. Two overarching themes in Sumara's work are those of emergent, interpretive insight, and the complexity of representing human experiences. He argues that studying literature plays a vital role in developing interpretive understanding, stating, "I have learned that what is considered true about myself and my contexts is not easily accessed or represented [...] What is experienced as truthful emerges from the complex relations of history, memory, language and geography" (2002, p. 4). Supported by Rosenblatt's (1978) and Iser's (1978) earlier analyses of the relationship between the reader and the text as a site for the production of meaning, Sumara (2002) further develops a theory of reading which explores "how engagements with literary fiction participate in the reader's complex ecology of human/human, human/text, human/context relations" (p. 11)

Sumara takes up Iser's (1989, cited in Sumara 2002) naming of the interpretive practices associated with reader/text relations as "literary anthropology". Using this term, he recognizes that the reader's own acts of interpretation shape the ongoing development of the reader's self-identity. Literary anthropological research is different from other forms of literary research or criticism because it is interested in exploring what is conditioned by literary identifications, rather than seeking to describe the interpretations themselves. Sumara (2002) writes, "the idea of literary anthropology is organized by the belief that a relationship to a literary text can become a productive site for the continued interpretation of culture" (p. 29). In literary anthropology, "literary texts must be read alongside other literary texts, as well as alongside other cultural objects. These intertextual meanings help to construct a broader and more complex commonplace location for interpretation" (p. 23).

Drawing on literary anthropology, Sumara (2002) puts forward the concept of a "commonplace book", which he discusses in both pedagogical (as a way for students to organize and reflect on their engagement with a text) and research settings (as a way for

researchers to chart their interpretations over time). Commonplace books are places (both physical and imagined) for the critical interpretation of readings, experiences, memory, history, culture, language and identity. A commonplace book is usually a literary text which has been chosen because of its potential to offer a range of themes which students may find significant, and around which they may develop multiple responses through structured interpretive methods including use of other texts, artifacts and/or discussions that provide different philosophical, theoretical, historical and critical insights into the main text. These intersections support the interplay of insight emerging from reading, re-reading, discussion, annotation and writing.

Sumara envisions the broader implications of his pedagogy by developing Bleich's (1978 cited in Sumara 2002) idea of interpretive community, which situates individual responses to literature in a fabric of interpersonal, intertextual experiences of reading. He is particularly interested in the learning that takes place within "activity systems, such as book clubs or classrooms, which both shape and are shaped by literary relationships" (Sumara, 2002, p.93). In Chapter Four, I will return to Sumara's discussion of interpretive community as a way of analyzing the space that was opened up by the relationships among the participants, the texts and their contexts during the research. Sumara's (2000) theory of reading leaves open multiple possibilities for interpretation and learning that may arise from the relationship between a reader and a text, conveying that "although absolutely particular to a specific act of reading, the response is also a window into a much wider set of relationships" (p. 275). This openness to multiple forms of learning, as well as his recognition of the central role played by the complex relations of history, memory, language and geography in shaping an individual's interpretation of a particular literary text, make Sumara's approach to reader response theory complementary to other pedagogical approaches based on theories of critical literacy and multiliteracies.

Lewis (2000) has explored how the social and political dimensions of texts, as well as the reader's relationship with the text, may be critically analysed by using reader response methods. She shows that in a significant number of cases in the United States, classroom applications of reader response have been limited to an emphasis on unexamined personal response and enjoyment of the text (p. 256). In such applications, Rosenblatt's (1978) distinction between the "aesthetic" and the "efferent" is often cited as

the theoretical inspiration for celebrating personal experiences with literature as somehow “pure” and beyond critical examination. However, as Lewis (2000) argues from a close reading of Rosenblatt’s major works, her interest in the reader does not privilege unexamined personal response. Rosenblatt identifies her work, along with that of Iser (1978) as “reception theory”, which she calls a “reader-plus-text-oriented” theory (cited in Lewis 2000, p. 254). Lewis argues that Rosenblatt conceptualizes aesthetic reading as a transaction not only between reader and text on an individual basis, but as also involving the social and political dimensions of the text and context.

Lewis’ (2000) work provides an important framework for my research, because I am interested in supporting immigrant and refugee youths’ aesthetic responses to literature in order to explore critical analysis of the issues of importance in their educational contexts and in their lives. Along with Lewis, I am interested in asking, “First, what do we mean by aesthetic reading and how is it different from personal response; second, what is the relationship between aesthetic and critical reading?” (p. 258). Lewis argues that “interpretation itself is a social act and that understanding the transaction between reader and text involves examining the many social conditions that shape the stances readers take up” (p. 258). This highlights that not only do readers produce interpretations of the text, but the text also works to form readers as subjects. From this perspective, Lewis argues that it is not possible to have an aesthetic response that is ideologically innocent. Therefore, it is essential to find a way to re-formulate an understanding of aesthetic response. Using an analysis of how a group of readers were positioned by a text as either insiders or outsiders to experiences of racism, Lewis argues that an aesthetic reading may include an ability to make connections between lived experience and the experiences of characters, or it could take the shape (as it did among the participants in her study) of a deeper understanding about how the text worked to disrupt the outsider reader’s inclination to identify with the characters across an experience they could never share.

Texts, readers, and interpretations are all subject to ideological discourses of power. Möller and Allen (2000) argue that responding to literature is always dialogic. Drawing on Vygotsky and Bakhtin, they argue that “speech and thought are always dialogical, even within one individual. Our words are always tied to voices and contexts in which they have previously been uttered” (p. 148). Beach (1995) contends that

literature dealing with power and difference offers readers interpretive possibilities for constructing alternative versions of the world and of themselves. However, he also signals that for this type of transformative thinking to occur, readers must develop an awareness of “how one’s own ideological stance shapes the meaning of one’s experience with literature” (p. 93). Thus, following reader-response theorists such as Lewis (2000), Beach (2000), and Möller and Allen (2000), I propose using reader-response methods to engage the research participants in the complex exploration of their own ideological stances, and how these connect to issues of power and inequality in their social and political contexts. This critical orientation to ways in which differences of power and social location may impact interpretation of a text will be important as I work with the participants to interrogate how their multiple, intersecting identities may be implicated by a text, and how their own readings may impact those of other participants. Although Sumara (1996, 2002) does not explicitly engage with issues of power and inequality in reader response pedagogy, his method of using simultaneous texts and contextual repeated reading has been adapted (see van der Wey, 2012) to provide a structured way for students to develop awareness of political context and ideology. I will discuss how I used these, and other specific reader response techniques, in my Methods section.

2.7. Power, identity and social location: overarching lenses for understanding the research context, process and findings

I recognize the pioneering work of Black feminist theorists in the United States in helping me to develop a more nuanced understanding of identity and difference. Crenshaw (e.g., 1989, 1991) explores subjectivity from a post-essentialist perspective, arguing that the self is multiplicitous, not unitary, and that subjectivity can be conceptualized as intersectionality, a “network of affiliations and ascriptions connected to axes of power” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1243), which may or may not correlate directly with political, social or legal interests and identities. Crenshaw argues that the intersection of forms of oppression impacts individuals’ lives in ways that cannot be captured by looking at any one dimension of those experiences in isolation. Although Crenshaw is often cited for originating the term “intersectionality”, Lorde (1984) and hooks (1990) also

explore the issue in their early work, and were influential in shaping this school of Black feminist thought. Intersectionality theory responds to “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1245).

The concept of intersectionality is closely linked to critical race theory. Early articulations of intersectionality, including Crenshaw’s work, focus in particular on the experience of Black women in the United States with respect to systemic racism and sexism. She writes,

. . . I have used intersectionality to describe or frame various relationships between race and gender. I have used intersectionality as a way to articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy generally. I have also used intersectionality to describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism. (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1265)

As I stated earlier in this chapter, scholars working in other areas have made connections between critical race theory, the concept of intersectionality and the specific concerns of their disciplines, or have elaborated critical race theory to address the experiences of other marginalized groups (see, for example, Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, and Han, 2011b). Of particular relevance for this thesis is the use of intersectionality in areas of study such as critical multiculturalism, critical sociolinguistics and critical literacy, and the potential of these approaches for engaging with the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth. Another notable example is the contribution of scholars studying the intersections of sexual orientation, race and gender (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Indeed, Crenshaw (1991) alludes to the possibility of just such continually developing applications of critical race theory and intersectionality:

I consider intersectionality a provisional concept linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory. [. . .] While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color. (p. 1245)

Critical race theory and concept of intersectionality also inform coalition politics theory (Burack, 2004; Reagon, 1983). Crenshaw (1991) suggests that the concept of

intersectionality has the potential to be “more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Coalition politics theory is concerned with taking up just this tension, focusing analysis on what happens when individuals engage in coalitions. Defined as the ‘joint activity of autonomous groups, either for a single purpose, or to pursue long-term social, economic or political goals’ (Burack, 2004, pp. 150-151), coalitions are “places of discourse where participants actively and persistently engage in discussion of the ubiquity of difference” (van der Wey, 2012, p. 201). Burack (2004) articulates coalition politics as a theoretical framework for examining identity and political and social action through three relational frames that correspond to experiences of difference: within the self, within the group (the intra-group), and between groups (the inter-group). She argues that these frames are mutually constitutive – that is, inter-group coalition building cannot take place without active engagement with difference within the self, and in the intra-group context. In the same way, political and social action within identity groups must include critical analysis of the impacts of differential power among the group’s members because each individual embodies multiple, intersecting identities. Reagon (1983) reminds us that such negotiation of conflict and power within the self and with others implies substantial emotional labor, requiring a willingness to commit time, energy, and an openness to being disrupted, being vulnerable, and relinquishing a sense of innocence in relations with others.

The theories that I discuss in this section are concerned with power and difference. I draw on the broad applicability of Foucault’s (1980) work on power, which reconceptualises power not as something which can be possessed, but rather which operates throughout society, having no ultimate origin, and manifesting itself not outside other relations, but rather as integral to all relations. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2009) argue that power wielders cannot be identified by a particular social category, but rather power is manifest in social relations termed “power blocs”⁹ which are ever-shifting sets of alliances around social formations of race, class, gender and others. This view links

⁹ “Employing the term as did Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political theorist, and Stuart Hall, the British Cultural studies scholar” (Steinberg 2009, p.9)

power to its social consequences in terms of access to resources and the production of privilege and inequality.

My views about the importance of explicitly addressing identity and power have been influenced by the following passage by Crenshaw:

For all these groups [African Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others], identity-based politics has been a source of strength, community, and intellectual development. The embrace of identity politics, however, has been in tension with dominant conceptions of social justice. Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different. According to this understanding our liberatory objective should be to empty such categories of any social significance. Yet implicit in certain strands of feminist and racial liberation movements, for example is the view that the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction. (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1242).

Similarly, Reagon (1983) argues that recognizing the ubiquity of intersecting identities and differences may be enriching and strengthening for individuals and groups who seek to transform oppressive power relations, yet only if such an engagement is built on the difficult intellectual and emotional work of interrogating power and privilege on all relational levels. In response, I seek to weave theoretical frameworks from coalition politics theory, critical race theory and critical socio-linguistics together with those of critical literacy and reader response theory, so that I may leave open the space for the research participants to explore the transformative possibilities alluded to by Crenshaw (1991), Burack (2004) and Reagon (1983). I will return to these scholars, as well as others who build on their work, in Chapter Three, in which I will discuss how their ideas shaped my decisions about the research design and my approaches to facilitation and observation.

It is not enough for me to simply acknowledge my positions of privilege as I did in my personal statement in Chapter 1.4. Nor is it sufficient to simply invite participants to speak without examining the conditions under which they are invited to do so. Critical feminist scholars who work on dialogue (Alcoff, 1991; Narayan, 1988; Razack, 1993;

Young, 1997, among others) problematize the notion of 'voice' and its origins in unexamined assumptions about access to power and representation in the social sciences and in supposedly "critical pedagogy" contexts. What are the limits of speaking and working across difference, and how does power structure the ability (and desire) of differently located subjects to engage in dialogue? What does it mean for a researcher to elicit "voice" or to listen to someone whose subject position is different from her/his own, particularly when unequal power relations cannot but structure such dialogues? Here, I draw on Narayan's (1988) concept of insider epistemological privilege in that "members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle, and critical knowledge of the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group" (p.35) Related is Young's (1997) concept of asymmetrical reciprocity, which affirms the value of dialogue in which participants are able to learn from and empathize with the perspectives of others because they listen to those perspectives with a moral humility, recognizing that they stand in relations of asymmetry and irreversibility with others.

Narayan's (1988) and Young's (1997) works informed my critical awareness of how I facilitated the workshops, in particular how my privilege might impact participants' willingness and ability to share their experiences and perspectives. In doing so, I sought to respond to Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy, in which points out the resistance among many so-called critical educators to acknowledge that "all knowings are partial, that there are fundamental things each of us cannot know" (p. 310). She argues that if critical educators seek to minimize difference by leaving untheorized and untouched their own desire to orchestrate (or control?) reparative relations across difference, they will continue to perpetuate relations of domination in their classrooms. As I discussed in the literature review about socially responsible criticism, unequal power relations in Canadian society re-enforce the authority of Eurocentric analyses on literature by people of colour (Episkew, 2002; Mukherjee 1994). I will need to be particularly conscious not only of the limitations of my own readings of literary works to which I am an outsider, but also of the authority with which my interpretations are laden. I will seek to make these thoughts about my reading position open and explicit to participants.

Sumara (2002) articulates an ethics of representation in research that I find useful for grappling with questions of signifying identity and experience. He writes,

I am committed to social justice and to eliminating the cruelties imposed on certain individuals and groups. I understand that language can never fully represent the complexity and fullness of human identity and experiences of identity. I also know that in order for individuals to experience a sense of personal and cultural coherence, language must be used to create identities that can be recognized. And so, while I do not want to essentialize human identities, I understand that to some extent categories are necessary heuristics. I also know, however, that any experience of identity is contingent. It emerges from a biological, geographical, social and cultural history that is given shape and form by language. This helps me to remember that my experience of identity is never really present to me but can only exist after the fact, in the memories and narratives that organize who I believe myself to be (and who I believe others to be). (p.90-91)

Razack (1993) addresses the issue of multiple and conflicting claims of epistemological privilege that may emerge in groups or coalitions. She calls for educators and researchers to confront their assumptions that groups must speak in a unified voice, and accept unknowability, in that knowledges and voices are always partial, contradictory, and only approachable through the lens of one's own subject position. I interpret from Razack's argument that the task of engaging across difference is not served by claiming to gain full, or true knowledge of another person or group's experience, but rather to understand the workings of one's own lens as fully as possible.

Alcoff (1991) argues that "rituals of speaking are politically constituted by power relations of domination, exploitation and subordination. Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result, as well as an act of political struggle" (p.15). Drawing on Foucault's ideas of the rituals of speaking, she acknowledges the discursive construction of self, others and context, and so argues that anyone who engages in speaking "with and "to" others across difference "should only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved" (p.24). Thus, my desire to co-construct knowledge with participants must also be seen in light of the discursive effects of how I choose to represent myself and the research participants, always remembering the privileges I carry as the researcher. I must be prepared to invite further disruption in my role as a researcher, particularly in the recognition that

notwithstanding my efforts to design participatory research, and to interrogate my own position, I will still be the main beneficiary of this research, in that successful research will significantly contribute to my educational credentials and career goals.

In order to remain aware of the limits of my perspective, I seek to explicitly acknowledge my assumptions, and how my subject position is implicated in the ways in which I interpret and narrate the events which occurred during the research, as well as in how I chose to represent the participants' voices and actions. My goal in doing so is to provide insight into how I came to construct my representations, so that they may be seen as just that - representations. As the author of this thesis, I cannot remove the limits of my own subject position. Any such attempt would obscure the workings of my own privileged point of view, silencing the multiple voices of the participants.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Introduction

For this study, I engaged with a group of eight multilingual immigrant and refugee youth in exploring their relationships with literary texts. The research consisted of two stages: 1) a series of four workshops over the course of which participants engaged with reader response and critical literacy methods to interpret three short literary texts, hereafter referred to as Literary Engagement Workshops (the workshops) and 2) follow-up semi-structured group interviews. In this chapter I introduce the research methods using the lenses of equity and participatory practice in research settings. I then review the criteria and decision-making process for inviting participation in the study, the consent process, and provide an introduction to the participants. I explain how I designed the research, how the study's two phases unfolded, and the respective roles of the participants and the researcher. I provide an overview of the data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with an overview of ethics and validity.

3.2. Respect for the research intentions and the participants

Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) argue that although there is an increasing recognition of the need for, and the power of, critical methodologies for conducting research and eliciting the perspectives of people who are marginalized, much learning remains to be done in this field. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) argue that power shapes all aspects of research, and researchers must be transparent about how they are implicated. Researchers must invest time and effort into learning about how power is at work in the research context, and how they may take responsibility to respond to inequity. In attempting to write about respect for the research intentions and the participants, I am conscious of Smith's (2005) criticism of relying on "respect" as a

vague, universalized, or tokenized concept that merely serves as a box to be checked off in an ethics application, or an excuse for a researcher to smooth over the difficulty of working across difference. She writes: “what is *respect*, and how do we know when researchers are behaving respectfully? What does *respect* entail at a day-to-day level of interaction? To be respectful, what else does a researcher need to understand?” (pp.97-98). Smith argues that respect is not a universal philosophical or moral principle, but that it is interpreted and expressed in different ways in concrete social milieus specific to cultural, gender and class groups and subgroups (among others). What respect means in a research context depends upon the people involved, and the methodological and theoretical paradigms that they use. In response to Smith’s call to critique my own assumptions and intentions when I speak of respect, my working definition of respect for the research intentions and the participants in this study is centred around my commitment to recognizing the role of power and privilege in how the research participants and I interacted, and also in how I represent the research process. I also found it important to create as many opportunities for participatory process as I could accommodate within the scope of the research because to me, respect means sharing power.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest that researchers may partially address issues of asymmetrical power in research by examining how research designs may privilege certain forms of communication, or ways of knowing above others. I am conscious that setting English as the default language for this research establishes unequal communicative opportunities between me as a first-language English speaker, and the participants as second-language English speakers. Based on my knowledge of the participants, and my observations during the research, I did not identify any major communication barriers. Nevertheless, I remain aware that I was always communicating in my preferred language, while some of the participants may not have been. Conscious of this difference, I carefully attended to any signals that a participant might have been facing communication barriers in English, and made adaptation such as encouraging additional time for reflection or silences.

Tsing (2004) contends that collaboration in research cannot be assumed to be equitably balanced, or mutually beneficial to all parties. She cautions against assuming that collaborators will share common goals or that everyone will benefit equally from

collaborative research. When I first began imagining this study, I hoped that it would be participatory action research. Richer (1998) defines participatory action research as being based on three principles: 1) a social action focus, 2) a transformative objective, and 3) a participatory process at all stages of the research, from design to dissemination. Participatory action research is often undertaken between a researcher and a partner group which is a pre-existing community with an articulated problem or issue that they wish to explore through research.

As I described in Chapter One, I planned to do this research project with the Youth Network, the group of immigrant and refugee community organizers with whom I have both personal and professional relationships. Both they and I saw participatory action research as an ideal model. In fact, the group has been involved in a previous participatory action project (Lui, 2005). However, my early, informal consultation with potential participants revealed several barriers to a fully participatory project. At the time of my research, the Youth Network was already engaged in a major project (the “ELL Project”, described in Chapter 1.2). I did not want to compromise their independence on the project by requesting that they collaborate with my thesis research because although our overall research goals are aligned, our specific interests are different. Instead, I decided to continue as a volunteer supporter of the ELL Project and to explore opportunities for our respective projects to inform one another. Given this immersion in their own project, as well as other commitments such as school, family and work, the Youth Network and I decided that their involvement in my research as participatory action partners would not be possible.

However, many Youth Network members still expressed interest in being involved in my research. In response, I sought to incorporate as much participatory process as possible within the research design without requiring unrealistic investment from the participants. I did early informal consultation with the Youth Network as I developed my research proposal, and sought their final approval of my proposal as a condition for proceeding with the research. I involved the participants in selecting much of the content for the study’s workshop component, and I structured a facilitation model that prioritized making space for participants’ skills and knowledge. I elicited formative feedback throughout the research, and consulted participants about how their data was used and represented in the thesis.

3.3. Inviting participation

In shaping the criteria for participation around an already existing group, the Youth Network, I drew on scholarship addressing issues of representation in research, such as the work of Denzin & Lincoln (2005) on purposive sampling and Jones and Martin-Jones' (2001) recommendations about dialogic knowledge production in research. These scholars argue for qualitative research methods which do not seek to select participants or research sites based on their ability to deliver fixed, true representation of people and their experiences, but rather recognize that identity may be composed of multiple, overlapping facets (Crenshaw 1991), and that its expression is necessarily lived, or performed. Methods based on these theoretical frameworks seek to make visible the complex, fluid and political processes of representation in research.

Informed by such approaches, I chose to invite participation from any members of the Youth Network who were interested in the study's goals, and who believed they would be able to participate in the activities. Although participation criteria relied on self-selection, I believe it is consistent with Denzin & Lincoln's (2005) notion of purposive sampling in that the members of the Youth Network represent a variety of social locations, identities and experiences, and are ideally suited to speak to the diversity of immigrant and refugee communities in Canada. Maxwell (2005) cautions that researchers using purposive sampling must be able to contextualize their findings through research methods which recognize that "cultural groups incorporate substantial diversity and that homogeneity cannot be assumed" (p.199). I also seek to balance purposive sampling with the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and dialogic knowledge production in research (Jones & Martin-Jones, 2001), in that participants are not assumed to be representative of certain essentialized identities or group experiences, but rather that the knowledge they create in dialogue with one another implicates their multiple identities, and has the potential to raise questions of significance for other multicultural, multilingual settings.

I set the ideal number of participants at five to ten people, based on other reader response studies relying on facilitated group dialogue and activities in extra-curricular or other non-classroom settings (Möller and Allen 2000, Lewis 2000, Sumara 1996). These studies concur that a small group will be best suited to create conditions for all

participants to contribute to rich discussion within the limited time-frame, and to accommodate the scheduling challenges of group meetings. Working with a small group of participants also allowed me to prioritize the type of in-depth exploration and analysis of participants' responses and narratives that this project demands. In preparing to invite participation, two issues required particularly careful consideration. First, I needed to examine what impact my pre-existing relationships within the Youth Network might have on potential participants' decisions about whether to become involved with the study. Second, I needed to decide how to accommodate the broad age range of the youth. The Youth Network's members range between ages fourteen to mid-twenties, which raised the issue of creating a consent process for youth who are minors.

I saw my pre-existing relationships with many of the potential participants as signaling both possibilities and challenges. I believe that their knowing me on a personal level contributed to their ability to make an informed choice about whether or not to participate in my research. Many members of the network have worked closely with me, either in my role as a youth worker and workshop facilitator, or as a volunteer supporting their projects. They are aware of the values and interpersonal dynamics that I bring to my work. Because I would be requesting their participation as an independent researcher with no official connection to my former employer or any of the agencies that currently fund or host the Youth Network, I expected that they would be able to respond without concern that their refusal might have negative consequences. Additionally, I planned to design and facilitate the Literary Engagement Workshops with the flexibility to respond to any pre-existing relationships the participants might have with one another. However, I also recognize that pre-existing relationships between a researcher and research participants may also present challenges such as differential levels of trust and comfort between older and newer relationships. I will explore these issues in greater depth when I discuss the research findings.

It was important for me to provide all interested members of the Youth Network with an equal opportunity to participate in the study. This meant that I had to design an additional parent/guardian consent process for minors. Although the university's ethics guidelines allowed for me to waive the parent/guardian consent process for youth between sixteen and nineteen years of age, I decided that it was important to include. This decision was based on my previous experience working with immigrant and refugee

populations, in which many youth under nineteen and their parents felt that it was essential to obtain parent/guardian permission to participate in research studies, and to provide the chance for parents or guardians to ask questions or raise concerns. I also included an assent form to be signed by any participants who are minors, so that they would have an independent opportunity to decide on consent.

After thinking through the criteria for participation, I contacted the Youth Network to request their feedback and permission to seek participants through their network. I presented the research plan at one of the group's weekly meetings, and facilitated a discussion in which Youth Network members asked questions and provided recommendations. I included several changes and clarifications in the research plan and the informed consent documents based on this consultation. For example, I was asked to provide more clarity about how the literary works would be selected for the Literary Engagement Workshops (described in section 3.5.1), and I made preparations for accommodating participants with young children¹⁰. Following my presentation and incorporation of the feedback, the Youth Network granted me permission to contact participants through their network.

In order to ensure that the process for confirming participation was clear and fair, all my in-person and written communications emphasized that I could only accommodate a maximum of ten participants, and that I would register people in the order that they expressed their intention to participate. To begin, I limited the invitation process to the members of the Youth Network who regularly attend meetings or are involved in current projects. This allowed me to get a sense of the level of interest and availability to participate in my research, and to avoid inviting more participation than I could accommodate. I made several brief in-person invitations to participants at Youth

¹⁰ One Youth Network member who is a single parent was interested in being involved in the research. We met to plan for how I might support her involvement, but the logistics of finding additional childcare on top of her regular arrangements proved too difficult, even with financial support. Perhaps with more advanced planning time, we could have searched for other options, or adjusted the meetings to meet her schedule. Her situation prompted me to reflect that in doing research with immigrant and refugee youth, potential participants who might offer significant insights into the research concerns may also face barriers to participation. It is important to talk about these barriers with participants before the research, and to pursue a research design that can balance participants' needs with the logistical limitations the researcher may face.

Network meetings, and also contacted members through the group's volunteer contact person, who shared my invitation with the email list. In both cases I provided a letter of initial contact with an overview of the proposed research and a consent form. Through this process, eleven people expressed interest in participating. Eight people formalized their involvement by returning signed consent forms to me, while three people decided they would not be able to participate due to scheduling conflicts. Having reached the high end of my goal for the number of participants, I did not go on with any further outreach plans.

I consulted with the participants to choose dates, times and locations that would accommodate as many of their needs as possible. Geography was a factor in choosing a meeting place for the group research activities because the participants live across three greater Vancouver communities. We considered various local community centres, youth organizations and other spaces, and finally decided on a meeting room at a lower mainland university campus because most participants could arrive by transit, and could coordinate the meetings with other plans requiring travel nearby. We met in the early evenings when most participants could find time after school and work commitments. Nevertheless, the participants had to make significant efforts and adjustments to their schedules and travel arrangements in order to attend the research activities, and I am thankful for their generosity and commitment.

Before each phase of the research, I reviewed the consent with participants, reminding them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to participate in any aspect of the workshops with which they did not feel comfortable. I explained my duty to ensure the confidentiality of their responses, and reminded them of the limits of guaranteed confidentiality in group research settings. I also asked them to commit to maintaining the confidentiality of fellow participants.

3.4. About the participants

Eight people registered in the research, but only seven were able to regularly attend the workshops¹¹. Scheduling issues, prior commitments, and unexpected events resulted in some absences. Eight participants attended the first and second workshops, five attended the third and six attended the fourth, but none of the seven regular participants missed more than one workshop. Seven participants also attended the follow-up interviews.

The following descriptions of the participants are adapted from their written or verbal communications with me in order to include their own words and self-identifications. Details such as names of schools, study programs, employers and job titles have been removed for confidentiality.

- Andrés identifies as a young man, a Colombian, and a Canadian. His languages are Spanish and English. He and his family became refugees because of their political convictions and came to Canada when he was nine. He is sixteen years old, attends secondary school and works part-time.
- Emily identifies as a young woman who is Canadian and South Asian. Her languages are Bengali, English and Hindi. She immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh as a teenager with her family and is now in her early twenties. She finished high school in Canada, attends post-secondary school and works part-time.
- Hiwot identifies as a young woman who is African-Canadian-Italian. Her languages are Amharic, Italian and English. Her parents emigrated from Ethiopia to Italy, where she was born and grew up. When she was a teenager, she and her family moved to Canada, where she completed secondary school. She is now in her early twenties and is a full time post-secondary student.
- Jon identifies as a young man who is Korean-Canadian and Christian. His languages are Korean and English. He immigrated to Canada from Korea as a teenager with his family and is now in his mid- twenties. He completed secondary school and his undergraduate degree in Canada and now works full time.
- Lila identifies as a young woman, an Afghan, a migrant settled in Canada and a cultural Muslim. Her languages are Farsi and English. When she was a

¹¹ One participant, Andrés, was only able to attend one workshop due to family responsibilities. However, he requested that any relevant data from his involvement be included in the thesis. For this reason, I have kept his consent form and included his contributions as a participant.

child, she and her family became refugees when the Taliban took over Afghanistan, and underwent a long journey to Pakistan before coming to Canada as government sponsored refugees. She attended elementary school and high school in Canada. She is in her early twenties, attends post-secondary school and works part-time.

- May identifies as a young woman who is Canadian and Bengali. Her languages are Bengali, Hindi and English. She immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh as a teenager with her family and is now in her early twenties. She finished high school in Canada, attends post-secondary school and works part-time.
- Moshtaba identifies as a young man and an Afghan. His languages are Pashto, Farsi/Dari, Russian and English. He and his family became refugees from Afghanistan when he was a child and sought refuge in Kyrgyzstan, where he grew up. As a young adult, he was recruited to Canada under the Government Assisted Refugee program, but had to come without his family because his father was not granted status. He is now in his mid-twenties, attends post-secondary school and works part-time.
- Sofia identifies as a young woman and a Latin American. She and her parents became refugees from Colombia as the result of years of conflict and displacement. When she was a teenager, they were forced to seek asylum and resettlement in Canada. She completed high school and her undergraduate degree in Canada. Her languages are Spanish and English. She is now in her mid-twenties, beginning her graduate studies, and working full time.

The following quotes in which the participants describe aspects of their migration and settlement process are also included to provide important context about the experiences of multilingual immigrant and refugee students in Canada:

Emily: Initially I was placed in grade 10, ESL level 3 and I remember my ESL classes as being fun and too easy. I was in ESL for 1 term and then got placed in transitional English. I remember most ESL students feeling inferior to their regular classmates and being in ESL was perceived as "uncool". Regardless, I enjoyed my time being an ESL student. In grade 12 I finally got placed in regular English but I was put in regular English 11 while I was in grade 12. The pressure to fit in and adapt to my new environment, the pressure from my family to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education and the struggle to financially support myself and help my family did make it difficult to settle after moving to Vancouver but over time things got better. I familiarized myself with the education system with the help of peers and mentors and after many years I do feel like I am a part of my community.

Hiwot: I was lucky enough to have been an English speaker prior to my move and I believe that has greatly affected my Canadian experience.

Jon: I struggled in many aspects of being included in peer groups at school. [. . .] Having my father back in my home country affected me a lot as I did not have a father figure most of the time.

May: We had pretty good life but my parents moved here so my sister and I could have better education and have better career options as girls.

Moshtaba: When I came to Canada, it was hard. Life was hard. I was struggling with everything starting from taking the bus and getting engaged in the community.

Sofia: My migration was very challenging as it was the result of years of conflict and displacement. When I arrived in Vancouver I faced many difficulties in school. My experience in ESL classrooms was discouraging. For the most part, I felt that the curriculum offered in the program, as well as the teachers' preparation to work with students who had faced trauma was inadequate. Had it not been for one or two amazing teachers I encountered in high school, as well as the support I received from community engagement workers and peers, I might have contributed to the drop-out statistic of Latin American youth. Overall, though grad school is a place where I have been able to better express my ideals and multiplicity of identities, there are still many challenges that deeply affect me and my community. For instance, the recent changes to immigration law have left me feeling further alienated from society. Regardless of the changes, I continue to work with and advocate for immigrant and refugee communities where possible.

Six of the participants knew all of their fellow participants well from previous work together in the Youth Network, while two participants had not yet met one another in person. Nevertheless, they all expressed a feeling of connection to one another through their shared membership in the Youth Network, and their commitment to its values and goals.

3.5. Research Design and Implementation

The research was organized in two stages: 1) the Literary Engagement Workshops (the workshops) and 2) follow-up semi-structured group interviews. In this section I will discuss the decisions involved in the research design, and then reflect on how the design played out in the field, including the adaptations I made in response to unexpected issues.

3.5.1. *Literary Engagement Workshops*

The Literary Engagement Workshops were intended to provide the participants with the opportunity to use reader response and critical literacy methods in interpreting literary texts both as individuals and as members of a group in dialogue. In particular, drawing on Sumara's use of "literary anthropology" (Iser, 1989, cited in Sumara 2002) in reader response research (discussed in depth in Chapter 2.6), the goal of the workshops was to provide a structured pedagogical process inviting the participants to first interpret the texts through the lenses of their individual experiences, and then to re-examine their own interpretations through encountering lenses different from their own, either by hearing the perspectives of others in group discussion, or through intertextual analysis. I also hoped that the workshops would prove to be a valuable, empowering space in which the participants would be able to pursue their own learning goals as they explored their relationships to the literary texts, and to the act of interpreting literature.

The design of the workshops is adapted from the pedagogical approaches used by Sumara (2002) in engaging readers in literary anthropological research methods to explore the interpretive practices associated with the reader/text relationship, and by van der Wey (2012, 2001) in her work on the possibilities and challenges of learning in coalition for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through use of Indigenous literature. Both scholars use the idea of a "commonplace book" as coined by Sumara (1996), which is the central literary text (or series of texts) around which an interpretive practice may be created by connections to other "horizontal texts", which act as historical, philosophical and theoretical lenses (Sumara 2002) through which different aspects of the commonplace text, and the reader's relationship to it, may be examined. The concept of horizontal texts can be thought of as an explicit pedagogical project of

creating opportunities for intertextual interpretation. In addition to horizontal texts, Sumara and van der Wey both identify a range of other interpretive connections including memories, stories, conversations with others, and media. Through these connections, readers have opportunities to review past, present and imagined interpretations of themselves, of others, of events and of places (Sumara 2002, p.29). van der Wey explicitly uses critical literacy (2012, 2001) and coalition politics theory (2012) to “set the stage” for critical and respectful dialogue across difference in her research utilizing reader response methods. Drawing on her work, as well as Möller and Allen’s (2000) study of critical approaches to reader response pedagogy, I wove critical literacy theory and activities throughout the workshops with the intention of engaging participants in questioning how power and identity are implicated in interpretation.

Over one month, I conducted four weekly two-hour workshops in which participants engaged with three short literary texts using the methods described above. I was conscious that the workshops should place manageable demands on participants’ time, given the many aspects of their lives— school, work, family and other commitments. For this reason, we used short texts to provide a focused scope for fruitful exploration during a relatively limited time frame. Before providing an overview of the structure of the workshops and how they played out during the fieldwork, I will discuss the criteria and process I used to select the literary texts and their accompanying “horizontal” texts or materials.

I began by defining what I considered to be important criteria for selecting relevant and accessible texts, based on the study’s research questions and a review of the literature about reader response theory, critical literacy, and literacy issues for multilingual people. The criteria included: texts published in English, or in English translation, as well as texts including the use of other languages or English dialects for literary purposes. They should be of a language level that is accessible to all the participants’ reading competencies, yet also provide enough challenge to allow for multiple aspects of literary analysis, for example: language use which subverts or plays with familiar grammatical, lexical or discoursal categories, mixed registers, poetic devices, and symbolic rather than literal meaning (Hirvela 2001). I did not have the resources to formally assess participants’ competencies for reading literary language in English, nor did I wish to do so as I believe any form of standardized assessment would

have worked against the intentions of the study, which was to provide a space built around participants' needs and interests, rather than any external standards. Instead, I asked myself the following questions:

- If the work contains language that may be unfamiliar to participants, is there enough context or familiar language to infer meaning?
- If the work subverts or plays with familiar grammatical, lexical or discursive categories, are the original categories such that they would be relevant and familiar to participants (i.e., do they reflect instances of language that participants might encounter in their everyday lives or studies?)
- Can participants draw on literary competencies and experiences in their mother tongue to infer similar conventions for reading and interpreting literature in English?

Texts should offer multiple affordances for interpretation, and should represent diverse experiences and ways of knowing. They should present instances of indeterminacy (Iser 1993, Sumara 2002) which are gaps in understanding suggested by the text which demand that the reader/learner is actively involved in 'teasing out' the unstated implications and assumptions of the text. Sumara (2002) suggests that texts suitable for reader response methods should challenge readers to "expand their perceptions and interpretations" (p. 97) Texts should offer opportunities to consider complex issues such as identity, belonging, migration, power, difference and intersectionality as they are relevant for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth. Finally, the works should provide participants with opportunities to encounter perspectives they may not have previously considered, or questions which may challenge their worldviews.

An important decision I made was to prioritize works by Canadian authors of immigrant and refugee backgrounds, or Canadian authors of colour. I chose this focus for two reasons. First, I predicted that such works would speak to participants' realities, whether through linguistic, cultural and aesthetic connections, or relevant events, contexts and issues. Second, influenced by Mukherjee's (1994) arguments on the place of "third world" writers in Canadian literature, I am committed to foregrounding literature which "challenges the unitary notions of national identity and asserts that being different by no means equates with being un-Canadian" (p. *xiii*). Mukherjee further argues that "racial and ethnic minority writers, particularly Aboriginal writers, have been at the

forefront in this task of re-thinking and reformulating the meaning of Canada as a nation state” (p. *xiii*). My goal in focusing on works by Canadian authors of immigrant and refugee backgrounds, or Canadian authors of colour was to make space for the complexities of intra-group difference in immigrant and refugee identities, as well as the issues of marginalization that immigrants face, and so it made sense to provide a space specifically for immigrant and refugee youth. Further connections with other bodies of literature, such as the important role of Aboriginal literature in Canada as noted by Mukherjee above (and also by a number of scholars of Aboriginal literature in Canada, for example, Armstrong, 1993; Eigenbrod, 2005; Episkenew, 2002), though beyond the scope of this research, are important issues for further study, a possibility I discuss in the conclusion of this thesis.

I compiled the following list of literary works as options for the workshops:

- Excerpts from Kim Thuy’s (2009, trans. Fischman 2012) novel *Ru*
- d’bi.young.anitafrika’s (2007) poem “rivers and other blackness between us”
- Rahat Kurd’s (2011) suite of three poems, “Surplus Knowledge”
- “Andante” from Tablo’s (Daniel Armand Lee) (2009) short fiction collection *Pieces of You*
- Selected poems and short fiction from Wayde Compton’s (2004) *Performance Bond*
- Carmen Aguirre’s (2000) play, *Chile con Carne*
- Selected poems from Evelyn Lau’s (1990, 2010) poetry collections *You Are Not Who you Claim* and *Living Under Plastic*
- “Money Tree” or “A Habit of Waste” from Nalo Hopkinson’s (2001) short fiction collection *Skin Folk*
- “Drift” from Hiromi Goto’s (2004) short fiction collection *Hopeful Monsters*
- “Seawall Sightings” or “Reunited” from Paul Yee’s (2002) short fiction collection *Dead Man’s Gold and Other Stories*

I then approached the participants for their feedback on this list, with which I included a short introduction to each of the pieces. I shared my criteria for text selection with them, and invited them to suggest other literary works in line with the criteria if they wished to do so. Several additional texts were suggested by participants, and although some of these were not possible due to excessive length or lack of availability, two were included in the list and one, “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), was eventually selected. I facilitated a

consensus decision-making process (in line with the one used by the Youth Network) in which participants indicated their top three choices, and we looked for combinations that would meet each person's priorities. The three pieces chosen were: d'bi.young.anitafrika's (2007) "rivers... and other blackness... between us", Rahat Kurd's (2011) "Surplus Knowledge", Tablo's (2009) "Andante". Kim Thuy's (2009, trans. Fischman 2012) novel *Ru* was initially as high a priority as "Andante", but because of its greater length, the group decided to leave it as a fourth, alternate choice, with the possibility of reading it for the final workshop, time permitting.

I found it important to engage in this participatory process because over the course of my work with the Youth Network, the members have emphasized that they consider decision-making power to be an essential component of a participatory project. Being included in decisions is important to them as a way of resisting and re-framing their past experiences in projects or organizations in which decisions were made for them, or without adequate consultation. During the follow-up interviews, several participants shared their thoughts about the consultation:

Because we got to choose the literature, we were able to identify with them more on a personal level. And we could contribute more, because we could see that, before when we were selecting the literature, there were some things that I could identify with.

(Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Something else that I liked was that we got to pick our readings. We had a big say— I mean, things were pre-selected, but we got a big say on what. And then it was also explained why we couldn't read some of the others, because it was too long, or because—So I felt a big, um, contribution to the process and to the things that we read, for sure.

(Sofia Interview, July 16, 2012)

The selected pieces met the goal of providing an array of texts capable of speaking to a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. d'bi.young.anitafrika's (2007) "rivers and other blackness between us" is performance-based dub poetry (both the text and a video recording of the artist performing it were used in the workshops). Dub poetry developed in the context of the political and social struggles of Jamaican independence and Black activism. It is a significant literary practice in Jamaica and across the Jamaican diaspora which is embodied through speech, rhythm, musicality, movement and political action (young.anitafrika 2010). The poem "rivers and other

blackness between us” weaves together both “Canadian Standard English” (though with poetic flexibility), and “Jamaica’s national language” (young.anitafrika, 2010, p. 55), also known as Jamaican Creole, to explore how identity is entangled with social and cultural memory through themes of decolonization, intersectionality, resistance, and healing. The author describes herself as “an afrikan-jamaican-canadian dubpoet, dramatist and educator”, who was born and raised in Jamaica until immigrating to Canada at 15 years of age (young.anitafrika, 2010, p.56).

Rahat Kurd’s (2011) suite of three poems, “Surplus Knowledge” slowly reveals glimpses of a story, yet these glimpses remain fractured, hinting, yet never fully revealing, so that the reader is left with questions and possibilities, rather than answers. These glimpses come through the memories of the poem’s unidentified speaker, who tells of growing up in an immigrant family in Ontario: memories of navigating the overlapping and sometimes conflicting worlds of Islam, family, and mainstream Canadian adolescence; memories of family rituals and relationships, and later, images of an unnamed catastrophe shaded by suggestions of violence, imprisonment and alienation. Throughout the poem, the author addresses the specificities of cultural and religious experience by integrating the language of prayer and images of daily practices in Muslim communities. The author identifies herself as a poet, a writer on arts, politics and culture, and as a Canadian of Kashmiri and Pakistani background (Kurd, 2001).

Tablo’s (2009) short story “Andante” is narrated by a young Japanese-American man who is struggling to understand his father’s battle with Alzheimer’s disease. The story explores the complex and problematic tensions of family roles and relationships, as well as questions about individual desires, family responsibility, and creative expression. The author, Daniel Armand Lee, who publishes under his stage name Tablo, is a Korean-Canadian writer, rapper, song writer and record producer.

During the follow-up interviews, several participants reflected on issues of accessibility and relevance with respect to the selected literary texts. For Sofia, the focus on diverse writers led her to feel “more respected”. She elaborated:

Even though we didn’t even read anybody that was from Latin America, in terms of being a woman of colour– like look, there are so many writers, so many artists, so many wonderful pieces by people of colour, and we don’t get ever to experience them, because we always

read Shakespeare or whatever we read in high school, I can't remember... 'Of Mice and Men' or whatever.

(Sofia Interview, July 16, 2012)

May also emphasized the importance of being able to make personal connections to the literary texts, saying, "It was interesting to read stories from different parts of the world that could reflect what is going on for people like us, our families, our friends" (May, Interview, July 17, 2012). Emily provided an important counter-point to the discussion by recognizing that although she could not always connect her experiences or perspectives with some of the works, ". . . unless you are exposed to things that are different from you, how else are you going to broaden your knowledge?" (Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012).

Following methods used by van der Wey (2012), a key component of the research design was a series of activities intended to "set the stage"¹², that is, to ensure that all the participants have an opportunity to develop or share their skills and knowledge for engaging critically and respectfully across difference. Because of their work with the Youth Network and other social justice movements, many of the participants already brought training in anti-oppression facilitation, and thus had experiences and theoretical frameworks which allowed them to engage at a high level with the concepts and activities based on coalition politics theory. I saw this as an asset, and facilitated the groundwork activities such that participants could share their knowledge with the group. It is important to recognize that the activities that I introduced could only form a part of the groundwork, and necessarily interacted with the pre-existing relationships between the participants and the knowledge and experiences they brought with them.

In the first session, I used a group guidelines activity based on van der Wey's (personal communication, April 2010) curricular and pedagogical use of Lee Mun Wah's (2004) "The Art of Listening", which draws attention to the skills in observation, empathy

¹² "Setting the stage" is a pedagogical sequence that my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey, has used in her teaching and curricular work. She has discussed elements of "setting the stage" in her 2012 study, and continues to develop other aspects through her current research. She shared the sequence and related resources with me in order to support my research.

and self-reflexivity which can support participants in critically and respectfully participating in dialogues across difference and power. I posted a large copy of the statements from “The Art of Listening” on flipcharts around the room, and asked participants to read them aloud, and then reflect on what the statements might mean for our group process. Participants also shared other conditions or actions that would be necessary for them to feel respected and safe in the space. In that way, we developed a set a guidelines that would guide our interactions and discussions. Examples from “The Art of Listening” include: “Listen to what is being said and what is not”; “Observe the language of the body”; “Notice how something is being expressed and what words are used”; “Acknowledge and utilize the wisdom that is in each person”; “Accept and validate the truthfulness of each person’s perception”. Examples of participants’ guidelines include “participation come in different ways”; “Check-in before correcting someone’s pronunciation or grammar”; “be aware of how much space you are taking.”

I adapted methods introduced by van der Wey (2012) for using coalition politics theory as a pedagogical tool, drawing on writings by Burack (2004) and Reagon (1983). By acknowledging the complexities and unevenness of power relations at the level of the self and in intra and inter-group contexts, I intended coalition politics theory to provide an important framework for the participants to reflect on and openly discuss their feelings about unpacking assumptions, biases, and stereotypical views, as well as to acknowledge the tensions that are inevitable when undertaking such work. I also shared my understanding of how my own social location and position as the researcher might impact our group, particularly addressing that my presence as a white, Canadian-born person changed what would otherwise have been a space for immigrant and refugee people. I made it clear that I am committed to ongoing critical analysis of my position, and would welcome participants’ feedback about how they are impacted by my presence, utterances, or actions. I shared two supplemental readings: Reagon’s (1983) essay on the difficult emotional work that coalitions entail, and a vignette from Episkenew’s (2002) article, “Socially Responsible Criticism”, which illustrates that interpreting literature across differences of power requires seeking out knowledge and critical tools to learn about the contexts and ideologies that inform the text, as well as those contexts and ideologies that inform the reader’s interpretation. Time limits during the workshops, and many participants’ lack of time for doing supplementary readings

between sessions proved to be a challenge for this part of the groundwork activities. However, I observed that the participants consistently practiced respectful and inclusive self-facilitation, and drew on prior knowledge of anti-oppression and intersectionality to develop critical self-awareness in relation to the literary works and to their discussions with one another. I discuss specific instances of these practices in Chapter Six.

Following van der Wey's (2012,2001) and Sumara's (2002) methods, I provided participants with personal copies of the three literary works¹³, inviting them to take ownership of the texts by recording all their responses, questions or notes as they read, whether by marking the text directly, or by keeping a separate recording system of their choice. I asked participants to read and annotate each work twice: once before the workshop in which we discussed it, and once during or after the workshop. In each workshop, I provided "horizontal" texts (Sumara, 2002), such as essays, media articles, websites and videos, which were to be juxtaposed or connected with the primary texts to explore intertextual meaning (van der Wey, 2012). For example, with d'bi.young.anitafrika's (2007) poem "rivers... and other blackness... between us", I used a video recording of the poet performing her work to raise questions about the role of performativity, language and literary form. I also provided horizontal resources, including a webpage on the historical, social and political context of language for people living in Jamaica and the Jamaican Diaspora (Chang, 2012), and a video by young.anitafrika (2012), in which she provides an introduction to dub poetry. Participants were also welcome to suggest their own horizontal resources. These processes of using intertextual resources and repeated readings are aimed at attuning readers to the changing, shifting nature of their interaction with the text (van der Wey, 2012).

Throughout the workshops, I structured activities to include critical literacy tools and questioning strategies. Luke (2000) provides the following guidance for developing a pedagogical practice of critical literacy: "the aim is to generate vigorous classroom debates over what texts attempt to do, which ideologies are represented, and how students can use them in different social fields. The agenda is not about the imposition

¹³ In accordance with the fair dealing exception for research purposes under the *Copyright Act* and SFU's agreement with Access Copyright

of a particular political ideology; rather, it is about beginning from the supposition of the embeddedness of reading and writing, of all texts and discourses, within the normative fields of power, value and exchange” (p.453). Critical literacy questions adapted from Giroux (1992) were posted in the room to serve as prompts for discussions and activities. Example of the questions include: “whose interests are being served by the representations in question? Who speaks, for whom, and under what conditions? Where can we situate such representations ethically and politically with respect to questions of social justice and human freedom? What moral, ethical, and ideological principles structure our reactions to such representations?” (p. 219).

I incorporated a variety of activities into the workshops with the goal of providing opportunities for participants to approach literary interpretation through multiple learning styles, and to re-distribute the traditional literature classroom’s emphasis on language-based analysis (e.g., dialogue and written responses) so that participants might have the chance to be temporarily liberated from language barriers. These structured activities included:

- **Tableaux theatre:** Participants create a tableau (a frozen visual picture with their bodies) to emphasize key details, relationships, or emotions in a text, or portion of a text. Tableaux usually involve a focus on facial expressions, individual body position, and relational body position. The small group presents the tableau to the whole group and invites others to comment, ask questions, and even change the tableau by adding or replacing a person to include their different interpretations (Adapted from Boal 2002).
- **Found Poems in Literature:** Participants identify the three words and three phrases which they find most significant in a text, and then rearrange them to form a poem (i.e. by arranging and repeating the words and phrases in different patterns). The found poems may also include words/phrases from intertextual connections and the notes participants have taken during dialogues. The poems are performed for the others, and the small group leads a whole group discussion (Adapted from Smagorinsky 2008).
- **Starting with questions:** In a round, participants share an aspect of the literary work about which they have questions or uncertainty. This may include unfamiliar grammatical, lexical or discourse features, questions about background or context or questions about indeterminacies. The intent of this activity is to acknowledge that every reader will face gaps in knowledge when interpreting literature, and to encourage learning through asking questions.

I also varied discussion formats among large group, small group and pairs. I included structured facilitation techniques such as rounds, in which each participant speaks in

turn and responses are held until everyone has spoken, and using a talking object, whereby an object is passed between participants, giving only its bearer the right to speak, while others must listen. Based on my observations and the feedback cards after each session, some participants seemed to feel more comfortable or more engaged by small groups or pairs, while others seemed to thrive in the large group. Some enjoyed the structured discussions, while others preferred to “let the discussion flow”.

As the workshop design unfolded in reality, I discovered some aspects that required reconsideration and changes. Some activities played out differently than I had anticipated, or departed from procedures described in similar studies. Some changes were minor, such as adapting subsequent sessions to respond to the participants’ feedback. However, a significant difference to emerge was that my study’s timeframe and scope was more limited than those described by Sumara (2002) and van der Wey (2001, 2012). Although I did include “horizontal” readings and resources, the recursive interpretive processes they are intended to foster would have required a structure such that participants could devote substantial time; for example, a classroom setting as in van der Wey’s (2001, 2012) research and Möller and Allen’s (2000) study or a group of people with the goal of professional development as in Sumara’s (2002) research.

The participants in my study were generous with their time, but their circumstances as young adults juggling school, work and family responsibilities, as well as other challenges, made it such that they could not volunteer significant additional time beyond attending the workshops. All of the participants read the primary text for each session, but as for the additional resources, two people said they did not use any, four people said that they had used at least some, and two people said that they had used all of them. Participants would have needed a longer period over which to return to the texts multiple times, and to process how new information and perspectives impacted their interpretations. I attempted to respond to this issue by designing the fourth workshop as a chance for participants to pick the literary work they most wanted to revisit, and to create an activity based on their new or changing interpretations of it to share with the group. While I believe that this did provide some opportunity for deeper reflection, it was still limited by time. I wondered if using only one text for all four workshops might have provided the necessary time for recursivity. However, feedback from the participants indicated that they had valued the range of themes, issues and

forms provided by the three texts, so using only one text would have necessitated a trade-off of depth versus variety.

3.5.2. *Follow-up interviews*

The follow-up interviews were intended to provide a space for participants to reflect on and debrief their experiences in the Literary Engagement Workshops. In the research design, I left the possibility open for either individual or group interviews in order to allow for my decision to be informed by emerging issues in the workshops, such as the dynamics among the participants. Ultimately, each choice had benefits and limitations. Individual interviews would offer an alternative format to the group-based workshops, and could provide a confidential space for discussing group dynamics or any other issues participants might feel unable to raise in front of their peers. Group interviews would provide participants with the opportunity to build off one another's insights, and to hear others' perspectives about the workshops. After the final workshop, I asked the participants to indicate their preference for individual or group interviews. I shared my thoughts on the trade-off between the two formats, and ensured that each person's response was confidential. They unanimously chose group interviews, with many stating that they looked forward to the opportunity to debrief with others, to hear others' perspectives, and to continue conversations from the workshops. Based on my observations of the group dynamics, I was not aware of any issues that might have caused any individual to feel uncomfortable or silenced in a group interview. However, conscious that observations may be limited by various factors, I encouraged participants to contact me if they wanted to share confidential feedback, or debrief individually.

I arranged two ninety-minute small group interviews, with three and four participants, respectively, between July 16 and 17, 2012. The interviews also took place at the same lower mainland university campus. The smaller group size allowed for more time for each participant to contribute to the discussion, and made it easier for me to focus my facilitation on ensuring that participants' voices were heard as equally as possible (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2011). The interviews were semi-structured using questions which I created to guide the discussion around the research questions (see Appendix D). I revisited the questions throughout the first phase of the research in order to adapt them to emerging themes or issues. I chose a semi-structured format because

it allowed participants to direct the interview toward themes or issues that had arisen for them and of which I may not be aware. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011) suggest that researchers may partially address issues of asymmetrical power in research by using informal, open-ended interviews “which follow the train of thought and response of the respondent” (p. 435). Additionally, the authors signal the importance of the interviewer’s conduct, which should include a non-judgemental and non-evaluative stance, giving the participants undivided attention, explicitly recognizing power asymmetries, and providing opportunities for respondent validation and clearance. I modeled my conduct on these recommendations.

The guiding questions focused on the following:

- If, or how, participants’ interpretations of the texts developed over the course of the workshops;
- If, or how, participating in the workshops impacted the ways participants conceptualize the act of literary interpretation;
- If, or how, participating in the workshops impacted their self-perception as readers or their understanding of their educational experiences;
- Themes and issues emerging from interpersonal and group dynamics during the workshops.

3.6. Data collection

Holliday (2011) suggests that researchers seek to ensure validity in qualitative research through thick description (citing Geertz, 1973), which he argues allows for “a broad interconnection of phenomena with which to underpin understanding and meaning in social research” (p. 29). In line with these aims, I included a variety of data sources, in order to consider the multiple and overlapping aspects of the participants’ experiences from different angles. The four workshops and the two group interviews were video and audio recorded and full verbatim transcripts for each were produced. During the sessions, I took mental note of things that might not be captured by the audio/video recording, such as my observations of non-verbal cues, and wrote up notes immediately following the interview sessions. I also kept notes about my expectations, assumptions and reactions to events in the research, both before and after each session (Maxwell, 2005). Like Sumara (2002) and van der Wey (2001, 2012), I saw the participants’ notes

and journals about the literary texts as an important data source for examining how their interpretations may have changed over the course of the research. After the workshops, I requested that the participants submit their notes and journals to me; however, the participants had the final choice about which of their writings they wished to share, and which they wished to keep private. I made photocopies of their submissions, and returned the original versions. The workshops included a formative evaluation component, in which participants provided feedback on comment cards at the end of each workshop. While I primarily used the feedback to improve subsequent workshops, I also included it as data. Finally, I invited participants to write, or verbally share their own short biography discussing the aspects of their identity and the experiences which they consider most significant to the research, so that I could include their own words and self-identifications in the thesis.

3.7. Data Analysis

My theoretical approach to the data analysis was informed by hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1997) because I am committed to attempting to understand the research questions through attention to the lived experiences of the participants. Schwandt (2001) defines phenomenology as an approach which “insists on careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life (the life-world) – a description of ‘things’ (the essential structures of consciousness) as one experiences them” (p.192). van Manen (1997) argues that phenomenology is particularly appropriate for inquiry into pedagogy, because teaching and learning are ways of being, and as such cannot be measured or even observed directly; insight must be invited from those who experience a particular pedagogical situation, and can thus only be interpreted, but never fully known, by the researcher.

I modeled my methods of analysis on Auerbach & Silverstein’s (2003) approach which seeks to analyse and interpret qualitative data “in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon” (p. 3). The authors describe this approach as “hypothesis-generating” because they allow the researcher to acknowledge that theoretical categories may be developed by studying patterns in the research data, rather using the data to test or validate pre-established theories or hypotheses. When

the research involves human participants, hypothesis-generating approaches are important for acknowledging that the research participants are active agents in co-constructing knowledge with the researcher. They have unique insight into the phenomenon being studied because they are experiencing it directly. Like Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), LeCompte and Schensul (1999) suggest that finding initial patterns in the data begins with the researcher noticing that “certain phrases, events, activities, behaviours, ideas or other phenomena occur repeatedly in the data” (p. 46). Both the above scholars emphasize that researchers must be explicit about how they may be sensitized to specific items and ideas because of the conceptual frameworks within which they work.

I engaged in informal, preliminary analysis as I transcribed and read over the transcripts, reviewed participants’ writings and read over my own notes. I used this initial overview to notice connections, patterns and anomalies. This informal analysis was useful, as it allowed me to become familiar with the data, and to notice how my theoretical frameworks directed my attention to certain themes rather than others. However, I felt strongly that I needed a structured process for analysis in order to engage in deep, critical analysis of the data. I coded the data by hand using Microsoft Word files to store different organizations of the data through progressive phases of analysis, and used large flip charts to map out visual representations of codes, themes and connections.

I began by reviewing all the data and highlighting “relevant text”, or any relevant items that expressed a distinct idea related to my research concerns (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). I then annotated the relevant text/items to record why I thought a particular selection was important, and began to organize them into groups which expressed similar ideas. Auerbach and Silverstein call this step “repeated ideas”, and make a strong connection between the frequency of ideas and their value as larger themes. Cautious about dismissing potentially important data, I also drew on LeCompte and Schensul (1999) to place importance on other types of patterns: ideas that are rare but seem influential; expressions of dissent or alternate perspectives; and data that resonates with the researcher’s theoretical frameworks. The “repeated ideas” and other patterns I identified as relevant became my codes. I read through the data in the codes several times, making changes and refinements. Next, I made sticky-notes for each

code, and created a series of large concept maps on flip chart paper to explore the connections between the codes. From these maps, I developed the key themes and sub-themes, and organized them into an outline for my thesis. Throughout the process, I often returned to the raw data to review data that had gone uncoded in light of changes in the themes and new connections.

The method of coding I used focuses on “what was said” (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, p. 48), that is, the participants’ own words and narratives formed the majority of the categories for coding. I found this method of coding to be consistent with my research goals of listening to immigrant and refugee youth’s narratives of their experiences. Such a method is relevant when rich analyses can be developed directly from what the participants express. I believe that this was the case with my research data because participants consistently expressed (in confidential written feedback and in group settings) that they felt the research context provided a safe enough space to allow them to express themselves relatively free from judgement, being silenced or being excluded. However, at times I noticed that important ideas were expressed not through direct communication, but rather through body language, intonation, or silence. In these cases, I drew on critical discourse analysis (Cameron 2001), which focuses on how things were expressed, or what was not expressed, often in relation to power dynamics. I met with each participant to review their portion of the transcripts, and to show them how their direct quotes and paraphrased ideas would be included in the final draft of the thesis. I sought their feedback on transcription accuracy, and in cases where I had interpreted their words or inferred meaning, I asked for clarification and permission.

My approach, primarily influenced by LeCompte and Schensul (1999) and Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) shares many of the concerns of narrative analysis (Holstein and Gubrium 2005). By considering that all the data in a research study can be in some way represented through multiple narratives about each participant’s subjective experience, I see data analysis as a way of hearing and organizing participants’ voices. My method aimed to use participants’ own words as much as possible; however, along with Holstein and Gubrium I also recognize that analysis “brings together the two very different worlds of researcher and participant” (p. 53) by weaving the researcher’s theoretical framework throughout the narratives of subjective experience.

3.8. Ethics and Validity

Discussions of ethics and validity are woven throughout Chapters One, Two and Three. This section reviews these discussions, pointing to their locations in the thesis for ease of reference.

The ethical issues that I consider most relevant to this research are: 1) the relationship between the researcher and the participants, and 2) voice and representation. Ethical concerns about research relationships include how I understand the notion of respect for the research participants, in particular how I approached the participatory process (Chapter 3.2), as well as the impact of my pre-existing relationships with the participants (Chapter 3.3). The implications of my privilege in my role as the researcher, which I examine in Chapter 1.4, are related to both research relationships and voice and representation. Building on this, in Chapter 2.7, I review the literature on theories of difference, including critical race theory, intersectionality and coalition politics theory in order to engage with the ethical challenges of voice and representation in working with immigrant and refugee youth as an outsider researcher. Key issues include Alcoff's (1991) discussion of the problem of speaking for others, Young's (1997) model of asymmetrical reciprocity, Narayan's (1988) concept of insider epistemological privilege.

The ethical concerns that I outline in Chapter 2.7 are also connected to issues of validity in qualitative research, including the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1997) that I used for this study. It is essential to acknowledge that my subject position is implicated in all aspects of this research: how I came to the research; the study design and implementation; my interpretation of the events which occurred during the research; the analysis and the representation of the participants' experiences and voices. Validity includes providing insight into how I came to construct my representations, so that they may be seen as just that – representations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, despite acknowledging the limits of my ability to know and to represent, I am still responsible for following the practices of research validity that have been advanced by qualitative researchers who are concerned with the problematic of representation (See, for example, Holliday, 2011). I explain how I implemented these practices in Chapter sections 3.3, 3.8 and 3.9. This research was approved by Simon

Fraser University's Office of Research Ethics for all aspects of participant recruitment, confidentiality, research design, data storage, data collection and data analysis.

4. Reading Literature in an Interpretive Community¹⁴

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to understand how the research participants moved from conceptualizing literary interpretation as an individual product to exploring literature through a community process and collaborative meaning-making project. To do so, I draw on Sumara's (1996) elaboration of Bleich's (1978, cited in Sumara 1996, p. 132) concept of "interpretive community" which argues that individual responses to literature develop within activity systems, both shaping, and being shaped by a web of interpersonal and intertextual experiences. In the first section, I document how over the course of their involvement in the Literary Engagement Workshops (hereafter "the workshops"), the participants became increasingly comfortable and confident in articulating their ideas about the literary works, even when they felt that these ideas were still "in-progress". Next, I show how the opportunity to hear and consider multiple perspectives, either from fellow group members or through intertextual analysis, challenged the participants to reflect on the ways in which they had come to form their own initial interpretations and to grapple with the question of how multiple possible readings of a text might co-exist. I also explore how participants enriched the interpretive possibilities of the literary works by engaging their multiliteracies¹⁵, including sharing experiential knowledge about their languages and cultures, creating connections between literature and lived experience and exploring emotional and bodily interpretations of the text. Finally, I argue that as the participants engaged their

¹⁴ Sumara (1996) suggests that individual responses to literature are woven into a fabric of interpersonal and intertextual experiences of reading, for which he builds on Bleich's (1978 cited in Sumara 1996, p. 132) concept of "interpretive community".

¹⁵ I refer to the following related concepts as "multiliteracies" in the interest of brevity: "multiliteracies" (Smythe & Toohey 2009; Lotherington, Sotoudeh, Holland, & Zentena, 2008), "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), "hybrid literacies" (Bhabha 1994) and "culturally responsive pedagogy" (Orellana and Reynolds 2008). See Chapter 2.5)

multiliteracies, they began to challenge the hierarchies of knowledge validity which they had encountered in their previous educational experiences.

4.2. Valuing “in-progress” contributions

The conversations in the room were all about uncertainty. It was the informal gathering time before the start of the second workshop, and the participants were checking in, asking about one another’s experiences reading Kurd’s (2011) suite of poems, “Surplus Knowledge”. I grew worried as I listened to their discussions. Although often funny or lightly self-deprecating, their comments revealed that they had struggled to understand the poems. Sofia provoked sympathetic laughter from other group members as she recounted her reaction to the first poem: “This one was, is, really tough. My head was hurting. My eye was going like this [indicating twitching eye] when I was reading it on the skytrain” (Sofia, Workshop, June 11, 2012). Moshtaba added, “I have something in my mind, but my mind is blocked because I can’t get to it, I can’t break it, the poem I mean” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012). The participants also talked about feeling daunted by the text’s multiple layers of difficulty, including poetic language which subverts Standard English grammatical forms, unfamiliar vocabulary in English, lines in Arabic and Punjabi, references to Islamic scripture, and events alluded to, but left unexplained. Perhaps I had misjudged. I had also found the poems to be challenging, but were they too difficult? However, as we became engaged in the group discussions and activities I had prepared for the text, something shifted. There was a mounting sense of excitement as many of the participants jumped in with their ideas about certain sections of the text, shared their knowledge about historical, cultural or scriptural references in the poems, asked questions or sought out additional information online. Participants who had begun the workshop by saying that they had nothing to contribute because they had not understood the poems now spoke at length about their interpretations. What had changed? Looking back through the transcripts and my notes, I began to see a pattern.

Reflecting back on their experiences in the workshops during the follow-up interviews, several of the participants talked about being unable to satisfactorily articulate their responses to “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) while working in isolation.

They described these experiences using words such as “lost” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012), “blocked” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012), “disconnection” (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012) or “unclear” (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). From their descriptions, I infer that they were alluding to feelings, impressions or ideas which the poem had evoked for them, but that they had not yet been able to put into words, or organize into a set of arguments about the poems’ meaning that they considered to be coherent or valid, or in other words, ready to express publically. Yet even in their statements about feeling confused or frustrated by the poems, the participants had also described the group dialogue, and their fellow group members, as sources of help. Comments included, “I will need help to crack this one” (May, Workshop, June 11, 2012); “the one that we’re working on today [“Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011)] - now it is confusing! But I’m looking forward to find out what is exactly going on from all of you” (Emily, Workshop, June 11, 2012); and “it will be interesting to see what another people have to say about it” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012). These comments focused my attention on how the participants used group discussion in a number of ways throughout the workshops— to clarify or to re-articulate initial impressions, to address instances of indeterminacy¹⁶, and to build off one another’s ideas. By group discussion I mean a variety of activity formats that involve participants in sharing their ideas, and in responding to the perspectives of others. This included large group, small group and pair discussion formats, as well as structured facilitation techniques such as rounds or using a talking object.

For Jon, the group discussion was a space where he could find support to clarify his initial, independent attempts to understand the text. He explained,

I wasn’t clear about what I was thinking, but she exactly expressed the way that I felt about the poem, and that helped too. We kept building, like bouncing off of each other, and that really helped, like bouncing the ideas off of each other. (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Hiwot expressed a similar sentiment, saying “That made sense? It made sense in my head, but I didn’t know if it would make sense to anyone else” (Hiwot, Workshop, June

¹⁶ As referenced in Chapter 2.6 according to Sumara (2002) building on Iser (1993) as gaps in understanding suggested by the text which demand that the reader/learner is actively involved in ‘teasing out’ the unstated implications and assumptions of the text.

11, 2012). In describing their initial responses to the text as “the way that I felt about the poem”, and “it made sense in my head”, Jon and Hiwot suggest impressions or feelings about the text which they recognize as significant, but had not been able to fully articulate. After hearing another participant express a similar idea, Jon was able to use it to frame and clarify his own response. When he talked about “building” and “bouncing ideas off of each other”, he further evoked the supportive aspects of the group discussion as a context for participants to continually get feedback, and to be exposed to the ideas of others which could act as catalysts or building blocks for further interpretations of the text.

Sofia focused on how the group discussion impacted her sense of confidence in her initial response to the text, saying, “I was so lost until we started speaking, and then I realized I wasn’t really lost, it was just easier to articulate it together as a group” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). Feeling lost was not a failure to understand the poem, or to develop ideas about it, but rather a sense that her responses did not become meaningful to her until she was able to activate them through connection to the ideas of others in the group discussion. In the same vein, Andrés exclaimed, “I was just looking at everybody’s interpretation of the poem, and I was looking down at mine, and I was thinking that I wasn’t that off” (Andrés, Workshop, June 11, 2012). Earlier, he had been reluctant to share any of his initial responses to “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) during a group discussion round. He said, “I have a lot of difficulty understanding poetry, and different poetry, so I really don’t have anything to say [...] It totally confuses me, so I really don’t understand. I don’t get this poem” (Andrés, Workshop, June 11, 2012). Yet when I reviewed Andrés’ annotations on his copy of the poem, I noticed that despite his statements about not having anything to say, he had written many insightful questions and comments prior to the workshop. He had identified imagery and references related to race, underlining the words “white skin” and adding a large question mark in the line “think of our white-skinned grandmother/ upstairs in the house on Lloyd Street” “Incantation/Reversal”, 7-8), and again underling the words “this brown stuff” and “your own skin” in the lines “When we were children/ you joined me in the bathroom/and said I’m scrubbing this brown stuff off,/ soap up to your elbows. I leaned over,/ spat out toothpaste, saw you meant your own skin” (“Surplus Knowledge” 18-22). Later in the workshop, as the group discussion delved into the text’s engagement with issues of

racism, Andrés referred back to his notes to draw the group's attention to the aforementioned passages. Andrés' move from early discomfort to later confidence suggests that when he was able to find links between his ideas and those of his fellow group members, he felt more confident about their value.

Moshtaba felt that the grammatical and formal elements of "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011) were challenging, and described his unfamiliarity with English and "North American culture" as a barrier. He was struck by the contrast of recognizing and understanding some of the Arabic words and references, but not being able to connect them to the poem's overall structure because of this language barrier. He said,

[It is] the English part, not the words but you know the grammar, or whatever, the way it's written, it confuses me because I think I know what is it about, but I think if I was more familiar to, you know, North American culture, or had more better understanding of English, it would be much easier for me to understand poem [...] knowing those parts that are in a different language that I can relate to, but at the same time not understanding, you know, not being able to connect that from the English too, yeah, it's confusing.

(Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012).

However, later in the workshop, after becoming immersed in the group discussion, he exclaimed, "You know what makes me happy? That I'm not that off . . . that I have actually understood the poem, yay!" As I have argued above, for many of the participants, hearing the ideas of others served to build their confidence that their initial responses to the text were valuable. In Section 4.5 of this chapter, I will return to a more in-depth analysis of what may have influenced the participants' hesitancy about the value of their initial responses.

The participants' increasing confidence to share their developing ideas led to valuable knowledge construction, providing opportunities for group members to build on their initial responses by filling in gaps and by comparing and contrasting varying points of view. For example, later in the first workshop, Sofia qualified one of her observations about the text with the remark, "And later on she also mentions something about uh, washing her skin- [...] -the brown off. Which I connected to this [*the group's recent conclusion that the Hamilton alluded to in the poem is likely the Canadian city of Hamilton, Ontario*]. But I don't know how. I just connected it. I don't know what that

means” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). Here, Sofia highlights that she believes the connection she has made is important, even though she cannot yet explain how. Even so, rather than dismissing her idea as invalid, or not coherent enough, she contributed it to the group discussion. Her observation prompted Emily to connect issues of racism, assimilation and migration to the text. She asked,

And then you know how you mentioned about Hamilton? So, it’s talking about Canada. Maybe it’s something to do with the fact of being exposed to a new culture, and they’re trying to wash the colour off you? It could be one way of interpreting.

(Emily, Workshop, June 11, 2012)

The “building on” and “bouncing off” of ideas during the group discussions proved to be a powerful way of exploring the “instances of indeterminacy” which we encountered in the literary works. According to Sumara (2002, building on Iser, 1993) instances of indeterminacy are gaps in understanding suggested by the text which invite multiple possible interpretations and call for the reader to make inferences. He argues that it is through grappling with indeterminacy in literary works that readers are challenged to create emergent meanings through exploring the “complex ecology of human/human, human/text, human/context relations” (p. 11), rather than searching for pre-existing meaning in the text. The ways in which readers respond to the instances of indeterminacy may provide observable instances of the kind of active, emergent and relational meaning-making which is central to reader response theory, as articulated in Rosenblatt’s (1978) characterization of the field as the study of “transactional” meaning-making. In recognition that “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) was a challenging text, I structured the first group discussion around the principle of starting with questions. In a round format, each participant was invited to share a question or uncertainty about the poems. The intent of this activity was to acknowledge that every reader will face gaps in knowledge when interpreting literature, and to encourage learning through asking questions. However, as I reviewed the workshop and interview transcripts during analysis, I made the connection between what I had earlier vaguely named “learning”, and Sumara’s arguments about the importance of instances of indeterminacy in the meaning-making process. I now see this activity as a key step in supporting the group to explore emergent meanings.

During the “starting with questions” activity, the participants identified many instances of indeterminacy in “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011). These gaps in meaning prompted the participants to compare evidence from the text, and to ask critical questions. The identity of the speaker (a first-person voice) is ambiguous, as is the speaker’s relationship to a second persona who is addressed as “you”. Participants provided interpretations ranging from a sister speaking to her brother, to an unidentified young man, or to another aspect of the speaker’s self. The following lines, in which the speaker remembers the endearments of her grandmother, proved to be an important site for exploring these questions:

. . . Her playfulness
was to call you her girl while I
in her delighted Punjabi was her boy.
It grieved you, her chortling reversal.

What could it mean?

Meri kurri! Mera mounda!

I know now it was like the prayer against harm

She would often repeat, then blow gently on our foreheads.

A practice of Muslim grandmothers. (“Incantation/Reversal” 13-22)

Our attention was originally drawn to this section by Moshtaba, who asked, “so knowing that she, that the writer, is female, why does she refer to herself as a boy? Like what’s she getting it from? “I in her delighted Punjabi was her boy.” So how is that? Who is it is that is writing?” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012) Moshtaba’s question prompted a discussion about how the linguistic forms used to convey gender identity may be connected to beliefs about gender roles and norms. The close focus on the lines from the text cited above sparked a realization for May and Emily, who drew on their experience of the use of gendered language for endearments in Bengali and Hindi. Emily mused,

Now that I'm working it out, I actually started thinking, I never thought of that word before. You know how saying that "In Punjabi was her boy". In our culture a lot of times you refer to your kids as "beta" . . . "beta" means boy or my son, but you would call your daughter as "beta".
(Emily, Workshop, June 11, 2012)

May agreed, remembering being called "beta" by her neighbours, while Lila and Moshtaba also drew parallels to similar usage in their experiences and languages. From here, Emily made an important critical connection: "But at the same time, it makes me wonder that in our culture, boys are given preference" (Emily, Workshop, June 11, 2012). She and May reflected on the connotation of praise in the term "beta" in the following exchange:

May: It's also interesting because if you do something really awesome, they call you "tu mera beta!" like "you are my son!"
(Workshop, June 11, 2012).

Emily: Because sons are a priority, so when you do something really amazing, you achieve something, as if you have that same sort of, uh... "darjah", what do you call it . . . level . . . so like you're given that status of a son.
(Workshop, June 11, 2012).

Lila then built on their insights to reflect on the complexities of gendered language in her own experience, saying,

In our language it's not about- it ties into the preference for males, but I think it's also- They're not calling you "beta" or "bachem" because they want you to be a male. It's because the male is so much the standard that- because you're a kid and you sort of don't have a gender, they'll use the standard term for you, and that is the male one. So only when you grow up and you're something different, either you stay the same, male, or you become a female.
(Lila, Workshop, June 11, 2012)

In looking back over the flow of the discussion I referenced above, I was struck by an earlier statement from Sofia in response to Moshtaba's original question. She highlighted the tension that may exist between the way one is labeled or perceived by others and how one self-identifies:

I wonder if then this poem is about hiding your i-, or, or being asked to perform an identity that's not yours. Or not the one that you identify with. I didn't know. Because I didn't understand the poem

[laughing slightly]. I just read that sentence.

(Sofia, Workshop, June 11, 2012)

I had not originally seen a connection between Sofia's question and the way the thread of the discussion about gendered language played out, but in revisiting her words, I believe they opened up the opportunity for her peers to think about how identity may be performed and communicated, and then to make connections to their own experiences and knowledge. Although Sofia expressed doubt about her interpretation, she still shared it, and thus provided a new avenue for other participants to make meaning through interrogating the instance of intermediacy. By being able to compare and contrast different perspectives, and draw on different experiences, the participants developed a nuanced and critical discussion regarding issues of gender, language and representation in that particular section of the text. Reflecting back on this process during the interview, Jon described it perceptively:

Often in the classroom it's- we feel kind of fearful and discouraged to express the bits and pieces of the things that we felt were relevant . . . the little things that we got out of the poem, we are afraid to express it because we feel like that is insignificant, because it's just like one thing, right. But those little bits and pieces that we contributed all came together like a puzzle and created a clearer picture of what the poem is about.

(Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Further important questions arose for me when I considered Jon's words. Why did he feel afraid to express his in-progress interpretations of literature, or see them as insignificant? Or were they judged to be insignificant, and if so, by whom? I will return to these issues later in this chapter in section 4.5. In the following section, I explore how the participants deepened their literary analyses through considering multiple perspectives.

4.3. Considering multiple perspectives

In the section above, I argued that the participants used group discussion to clarify and contextualize their initial responses to the text, to address instances of indeterminacy, and to build off one another's in-progress, developing interpretations. Group discussion also continued to be meaningful for the participants as they built on

these preliminary processes of engagement with the text to move into deeper analysis. During the interviews, I asked the participants if their interpretation of the literary texts had changed over the course of the workshops, and if so, what factors might have contributed to these changes. Many participants said that the opportunity to hear and consider multiple perspectives throughout the group discussions and other group activities challenged them to reflect on the ways in which they had come to form their own initial interpretations and to grapple with the question of how multiple possible readings of a text might co-exist.

In the fourth workshop, the participants worked in small groups to revisit one of the previously studied literary works, and to reflect on whether their interpretations may have changed. Hiwot and Emily chose to revisit the poem “rivers and other blackness between us” (young.anitafrika 2007), which we had studied during the first workshop. They represented their analysis using the found poem activity (adapted from Smagorinsky 2008) in which participants identify the three words and three phrases which they find most significant in a text, and then rearrange them to form a new poem (i.e. by arranging and repeating the words and phrases in different patterns). The found poems may also include words or phrases from other sources. Sofia was absent from the workshop, but had also wanted to revisit “rivers and other blackness between us”, and so had sent a written reflection on the poem as her contribution to the small group activity. Hiwot and Emily drew on Sofia’s written reflection during their process in order to include her perspectives in the activity. The found poem they created is reproduced here:

Forgotten

Fear

Studently

Washing away all the unknowing I have come to know

Who among us carry the sage secrets of loving?

This is a healing love

Decolonizing our bodies, minds and lands

The line, “Decolonizing our bodies, mind and lands” comes from Sofia’s written reflection, while all other words and lines are taken from “rivers and other blackness between us”. Sofia’s written reflection reads:

I read the poem many times over and the thing that jumps at me the most is the part about unconditional love which we already discussed. In addition the line “washing away all the unknowing I have come to know” makes me think a lot about decolonizing our bodies, minds and lands. To me this line was super powerful in getting us to be more brotherly/sisterly and start unpacking all of those misconceptions we have built up about our indigenous people who are our families. I think especially this makes a strong statement given that Haiti was the first countries to fight back the colonizers and become an independent nation in Latin America. Haiti was our inspiration for Latin America and those who fought against the Spaniards in Colombia learned everything they learned from Haiti.

(Sofia’s journal emailed on June 24, 2012).

As they presented their found poem to the larger group, Hiwot and Emily credited Sofia’s reflection with pushing them to reconsider their earlier interpretations of “rivers and other blackness between us”, particularly for the following lines:

somewhere between a dream and a time-less-ness

across di ocean waters

black sons and dawtahs

black moddahs and fadahs

black auntie uncle sistah and breddah

stretch love fabric

thick and thin

suh now we trodding

trying to heal dese scars

of broken fibre

dat stick up inna wi like macka (17-27)

Hiwot described her experience of recursively re-reading and re-interpreting the poem:

We kind of combined our ideas and I got a whole new reading of it [the poem, "rivers and other blackness between us" (young.anitafrika, 2007)]. And I thought, oh, I thought I understood this poem, but then after all we talked about it, I was like, oh, I feel like I didn't understand it at all, and so it was a little bit of a shock, because I thought I really had a good grasp on it, but after I talked to her [Emily], and after we read it, I don't know, five times again, and we wrote different notes, and I think also what Sofia said in her email, that really changed my initial thought of what she was talking about, and I thought it was quite interesting that on the fourth session my thoughts could just change. (Hiwot, Interview, July 17, 2012)

In the first workshop, Hiwot had focused on the juxtaposition of love and fear in the poem (these words are often repeated), but recalled she had been unable to reconcile the above lines; they had just not seemed to fit in with her original interpretation. Now, she was able to interpret them through the lens of Sofia's analysis which explicitly named the legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean and Latin America, prompting Hiwot to re-interpret the lines in light of what they might suggest about the intergenerational impacts of slavery and other forms of colonial violence on families:

The "stretch love fabric" and then "trying to heal the scars of broken fibre". So we just came up with, maybe it was the family love, like what happened to the family love. 'Cause she's talking about you know, the family, and then "stretch love fabric", so maybe it's the family that gives you the love. And then she says, "trying to heal the scars of broken fibre". And we were just thinking, maybe the fibre is what connected the love, like maybe the love was broken, not by the family themselves but because they were broken apart by all that violence. (Hiwot, Interview, July 17, 2012)

Similarly, the lines "washing away all the unknowing I have come to know" (repeated in lines 12, 38 and 74) when connected to decolonization, sparked an insight for Lila:

I think that line also talks about freedom, and especially as Sofia mentions that Haiti was the first country to fight for its independence, because I think there's a certain kind of imprisonment I guess, when you just sort of accept things, or being socialized and not questioning it. I think when you're washing away all the unknowing you've come to know, you're not just taking whatever is up there that's blinding you. You're kind of challenging the system and just the way in which

you're brought up to think. So, that is, I think, the step towards freedom, towards independence, because you're challenging what you've been taught, and how you've been taught to think.

(Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

Although Lila does not explicitly name decolonization when she talks about "freedom" and "independence", nor does she specify what she means by "challenging the system" and "challenging what you've been taught", I believe she is referring to the power available to people who have experienced oppression to use literary engagements as tools for challenging and subverting the oppressive systems of thought, such as racism and colonialism, which impact their lives (See hooks, 1991, as one example).

For Jon, one of the most valuable outcomes of participating in the research was "learning from people from different backgrounds because of the diversity in the room in terms of experience, knowledge" (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). Moshtaba valued the opportunity to be challenged by peers who introduced "different themes, like colonialism, patriarchy- issues that are really important to pay attention to". He continued, "it was really interesting to hear what other participants think and learn lots of stuff from them" (Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012). May found herself returning to the literary works to reflect on why she was attuned to some aspects of the text and not to others: "It's important when somebody says something about the piece that I did not even notice. That's when it makes me go back and say, wow, how come I didn't notice that?" (May, Interview, July 17, 2012). May's insight about her interpretive process can be connected to Sumara's (2002) insistence on the importance of recursive reading and reflection, by which readers may develop layered interpretation through intertextual or dialogue-based intersections over time and in different contexts of reading. He argues that structured interpretive methods, including repeated readings of a text, foster the reader's meta-awareness about her/his relationship to the text. Significantly, May talks not only about becoming aware that there are multiple facets of the text, many of which she may not have noticed in her initial reading, but she also asks herself the key question of *why* she did not notice them. She describes going back to the text with fresh eyes, while at the same time asking herself questions about how she is engaging with the text as a reader, and how her experience of the text may change over different readings, or based on the insights of other group members. Significantly, she speaks to her immersion in group

discussion as an important catalyst for becoming aware of these multiple possibilities for interpretation.

Connecting again to Sumara (2002), Sofia reflected on the emergent, recursive process of interpreting art:

I think with, with any literary piece, or any art piece, the more you look at it, or the more you read it, the more you're able to discuss it with the most people, I think the more it gets enriched because everybody's going to have a little bit to add to that interpretation.

(Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Throughout the workshops, I provided other texts, such as essays, media articles, websites and videos¹⁷, upon which I hoped the participants would draw in order to create intertextual meaning with the primary texts. Sumara (2002) argues that such intertextualities, or in his words, “horizontal texts”, act as historical, philosophical and theoretical lenses for exploring the primary text, and that it is the relationships that emerge between the texts as the reader recursively engages with them over time which transform the primary text into what he calls a “commonplace book”. Pedagogically, the use of horizontal resources and repeated readings is aimed at attuning readers to the changing, shifting nature of their interaction with the commonplace text (van der Wey, 2012). As I explained in the Chapter Three, the full process of creating commonplace texts was not possible because of limits on the participants' time as volunteers. Because most of the horizontal resources had to be read or viewed between the workshops, not all the participants were able to engage with them. I also invited participants to contribute their own horizontal resources, but most concluded that they simply did not have enough time, given the volunteer nature of their involvement. However, several people shared suggestions for further reading. For example, Jon shared online links to poems and song lyrics by Tablo, the author of “Andante” (2009), and Lila recommended *The Conference of the Birds* (Persian: الطير منطق, *Mantiqū 't-Tayr*) (Farīd ud-Dīn (فريدالدين), 1177) a work of classic Persian literature, as a follow up to the discussion about multiple conceptions of love sparked by the poem “rivers and other

¹⁷ I provide examples of these “horizontal texts” (Sumara, 2002) in my discussion of the research methods (Chapter 3.5.1, pp.59-60). I further discuss how they were used in the workshops later in this section on pages 83 – 85.

blackness between us” (young.anitafrika 2007). Despite the time limitations, when participants were able to use the horizontal texts, either on their own time between workshops, or when they were built into the workshop activities, the process yielded valuable insights.

In the first workshop, which was our initial encounter with d’bi.young.anitafrika’s (2007) poem “rivers and other blackness between us”, the participants arrived at the workshop having independently read the text version of the poem. We then viewed a video recording of the poet performing her work, as part of an activity in which I intended to raise questions about the role of performativity, language and literary form. This activity was based on my preparatory research about performance-based dub poetry, in which d’bi.young.anitafrika situates her work. Dub poetry is a significant literary practice in Jamaica and across the Jamaican diaspora which is embodied through speech, rhythm, musicality, movement and political action (young.anitafrika 2010). The performance was not a separate text, but rather an alternative form of the text which led to powerful intertextual insights for several participants.

Emily and Sofia both noted a difference in how they engaged with, and understood “rivers and other blackness between us” (young.anitafrika 2007) in its performative form, versus its written form. Emily described this sense of difference, saying,

I remember when we saw her performance on YouTube, it was different because when we read it, we have a different kind of voice in our head. Versus when you hear her perform it, the way I would interpret some of the lines or the way I would say it, her tone was different.
(Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Here, Emily observes that hearing the poet speak in her own voice drew her attention to the importance of how the poem’s words and lines are delivered and received, and how the poet’s “tone” may impact one’s interpretation. After viewing the video performance in the workshop, Sofia spoke about a deepening sense of understanding or connection to the poem’s message: “Seeing her perform it was much, much different than just reading it. It gave me a much deeper understanding of what the poem really was about” (Sofia, Workshop, June 4, 2012). Later, in the interviews, she returned to this idea, situating her developing interpretations of the poem within her ongoing engagement with

young.anitafrika's work, "I had seen it [the poem "rivers and other blackness between us"] before, and I had read it before, but seeing it being performed by her, for me was like- now I got everything she wanted; I got the message deeply" (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012).

Other horizontal texts also contributed to Emily and Sofia's thinking about how meaning and performativity are connected. One such horizontal text which I shared was a piece written by young.anitafrika (2010) about the practice and principles of dub poetry. In it, young.anitafrika emphasizes how dub poetry practice is rooted in communication between the poet and the audience/community. She argues, "Dub prides itself on locating itself within the centre of the community where the people gather and it reflects what the people are going through" (young.anitafrika, 2010, p.55). I see a connection between Sofia's statement that "I got everything she wanted, like I got the message deeply" (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012) and the poet-community bond which young.anitafrika evokes. Sofia's assertion suggests that experiencing young.anitafrika's performance helped her to establish a sense of connection with the poet, which was different from that which she experienced when reading the written poem. Such a deep connection is also evident in the insightful and passionate way that Sofia responded to the themes of decolonization and healing which she found in the poem. She felt deeply implicated by the themes because of her own beliefs, experiences, and her historical and geographical connections (see Sofia's journal entry, cited on p.79). Similarly, Emily's sense that the poet's "tone" during the video performance helped her to access another layer of meaning in the poem can be connected to young.anitafrika's (2010) argument about the importance of rhythm, physicality and spirituality in dub poetry:

Another principle of Dub is its commitment to rhythm and using rhythm as a tool of communication. As we know music has a potential to speak to people in a way that words are limited, so Dub even though it's heavily word-based is also heavily music-based because it is understood coming out of that oral African storytelling trunk. . .And then the final principle that I'll mention is performance. Dub is a storytelling poetry and storytelling works best when the storyteller is involved in the process of telling their story physically, energetically, vocally and spiritually.

(young.anitafrika, 2010, p.55)

Hiwot provided another important account of her experience using the horizontal resources to develop her interpretation of “rivers and other blackness between us”. A week after the first workshop, she shared an insight which had emerged from her recursive engagement with the text over the time between the two sessions. In the following quote, she refers to a horizontal resource which I shared (a webpage, Chang, 2012) in order to help our group gain contextual knowledge about the role of language in Jamaican literature and the historical, social and political context of language for people living in Jamaica and the Jamaican diaspora:

Actually, I liked the link that you sent about the language. And I talked to my brother about it, and he gave me this link on YouTube, and we were watching people speaking the Jamaican language, I can't remember, it begins with a “p”. I'm not sure what it was called, “pata”¹⁸ or something? And then I went back and looked at the poem and I realized that when she was reciting it, d'bi.young, it had, like this sort of like flow to it. There was charisma oozing out of her performance. And again, I think we talked about it last week, reading it and watching her is completely two different things, and after I looked up some of the words, I realized just how much flow it had, and how important it was for the wording to be in that specific order, or to be written like that. At first I was like, “why are you writing like this?”, and then I realized if it's not written like that, it almost just ruins the whole poem. (Hiwot, Workshop, June 11, 2012)

Here, Hiwot comes to the important insight that the poet's use of “Jamaica's national language of the people” (young.anitafrika, 2010, p. 55) plays a central role in giving meaning and form to the poem. Hiwot admits that at first, she felt alienated from the unfamiliar form of language, as she evokes in her question to the author, “why are you writing like this?” However, Chang's (2012) webpage prompted her to further explore the role of language, politics, orality and performance in “rivers and other blackness between us”. She also included her brother in her interpretive process as they used online sources to develop their contextual knowledge together. These connections

¹⁸ Hiwot is referring to the term “Patois”, which is sometimes used to denote the language spoken by most Jamaican people in their daily lives. There are many terms for Jamaica's vernacular language, including Standard Jamaican English, Standard Jamaican Creole, Jamaican Creole English, Jamaican Creole, and Patois/Patwa. These terms are loaded with political connotations. Both young.anitifika (2010) and Chang (2012) use the term “Jamaican” to refer to the language spoken by Jamaican people in their daily lives, which they also consider to be “Jamaica's national language of the people” (young.anitifika, 2010, p. 55), rather than Standard Jamaican English.

helped Hiwot to recognize the beauty, power and political significance of young.anitafrika's use of language.

Reflecting back on her multiple readings of "rivers and other blackness between us" (young.anitafrika, 2007), Sofia provided validation for pedagogical approaches which can open up the space and the time for recursive interpretive practices. She said, "I did feel like every time I came back to it, I got another sentence. Like another sentence caught my eye, or another word that I was like, "oh, I didn't see that before. That's awesome!" (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). The reader response pedagogies I used, based on the work of Sumara (2002), van der Wey (2012, 2001), Lewis (2000) and Möller and Allen (2000), were intended to open up just such opportunities. Common to these approaches is their engagement with Rosenblatt's (1978) conception of aesthetic reading. To review, Rosenblatt defines aesthetic reading as "a special kind of lived-through experience" (p. 27), which disrupts the convenient dichotomy of art/life, by which the imagined experiences and possible worlds of fiction make significant contributions to humans' conceptualizations of the "real" world and their lived experiences. According to Sumara (2002), aesthetic reading may take place in classrooms and other educational settings, but it is often not supported by the pedagogical conditions. He argues that pedagogies which privilege what Rosenblatt refers to as "efferent" reading, that is, readings which seek conceptual knowledge in a text, may not accommodate the longer, more complex thought processes required for aesthetic reading.

In his work on literary anthropology, Sumara advances several important pedagogical conditions for supporting "emergent" meaning making (2002, p.4) as an interpretive process for aesthetic readings. In particular, he calls for structured activities which guide readers through recursive practices including intertextual and interpersonal relationships. Sofia's further comments indicated how scarce such spaces for recursive reading and multiple perspectives had been in her experience:

It's so cool to have the time to go back to readings that we did in the past and to have a lot more time to discuss it, so it's not just like "read this and write me a two-hundred word reflection". It's like, "Read this, and think about it, and let's talk about it, maybe let's write about it. Maybe let's go back and read it again. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

She contrasts her involvement in the workshops with her previous experiences of being asked to submit one-off interpretations immediately after reading, and without access to any explicit recursive or collaborative processes.

Sofia's experience is all too common, as shown by scholars who have documented the scarcity of literary pedagogies which devote significant focus to explicitly teaching meaning-making and to valuing in-depth, multiple, and changing interpretations (See, for example, Gutiérrez and Faulstich Orellana (2001); Knapp and Associates (1995); Möller and Allen (2000); and Walmsley and Allington (1995) in the U.S.A, as well as Luke (2004) and Norton (2008) with reference to the Canadian context). At best, even meaning-oriented pedagogical approaches tend to expect students to create a fully formed analysis independently, in a single step (Möller and Allen, 2000), or conversely, leave initial, informal responses such as journals or group discussions unexamined (as documented by Lewis, 2000), and thus fail to provide structured guidance through which students may change and enrich these initial responses. As Sumara (2002) asserts, meaning does not emerge fully formed and static after a single reading of a text. Rather, it is built over time and through recursive activities and reflection processes, either by the individual or in a group. However, using such interpretive practices does not necessarily come naturally, and so it is important for teachers to explicitly foster such practices through guided activities and facilitated discussions which invite group members to share their knowledge, and to critically and receptively consider the perspectives of others.

4.4. Engaging multiliteracies to enrich interpretive possibilities

Scholars of multiliteracies¹⁹ argue that literacy education in schools should be linked to the literacies that people develop in their lives outside school (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Smythe & Toohey 2009). Through learning about multiple forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, teachers and students may begin to interrogate the ways in which usual school practices and knowledge are associated with

¹⁹ See footnote 15, p.69

the cultural inheritances and practices of particular, usually powerful, groups (Ladson-Billings 1994, Moje 2000) and thus develop awareness about the role of power in socially constructing knowledge validity. A major goal of this research was to engage the participants' multiliteracies as rigorously as the forms of literary knowledge which are already legitimized in academic contexts. My approach to engaging multiliteracies in literary interpretation was guided by Sumara's (2002) idea that the individual's literacy practices and experiences are shaped by "relationships among of history, memory, culture, geography, language and identity" (p.73), and I worked to facilitate a space where participants could contribute this rich range of knowledge and experiences²⁰.

As our group began to explore the multiliteracies we brought together, we were often challenged to think about what kinds of ideas, knowledge and activities we assumed to be more or less legitimate for literary analysis, and how we had come to have such assumptions. Three particularly significant kinds of knowledge emerged during the workshops: experiential knowledge about one's languages and cultures, making connections between literature and lived experience, and emotional and bodily interpretations of the text. All of the participants said that these multiliteracies had enriched their engagement with the texts during the research, but several of them also stated that in their previous educational contexts, such multiliteracies had not been recognized as legitimate ways of interpreting literature. In this section, I will discuss the ways in which the participants engaged their multiliteracies in the workshops. In section 4.5 of this chapter, I will move to analyzing how the participants reflected on and critiqued the views that had delegitimized their contributions in previous contexts.

Fox (2008) asks, "So, what do we mean by this concept "experience"? Experience is clearly a complex, constructed "reality." . . .What exactly is experience? Whose experience is heard?" (p. 39). In asking these questions, she is acknowledging that "experience" is a widely used concept in education but the term is rarely defined or rigorously examined by drawing on theoretical, critical scholarship. Experience is variously invoked by mainstream curricula as "experiential learning," "hands-on learning," "learning by doing," and "active learning", and is set up as a progressive

²⁰ I will elaborate on the pedagogical approaches I used and the feedback participants provided in Chapter Six.

alternative to learning rooted in received knowledge and standardization (Roberts, 2008, p. 19). Most often, educators use common-sense, unexamined notions of experience, usually described as a “pure, unmediated, and transparent” (Fox, 2008, p. 43) account of an event or feeling by the person to whom it occurred. Yet “experience is discursively constructed the moment we attempt to share it with one another. The act of representing experience through language restructures, describes, redescribes, translates, interprets, and reinterprets experience” (Fox, 2008, p. 47).

In an effort to flesh out scholarly literature about experience and education, Fox draws on research across various disciplines including anthropology, neuroscience, education, psychology, and religious studies (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000; Doidge, 2007; Ingold, 2000; Smith, 2004, cited in Fox, 2008, p. 41), to argue that, “experience from an individual perspective is a complex interaction between body, sensory input, and neurological processing—a relationship with the world as humans encounter, interpret, and shape messages” (p. 41). She also engages with critical theories such as feminism and cultural studies (Butler & Scott, 1992; Narayan, 1997; Warren, 2000) to contextualize experience within larger networks of culture, history, political economy, and power, painting a picture of experience as “a multilayered phenomenon; individuals make sense of experience through cultural, cognitive, subconscious, and personal interpretive layers, by negotiating norms and dominant values, attending to immediate human relationships, and through an individual’s context within larger societal and historical positioning” (p. 41). When I describe participants’ “experiential knowledge” or refer to them drawing on their experiences to form literary interpretations, I am using the concept of experience as I outlined it above: discursive, layered and always socially situated. I will also further explore the complexities of experiential knowledge in Chapter Five when I discuss the ways in which participants grappled with the tension between the personal and the political in their literary interpretations.

During our work with the “Surplus Knowledge” poems (Kurd, 2011), Lila and Moshtaba shared their experiential knowledge about the text’s references to prayers from the Qur’an as well as other religious, historical or cultural information related to their relationships with Islam and Afghan culture. Moshtaba identifies as Afghan and Muslim. Lila describes herself as Afghan and cultural Muslim, meaning that she does not believe

in the religion of Islam, but sees her culture, traditions and upbringing as inseparable from Islam, and is working to understand its significance in her life. As shown in the following excerpt, they contributed knowledge from their different perspectives, which helped the group to clarify some basic comprehension gaps, but also provided the opportunity to consider these instances of indeterminacy in the text through different, yet at times overlapping “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Moshtaba: What is Zam Zam, Lila?

Lila: It’s holy water. Isn’t the story in the Bible too? No? It has to do with Abraham.

Moshtaba: Oh!

Lila: They were like in the middle of the desert and they found a spring, and called that water Zam Zam.

Jon: Oh, I see!

Moshtaba: a lot of Qur'an and Bible are similar.

May: Yeah, similar.

Lila: Yeah, and it’s interesting that it’s not numbered, and the poem just goes, so I don’t know, that made me think of water, and Zam Zam, and how it just came out, like, bursting, ‘cause it was like a moment of- in the story, they’re in the desert. They’ve had no water for days and then suddenly it all comes up.

Moshtaba: Zam Zam is in the place where the *Kaaba* is located?

Lila: It’s there?

Moshtaba: Well, in the city.

Lila: Oh.

Moshtaba: And there’s another mosque which is called *Al-Masjid al-Harām*. And it’s not exactly where the *Kaaba* is, but it’s in a holy place, the Mosque.

(Workshop, June 11, 2012)

In this discussion, Moshtaba was asking about the meaning of “Zam Zam” as it is repeatedly invoked in the final poem, titled “After Zam Zam” of the “Surplus Knowledge” suite. Lila had previously observed that the reference to Zam Zam could be seen as a stylistic marker for the point at which the poem moved from numbered, scripture-like verses to free form verse. She then contextualized the reference as belonging to the account of the miracle of the desert spring Zam Zam, which she knew from the Qur’an and which she thought might also be in the Bible. Prompted by this information,

Moshtaba made connections to his knowledge about the religious sites which he believed might be associated with Zam Zam. The discussion allowed Moshtaba and Lila, as well as the other participants, to discover not only that their funds of knowledge could become important lenses for exploring the poem's intertextual and historical references, but also that different individuals may activate different funds of knowledge in response to the same text. In this case, Moshtaba and Lila's different, yet overlapping intertextual awareness allowed the group to appreciate the rich historical, geographic and religious contexts with which the poem "Surplus Knowledge" interrelates.

Later, in the fourth workshop when Lila, May and Jon revisited "Surplus Knowledge" in a small group activity, they drew on Lila and Moshtaba's earlier intertextual connections around Zam Zam to further develop their analysis:

"We felt that in her memories and how she's recounting things . . . something has happened and they're no longer sort of the kids that they were. Like she says, "October in a home/ our uneasy parents strove to make new for us." So we thought that there was a difference between that home or house and then the one on Lloyd Street. So things have changed and we think Zam Zam is happiness or good times. Because she recounts a memory of her and her brother playing and she says, "Hardly a memory to drink deep from. / Hardly Zam Zam / springing up in the unaccustomed desert". So I felt that this part of the poem talked about how maybe they moved or else just changes happened in their life. They didn't really have any happiness afterwards. They sort of lost touch with- they grew up, they lost their innocence." (Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

Here, Lila, May and Jon suggest that Zam Zam may be a metaphor for memories of happiness and hope, which contrasts with the instances of loss and disconnection in the family that unfold throughout the poem.

At other times, participants were motivated to go beyond their own experiential knowledge, and to seek out further insight through their personal or community networks. During the discussion of "Surplus Knowledge", Moshtaba identified the *Ya Sin* (in the lines, "A room we searched for novelty, found unchanging: / bed and lamp, beads and *Ya Sin* on the table." ("Incantation/Reversal", 9-10) as one of the Suras in the Qur'an, but neither he nor Lila felt familiar enough with it to provide further background information to the group. Later, in her follow-up interview, Lila recalled that her desire to engage in a deeper analysis of that particular passage had prompted her to discuss it

with her parents. From her mother, she learned that the *Ya Sin* is often read when a person has died. She reflected,

There was a personal connection, like the discussions that we had, they weren't restricted to just the time that we spent together. I went out and I talked to some other people in my family and friends about some of the themes that we discussed, or I thought about them to myself. So for me, that, I won't say it didn't happen before, but it didn't happen as much, like when I would go to school and do English.

(Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012).

Similarly, Moshtaba drew on his experiences to explain that the lines "*wa min sharri hasidin itha hasad*" ("Incantation/Reversal", 24), quoted in the poem from the Dawn Sura, are often used to bless a loved one: "they would pray that on you, so you're safe when you go out and nothing happens to you" (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012). Without the intertextual insight provided by the participants, the social and emotional significance of these words and quotations in the poems could go unnoticed. They might simply seem to be mysterious utterances, or inscrutable markers of otherness, apart from the "normal" flow of English language in the poem. Yet from Lila and Moshtaba, we learned that these words and references could create powerful emotional resonance. They spoke of daily actions performed out of love, the desire to protect children or in response to a death- the very fabric of family and communal life. Likewise, the group discussion I cited in section 4.2, in which participants shared their funds of knowledge about gendered terms of endearment in their home languages, is another example of how our analyses of the poem were enriched by our diversity as a group. The subtleties of language, with all their cultural and historical connections, can be lost if space is not made for multiliteracies. Mukherjee (1996) argues just this, writing,

I am suggesting here that bilingual and bicultural texts demand a different kind of response from their readers. They demand that we recognize the reality of a multilingual, multicultural earth [...] as well as the coming together of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. While many of us have gained competence in English, for a variety of reasons often linked to colonialism and migration due to economic and political imperatives, we have also persisted in retaining our heritage cultures despite the tremendous pressures to assimilate. (p. 41)

Mukherjee's assertion that multilingual people have a unique role to play in the interpretation of multicultural texts resonates with what our group discovered during the workshops. The examples which I cited above, while singled out for their richness and complexity, are but a few of the many instances in which participants enhanced the interpretive possibilities of our work with the texts through drawing on their funds of knowledge – their unique perspectives shaped by “the relationships among of history, memory, culture, geography, language and identity” (Sumara, 2002, p.73). In response to the interview question about what factors impacted their interpretations of the texts, all of the participants said that they placed great value on the insights they developed through the diversity of the knowledge in the group. The following comments by Jon are reflective of many participants' responses to this question:

To learn to be able to look at the literature from different perspectives was very valuable to me. . . Learning from people from different backgrounds, and because of the diversity in the room in terms of experience, knowledge- that process was very I think interesting and valuable.
(Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012)

While the intertextual insights that emerged during our group discussions could also have been engaged through research, such as seeking out print or online resources, I concur with Mukherjee (1996) in emphasizing the unique role of interpersonal interaction in literary analysis. She writes, “What, then, can readers not familiar with the cultural universe of the text do? I suggest that they ask. Information is all around us” (p. 42). Sofia also wondered whether such spaces could be empowering for those who are invited to share their funds of knowledge:

How cool would it be to, to read something like this in high school, and to feel like the few people in the room who are Muslim, or have a Muslim background, are a bit more knowledgeable because of the language? Like, I wonder what it would feel like when everybody else is asking, “Oh, what does that mean?” and “what does it mean by the white sandals?” Just feeling like the experts for once.
(Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Many of the participants affirmed that they did feel empowered when asked to share their knowledge, yet they also wrestled with the complexities of how this could be done respectfully across differences of power and privilege. Sofia's quote above contains many significant insights which require further unpacking. Chapter Six undertakes a

more in-depth analysis of the issues she raises with respect to power, positionality and insider/outsider readings. Mukherjee's (1996) call for readers to seek out interpretive resources from within their own social environments opens up possibilities for more democratic approaches to literary interpretation and critique, which may either complement or contest interpretation based on the guidance of trained critics. Such an approach is democratic in that it invites people into spaces where they have the opportunity to listen to one another and to consider how their relationships with one another may be impacted by taking up different perspectives. This, argues Mukherjee, is the benefit of reading literature in a multicultural society. To those who are willing to engage, it offers to "help us see how ethnicity, language and culture are intertwined. By encountering what is unfamiliar to us, we may become aware that what we assume as normal within our cultural boundaries may appear unfamiliar to someone from another cultural group" (Mukherjee, 1996, p. 47).

Making connections to their lived experience also provided the participants with important insights into the literary works. In the short story "Andante" (Tablo, 2009), participants drew on their own experiences to notice the ways in which gender roles and parent-child relationships played out in the story's fictional Mishima family. "Andante" is narrated by its protagonist, Jonathon, a young Japanese-American man who is studying music and lives with his mother and father. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that Jonathon's father, a former concert pianist, has Alzheimer's disease, and that his mother is acting as the caregiver and running the household. Moshtaba felt an immediate personal response to the passages in the text which suggested tensions between Jonathon and Mr. Mishima. He wondered, "it seemed like he was having a lot of expectations from the, from the boy, um, his son . . . like I'm just connecting myself to that too, so I don't know if it's there. I'm just thinking about my family" (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 18, 2012). Here, Moshtaba acknowledges that his own family experiences have shaped his initial response to the text, and although he expresses reservations about the validity of his response, saying, "so I don't know if it's there", I believe that the ability to connect his lived experience with the text caused him to be particularly sensitive to those passages which suggested, but did not explicitly state, the pressures that Jonathon felt in navigating personal desires and family expectations. Because of his sensitivity to these nuances of the text, he was able to open up this

avenue of discussion and reflection for the rest of the participants. In response, many of the participants shared their experiences of bearing the burden of family expectations, particularly in the context of the pressures faced by immigrant families, such as barriers to economic opportunity and navigating multiple cultural contexts.

Sofia also spoke about drawing on her life experience to interpret “Andante” (Tablo, 2009). She explained, “personally it made me think a lot about the relationship with my dad. And so that made me more connect with it on a deeper level” (Sofia, Workshop, June 18, 2012). Although she understandably kept the specificities of her own experiences private, her comment suggests that she believed she was able to develop deeper layers of analysis because of her ability to interpret the text in relation to her own situation. In the same way, her later assertion about identifying with the character of Mrs. Mishima in “Andante” suggests that she was using both conceptual and experiential funds of knowledge to analyse issues of gender and power in the text:

The character that I connected the most with was to uh, the mom. And I felt she was so invisible in the whole story and the family as a whole. Like she’s only good for cooking, and just being there . . . Ugh, I felt so bad for the mom (Sofia, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Sofia’s argument about Mrs. Mishima’s invisibility proved to be a turning point in the group discussion. Until she pointed it out, none of us, including me, had used a gender analysis lens to interpret the text. In this section, I will focus on how Sofia’s contribution to the group discussion invited other members of the group to recognize how their own experiential knowledge may have shaped their interpretations of the text. Although the ensuing group discussion about gender and family power dynamics also revealed opportunities and challenges in contextualizing personal readings through critical literacy analysis, I will hold this discussion until Chapter 5.2 for in-depth analysis.

In response to Sofia’s comment, Hiwot realized that she had not questioned the way that the text positioned Mrs. Mishima:

Sofia was saying again she was invisible, and I realized I almost made her invisible when I was reading. I was just like, oh the mother is just doing her thing, you know, blah, blah, blah. Then Sofia was saying, oh, the mom is just there to cook, so I realized that the mother was there, but I just kind of brushed her off to the side, and even in the

story, she just *was* brushed over to the side.

(Hiwot, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Listening to Sofia prompted Hiwot to think about how she could be implicated as a reader in either perpetuating or challenging assumptions about the role of women in the family. She began to actively question her relationship with the text, and to harness this increased awareness as a way of pushing her interpretation to a new level of complexity. Similarly, after Moshtaba listened to Emily's argument about how the events in "Andante" might be interpreted differently if viewed from the perspective of a parent, rather than that of a youth, he became more aware of how his experiences had shaped his relationship with the text. He reflected,

I was focused on the kid himself, not really realizing what's happening: what the father thinks, what the mom thinks. I was like sort of reading it from his perspective, but I really liked what you mentioned Emily, you mentioned the other side of it that I didn't think of- [. . .] I just wanted to say that that really connected to me. I always thought from his point of view, but it was really good what you mentioned, that we should look at it from this side as well.

(Moshtaba, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Moshtaba notes that hearing another person's interpretation alerted him to the value and potential of considering alternate perspectives when interpreting a text. His personal identification with one of the text's characters could be layered along with other possible interpretations, with these multiple perspectives enhancing, rather than detracting from a rigorous interpretive process.

Feminist scholarship has helped me to notice the significance of emotional and bodily responses to literature in my research data. Gorton (2007) locates the impetus for studying emotion as a valid way of knowing with the work of feminist theorists in the 1980s, such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1986), Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), bell hooks (1989), Alison Jaggar (1989), Audre Lorde (1984), Elizabeth Spelman (1989) and Catherine Lutz (1988), who focused on women's emotional lives and labours (cited in Gorton, 2007, p. 333). hooks (2003) asserts that emotions, and the ways in which emotional responses are embodied, are inextricable from other processes of learning. This theoretical lens helped to remind me that literary responses, like other forms of human experience, may be shaped "not just by what we think but also by how we feel

and our bodily response to feelings” (Gorton, 2007, p.385). I then connected the epistemological significance of emotions to my earlier discussion of Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory of aesthetic reading, particularly the following passage cited by Lewis (2000, p. 255-256): “it is through the “cues provided by the text” that readers can achieve a “lived through experience” . . . “a process in which the reader selects ideas, sensations, feelings and images drawn from his past linguistic, literary and life experience, and synthesizes them into a new experience. . . (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 40)”. Rosenblatt’s inclusion of sensations and feelings in her description of aesthetic reading suggests that it is important to make space for emotional and visceral responses to the text during any interpretive process, for they are strands in the complex web of phenomena and information from which readers synthesize literary interpretations.

There were several instances in the workshops where emotions and the body played a significant role in the participants’ interpretative processes. The tableaux theatre activity which I included in the first workshop on “rivers and other blackness between us” (young.anitafrika, 2007) proved to be an important space for participants to explore their initial responses to the poem. In the activity, which I adapted from Boal (2002), I asked the participants to create a tableau (a frozen visual picture with the body, or group of bodies) based on any element of the poem that had stood out for them during their initial response, emphasizing that the elements they chose to represent could be varied, from particular words or phrases, to characters, relationships, feelings, or concepts. The participants decided to do a large group tableau based on two words that were repeated throughout the poem: “love” and “fear”. As they created the tableau, activating their bodies as instruments of interpretation, some unexpected connections emerged. May described her stance in the tableau as a way of exploring the interplay between the words “fear” and “forgotten” and the bodily sensations they evoked for her. She explained,

My one is kind of like this [*placing her hands over her mouth*] because I was thinking of the idea of fear and forgotten, those two words, and how you’re kind of shocked to know your own past. And how bodily sometimes it’s not very exaggerated but it’s still, you feel that stunned-ness within you, so that’s what I was trying to portray I guess: fear/forgotten-ness. (May, Workshop, June 4, 2012)

Hiwot discovered that attempting to physically represent the word “love” drew her attention to the complex interplay between love and fear in the text, and evoked the contradiction of experiencing the two emotions simultaneously:

I was thinking of love at first, like when I love someone or cherish it, so I keep it close to my heart. But then my facial expression is kind of fearful, so I was thinking like a mixture, if I love something and it was taken away from me, or if I loved someone so much it would be scary to me.
(Hiwot, Workshop, June 4, 2012)

Through the tableaux theatre activity, participants explored the notion that the text’s emotional resonances are important sites of recursive meaning-making between readers, texts and contexts. By making time to discuss emotion in the text, as well as their emotional responses, they were able to make connections between “rivers and other blackness between us”, its social and historical contexts and significant issues in their lives. Emily noticed a pattern in the group members’ embodied interpretations:

So I noticed there was way more fear than love. ‘Cause I think of seven of us, only two chose to do love. Everybody else did fear. But I think it’s just easier to do it . . . in real life too, fear is what takes over people most often too. So I thought it was pretty real.
(Emily, Workshop, June 4, 2012)

Emily’s observation prompted me to pose a new question for group discussion. Was it easier to physically portray fear than love, and if so, why? Although this question initially seemed to disconnect the discussion from the text because participants began by focusing exclusively on their personal experiences (Lewis, 2000), their reflections became a bridge to engaging the cues in the text pointing to issues of colonialism, resistance and healing. Sofia connected the feelings of fear in the poem with the emotional and psychological violence inflicted by colonization, saying,

That’s how my region was colonized, through fear, right? And I think we live in a constant state of fear, even nowadays, like with everything that’s happening, it’s like fear fear fear. It’s much easier for me to understand fear than to understand love. Because fear, I live it on a daily basis, all the time.
(Sofia, Workshop, June 4, 2012)

Here, Sophia draws on her historical knowledge about the impacts of colonization in Latin America, and also shared her personal experience of living with fear. Although she

did not explicitly state the conditions that create fear for her, I infer from other information she has shared that was referring to the persistence of forms of oppression such as racism which impact her daily life. In looking back over the workshop transcripts, I realized that Sofia's statement above marks the first time during the workshop that a participant considered "rivers and other blackness between us" (young.anitafrika, 2007) in relation to its historical, social and political contexts. By the fourth workshop, when we revisited the poem, the participants had had the opportunity to use intertextual analysis to approach the poem with knowledge of Jamaican history, from colonization and slavery to its independence movement and the migration of Jamaican people to Canada. However, I believe that these early explorations of the poem's emotional resonances were an important part of the participants' interpretive process because the poem's themes of oppression, resistance and healing are not only theoretical issues; they are also experienced emotionally and bodily.

For many of the participants, discussing the feelings and sensations evoked by the poem opened up the opportunity to think about these issues in their own lives. Reflecting on his emotional response to the poem, Moshtaba made the connection to the fear that he had felt in the face of racism, pointing out that like him, d'bi.young.anitafrika had immigrated to Canada as an adolescent. He argued, "I could also relate it [fear] to what's happening to her now, specifically. Or what happened to her when she came to Canada . . . where, you know, there's obvious racism" (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 4, 2012). He summed up his interpretation above with the words "I think I can relate to it more now", suggesting that the poem had become more powerful for him. Finally, as the forum theatre activity came to a close, Lila challenged her fellow participants to think about how their insights into the tension between fear and love in the poem might be used to examine their beliefs about, and behaviour towards, other people:

The idea of love that we have is really limited, and we limit it to like certain people or certain kinds of people, because fear takes over us . . . We're kind of scared of people who might be different from us, or who might not have the same values, so we judge them based on that, instead of trying to understand them.

(Lila, Workshop, June 4, 2012)

Lewis (2000) cautions against reducing Rosenblatt's (1978) concept of the "aesthetic stance" to literature in reader response pedagogy to an exclusive emphasis

on personal response and direct identification. Following her critique, in Chapter Five I will discuss the importance of contextualizing personal responses to literature through critical analysis of the social and political construction of readers, texts and contexts. Nonetheless, based on the experiences of the research participants in the workshops, as shown in the examples above, I argue that having a non-judgemental space in which to express their emotional responses to the text was an important foundational stage in their interpretive journey, and that ideas expressed at this stage were built upon in later, critical phases.

4.5. Questioning hierarchies of knowledge validity

In the previous section, I argue that the participants brought valuable multiliteracies to the workshops which enriched both their individual and collective interpretive processes. Another layer of insight emerged when the participants began to share their doubts and questions about why some forms of knowledge and ways of interpreting literature had been given more legitimacy than others in their previous educational experiences. Lila revealed that she has avoided English courses in her current post-secondary studies partly because her experiences with literature in secondary school were characterized by an emphasis on “remember[ing] a set of standards, themes or ideas that other people have thought up and then writ[ing] them back out in the essays” This approach left her feeling “so intimidated, [...] so overwhelmed by all the things that other people had written about that piece of work” that she began to doubt her abilities, wondering, “maybe I just don’t have the brain for it, like it’s just not my thing.” (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012). By contrast, in the workshops, she was able to see how her knowledge about her languages and culture and her ability to make connections between the text and her life helped to shape major avenues of interpretation, which were then taken up by her fellow participants. She commented,

It’s so amazing . . . because I don’t see myself as an interpreting literature kind of person, and I’m not saying, oh I was so great in the sessions, but I’m just saying it was interesting for me how I contributed way more than I thought I could.

(Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012)

In Sofia's experience, studying literature in Canadian classrooms meant being expected to know "the English world" (Sofia, Workshop, June 11, 2012), or analysing literary works using dominant Anglo-Canadian cultural and linguistic resources. She remembered instances where she and other immigrant and refugee youth were left behind in English classes because teachers and peers assumed cues from the dominant cultural context to be common knowledge (See also, Duff, 2001). She then contrasted these experiences of feeling excluded from spaces of legitimized knowledge to her experience with "rivers and other blackness between us" (young.anitafrika, 2007) and "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011). For her, these works opened up the possibility of recognizing immigrants' and refugees' funds of knowledge about their languages, cultures, and socio-political contexts as valid and essential for interpreting Canadian literature. She summarized, "to me is really cool, to be able to learn from everybody, and not just saying it's one standard way of looking at poetry" (Sofia, Workshop, June 11, 2012).

Similarly, as I discussed in section 4.2, Andrés' confidence in his initial interpretations of "Surplus Knowledge" increased when he realized that other participants were also drawing on their funds of knowledge in order to interpret the poems, and that his political beliefs, including his concern with discrimination and inequity, could be a valid lens for interpreting the poem. Andrés' annotations on his copy of the poem suggest a reason for his initial lack of confidence in his ideas. Along with his many insightful annotations, he had also made notes that revealed frustration, for example, "very confusing!" and "I am having difficulty identifying poetic and literary devices!" (Andrés' annotations, June 11, 2012). Although I had not designed the workshops to focus on analysing the texts according to exclusively formal and structural criteria, I wondered if Andrés' experience of finding poetry inaccessible could be related to a lack of opportunity in his previous educational experiences for questioning normative standards for literary analysis. When I reviewed the transcripts with Andrés, he confirmed that for him, interpreting poetry in school had primarily meant listing all the literary devices present in a piece.

Looking back, I notice tension between the approaches to literary interpretation that Lila, Andrés and Sofia found meaningful, and the approaches that had been held up as legitimate in their previous educational experiences. Scholars writing about literature

and education in Canada have raised similar concerns to those of the participants. In 1994, Mukherjee argued that despite being having been “. . . challenged by a diverse set of constituencies such as writers and critics in the Third World, feminists, racial-minority, gay and post-structuralist critics” (p. *vii*), English literature curricula in Canada were still predominantly biased toward analysis of formal elements in the text and universalized Western aesthetic and epistemological standards, as a result often marginalizing readings which engaged political and social discourses. A decade later, Mukherjee (2004) wrote that although Canadian academia now pays substantial attention to the performativity of race, ethnicity, nation, gender, and sexuality in literature, little research is dedicated to how these issues play out pedagogically. Biases towards apolitical, formalist literary analysis still persist in classrooms, be they of traditional sort, or in the guise of postmodern, postcolonial²¹ readings cleansed of any political, social or historical immediacy. Sugars (2004) also reviews recent research showing a persistent gap between academic theory and pedagogical practice in literature. While radical forms of analysis are gaining influence in postcolonial literary theory, the majority of approaches to teaching Canadian literature in high school and entry-level post-secondary contexts remain as traditional as ever (Sugars, 2004, p. 19). The analyses by Mukherjee and Sugars suggest that approaches to interpretation which fall outside of traditional Western pedagogy, such as the multiliteracies engaged by the participants in my research, continue to be marginalized.

In “Teaching community: a pedagogy of hope”, hooks (2003) affirms that greater equity in education systems should be sought not only in structural terms, such as the redistribution of resources, but also at the symbolic level, that is by deconstructing the systems of thought which prioritize the funds of knowledge of privileged groups over those of other groups. This stance has played an essential role throughout her work, as has her focus on how texts, whether literary or narrative, are sites where power is played out, but also where it may be engaged, critiqued and transformed (see for example, hooks 1990, 1991, 2000). In “Teaching community”, hooks revisits these lines of

²¹ I refer to Mukherjee’s characterization of the postcolonial as “post ideological”, in that “I take it to mean that the postcolonial is now safely ensconced in the academy and does not give the establishment any bad dreams. Insofar as no sit-ins were carried out in postcolonialism’s name and insofar as its meaning is infinitely stretchable, being all at once a methodology, a temporal marker, and an identity for some” (Mukherjee 2004 p. 203).

thought in order to challenge the rationalist view that teaching and learning should be characterized by emotional distance. She argues that literature and other cultural products, such as art and media, when approached critically, can create opportunities for the recognition and affirmation of marginalized people's experiences from multiple epistemological stances – relational, emotional, bodily, and spiritual, as well as the ongoing opportunity to grapple with the complexities of power and representation.

Sumara (1996) also provides insight into the factors which may have influenced the research participants' hesitancy about the validity of their personal and emotional responses to the texts. Relating an experience in which he suppressed his emotional reaction to a text while teaching, he analyses his own self-censorship through a lens which parallels hooks' critique of rationalist, emotional distance as a standard of professional behaviour in education:

The teacher is not supposed to cry over a story. The teacher is supposed to be neutral. There is no room in the school classroom for life that is infused with the kind of passion that goes along with having a body that expresses emotions. (p. 4)

He goes on to argue that students face similar expectations within the education system, and that "none of what is typically asked of secondary students (including the popular practice of journal responses) really requires that they have any deep and enduring relationships with the text" (p. 199). As an example, Sumara recounts the challenges that a fellow teacher encountered as she attempted to critically engage her students in issues of discrimination through a reading of *The Chrysalids* (Wyndham, 1955). Accustomed to conventional school practices, most students expected to do no more than to summarize the text's content, identify literary conventions and discuss these in relation to their own opinions. Nothing had prepared them to be asked what reading the book might teach them about "what it was like to be hated" (Sumara, 1996, p.199). The few students who made personal and emotional connections to the text were those who had experienced discrimination, or who were prompted to deeper reflection after hearing a guest speaker's story of the impact of homophobia in his life. In my research, the participants often made meaningful emotional connections to the literary works because they held what Narayan (1998) calls "insider epistemic privilege" (p.36), a concept which asserts that individuals have unique "immediate, subtle, and critical knowledge" (p.35),

about the nature of their own experiences, and that direct experience of oppression or discrimination is an emotional as well as intellectual matter. Multilingual immigrant and refugee youth are positioned to offer rich insights into issues of identity, difference and power in Canadian literature, but classrooms and other educational settings must foster receptiveness and respect for the different funds of knowledge and epistemic positions that they contribute.

4.6. Re-conceptualizing literary interpretation: from individual product to community process

Over the course of their involvement in the research, the participants developed nuanced insight into their processes of interpretation. They expressed a growing sense of confidence in their self-perception as readers and critics in English, particularly through deconstructing hierarchies of knowledge legitimacy in order to affirm the value of their multiliteracies. They also participated in a layered, recursive interpretive process through their willingness to re-examine their initial responses through the lenses of differing perspectives from other participants or through intertextual analysis using horizontal texts and resources (Sumara, 2002). These insights may be imagined as a journey through which the participants moved from conceptualizing literary interpretation as an individual product to exploring literature through a community process.

When the participants approached literary interpretation as an individual pursuit which ought to result in a polished product, they often felt anxious about their abilities. The participants first addressed these anxieties directly in the second workshop, when Andrés exclaimed, “But sometimes you don’t trust your own interpretations!” (Andrés, Workshop, June 11, 2012). Andrés’ comment struck a chord, prompting Moshtaba to agree, explaining that he often doubted his interpretations “because of English I think” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012) and May to interject, “It’s because of my experience! I’ve been wrong many times!” (May, Workshop, June 11, 2012). Although the participants were eager to continue the discussion, we had to cut it short because of time limitations. We agreed to return to the issue during the follow-up interviews, for which I created a question asking them to reflect on whether, and how, Andrés’ assertion that “you don’t trust your own interpretations” was significant for them. The common

theme which ran through their responses was that their previous educational experiences had left them with a sense that successful literary interpretation meant “find[ing] the right answer” (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012).

Significantly, the idea of “the right answer” was not limited to certain contexts. The participants cited educational experiences both in Canada and in their former countries of residence, as well as other non-educational experiences as being factors which had shaped their understanding of what it means to interpret literature. Emily spoke about the pressure she felt, as a non-native speaker of English in a Canadian classroom, to produce a “safe” response, saying, “I would just go with whatever the professor would do, because . . . I feel like I’m not confident enough about what I think my ideas are. Maybe because it’s not my first language” (Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012). Sofia linked her desire to “get it right” with recollections of being taught at her Canadian high school that “You need to get one answer. There is only one answer to this. There is no multiple interpretations” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). May elaborated on her earlier statement that she had been “wrong so many times” by connecting it to her educational experiences in Bangladesh. She remembered studying literature as an exercise in memorizing a “guidebook” which provided an approved analysis of the text. Struggling with memorization, May would often try to share her own interpretation. She recalled, “I would say something like, “Oh, but I think this happened”, and they’d [*the teacher*] say, “No, that’s not what happened” (May, Workshop, June 11, 2012).

Lila and Moshtaba provided an example outside the school context, discussing their relationship with poetry in Afghan culture. Although they both affirmed that certain aspects of Afghan literary culture, such as the tradition of women’s poetry, people’s ownership of poetic expression and recitation across lines of class and literacy, and the presence of poetry in everyday life, had helped them to broaden their conception of literature, they also expressed frustration with some of the limitations they had experienced. Lila explained, “One thing I don’t like about poetry in my culture is that the interpretation of it is very fixed . . . to actually tell other people, “this is what I think this poem is about”, I don’t know if you can do that” (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012). Moshtaba agreed, “You can’t talk about it if you don’t know a lot already” (Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012).

In the follow-up interviews, the participants examined how their understanding of literary interpretation had changed over the course of the workshops. For Sofia, a major outcome of participating in the workshops was challenging the self-doubt she encountered when faced with interpreting poetry. She described her initial reaction to “Surplus Knowledge”, which she had found particularly difficult: “I know it wasn’t the intention of the activity, but deep inside, I was like, why can’t I get this poem? I read it so many times, and I couldn’t get it. I’m so dumb. I can’t even get this. I can’t believe it” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). Yet through the group discussions and activities in which participants built on one another’s in-progress responses, and considered multiple perspectives, she began to question her doubts. In the interview, she articulated this gradual change in her perspective over the course of the workshops by asking a series of questions: “why am I judging it? And why am I wanting to get it right? And what is getting it right? (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012).

“What is getting it right?” became a powerful question that came up time and again during the interviews as other participants took up Sophia’s questions and began to deconstruct the exclusionary assumptions they had encountered about what constitutes legitimate literary analysis. Referring to the discussion about hierarchies of knowledge, Sofia further reflected on why she, and other multilingual immigrant and refugee youth often doubted their ability to interpret literature in English: “I think because of society, because of how we’ve gone to school, etc. . . . everything we say is usually judged . . . now we watch what we say so much, and we think that everything that we think is stupid”. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). Jon revealed that his past educational experiences had often left him feeling “fearful and discouraged” (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012) to express his feelings and ideas about a literary work. Reviewing his experience in the research, he realized that his assumption that he needed to find the correct answer had also held him back from participating in the early group discussions (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). However, over the course of the workshops, his perspective changed, and he became more comfortable with the idea that insight into a literary work could be a gradual, non-linear and fragmented process. He concluded, “What I got out of it [the workshops] is that I would feel ok to just get one thing out of the poem. Like, I got this, and it’s ok, I don’t have to know everything about the poem.(Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012) Jon’s perspective is very much in line with

Sumara's (2002) argument that insight cannot be discovered fully formed, but rather "is fashioned from what Francois Lyotard (1984) has called "les petits recits" – the "small stories"" (p. 4).

4.7. Conclusion

As the participants moved from conceptualizing literary interpretation as an individual product to exploring literature through a community process, they became part of a collaborative meaning-making project which Moshtaba described as "contributing and at the same time learning" (Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012). I believe that this can be linked to Sumara's (2002) assertion that "readers do not extract knowledge from a text, nor do they impose personal knowledge on it. Rather, readers and texts and contexts of reading collaborate in the continued inventing and interpreting of knowledge" (p. 93), where knowledge, meaning, or "what is experienced as truthful emerges from the complex relations of history, memory, language and geography" (p. 4). Sumara (1996) is particularly interested in the learning that takes place within "activity systems, such as book clubs or classrooms, which both shape and are shaped by literary relationships" (p.93). He takes up Bleich's (1978) naming of such spaces as "interpretive communities" (p. 95) which situate individual responses to literature in a web of interpersonal, intertextual experiences of reading, or "commonplace locations" which are "spaces opened up by the relations among readers, texts and contexts" (Sumara 1996, p. 132) or the dynamic "fabric of intertextual relations that include reading and re-reading" (p. 133).

I take up the term "interpretive community" to describe the processes I observed in the workshops whereby being part of such a community allowed participants not only to examine their own relationships with the text, but also to develop nuanced awareness of their peers' interpretive processes. By being able to compare, contrast and connect one another's different memories, histories, languages and geographies, the participants engaged with literature as it is compellingly described by Mukherjee (1994):

Literature, for me, is not a confection to be admired for its taste and texture. Rather, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, literature is "equipment for living". It is someone speaking rather than a cold, dead objet d'art. And,

because it is someone speaking, it is about human beings living in the world and reporting on how they live. (p. *viii*)

Coming to see interpretation as an ongoing process in which different people have unique insights because of their different perspectives helped the participants see themselves as contributors of linguistic, cultural and political funds of knowledge, rather than as people with linguistic barriers or other markers of cultural “outsider-ness”. The participants’ insights in the workshops should challenge educators (myself included) to consider Canadian literature as a field which requires multiple, diverse perspectives for rich interpretation. Their contributions also work to dismantle the flawed and discriminatory discourses which construct “deficit identities” (Marshall 2010) for non-native speakers of English, casting student’s multiple languages and identities as disruptions to the homogeneity of English-medium educational settings and as a “problem to be fixed rather than an asset to be welcomed” (Marshall 2010, p. 41). I conclude this chapter by returning to Jon’s insight, which I believe speaks to the experience of reading literature in an interpretive community: “. . . the little things that we got out of the poem . . . those little bits and pieces that we contributed all came together like a puzzle and created a clearer picture”.

5. Exploring Reader-Text-Context Relationships Through Critical Literacy

5.1. Introduction

In Chapter Four, I argued that personal responses and experiential knowledge can play a valid role in literary interpretation. I now engage with the questions, contradictions and possibilities that arose for the participants and me as we sought to make space for both our individual experiences and the critical implications of our broader social contexts. What are the challenges of connecting the personal to the theoretical and the political, particularly when these different lenses come into tension with one another? How are such tensions negotiated, and what can be learned from them?

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the perspectives of the research participants alongside ideas from reader response theory and critical literacy scholars in order to address the challenge of remaining receptive to personal interpretations of literature from multiple standpoints while also engaging with issues in the political, social and historical construction of our perspectives. Next, I examine how issues of positionality, insider/outsider readings and the limits of knowing shaped the participants' and my responses to the literary works. Lastly, I show the ways in which the participants reframed literary interpretation to blur the boundaries between interrogating meaning in the text and in their own lives, and in doing so, transformed the Literary Engagement Workshops into a powerful space for grappling with identity issues.

5.2. Opportunities and challenges in contextualizing personal readings through critical analysis

A major focus during our engagement with Tablo's (2009) short story, "Andante" was analysing the text's portrayal of gender roles and family power dynamics. In Chapter Four, I included examples from the group discussion about gender in "Andante" in order to explore how the participants' interpretations of the text were shaped by their experiential knowledge. I argued that through hearing the different perspectives of their peers, the participants developed awareness of how one's interpretation could vary according to one's experiences, identity and social location. I now return to this discussion to further explore how the participants drew on critical literacy tools to challenge one another to deepen their analyses of gender in the text. As a part of this critical interpretive process, we were faced with the tension between maintaining openness to multiple interpretations while at the same time bringing a critical lens to the political, social and historical construction of our perspectives. We grappled with the question, if there is no single "right answer" how do we choose the criteria by which we evaluate our literary interpretations? This question was particularly relevant for us as we discussed the challenges of reading literature by Canadian authors who are immigrants and people of colour, such as the problem of interpretations which perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination.

As I noted in Chapter Four, Sofia's observation that Mrs. Mishima occupies a marginal position in "Andante" (Tablo, 2009) was a turning point in the group discussion. She was troubled by the evidence she saw in the text that cast the character in the role of a helper in the background. She drew the group's attention to Mrs. Mishima, noting,

I think she's completely invisible, and I think the mom's life is like whatever her son and husband are. Which is why I think she has that hallway full of pictures and newspaper clips that are all about her son and her husband. There is nothing about her.

(Sofia, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Sofia's reference to the hallway, described in "Andante" (Tablo, 2009) as the "Mishima Hall of Fame, a shrine to her husband and son's excellence" (p.12), was a part of her argument that Mrs. Mishima prioritized her husband and son's lives to the exclusion of her own needs. She remarked that the text makes no mention as to whether she has

any occupation or interests outside of her role as wife and mother. Until Sofia raised the issue, none of us, including me, had questioned Mrs. Mishima's position in the family. Her reading prompted several other participants to attempt to understand the family dynamics in "Andante" by bringing to bear their concepts of "culture" and their personal experiences. Jon connected Mrs. Mishima's position to what he described as cultural expectations about the behaviour of women and roles of mothers in "Korean culture", explaining,

I think in Korean culture, it's very similar to the mother here. She usually is only there to support the father and his children- [...] I think it kind of coincides with how the culture looks at the usual mother role in a family. (Jon, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Emily built on Jon's reading, drawing on her perception of gender roles in Bengali families:

. . . how the Korean culture is, it's very similar to our culture too. Like when you look at every family dynamics, it's always the father that is the lead and the tensions are always between the kids and the father. The mom is the one that the kids go to, because you know, they can always neutralize all the tensions. (Emily, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

She also based her interpretation on personal experience, remembering her mother saying, "I'm happy when I see my kids happy". From these connections, she went on to argue that for her, it seemed natural for a mother to assume a supportive role, asserting, "So I think it's just a mother thing, and also the culture thing plays a role." (Emily, Workshop, June 18, 2012).

However, for Sofia, it was very important to differentiate between explaining gender inequality as a cultural phenomenon and using a gender analysis lens to critique patriarchy and sexism. She exclaimed,

I think it's different. When we start excusing invisibilizing the mom, or the woman's role in a family, and we start saying, 'cause it's in my culture too, or because it's in Latin American culture that often the mom is brushed to the side, or she's cooking and she's keeping peace in the household. But we need to recognize that that comes from a deeper level, and that's patriarchy . . . And there is a big difference between the two because there is lots of people in my culture where those relationships don't happen, and where women do play an important role. (Sofia, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Sofia drew on her theoretical and experiential knowledge to invite the other participants to join her in using critical literacy tools to explore complex questions arising from their reading of the text: What did it mean that many participants believed that the gender roles in the fictional Mishima family mirrored expectations within their own social and cultural contexts? How might an analysis of the intersections of gender, race and culture (Crenshaw, 1991) inform our readings? Would our expectations and reactions have been different had the family portrayed been of another ethnicity, nationality or social class? These questions lead to further rich discussion as the other group members took up Sofia's challenge and in doing so struggled with another, overarching question: What happens when our previously unquestioned personal experiences or beliefs come into tension with the questions critical literacy prompts us to ask? For insight into this question, I turn to the work of scholars interested in the confluence of reader response theory and critical literacy (Beach, 2000; Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000; van der Wey, 2012).

Rosenblatt's (1976, 1978, 1982, 1990, 1995, 2003) work continues to be a foundational reference for reader response pedagogy in North America. However, Lewis (2000) shows that in a significant number of cases in the United States, classroom applications of Rosenblatt's theory have reduced her arguments to the misconception that an aesthetic reading is synonymous to a personal, emotional reading, while analysis is practiced during efferent reading. From this misreading come arguments that set up personal responses as experiences to be celebrated, but never questioned or critiqued for fear of threatening the reader's enjoyment and sense of living through the evocation of the text's story world. Lewis argues that this has led to the proliferation of pedagogical approaches which set up aesthetic response as "ideologically innocent" (p. 258), that is, as the unique expression of one individual's enjoyment of the text which ought to be elevated above political and social issues. Such a misreading of reader response theory is problematic, because it does not provide the space or pedagogical tools to support students in revisiting and critically analysing their initial responses to a text. As I argued in Chapter Four, through the process of sharing, building on, and re-examining their initial responses, the research participants contributed to a layered, recursive process of knowledge construction which allowed them to develop nuanced interpretations of the texts. This rich process would not have been possible without the space to acknowledge and explore the critical dimensions of our aesthetic responses.

Lewis (2000) and Dressman (2001) have traced the evolution of Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading from her early (1976, 1978) to later (1990, 1995, 2003) works, and they both find that a strong thread of argumentation in support of examining the social implications embedded in aesthetic reading experiences runs throughout her writing. Building on Lewis and Dressman, as well as his own analysis of reader response theory, Cai (2008) argues that Rosenblatt's theory considers any act of reading to be located in a specific "personal, social and cultural matrix" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p.104), and so provides a framework for exploring how critical readings are developed. I follow Cai in quoting Rosenblatt's (1982) description of aesthetic reading at length, because it offers a nuanced explanation of how the many aspects of reading and interpreting literature are intertwined, as well as making specific reference to the development of critical readings:

In aesthetic reading, we respond to the very story or poem that we are evoking during the transaction with the text. In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts. We listen to the sound of words in the inner ear; we lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive, to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the text. We participate in the story, we identify with characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings. At the same time there is a stream of responses being generated. There may be a sense of pleasure in our own creative activity, an awareness of pleasant or awkward sound and movement in the words, a feeling of approval or disapproval of the characters and their behavior. We may be aware of a contrast between the assumptions or expectations about life that we brought to the reading and the attitudes, moral codes, and social situations we are living through in the world created in transaction with the text.

(Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 270, in Cai 2008, p. 215).

Cai emphasizes Rosenblatt's argument that as the reader evokes the story world from the text, she/he is simultaneously and recursively responding to that which is evoked. Thus, self-reflexivity, including the critical analysis of one's own response is an integral part of reader response theory and practice. Rosenblatt also claims that the reader may experience ideological and moral conflicts with what is called forth from the text, that is, the reader's belief system may be challenged by the belief systems which are explicit or implicit in the text. Ideologies, beliefs and assumptions are not only personal attributes

of readers and writers; they are shaped by the individual's participation in larger social, political, economic and cultural systems (Bakhtin, 1981, hooks, 1991).

Cai suggests two ways in which reader-response theory envisions aesthetic response as a “matrix within which any critical approach is selected” (Rosenblatt, 2003, cited in Cai, 2008, p.214). First, aesthetic reading may contain response elements that can be developed into a systematic critical analysis of the text by using a specific theoretical lens, for example, a feminist or postcolonial reading (See, also, van der Wey, 2012 and Sumara, 2002 for a related argument about the importance of reading literary genres through the lenses of theoretical, historical and philosophical scholarship). Second, readers may notice, or be questioned about, the assumptions, expectations, and attitudes which they employ during their aesthetic response to a text, and can then seek additional resources to critically examine the relationship between their responses, the text, and their context. Lewis (2000) writes, “interpretation itself is a social act and understanding the transaction between reader and text involves examining the many social conditions that shape the stances readers take up” (p. 258). She further asserts that not only do readers produce interpretations of the text, but the text also works to form readers as subjects. From this perspective, Lewis argues that it is not possible to have an aesthetic response that is ideologically innocent and that reader response theory must continue to explore how personal responses are charged with social and political implications.

Based on the preceding elaboration of reader response theory, I argue that its concerns intersect with those of critical literacy, particularly when it comes to examining the impact of power and privilege in the social systems and material conditions which shape the relationships between readers, texts and contexts. Cai (2008) argues that pedagogical approaches which consider personal responses to be apolitical risk reinforcing misconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices about literary works written from non-dominant social positions. Writing about studying multicultural literature with children, he recommends that reader response be used in conjunction with critical literacy pedagogy so as to support both students and teachers in recognizing how that which seems most individual—views, emotions, identifications, may be bound up with socially constructed ideologies structured by unequal power relations. Cai concludes that such an approach is essential for engaging with multicultural literature in American

classrooms still marked by inequities of power along lines of race and class, as well as other social categories. I extend Cai's concerns to Canadian education contexts, where although power and privilege may be manifest in different ways as a result of national differences, many immigrant and refugee students continue to face inequities (Early & Marshall 2008; Gaztambide-Fernández 2011; Gunderson 2007, 2008; Marshall 2010; Pirbhai-Illich 2005; Toohey & Derwing 2006).

In Chapter Four, I examined the many benefits that the participants found in interweaving and building upon one another's multiple interpretations. Yet I do not want to imply that their interpretive processes were always linear or unanimous. Edelsky (1999) writes that to practice critical literacy is to engage in the tensions of competing voices. I connect her argument with the work of scholars concerned with issues of difference, multi-vocality and power in Canadian literature (Blaeser, 1993; Cheung, 1994; Dudek, 2006; Episkenew, 2002; Mohammadzadeh, 2009; Mukherjee, 1994, 2004). While they advocate for the recognition of literature in Canada as multivocal, these scholars are also cautious about un-examined celebrations of "difference" without considering power. They have made me realize that while theoretically, it is attractive to argue for multi-vocality not only in literature, but in literary interpretation, what does this mean in practice? What happens when things get messy, when one person's interpretation collides with another's, or when one interpretation or one interpreter carries greater power? How should a teacher respond when a reader's personal interpretation is challenged by the political, social or historical context of a work, or when a work's social or political assumptions are challenged by an individual's experience? Who is heard? Who is validated? Who is silenced? I further address these issues in Chapter 6.4 and 6.5. Beach (1995) contends that readers who are willing to engage with questions of "how one's own ideological stance shapes the meaning of one's experience with literature" (p. 93) can help open up space in their interpretive community to address the tensions between their own and others' ideological models. But what pedagogical conditions may support a reader to take the first steps in seeking information and theory beyond their personal experience?

In Chapter Four, I drew on Fox (2008) to examine what I mean when I refer to the participants' "personal experiences" or "experiential knowledge". Questioning my assumptions about these concepts has helped me to appreciate the complexity of the

relationship between the personal and the political in literary interpretation. Although light in tone and subject matter, I found that the following personal vignette by Fox adroitly introduced important questions about the tensions which come with critically engaging with personal experience during any learning activity. She writes,

While training with elite cyclists, the coach challenged my description of “pain” during an interval. He said I was experiencing “discomfort,” and it was a sign of progress. I found myself getting angry and resisting further conversation. Who was he, a young white able-bodied privileged male athlete to challenge or correct my experience? With several bicycle trips behind me and a deeper understanding of training processes, I realize he was accurate. (p. 39)

She then asks a series of questions that I find relevant for literary interpretation and pedagogy:

Who gets to say what is important about an experience? What if the leader and participant frame it differently? . . . What was or is my experience if someone outside of me can be more accurate? If someone else can redefine and interpret my experience/ interpretation, how do I know when to alter, change, or challenge interpretations or understandings of experience? (Fox, 2008, p. 39)

Here, Fox is asserting that she maintains the right to interpret her own experiences, and to be critical of outside attempts to reframe her subjective experience, particularly when these “corrections” come from a position of unacknowledged power. This position is also argued by Narayan (1997) in her work on the “epistemological privilege” that people who have faced oppression have into their own experiences of such. However, Fox is also recognizing that her coach’s theoretical knowledge about the training process played a constructive role in interpreting her experience. She extends the insights from the vignette to larger issues in experiential education, explaining, “A pedagogy committed to honouring participants’ experiences cannot dismiss out of hand their avowed desires, and yet it must also reject the assumption that such avowals are all there is to that experience” (Fox, 2008, p. 50). She argues, “No one knows everything about oneself, and accounts of experience are affairs of language, memory, desire, intent, and cognition, which are all problematic, ambiguous, and translations” (Fox, 2008, p. 44).

From this perspective, in order to have meaning, experience must be located in the historical, social and material fields within which those who have the experiences are living. Such a concept of experience can be framed within Butler's (1990) theory of "performative identity". She argues that individuals perform identity in what they do, how they do it, when and where they do it, and in relation to the social and material structures with which they interact, that is, the pre-existing discourses and regulatory frames that are sedimented through the repetition of their enactment. Part of performative identity is how individuals perceive and narrate their experiences. Such a theory of experience avoids a false dichotomy between experiential knowledge and critical theoretical analysis because it allows for the acknowledgment of an individual's experience as real and valid in its own right, but also recognizes that experiences must be interpreted with respect to their "larger social, cultural, and political horizons if they are to be understood by others and have social consequences" (Fox, 2008, p. 46). When I ask a participant to critically examine her/his own experience, I must draw on theory and practice which is capable of engaging with the conflicts of power, knowledge and representation for both myself and the participant. Critical literacy must be both about making space for multiple voices, multiliteracies, and many ways of knowing, but also about recognizing how individuals' experiences and perspectives are shaped by their historical and social locations, thus necessitating critical analysis of a text's location, the reader's social context and the relationships between participants in the educational environment.

hooks (1991) argues that for people who have experienced oppression and marginalization, reading what she terms "critical fictions" (p. 55) is a powerful component of critical literacy. She defines critical fictions as stories that speak of, and to, the social, political and material experiences of people and groups who have been underrepresented in mainstream literary venues and other cultural spaces. Writers of critical fictions "challenge dominant discourses and reading practices" (hooks, 1991, p.55) in order to claim agency and space in society on their own terms, and in their own words. I draw on hooks' work about critical fictions to describe the relationships that developed between the research participants and the texts they read, in that interpreting works by Canadian authors who are immigrants and people of colour can be seen as a way of challenging dominant discourses in Canadian literary criticism and education. These discourses, as I argue in the literature review, continue to construct "postcolonial",

“multicultural” and “minority” literature not as integral parts of the spectrum of national literary expression, but rather as “other”, always to be defined in relation to canonized European or European-Canadian (colonial) works and theories (Mukherjee, 1994, 2004).

Lewis (2000) acknowledges that her work on developing critical literacy within reader-response pedagogy owes a debt to hooks’ (1991) argument that the imagination should not be viewed as “pure, uncorrupted terrain” (p. 55) but as colonized by dominant discourses that become naturalized ways of thinking. The power of hooks’ idea comes from her insistence on action and agency in the face of oppressive discourses. Reading or writing critical fictions constitutes action in that it pushes us to interrogate dominant discourses in our imaginations, and to make explicit the very processes by which they become naturalized. The research participants demonstrated just such agency as they critically analysed the texts. Through their readings of “rivers and other blackness between us” (young.anitafrika, 2007) as a text which evoked stories of colonialism, racism and slavery while also speaking to them about resistance and healing in their own lives and in the larger society (discussed in detail in Chapter 4.3 and 4.5), they challenged the discourses which treat racism and colonialism as problems of the past which are no longer relevant in Canadian society (as described by James, 2010 and Dion, 2007 and elaborated in Chapter 2.2). They also confronted the difficult work that hooks speaks of, the process of interrogating dominant discourses in our imaginations, when they examined their own reactions to the issues of gender and power in “Andante” (Tablo, 2009).

A regular strategy I used while facilitating the workshops was to refer to the critical literacy questions (See Chapter 3.5.1 for a full description) which I had shared with the group as part of our groundwork activities. To review, some examples of the questions include: “whose interests are being served by the representations in question? Who speaks, for whom, and under what conditions? What moral, ethical, and ideological principles structure our reactions to such representations?” (Giroux, 1992, p. 219). I also attempted to highlight instances in which a participant raised such critical concerns. For instance, when I realized that Sofia’s reading of Mrs. Mishima’s portrayal in “Andante” (Tablo, 2009) contained many critical questions about intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; hooks, 1990; Lorde 1984) which could support our group in deepening our analysis, I decided that it was important to draw attention to her ideas, and to hold

the flow of discussion so that the other participants could reflect on the issues she had raised. I see this critical literacy questioning strategy as one way of pedagogically enacting the theoretical arguments about the intersections of the personal and the political that I discuss above. Pedagogical strategies from critical literacy can respond to reader-response scholars' concerns with contextualizing personal responses to literature within the historical, social and material contexts of the reading (Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000; Rosenblatt, 2003; van der Wey, 2012), and can also support teachers and learners to use their experiential knowledge with critical awareness of how it must be "located in larger social, cultural, and political horizons if they are to be understood by others and have social consequences." (Fox, 2008, p. 46).

Drawing on accounts from the Literary Engagement Workshops, I argue that using critical literacy strategies supported our group to develop literary interpretations using theoretical frameworks such as gender analysis and critical race theory, in particular the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; hooks, 1990; Lorde 1984), while still making space²² for our experiential knowledge and personal responses. This is because we were interested not just in the theories, but in how our personal experiences connect to them – that is, how our views are shaped by, and in turn may shape, our social contexts. Such an analysis cannot take place without recognizing that the personal is a valuable interpretive lens. One of the strengths of critical literacy strategies, such as posing questions which invite us to interrogate assumptions or to consider alternative perspectives, is that we may develop our analyses through grappling with the complexities and tensions of difficult questions, rather than simply receiving an authoritative perspective. In the following accounts of how the research participants struggled with the challenging questions raised by Sofia, I explore the relationship between theoretical analysis and experiential knowledge within reader response and critical literacy.

²² I need to qualify my statement that I was able to "make space" for participants' personal responses. I cannot be sure that over the course of the workshops, no one felt shut down or silenced, so I am not claiming that it did not occur. While no participants told me that they had felt silenced, it may be that they did, but did not feel free to tell me so. All social situations are marked by differential power and privilege, and no pedagogical strategy can, or should seek to, erase these differences. I believe that critical literacy strategies are important precisely because they acknowledge inequity, provide ways to talk about it and to propose change.

Moshtaba started with a highly personal reading of “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), in which he identified with Jonathan, the story’s young narrator, as a way of articulating his own experiences with feeling the pressure of meeting his own family’s high expectations. However, when Sofia invited the group to use a gender analysis lens, Moshtaba was able to further develop his interpretation, not by discarding his initial personal response, but rather by building on it to include the new perspective. Sofia reminded the group of the importance of using critical theory, in this case a gender analysis which used the concept of patriarchy as a way of understanding how restricting women to supporting roles becomes normalized, rather than accepting fixed gender roles as a “natural” part of one’s culture. Later, in his interview, Moshtaba credited Sofia with orienting him to the critical lens on gender and power, saying that it caused him to re-consider his initial assumptions about Mrs. Mishima’s role in “Andante”:

It was interesting how I didn’t really notice- well I noticed the mother in there [“Andante”], but I thought that, you know, it was ok. But it was really interesting how Sofia pointed out the patriarchy, and how mothers could be seen in different cultures, and how we’re not validating women in general in our lives.

(Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012).

Moshtaba’s reflection is a testimony to how the recursive interpretive process described by van der Wey (2012) and Sumara (2002), in which readers make meaning through engaging with the relationships between their lives and the world of the text, may open up not only the possibility for readers to develop more personally meaningful analyses of the text, but also to create insights into their own lives and contexts through literary relationships. For Moshtaba, the group discussion was a valuable opportunity to question why he had thought “it was ok” for Mrs. Mishima to occupy a marginal position relative to the men in the story. When he said, “how we’re not validating women in general in our lives”, he was taking the powerful step of assuming personal responsibility for challenging gender stereotypes and discrimination in his own life. By approaching the text through the lenses of both his experiential knowledge and the theoretical knowledge from the group discussion, Moshtaba developed deeper layers of analysis and gained insight into important issues impacting his life and the lives of others in his family, his community and the broader society.

I now return to the group discussion I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, so as to further examine how the participants contextualized their readings of “Andante” (Tablo, 2009) by drawing on different, and at times contrasting, understandings of the intersections of gender, race, culture and ethnicity. Critical literacy and reader response also offered us the means to have an inclusive yet critical discussion when the participants put forward different interpretations of “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), or gave different meanings to the intersections of gender, race and culture in their own lives. In response to Sofia’s critique, Jon returned to the text to attempt to gain new insight. In doing so, he found instances which suggested to him an alternate interpretation of Mrs. Mishima’s character, and her relationships with her son and her husband. Jon noticed that throughout the story, “she [Mrs. Mishima] doesn’t say much in the story . . . the way he [Jonathan] described his mother as expressing her feelings or opinions is without speech. Like through her eyes, or through her stare or glare” (Jon, Workshop, June 18, 2012). Building on Jon’s observations, Hiwot argued that to describe Mrs. Mishima as without a voice in the text was to overlook the other forms of communication she used. She explained:

I was just thinking maybe her invisibility or silence is like her strength in a way, even if she just conveys her emotions through her eyes. [. . .] Because maybe if she didn’t say anything at all . . . I don’t know what could have happened in the story. It could have been really different. (Hiwot, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

Here, Hiwot suggests that although Mrs. Mishima expresses herself primarily through non-verbal cues, she does have agency in the story. By wondering “what could have happened in the story” without Mrs. Mishima’s contribution, Hiwot acknowledged that she is neither voiceless nor powerless in the text. Jon also re-examined the relationship between Mrs. Mishima and Jonathan. He quoted several passages from the text in which Jonathan worries that his mother’s health is deteriorating because of the stress of caring for her husband and her grief over losing him to mental illness. For Jon, these passages pointed to strong bond of love and concern between Jonathon and his mother:

I noticed that he had a lot of love for his mother. He describes her as aging, and losing energy. . . [quoting “Andante” (Tablo, 2009, p.24)] “I find myself wishing that my father would never return”. I felt kind of like he was blaming his father a little bit for his mother’s aging and losing life. (Jon, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

New questions arose for Jon: how could the text evoke a reading in which Mrs. Mishima's identity is recognized only in relation to the men of the story, yet also yield a reading exploring the complexities of her communication and relationships? At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Jon as he sought to contextualize "Andante" within what he saw as widespread expectations about the behaviour of women and roles for mothers in Korean society. Although he attributed these attitudes to "Korean culture", I believe he was struggling to articulate the systemic nature of sexism as he saw it in his own cultural contexts. He wondered if "it was maybe the author's intention to sort of put her [Mrs. Mishima] in the background" (Jon, Workshop, June 18, 2012) in order to reflect on "how the culture looks at the usual mother role in a family" (Jon, Workshop, June 18, 2012). Different possible interpretations, such as those Jon considered, raised a challenging question for the participants. Does Mrs. Mishima's position in the text reflect unacknowledged sexist discourses, or can the text raise provocative questions about the reader's assumptions by acknowledging that Mrs. Mishima lives within a patriarchal structure while at the same time including opportunities for resistance and subversion? The participants ended the discussion by leaving both possibilities open. Yet what stayed with them was the experience of critically analysing the text as a site for multiple, and often contradictory discourses. In the follow-up interviews, all of the participants remembered the discussion of gender in "Andante" as one of the most important experiences which had shaped their understanding of what interpreting literature could mean.

Corcoran (1994) argues that both reader-response and post-structuralism offer opportunities for literary interpretation to "be redirected from a pursuit of a single meaning embedded in the text to the investigation of the social, political, cultural and historical context in which the text was written and published" (p. 10) as well as "all the subsequent contexts of reception" (p. 9). I connect these arguments back to Chapter Four of this study, in which I discussed the research participants' changing ideas about "finding the right answer" (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). I argued that challenging the conception of literary interpretation as a quest for the "right answer" helped them to participate in collaborative meaning-making and to develop greater confidence as readers and critics of literature in English. Yet their insights were not limited to their individual experiences in the workshops. As they considered the implications of the

multiple interpretations in our group, some participants began to question the notion of “the right answer” in relation to broader issues of power, ideology and subjectivity in text production and reception. This was particularly evident when the participants put forward their different ideas about the relationships between social contexts and gender discourses in “Andante”, then listened to, and sometimes challenged one another, thereby experiencing both the quandaries and the possibilities of critical literacy.

In seeking to critically analyse gender discourses in “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), the participants and I struggled with the complex intersections of gender with other systems of power. Our discussion initially focused on framing gender in relation to culture and ethnicity, as I showed at the beginning of this chapter. I believe that this focus came in part from my emphasis on making space for the participants to connect the text to their knowledge of their own cultural contexts. For example, Emily, Jon and May saw parallels between the experiences of the Mishima family as Japanese-Americans, and their own experiences as Canadians whose families had immigrated from Bangladesh and Korea. The focus shifted when Sofia challenged us to problematize cultural explanations for gender roles by arguing that such discourses serve to erase intra-cultural difference and avoid examining systemic power across cultures. When I look back at the way the subsequent discussion played out, I see that I was not prepared to support a structured process through which participants might re-examine and perhaps re-interpret their experiential knowledge through various critical lenses. Throughout the workshops, I sought to practice Freirean problem posing (Freire, 1970) because it calls for teachers and students to approach one another as fellow dialoguers, each grounded in their own individual experiences and circumstances, yet also working to understand how individuals are shaped by their historical and social locations. Although I attempted to use problem posing to invite the group into a deeper discussion of Sofia’s critique, I see now that I would have needed to make additional time for groundwork activities specifically dedicated to thinking about the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and culture, and the social construction of such categories.

For example, we could have begun by examining what we mean when we talk about “culture”, drawing on an introductory definition such as Hall (1997):

Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings- the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. (p.2).

It is important to examine the assumptions underlying our use of “culture” as a social identity category because without critical analysis of its theoretical and everyday uses, the idea of culture can too easily become a homogenizing, essentialist notion. Such an analysis could have further engaged with Sofia’s argument that in her experience many Latin American women and families do not conform to sexist stereotypes. For example, LeCompte and Schensul (2010) argue for keeping descriptions of culture continually open to challenge and redefinition by many contending voices:

Although we have defined culture as shared patterns of meaning and behavior, we do not want to imply that everyone in a cultural or social group believes the same things or behaves in the same way. Substantial variation will exist in every group and in any domain of culture we could imagine. (p. 27)

Variation within a cultural, ethnic or national group, or other identity group, may be understood through the lens of intersectionality, which sees identity as a “network of affiliations and ascriptions connected to axes of power” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1243). An individual’s experience then, cannot be captured by looking at any one social category in isolation. What some of the participants referred to as “my culture” or “our culture” may also refer to ethnic, national or religious affiliations, and may intersect with other social categories such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. Some participants identified as ethnic or religious minorities within their nation states of birth, or considered certain ethnic, religious or class affiliations to be defining aspects of their identity. In immigrating to Canada, these social locations became even more layered. I maintain the participants’ original use of the term “culture” because they are articulating their particular location within these complex dynamics. However, in the following pages, I also situate the participants’ and my own struggles with the meaning of “culture” within the discourse of critical race theory.

Our attempts to address gender issues in cultural context intersected in problematic ways with notions of race, ethnicity and culture in Canada, which is, as Han (2011b) documents “a racialised society originated from a White settlers’ society (e.g., Chen 2004; Fernando 2006; Folsom 2004; Haque 2005; Ibrahim 1999; James and Shadd 2001; Li 1998, 2003a, b; Madibbo 2006; Wang 2000, 2001, 2006)” (p. 64). As I argued in my literature review using critical race theory, immigrants and refugees of colour in Canada have historically been, and continue to be constructed as racialised groups (Carr and Lund, 2009; Han 2011b; Haque 2005; James 2010; Taylor, 2006). In the workshops, many of the words and phrases with which we evoked racial, ethnic or cultural difference can be seen to carry the weight of discomfort or a desire for euphemism: “a struggle between the new modern ways of life and the traditional ways” (Jon, Workshop, June 11, 2012); “traditional stuff” (May, Workshop, June 18, 2012); “just a cultural thing” (Emily, Workshop, June 18, 2012); “how might culture influence our perspectives?” (Fiona, Workshop, June 18, 2012).

LeCompte and Schensul (2010) argue that “ethnicity, national identity, culture, and race are concepts that often are conflated and confused” (p. 27), so it is vital to be guided by rigorous theoretical frameworks when using them because “all of these concepts affect the power and position that individuals possess and occupy within a given society” (p. 27). The difficulties many of us in the group faced in talking about this intersectionality needed to be more systematically engaged through critical race theory. In particular, it would have been productive to deconstruct the words and discourses we used in order to see how their uncritical use serves to homogenize or essentialize identity categories. LeCompte and Schensul reveal the workings of such social construction in their discussion of race:

The concept of race, in contrast to ethnicity, has a biological, not a cultural referent. However, there is little real biological validity to the concept of race; skin color, hair texture, eye shape, propensity to inherit certain ailments, and other so-called racial characteristics most often are adaptations to environmental conditions in the distant past. They do not distinguish groups of people one from another genetically. Race is a social construct that conveniently allows groups that do not possess stigmatized phenotypical characteristics to discriminate against those who do.” . . . [Race is] a way of organizing social, political, and economic power (Feagin 2006; Ladson-Billings 2005; Omi and Winant 2008, 2009).
(p. 30)

Chapra and Chatterjee (2009) assert that challenging racism in Canada must be built on “addressing systemic issues instead of using culture as an entry point” (p. 18) because, “the concept of “culture” replaces or recodes “racial difference”, and in the process manages to sustain the idea of race as an act of nature” (Chapra and Chatterjee 2009, p. 18). Similarly, Han (2011b) argues that although race has no biological validity, and is highly problematic in its potential to homogenize “many groups of people from diverse geographic locations and socio-political, cultural, linguistic, experiential and even ethnic backgrounds” (p. 65), it must be discussed because it names how individuals and groups experience power and privilege systemically.

As the researcher and facilitator, I must be responsible for examining how my interpretation of the text may be shaped by my social location and ideologies. This is particularly important in this research because of the positions of privilege I occupy: being white, born in Canada and using the dominant language. When Sofia raised her concerns about the portrayal of Mrs. Mishima in “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), I was at first only able to respond in the most basic manner: by acknowledging that I had failed to consider the story from a critical perspective with respect to gender, and by realizing that I had to facilitate time for a deeper discussion of the issues. Later, as I wrote my notes about the workshop, I began to question why I had not noticed the tensions surrounding gender and family roles in the text during my preparatory reading and the workshop design. I re-read the story, and noticed several hints that should have at least alerted me to the possibility of conflicting discourses on gender in the text. Why had I not seen them? The critical literacy question that stood out for me was, ‘Would my expectations and reactions have been different had the family portrayed been of another race, ethnicity, nationality or social class?’

I still question myself: did I normalize Mrs. Mishima’s marginality in the story because she was a Japanese-American woman? I believe that I would have found her portrayal in the story more shocking or anomalous had she and her family been white. While there are many more nuances of race, ethnicity or social class that might impact interpretation, I believe that the principle stands: my response was certainly not ideologically innocent. Using critical race theory to examine my response, I see connections to discourses which construct “Asians” as a racialized group. Matthews (2002) documents a range of racialized and gendered narratives, both historical and

contemporary, some of which perpetuate “the stereotyped notion of Asian femininity as a form of hyper-femininity where Asian women are represented as being more passive, subservient and compliant than Anglo women. [They are assumed to be] traditional, docile, oppressed by men and always willing to please” (p. 214). Takahashi (2012) explores racialized and gendered narratives in English language learning (ELL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), in which “learning English is presented as a weapon for Japanese women to cope with or move away from chauvinistic Japan, toward a more modern Western world of gender equality”, predicated on the “widely circulating international image of Japanese men as sexist” (p. 427).

While I am critical of these essentializing discourses when I approach them consciously, or when I interact with real people who by their lived complexity necessarily defy such stereotypes, I must recognize that I am still capable of unconsciously reproducing them as I did in my reading of “Andante”. I failed to challenge my assumption that relationships in a Japanese-American family would normally be patriarchal and so read Mrs. Mishima’s marginal position in the story as unremarkable. As a facilitator, I must remain aware of the limitations of my interpretation, and must leave space for the participants to raise new avenues of inquiry into the text. Otherwise, opportunities for richer, more complex interpretations will be lost. I will elaborate this point in the next section when I discuss positionality and literary interpretation.

While I found critical race theory to be a powerful lens for examining my own assumptions, I do not want to imply that other participants’ interpretations were less valid if they did not explicitly reference such theories. For example, Emily used her own family relationships to interpret the text. I do not believe that theory should contradict Emily’s lived experience, but I do believe that it could have provided her with the tools to affirm her own experiences, yet at the same time reflect critically about problems of generalization. Theory can also engage with the complexities of individual experience, as when Emily’s sister, May described how in her view of their family, the seemingly stable gender roles might not be quite as they seem:

And decision-making, if anyone asks me who is the head decision-maker in my family, without a doubt, my dad makes the final decision. There is no doubt of that in my mind, but [laughs] there is a trick to it. You can definitely tell my mom something, and it will alter my dad’s decision, because yeah, she could probably influence some stuff. So

there's the traditional stuff and then there's other things.
(May, Workshop, June 18, 2012)

May shared this reflection in response to Sofia's critical questions about gender and culture. While acknowledging the complexity of her own family dynamics, she nevertheless reminded the group that the real life experiences of many women are still very structured by restrictive gender roles, saying "there's a huge portion of mothers expected to do certain things" (May, Workshop, June 18, 2012).

These examples from the workshops, and the participants' reflections on their process over the course of the research support the argument that examining how one comes to form an interpretation of a literary work is a vital part of experiencing, or in Rosenblatt's (1978) words, "living through" (p. 27) one's relationship with the text, and thus the critical stance is at the root of aesthetic reading. Engaging in a critical analysis of one's response, including experience, memory, belief and emotion, can enhance, rather than threaten, one's personal connection to a text. Rosenblatt (2003) reiterates that she supports pedagogy which encourages students to draw on the specific bodies of scholarship and analytical tools employed by different literary and social schools of criticism as ways of exploring their aesthetic reading of a text: "Emphasis on the reader need not exclude teaching criteria of valid interpretation or application of various approaches, literary and social, to the process of critical interpretation and evaluation (Rosenblatt, 2003, p.7). She argues that reader response is "too often interpreted simply as a critical approach with personal response as its end product", whereas she sees it as "the matrix within which any critical approach is selected" (Rosenblatt, 2003, p. 70) in order for the reader to make sense of the many aspects of evocating the text as a "lived through experience".

5.3. Positionality: insider/outsider readings and limits of knowing

Studying the entwinement of personal experience, aesthetic response and critical literacy calls for a recognition that literature and other cultural products resonate not universally, but in culturally and politically specific ways for people from different social locations. Readers transact with the text within a web of intersecting "insider" and

“outsider” reading positions which are constructed through many signifiers such as language, implied audience, or culturally shared memories and meanings (Mukherjee, 2004). From a post-structuralist perspective, the text is a site for multiple competing discourses. Texts both shape, and are shaped by a range of possible reading positions (Corcoran, 1994). Yet these reading positions are not purely theoretical; they are taken up by real people who are acting in the real world as it is shaped by power in its many forms, both material and ideological (hooks, 1991). In order to engage with issues of power in the construction and enactment of reading positions, I draw on the concept of positionality. Defined by LeCompte and Schensul (2010) as, “the power position in which a person or group is situated socially. It is related to ascribed or achieved characteristics, such that individuals are partly defined by the situation and partly by the engagement—or agentic interaction—with the structural constraints of the situation” (p. 30). In line with the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; hooks, 1990; Lorde 1984), positionality is a shifting aspect of identity. A person may simultaneously occupy different and even contradictory positions, “depending on the power and status attributed to his or her race, social class, ethnicity or culture, gender, sexual orientation, age, educational level, religion, or many other characteristics” (LeCompte and Schensul p. 30).

Many of the participants touched on issues of positionality and insider/outsider reading positions as they examined their relationships with the literary works and with one another. As immigrant and refugee youth reading works by Canadian authors of immigrant or refugee backgrounds, or Canadian authors of colour, they expressed a sense of being addressed as insiders. Hiwot described both the texts and her reading position as “from the Canadian point, but also from the immigrant point” (Hiwot, Interview, July 17, 2012) while Sofia felt that the literary works were “very much reflective of my group of friends and the people I associate myself with . . . because all the writers were writers of colour” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). However, the participants also engaged with the complexity of difference as articulated by Crenshaw (1991), Burack (2004) and Reagon (1983), who theorize identity through relational frames which recognize multiplicity and difference within the self, within groups and between groups. Similarly, Mukherjee (1996) argues that insider and outsider positions are fluid: “If I am a “cultural insider” reading a South Asian Canadian text, I lose that

position when I read a Native Canadian or a Chinese Canadian, or, for that matter, an Anglo Canadian text” (p. 42). Building on Burack’s (2004) coalitional theory of the frames of difference, which we studied during the workshops, the participants talked about instances in which they transacted with the literary works from both insider and outsider positions.

Lila was particularly interested in the possibilities for collaborative interpretation between insider and outsider readers. She was struck by how Jon, as an outsider to many of the cultural referents in “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) brought a very different focus to the text than did she as an insider reader. She reflected,

There’s a lot of things here [in the suite of poems “Surplus Knowledge”] that I think I know, just because I relate to it. But then for example, Jon, he didn’t understand some of the references or words, so it was interesting because he would catch some different things in the poem than me. I would just sort of skip over some stuff, so that was cool because sometimes you know a lot, but then a person who might not get the same references as you, they will look at the things that they understand, and those parts that you might skip over.

(Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012)

Lila uses a particularly sensitive turn of phrase, “things that I think I know”. I believe she is drawing attention to the value of seeing one’s own insider knowledge through the eyes of an outsider, and thus returning with new eyes to the things that one may take for granted. She also notes that Jon’s questions caused her to more closely examine aspects of the text “that you might skip over” as an insider reader. One example she gave was when Jon asked about the significance of the garments and the colour white in the lines,

I could not look at the men of the Tablighi Jamaat
coming off a plane in their pious gowns last week, though I saw
one smooth young face beneath the white cotton cap,
his white-socked feet in leather sandals.

I know that feeling so well, the purposeful virtue

only the grip of clean white cotton can bestow.

("Surplus Knowledge" 58-63)

As she shared her knowledge of religious attire in Islam with Jon, Lila became aware of nuances in the lines that she had not previously seen. Focusing on the poem's specific language about clothing directed her attention to the symbolic implications of appearance:

I think there's a mocking tone in this one particular stanza. Because she says, "in their pious gowns". I feel like it's like she doesn't believe that they are pious, just their gowns. [...] It seems like for her these are not pious people, these are just people who maybe like to show that they're pious. And we related that back to challenging religious and traditional values (Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012).

Lila also noted that as an insider reader of "Surplus Knowledge", she had been drawn to the passages which seemed to address her more intimately, for example through the use of shared language. Yet she saw the poem as full of interpretive possibilities for both insider and outsider readers, saying,

There are so many parts [of "Surplus Knowledge"] that are in another language. You would really need to know who she is or where she's from, but if you don't then you pick up on other things, and that was really interesting for me. (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012)

In this case, Lila thought that interpreting a text in a group including both insider and outsider readers provided the opportunity to see the text from new and unexpected angles, echoing Mukherjee's (1996) assertion that rewarding interpretations happen when readers from multiple positions come together in an interpretive community.

hooks (1991) provides a powerful argument against assuming that critical fictions which address a specific audience, for example through the use of a vernacular language, or other cultural and historical signifiers, necessarily exclude other readers from engaging with the text in meaningful ways. She writes, "To address more intimately is not to exclude; rather, it alters the terms of inclusion" (p. 56). Our group was confronted with such different terms of inclusion when we read d'bi.young.anitafrika's (2007) poem, "rivers and other blackness between us". In contrast to "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011) and "Andante" (Tablo, 2009), none of the participants had

insider knowledge or experience for interpreting the poem's use of Jamaican vernacular language or Jamaican poetic and literary history. At first, the poem's passages in the Jamaican vernacular seemed strange and daunting to many of the participants. Hiwot's question to the author, "why are you writing like this?" expressed her initial sense of disconnection from young.anitafrika's subversive use of language, yet also her curiosity and willingness to dig deeper. "rivers and other blackness between us" bears out hooks' (1991) assertion that language is often a major field of contestation in critical fiction: "The way writers use language often determines whether or not oppositional critical approaches in fictions or theory subvert, decenter or challenge existing hegemonic discourses" (p. 56). Readers who are not cultural insiders must "shift locations and grapple with language" (p. 56) so as to enjoy and engage with works of critical fiction in ways which re-centre the languages and paradigms of the text. As I described in Chapter 4.3, Hiwot undertook just such a project of "shifting locations" when she drew on Chang (2012), whose webpage helped her to learn about the context of language, orality and performance in Jamaican literature and the historical, social and political context of language for people living in Jamaica and the Jamaican diaspora.

The complex dynamics of insider/outsider readings and positionality are also implicated in another challenge of critical fictions: "Readers of critical fiction cannot approach work assuming that they already possess a language of access, or that the text will mirror realities that they already know and understand" (hooks, 1991, p. 57). hooks' words seem to resonate in Lila's description of her experience with "rivers and other blackness between us" (young.anitafrika, 2007). With this poem, Lila felt like an outsider reader:

When I first read it [rivers and other blackness between us], I didn't really feel anything, I didn't really relate to it, or understand what it was . . . I didn't feel any connection to her message. I knew she was talking about love, but I didn't know what that meant, exactly, or what that meant for me. And I just thought that maybe since she's from another place, she's writing about something that I can't really get-like maybe a kind of love that doesn't really exist in how I was brought up. (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012).

However, after engaging with the poem as a member of our interpretive community, Lila revisited her relationships with the text:

But then it was interesting because people brought more things out, and they were talking about unconditional love and things like that, and then that gave me an opportunity to connect what she [young.anitafrika] was saying to who I am, and what my cultural background is, even though it feels like what she has written is maybe specific to where she's from. (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012)

Here, Lila shares an important insight, acknowledging that “rivers and other blackness between us” constructs a unique relationship with insider readers who may identify with its cultural, historical or political specificities. She does not claim that her new understanding of the concept of unconditional love in the poem made her an insider, but rather that through making connections with her own experiences, she came to empathize with the poem's unique voice. Emily saw being an outsider reader as an opportunity, saying “Unless you are exposed to things that are different from you, how else are you going to broaden your knowledge?” (Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012). Echoing Lewis' (2000) study, which explores how outsider readers developed critical analyses of the limits of their ability to identify across differences of power, privilege and social location, May commented:

If I would have been able to relate to everything personally then it would be kind of boring. It makes it more interesting because you see how other people are able to relate to the story, and how you are not able to relate to it. (May, Interview, July 17, 2012)

Hiwot also suggested that it is not necessary to personally identify with a work in order to develop a meaningful interpretation, as long as one is aware of the limits of one's knowledge. After reflecting on her position as an outsider reader of *Surplus Knowledge* (Kurd, 2011), she felt more comfortable with having only a partial understanding, saying:

For “*Surplus Knowledge*” it was really hard, because I felt like I couldn't connect to any of them [the three poems comprising the suite]. I really wanted to, because I really liked them. But I guess also that in itself was a good experience for me, because I thought, well I don't have to connect to everything or always understand what's going on, or what it means. (Hiwot, Interview, July 17, 2012)

By contrast, Sofia came to “rivers and other blackness between us” already feeling a sense of solidarity with the text's historical context. She spoke of feeling empowered by reading “someone like d'bi.young who is from Jamaica and there is so much parallel between Jamaica and Colombia in terms of how colonization came about” (Sofia,

Interview, July 16, 2012). She saw the poem as a critical project to re-centre colonized peoples' ways of knowing and its subversive energy resonated with her. These diverse experiences show that insider/outsider reading positions were not static, but constructed and negotiated by the participants as they interpreted the literary works.

Yet any discussion of positionality requires examining power, privilege and the limits of knowing. To do so, I draw on Young's (1997) concept of asymmetrical reciprocity and Narayan's (1988) idea of insider epistemological privilege. Young describes asymmetrical reciprocity as a theory and practice of dialogue in which participants seek to value and empathize with the perspectives of others, not by assuming they can stand in another person's shoes, but rather by interrogating how their own perspectives have been shaped by power and privilege. Narayan argues that "members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle, and critical knowledge of the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group" (p.35), and thus can claim insider epistemological privilege even if they do not articulate their experiences in ways which are legitimized by dominant discourses. She calls for individuals to practice "epistemological humility" (p.35) across differences of power and privilege in order to recognize that knowing is always partial, often contradictory and ultimately only approachable through the lens of one's own subject position.

In particular, the group discussion about issues of gender in "Andante" (Tablo, 2009) required us to grapple with the nuances of asymmetrical reciprocity and epistemological humility. One such example is how Jon and Moshtaba, the two men in that discussion, were willing to revisit their analysis in response to Sofia's critique. Initially, they considered themselves to be insider readers of the story, particularly because they identified strongly with the young male narrator. However, after listening to Sofia, they recognized that they were also outsiders to other experiences evoked by the text, namely the experience of sexism. Later, Jon reflected critically on the limits of his perspective, saying, "Sofia's perspective of the absence of women was really eye-opening for me. I couldn't think of that. I couldn't see that at the beginning, but then she brought it up and I noticed it" (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). Moshtaba's comments in the group, some of which I quoted earlier, reflect a similar recognition of Sofia's insider

epistemological privilege as a woman. Both men responded by working to incorporate her critique into their interpretations of the story.

As the researcher and facilitator, I must remain critical of how my positionality may shape and limit my interpretation of a text. This became particularly clear to me as I reflected on my interpretive process with “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), re-examining my assumptions through a critical analysis of gender, race and power. Of particular relevance for this research are the positions of privilege that structure my relationship to works by Canadian authors of colour or immigrant authors, and to the research participants. As I argued in my literature review, Canada still operates as a society in which the deracialized white-settler identity acts as a privileged yet invisible norm, racializing anyone who is “other”, whether Indigenous, immigrant or Canadian-born people of colour. Because of my privileged subjectivity, I am used to being the assumed norm, to seeing myself and my values positively represented in literature, art and popular culture. As Young (1997) argues, I cannot transcend the politics of my social location, nor can I claim to understand the experience of another person across asymmetries of power. I can only work to remain critically conscious of power and privilege in order to ethically hear and respond to others.

Episknew (2002) and Eigenbrod (2005) call for critics, teachers and readers who are outsiders to a text’s cultural context to recognize the limits of their capacity to understand experiences with which they stand in asymmetries of power (Young, 1997), and to explicitly name their analyses in ways that can “clearly mark it as a representation: viewed from the outside” (Eigenbrod, 2005, p.44). Although writing specifically about Aboriginal literature in Canada, these scholars also providing important insight into similar issues for analysing literature by authors who are immigrants, refugees and people of colour. As I discussed in the literature review, unequal power relations in Canadian society re-enforce the authority of Eurocentric analyses on literature by people of colour (Episknew, 2002; Mukherjee 1994). As I respond to literature, or participate in an interpretive community like the one we created in the workshops, it is my responsibility to make visible my implication in these unequal social relations, and, as hooks (1991) counsels, to “relinquish privilege and [my] acceptance of dominant ways of knowing as preparation for hearing different voices” (p. 57).

In this section, I have discussed how the participants and I engaged with the literary works through examining our positionality. However, positionality and power structure not only individual interpretations of the text, but also the relationships within interpretive communities, such as our workshops, or a classroom. In Chapter 6.5, as a part of the discussion of conditions for supporting meaningful literary engagements, I will return to these issues by exploring how the participants saw positionality in our group, and in their wider educational contexts. Now, I conclude this chapter by looking at how, by engaging with the complex entwinement of the personal and the political, the participants created a space in which their interpretations and lived experiences could speak to one another, allowing for insight into important issues in their lives, namely, identity and belonging within multiple cultural contexts.

5.4. Interrogating identity within multiple cultural contexts

Drawing on his research with a long-term reading group, Sumara (1996) reflects on the relationship between literature and lived experience, arguing that each person's interpretation was "simultaneously affected by the complex set of intertextual relations of these layered stories and our own history of interactions in the world, both in and out of the context of the reading group" (p 108). Further exploring this web of reader-text-context relations, he explains "In other words it was finally impossible to say whether our experiences prior to reading and interpreting gave the story meaning, or whether our interpretations gave new meanings to our lives" (p. 108).

This blurring of the boundary between literary interpretation and the interrogation of meaning in one's own life provides a powerful way of framing a major theme to emerge from my research—the ways in which the Literary Engagement Workshops became a context for participants to grapple with identity issues. Throughout the study, identity emerged as a salient focus for the participants, both in the frequency that discussion of different identity issues took place, and in the greater intellectual focus and emotional urgency demonstrated by many of the participants during such discussions. I argue that because the participants grappled with the challenges of bringing a critical lens to the political, social and historical construction of their personal responses to literature, their interpretive process was not merely an academic exercise, but rather a

dynamic project for making new meanings in their lives. For immigrant and refugee young people, critical literacy is an important practice for engaging with issues of identity in their lives in Canada. Luke (2004) argues that “what has counted as critical in recent years has focused on how people use texts and discourses to construct and negotiate identity, power and capital” (p. 21). Critical literacy is not only concerned with the interpretation of texts, but also with the interpretation of lived experience. Freire and Macedo (1987) assert that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (p. 35). In believing that our interpretive process with the literary works could also open up possibilities for the participants to develop insight into issues of importance in their lives, I was inspired by Freire and Macedo’s call for literacy to be “laden with the meaning of the people’s existential experience” (p. 35).

The workshop discussions of Kurd’s (2011) suite of poems, “Surplus Knowledge” provides a striking example of how a literary work opened up space for the participants to explore questions of identity. The poems are rich with allusions to Islam, the cultural practices and beliefs of elders, and mainstream popular culture in Canada. The two personas in the poem, “I” and “you”, have ambiguous relationships with these different cultural spaces; their identities and affiliations are suggested rather than explicit. By interrogating such instances of indeterminacy (Sumara 2002), the participants not only developed sophisticated intertextual interpretations of the tensions that they sensed between the text’s different cultural spaces, but they also engaged personally significant questions about identity and belonging. Many of them drew parallels between the text and the struggles faced by young immigrants who must navigate multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural contexts. Hiwot expressed this theme movingly when she commented that like many immigrant youth, the speaker in “Surplus Knowledge”, “seems to be struggling between two worlds” (Hiwot, Workshop, June 25, 2012). This idea of “two worlds” was taken up by the other participants as a way to name both a major theme from the text and what they were feeling in their own lives. In response, I draw on the theme of “two worlds” as a way to frame the participants’ discussions of identity. I use the idea of “two worlds” not to suggest that immigrants or bi-cultural people are confused about their identity (for criticism of this essentialist stereotype see: Taylor, 2006; Iijima Hall, 2004), but rather to recognize how experiences of immigrant

identity cannot be contained in neat, identifiable categories, as expressed by Chapra and Chatterjee (2009):

For many of us, culture is not a fixed essential identity that we can comfortably exist within, even as so called “new” immigrants to Canada. We face a silencing of our experiences when we do not fit within either the normative of “Canadian” values or with the values associated with our identifiable culture (p. 18)

May noticed that “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) evoked space in which membership in a Muslim religious community coexisted with North American popular culture, quoting the lines “thirteen-year-old boys/ moonwalking in the parking lot/ of the Hamilton mosque” (39-41). She commented,

It kind of has the same fun, quirky feeling to it, but it’s also the idea of challenging old and new. Like this boy who just got off of a plane with a very proper Muslim outfit, he could be moonwalking soon. Because that’s what kids pick up. (May, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

She then spoke with a sense of personal knowing about having one’s existing values and sense of self challenged through the experience of migration, saying,

You come in a new land with your values and with your morals and with your religious view perhaps, but as a young person as you start to grow in a new culture, your perspective changes. So that’s what I saw, like challenging it and questioning it. (May, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

May’s insight about the impacts of migration on one’s identity and values led to a conversation with her sister, Emily, in which they reflected on the meaning of such experiences in their own lives. Remembering what it was like to come to Canada at age sixteen, Emily reflected, “Somebody who was born here, they only know one life . . . whereas for us, it’s like, what do I pick? What’s best for me? It’s just like the more the options, the more you don’t know what you want” (Emily, Workshop, June 11, 2012). She also spoke about continuing to process the changes that she and her family experienced as immigrants in Canada:

Sometimes we can’t believe that things have changed so much. And I feel like I can definitely relate to it [“Surplus Knowledge”] that way, because when I compare how things were for us back home and how

they are now, they are two worlds apart. It's completely different lifestyle and sometimes I just sit at home, even with our parents too, talking about it, we sometimes can't believe how much it has changed. It's one of those things you can deny, "oh you know, nothing has changed", but things have. And maybe that's why she says in "whispers of disbelief" ("Surplus Knowledge" 7,116) that you make and re-making yourself. So constantly changing things.

(Emily, Workshop, June 11, 2012)

In referring to the differences between her life in Canada and Bangladesh as "one of those things you can deny", Emily suggests that the immediacies of everyday life can make it difficult to talk about the emotional, psychological and material impacts of migration. Yet her words also convey a sense of drawing strength from the opportunity to talk openly about her experience, either with her family, or with her peers in the workshops. The lines "making and re-making yourself" (6, 115) became a literary space where Emily could interrogate the meaning of the many changes in her life, and connect them to the important questions she asks above about navigating multiple cultural contexts: "What do I pick?" "What's best for me?"

The speaker in "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011) repeatedly refers to an unnamed, possibly violent catastrophe which has resulted in the "you" persona's incarceration. Lila argued that the "you" persona is the speaker's brother, and using clues from the text, as well as her experiential knowledge, she suggested that the brother had become alienated from his family, and was unable to communicate with them about his problems. She alluded to the tensions that she saw within her community when youth navigate different cultural spaces from their parents, saying:

There's hardship that youth can go through sometimes, where they have a different culture at home and a different culture outside. Not blaming, but just realizing that it's hard for both sides. It's hard for families to have open communication with a child who also has this other culture.

(Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

Lila's words call for empathy with the kind of challenges immigrant family members might face in communicating with one another, rather than blaming either the parents or the children when conflict arises. This recognition of the particular intergenerational stresses faced by immigrant families resonated with May, who responded by sharing her

observations of the struggles faced by families in her community, particularly those in which the parents have strong religious beliefs:

The parents struggle because they want to continue their culture and their tradition, and their perspective, and they want to pass it on and have kids respect that. But at the same time, if you don't give your kids a chance to learn and grow from where they're actually living and growing, it creates a big boundary almost and you stay in a time capsule. (May, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

Both Lila and May used the many instances of indeterminacy within "Surplus Knowledge", such as the events leading up to the "catastrophe" and the changes in the family relationships, as interpretive spaces in which the questions they were asking about the text could also open up the opportunity to reflect on, and perhaps re-interpret, connected issues in their communities.

For several participants, interpreting "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011) triggered deeply personal reflections about the challenges they face as immigrant and refugee youth seeking to question some beliefs and practices within their own religious, ethnic or national communities while still being proud and connected members of their communities. Jon felt a strong connection to "Surplus Knowledge", saying, "even though I'm not from the same place as the author, certain things are so common to my experience" (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). For him, the poem spoke with the voice of a person who has come to question certain aspects of their religious faith or cultural practices, but who has chosen to keep this journey private. He quoted the poem: "Making and remaking yourself in whispers of disbelief" (115-116), adding his interpretation,

For me it related to your identity, coming to terms with who you are. And also like, "whispers of disbelief", it related to the religion and the traditions . . . The poet is emphasizing the smooth and gradual progression from traditions she can't agree with anymore. I didn't know what to think of "whispers" —it says "whispers of disbelief". So whispers sounds like almost like secretive disbelief. So you're making transition without anyone knowing. (Jon, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

Jon concluded his reflection on the poem by sharing a line he found to be very powerful: "No. We must not reveal everything at once, / or else we will crumble" (111-

112) (Jon, Workshop, June 25, 2012). When Jon reviewed the transcript, he clarified why he found this section of the poem to be personally significant:

I definitely thought of my struggles with certain aspects of the way fellow Christians practice or approach their beliefs in their life. At the same time, the comment also came from my sense of understanding and empathy, how little it may be, with the writer as someone coming from a background in which their identity is deeply grounded in and intertwined with their cultural, religious, traditional beliefs and practices, some of which are oppressive and disagreeable. And this understanding came from my conversation with peers who are from a similar background.

My case is a bit different because Christianity is not part of my culture or tradition. In fact, a lot of it contradicts with Korean culture and tradition in terms of belief and practice. Though I went to church in my childhood without much knowledge, I came to choose to believe in it in my mid-20's. In the writer's case, from my perception, it's harder to separate their cultural or traditional identity, belief or practice from that of religion. Another part is that their cultural, traditional beliefs and practices mean a lot more to them and their family and a lot of it seems to be maintained to this day.

(Jon, transcript review email, May21, 2013)

For Jon, interpreting the poem was a way to articulate that “coming to terms with who you are” (Jon, Workshop, June 25, 2012) often begins by grappling privately with contradictions between aspects of one’s belief systems. May agreed, saying that she had often felt in a similar position: “Like you have this burst of thoughts in the moment, like mm, this is probably not right, but you don’t say it” (May, Workshop, June 25, 2012). For some people, to publicly question an accepted belief or practice in their religious community, or other identity group, may carry a high risk. The words “or else we will crumble” can be seen to acknowledge the great social, psychological, emotional and spiritual cost that such an action might entail. Yet Jon’s interpretation of “Surplus Knowledge” also draws attention to the potential growth that can emerge, for both the individual and the community, when someone from within that community dares to challenge received beliefs that are oppressive or exclusionary.

Lila considers that several aspects of her experience and identity, including coming to Canada as a refugee and living with a “dual identity” (Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012) have equipped her with critical tools for questioning injustice, both in mainstream Canadian society and within her ethnic, national and religious communities. However,

maintaining a critical voice has not been an easy path for her. As she read “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011), she saw many parallels with her experiences: “Especially as somebody who’s growing up with a dual identity, maybe there’s some things that you want to fight against or challenge, but you can’t because of how your traditions are” (Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012). Later, she added:

I feel like sometimes as a person who comes from another culture, when you come into the West your family has this tendency to make it seem like everything back there was perfect. There was nothing wrong. And then one thing went wrong and then you’re here! But your culture, your religion, the way you are, all of that is perfect, and it’s really hard to say things against that sometimes. So, I feel like that’s really in this poem. Especially when she’s trying to say, “even Muhammad, even Muhammad”²³. . . I don’t know why, but it gets to me so badly, especially the parts where she mentions Muhammad, because I feel a lot of the same things. . . Sometimes I feel like religion and authority figures in religion are presented to us as perfect, and they’re not. In my culture it’s hard to say that out loud.

(Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

I situate Lila’s experiences as she described them here within the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), particularly as articulated by Burack’s (2004) coalition model which theorizes three frames of difference— within the self, the intra-group and the inter-group. I believe that “Surplus Knowledge” resonated for Lila, Jon and others because it can be analysed using all three frames of difference. The intersecting identity positions occupied by the poems’ speaker (immigrant, person of colour, woman, Muslim) evoke difference at the level of the self, the first of Burack’s frames. Difference in the intra-group frame can be seen in the text’s portrayal of someone who is Muslim grappling with tensions and contesting oppression within her own cultural and religious community. The third frame of difference, inter-group relations, is addressed through the poems’ examination of the impacts of racism in Canada, for example as in the telling lines, “When we were children/ you joined me in the bathroom/and said I’m scrubbing this brown stuff off,/ soap up to your elbows. I leaned over,/ spat out toothpaste, saw you meant your own skin.” (“Surplus Knowledge” 18-22).

²³ “Even Muhammad grew anxious / in the long silence between the earliest verses” (Kurd, 2011, p. 119) and “Even Muhammad worried / about the disputes that would follow his death” (p. 120).

When Lila talks about the resistance to her critiques that she feels from some people in her community, I see connections to Burack's (2004) argument that groups facing oppression, for example racism, desire to present a unified counter-discourse to power, or to maintain an uncontested, homogenous identity which may serve as a safe haven from the pressures of oppression. In this context, recognition of intra-group difference or critiques of discrimination within the group itself may be seen as destabilizing to the desire for solidarity and safety. However, Burack maintains that if groups are able to engage in "the complex dialectic between negotiating inclusion in the group and negotiating an individual's own ideals, beliefs and aspirations" (p. 150), the group will be stronger and more just. Oppression from without must not serve to excuse the silencing or oppression of different identities within a group. For this reason, literature, particularly critical fiction (hooks, 1991) plays an important role in opening up spaces where, like Lila and Jon, individuals may voice and exchange critical perspectives about difference within the self, the intra-group and the inter-group.

Language played a prominent role as the participants engaged with identity issues through the literary works. Mukherjee (1996) writes, "Ethnic minority texts inform their readers, through the presence of other languages as well as through a whole repertoire of cultural signs, about the multicultural and multilingual nature of Canadian society" (p. 47). Mohammadzadeh (2009) argues that English language learning contexts ought to develop more critical approaches to language and identity by drawing on "a range of literatures in English; [...] to acknowledge a broader appreciation of nonstandard varieties of English and other world varieties of English" (p. 27). My goal in selecting the texts for the workshops was to provide just such opportunities for critically engaging with language and identity.

Moshtaba reflected on the significance of multilingual text-worlds for his own life. Because of his family's refugee status which forced them through successive moves, or limited their access to education, Moshtaba's opportunities to pursue education in both his first languages, Pashto and Farsi/Dari, and second language, Russian, were often curtailed or interrupted. He felt that writing and studying literature were particularly difficult: "I never felt like I had both languages [Pashto or Russian] that I could contribute" (Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012). Now, studying in college and working in social services, Moshtaba is constantly immersed in English, and in fact feels most comfortable

reading and writing in English. He commented on the sense of strangeness that the dominance of English over his other languages evoked, saying, “the best that I could do was English, which is weird”. In this life context, Moshtaba found it particularly significant to engage with literary works that celebrate the complexity and richness of multilingual writing and identities. Although, as he explained, “it’s all still connected to English”, working with texts which recognize the co-implication of language and identity opened up a space for literary experience which he described as “actually the first time that I try to interpret literature the way that I wanted” (Moshtaba , Interview, July 17, 2012).

Lila recognized that the layering of multiple languages in “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) could serve to challenge narrow visions of Canadian English literature. She said:

One thing I really liked about this poem [*Surplus Knowledge*] was how she has the different languages. Because before I would just think of English literature as being in English . . . but there are some parts of me and my identity that English just can’t express. So I thought it was very liberating how she [Rahat Kurd, 2011] didn’t let that limit her, she just put it in a different language. And I think that speaks a lot to me because it’s showing what’s happening in the world. Which is the fact that we might all have this one language in Canada, which is English, but we can add to it. There’s nothing that says that we can’t add to it. Like English literature doesn’t only have to be about English words. (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012)

When Lila says that there are aspects of her identity and experiences that cannot be expressed in English, she calls to mind Mukherjee’s (1996) exploration of the role of language in representing the complex experiences of migration. Mukherjee contends that by making texts published in an English-dominant society “carry the weight” (Achebe 1976, cited in Mukherjee, 1996, p.41) of the many other languages and dialects which are spoken in Canada, multilingual writers “concretise for us the pluri-cultural nature of humanity on the one hand and the loss and deprivation felt by those transplanted to an alien cultural universe on the other hand” (p.41). Yet in order to hear the many voices which bear witness to the multicultural and multilingual nature of Canadian society, educators and critics must challenge evaluative and interpretive criteria based on monolingual and monocultural principles (Mukherjee 1996, 2004).

Chinua Achebe's (1976) still widely influential writings speak to the strong alternatives that many writers and critics have developed in response to the shortcomings of monolingual models of literature. He writes, "The English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (p. 84). He stresses that the power to shape a language lies with those who consciously use and change it. This is why Lila's insight that "English literature doesn't only have to be about English words" is so powerful. As Steffler (2004) writes, "The presence of other languages [in Canadian English literature] raises in the reader questions about semiotics, focusing particularly on breaking down assumptions about the ownership of language" (p. 364). By claiming the power to shape English, and read literature according to her own needs and experiences, Lila affirms that she and other multilingual people bring unique and enriching voices to Canadian society and its literature.

5.5. Conclusion

By analysing examples from the Literary Engagement Workshops alongside the participants' and my reflections on our interpretive processes, I have explored several ways in which our personal, individual engagements with literature are embedded within broader social contexts, each frame in turn shaping the other. The participants talked about both the challenges they faced and the possibilities they discovered as they negotiated multiple interpretations of the literary works. In the case of our in-depth discussion about gender, power and representation in "Andante" (Tablo, 2009), we realized that naming and engaging with the social contexts and the ideologies informing our perspectives was a powerful way to find a common space in which different individual interpretations could overlap, challenge and even change one another. I connected this process to scholarship from reader response theory, critical literacy and experiential education in order to argue that examining how one comes to form an interpretation of a literary work is a vital part of experiencing, or in Rosenblatt's (1978) words, "living through" (p. 27) one's relationship with the text. In particular, I argued that creating spaces for connecting experiential knowledge with critical analysis is essential when the goal is to challenge dominant, exclusive discourses in Canadian education or

literary criticism. This research sought to create such a space through inviting multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to re-centre their experiences as readers and critics of Canadian literature in English through engaging with critical fictions (hooks, 1991), texts with multilingual, multi-dialect aspects, and texts by authors of immigrant backgrounds.

As we increasingly recognized the ways in which our contexts and social locations were implicated in our personal responses to literature, the participants and I sought to openly discuss our positionality, our changing relationships to the texts as insiders or outsiders and the limits for knowing that these implied. In some instances, as with Lila's new insights into "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011) as a result of Jon's questions, the sharing of perspectives between insider and outsider readers led to a new, expanded interpretation. In other instances, it led to outsider readers realizing their limits of knowing or bias, and subsequently changing their perspectives, as was the case with Moshtaba, Jon and I in response to Sofia's critique of "Andante" (Tablo, 2009). In the next chapter, I will build on these issues as I outline the participants' views on issues of positionality, power, privilege and responsibility, and ask what implications their insights may have for educators interested in conditions for supporting meaningful literary engagements.

Because a major goal of this research was to create opportunities for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to engage with Canadian literature in ways that would have value and significance for them in their own lives, on their own terms, I believe that the final section of this chapter is particularly important. Looking back on the conversations from the workshops and the interviews that centred around identity issues, I see much evidence of Sumara's (2002) theory of reading, which posits that literary interpretation and exploring one's identity are mutually constitutive pursuits which come together through the "complex relations of history, memory, language and geography" (p. 4). Yet such intellectually and emotionally productive spaces do not create themselves. In fact, according to the participants, they have rarely encountered them in their Canadian or home-country educational careers. Although I argue that the Literary Engagement Workshops were sometimes able to support such meaningful engagements, this was by no means always the case. In the next chapter, I outline the participants' feedback

about what conditions, actions and standpoints are necessary for supporting meaningful literary engagements for themselves and other multilingual immigrant and refugee youth.

6. Chapter 6: Conditions for supporting meaningful literary engagements

6.1. Introduction

Many of the participants' stories of their previous educational experiences with literature shared a common thread: they often felt reluctant to express their interpretations, ask questions, or engage in critical analysis, particularly in group settings. In Chapter Four, I argued that over the course of their involvement in the Literary Engagement Workshops, the participants became increasingly comfortable and confident in articulating their ideas about the literary works. Based on the follow-up interviews and my observations of the workshops, the activities which facilitated this change included: engaging with literature that foregrounds the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour; drawing on experiential knowledge and multiliteracies of language and culture; sharing in-progress interpretations; hearing from multiple perspectives; and mutually challenging one another to re-work interpretations in light of critical feedback. Yet one of the most re-occurring themes in the participants' feedback was that their ability to benefit from the activities outlined above should not be uncritically assumed, but rather understood as dependent upon pedagogical approaches capable of recognizing, deconstructing and contesting inequity, both in educational settings and in the broader society.

In this chapter, I consider the major themes from the participants' feedback about what conditions are necessary for creating inclusive, critical interpretive communities. The first section focuses on the participants' observations about literature foregrounding the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour. Next, through their stories of previous educational experiences, the participants draw attention to the lack of safe spaces for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth in Canada to engage with literature.

The following section reviews some of the theories and practices I used in “setting the stage²⁴” (van der Wey, 2012) for the workshops, as well as the participants’ feedback on what worked, what was missing and further suggestions for educators wishing to pursue similar projects. Finally, I address how the participants and I grappled with difference, power and positionality in our interpretive community, drawing on research from coalition politics theory, critical pedagogy and critical literacy in order to contextualize examples from the workshops and the participants’ reflections during the interviews.

6.2. Opportunities to study literature foregrounding the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour

One of the main benefits of the research cited by the participants was the opportunity to participate in an educational setting focused on Canadian literature that re-centres the experiences, histories and subjectivities of immigrants, refugees and people of colour. Such opportunities had been largely missing from their previous educational experiences. For May, it was a first time experience. She said, “I never have been part of a project that brings literature from the perspective of people from immigrant backgrounds” (May, Workshop, June 4, 2012). Similarly, Hiwot hoped to use the workshops to increase her exposure to diverse Canadian writers, noting that throughout high school and now into her post-secondary education, she had not yet had such an opportunity: “They [Canadian writers] are not all the same, they’re from other different countries, with different backgrounds, and we don’t necessarily know about them much” (Hiwot Workshop, June 4, 2012). Jon counted several Canadian writers who are immigrants among his favorite authors, including Tablo (2009), whose short story “*Andante*” he recommended for our workshop reading list, but as he noted, “I didn’t think they would necessarily be writers you could study in school” (Jon, Workshop, June 4, 2012). Sofia framed the issue of the lack of educational spaces for engaging with writers of colour as part of the continued dominance of the Western literary canon in Canadian education (See also Mukherjee, 1996, 2004; Bailey Nurse, 2003; Seiler, 1998). She commented:

²⁴ See footnote 12, p.61, for more details of my use of van der Wey’s “setting the stage” sequence.

I was also thinking about how little we read about writers of colour . . . We don't get ever to experience them, because we always read Shakespeare or whatever we read in high school, I can't remember... 'Of Mice and Men' or whatever. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

For Sofia, participating in a workshop dedicated to literature by authors from immigrant and refugee backgrounds was connected to her sense of identity and solidarity with other people of colour:

And I do feel more respected. Even though we didn't even read anybody that was from Latin America, in terms of being a woman of colour, it was like look, there are so many writers, so many artists, so many wonderful pieces by people of colour. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Although we did not read any works by authors from her region or linguistic background, she felt that in re-centring writers of colour, the workshops respected the rich diversity of Canadian literature that exists outside Eurocentric notions of the literary canon. I connect Sofia's standpoint here to the work of Bailey Nurse (2003), who argues that although writers of colour still do not enjoy the same privileges as White writers, in that institutions such as the mainstream publication system are not designed to advantage them, or their work is still seen as "special interest" and not "universal", this does not mean that they are marginal. In fact, she shows that writers of colour (in the case of her work, Black writers) are flourishing in Canada, and have always been important both in and beyond their communities. They have and continue to develop their own spaces, networks and projects. It is in mainstream settings where inequity must be challenged in order for wider audiences to benefit from their work. I believe that Sofia's perspective supports Bailey Nurse's argument. For Sofia, being in a learning environment that recognized the important contributions of writers of colour reaffirmed the potentially empowering role of literature in her own life.

Several participants talked about the importance of reading literature that portrayed the complex, nuanced realities of immigrants, refugees and people of colour from the perspective of writers from the community. They believed that this allowed for interpretation and discussion which could go beyond the stereotypes and tokenization. For example, Moshtaba reflected,

It was really important to have the opportunity to discuss writers who are originally from different parts of the world . . . it made us see things through different perspectives and pay attention to the issues that are important but that maybe don't get that much attention.
(Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012)

An instance of such possibilities for deeper analysis from an insider perspective can be seen in the participants' discussion of "Andante" (Tablo, 2009), in which they explored power and difference in the intra-group frame (Burack, 2004) by having critical discussions about gender inequality in their own communities (See Chapter 5.2).

Sofia described literature by writers of colour as a space where she could "let her shields down" (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). She explained that repeated experiences with encountering stereotypes or ignorance about immigrants and people of colour have led her to approach the works of white writers cautiously, always cognizant of the need to protect herself:

We are bombarded by this other culture that doesn't necessarily represent us, or even accept us- now I'm just like, shields everywhere, because I don't know at any moment I'm going to get offended or my friends are going to get offended or I'm going to be called something that I don't want to be called, so I guess that's why I'm so cautious When I read of a writer that is not of colour- well, one that I'm not familiar with, because there are Caucasian writers that are uh, like really great allies. But for ones that I don't know, I'm already like, ok, what is this person going to say? I become so cautious.
(Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

For Sofia, literature by people of colour can provide an alternative discourse and a space of refuge where "this other culture", white settler culture, is no longer dominant, and no longer has the authority to define her, or her friends, family and community through stereotypes or ignorance. However, she noted that the freedom she feels in reading outside of dominant discourses does not mean that she will cease to be a critical reader. She emphasized, "We can still be critical with writers that are of colour, or [writers] that we can relate to. We *should* still be critical with them" (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). Sofia's perspective is in line with Burack (2004) and Reagon (1983), who argue that people facing oppression create their own spaces in order to find respite, support and solidarity, yet that these intra-group spaces remain coalitional, in that they are comprised of individuals who share an affiliation with one identity group, yet also bring many

intersecting differences to the group. As Sofia recognized, even as she felt more comfortable reading texts by writers of colour, she could also hold these works accountable by critically analysing how they speak to other intersections of power and difference. Nevertheless, she was clear that because these works re-centre the experiences and concerns of immigrants and people of colour, they invite her to engage with a freedom that is not available to her in mainstream contexts. She said:

I didn't go into these readings with my shields up, like defensive about what people might be saying that creating misconceptions of me . . . With these readings I was just like, shields down, I'm just open to what I'm going to read. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

As the participants discussed the benefits of studying literature which foregrounds the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour, an important contradiction emerged: even as they desired to have more opportunities to read diverse and critical literature, they could think of few mainstream settings where they would feel safe having honest discussions of such works. The next section elaborates on their insights into the challenges of doing so.

6.3. Few safe spaces for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth in Canada to engage with literature

As the participants reflected on which activities and learning conditions had supported their meaningful engagement with literature during the workshops, they often made comparisons to their previous educational experiences. They also imagined how studying the selected literary works might have played out in other educational settings. As I discussed in Chapter Four, the participants were able to develop more complex, nuanced interpretations of the literary works when they engaged in the collaborative interpretive spaces created by the workshops. However, in the follow-up interviews, several participants recalled instances from their previous educational experiences in which they had held back from participating in group contexts. May said, "All that talking out loud, it definitely helps. That is one thing that I didn't do when I was in high school, or even my first year of English classes [in college]" (May, Interview, July 17, 2012). Hiwot agreed: "That's true, the more discussion you have, the more it clarifies. And I

really remember that we would have class discussion on stuff, but I didn't want to talk because I didn't know if my ideas would be accepted" (Hiwot, Interview, July 17, 2012). Their comments illustrate that simply inviting group discussion is not automatically beneficial to all participants. There may be many reasons why individuals either choose not to participate, or feel dissuaded, even prevented from doing so.

Emily contrasted the sense of trust and safety she felt with her fellow research participants to her experiences in high school and later post-secondary school, where she rarely knew her classmates well enough to take the risk of speaking out. She envisioned the following scenario:

Sitting in a classroom where I'm not comfortable with everybody else, it would be very difficult, reading a text that is written by somebody who is different, because first of all you wouldn't be sure of what questions to ask, because there are so many unknowns.

(Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012)

When Emily considers the risks of studying a text "written by somebody who is different", she is referring either to an author who is "different" than the assumed white settler-Canadian norm, or to an author different from her, for example someone of a different ethnicity, culture or nationality from her own. For Emily, such a lack of "comfort" with classmates can be a barrier to critically engaging with issues of difference and power in literature because of the uncertainty around how her comments or perspectives might be received by others. Emily also worried about revealing attributes that might mark her as an outsider, such as speaking with an accent or revealing unfamiliarity with words one is "supposed to know". She said, "Often at school, I don't want to say a word if I don't know, because maybe I'm supposed to know it already or maybe I'll pronounce it wrong" (Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012). Sofia agreed, noting that during the research she had felt more confident asking questions or revealing that she had not understood something. However, this had not often been her experience:

Even in university classes but in many high school classes, I mean having English as a second language, having a thick accent, not knowing some of the words. Like those are not the kind of questions you would ask in an ESL class, that here I felt so comfortable asking.

(Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Emily and Sofia's concern about being marked as outsiders by their speech reveals not only the everyday discrimination facing immigrants and refugees, but also their sense of the risks that they might face while engaging in critical literacy practices in a mainstream setting. By engaging with texts which challenge dominant discourses, or daring to voice critical perspectives, they feared they might expose themselves to skepticism or resistance on the part of privileged individuals. Such resistance can often take the form of highlighting so-called deficits like accent or language ability in order to discredit the perspectives of those who are different. As I argued in the literature review, many claims that purport to be about intelligibility, such as critiques of non-native speakers' accents, or about "correctness", such as the belief that non-dominant dialects are less sophisticated, in fact have their roots in systemic discrimination such as racism and classism (Canagarajah, 2004; Kubota, 2004; Han, 2011b; Lippi-Green, 1997). Many of participants reported having been targets of discrimination based on their accents or language ability, often in the form of deficit assumptions about their intelligence or ability to contribute to the learning environment (See also Marshall, 2010).

Drawing on her previous experiences, Sofia further surmised that in most mainstream educational contexts, she would be wary of engaging with the issues of racism, immigrant experiences and Muslim identity raised by "Surplus Knowledge" (Kurd, 2011) because of the fear that she would be overwhelmed by hearing the prejudiced responses of her peers. She said:

Thinking about discussing this ["Surplus Knowledge"] in high school- [Emily laughs] – I don't know because it depends obviously how a classroom is run, but seeing my classmates and having heard my classmates, I would probably shut down and not want to share anything for fear of what horrible things I might hear, um in terms of stereotypes and things like that. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Emily's laugh here was bleak in tone, as if to suggest that she too had difficulty imagining unprejudiced responses to Kurd's poems in a mainstream context. Later, Sofia returned to the topic, this time focusing on the role of the teacher: "I can see how my English teacher from grade 12, given the same curriculum or the same material, it would have been disastrous. Just like offensive and hurtful" (Sofia Interview, July 16, 2012). Mohammedzadeh (2009) raises just this risk in discussing the challenges of teaching post-colonial works: "The lack of knowledge about the theoretical perspectives

[of postcolonial theory] among teachers of English can direct them to force their students to learn problematic representations of various cultural groups uncritically as they come across these representations in literary works they read” (p. 23).

Based on their past experiences, the participants overwhelmingly doubted that they would take the risks they had taken in the research workshops in mainstream contexts, particularly such risks as asking questions, revealing they had not understood, articulating in-progress interpretations, sharing their experiential knowledge and multiliteracies, or offering critical feedback to others. Across their experiences, racism, including aspects such as discrimination based on accent and language ability was the major factor contributing to their lack of safety. Without a pedagogical approach capable of creating equitable relationships in the classroom, the risks of engagement for immigrant and refugee youth can be high. In the next section, I ask whether the Literary Engagement Workshops were able to respond to the above concerns by examining the theories and practices I used in “setting the stage” (van der Wey, 2012), and by considering the participants’ feedback on this process.

6.4. Setting the stage

While the participants emphasize the benefits of reading critical fictions (hooks, 1991), and of engaging with others in the collaborative interpretation of these works, their previous educational experiences have made them very aware of the dangers of approaching such texts without critical groundwork for supporting responsible, informed analysis and dialogue among people from varying social locations. As hooks (1991) writes, much work must be done to decolonize imaginations before critical fictions can be read and appreciated for their ability to challenge dominant discourses and to propose alternative visions of how we might live without hegemony and oppression. Sofia reflected this when tried to imagine reading “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011) in a high school setting: “What we hear about the Muslim world is so negative, always, in high school and everywhere, that reading a poem like this- well I can’t imagine reading a poem like this in high school” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). Her comment highlights the importance of groundwork activities that can provide students with the critical tools to deconstruct oppressive discourses, such as the racist discourses to which she refers.

This challenge is taken up from a pedagogical perspective by van der Wey (2012) in her work on interpreting Indigenous literature in coalitional settings. She argues that without critical groundwork, much of what is culturally and historically specific in texts by writers from non-dominant social positions is often taken out of context, becoming misconstrued or twisted so as to bolster stereotypes and racist beliefs. She proposes practical approaches for “setting the stage” for such works according to two major goals: 1) providing students with critical theory such as critical race theory, intersectionality and coalition politics theory, so that they may recognize, deconstruct and contest oppressive discourses, as well as interrogating their own positionality and implication; and 2) introducing background material or “horizontal texts” (Sumara, 2002), which, following Episkenew (2002), support students to “[look] outside the texts into the contexts in which they were written to glean some kind of understanding of the ideology of the people whose works they interpret” (Episkenew, 2002p. 57). Without such groundwork, using a text such as “Surplus Knowledge” would be a risky endeavor, with racialized students the most likely to be re-traumatized by hearing oppressive discourses reproduced in the classroom.

Mohammedzadeh (2009) has shown that in English Language Learning contexts, teachers and schools increasingly desire to include “multicultural” literature in the curriculum, yet they often lack the theoretical and practical knowledge about how to support critical analysis of such texts, thus reinforcing misconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices. Similarly to van der Wey, Mohammedzadeh suggests that “students can fill the gaps that exist within literary texts created by the exclusion or silencing of certain relevant discourses using proper supplementary materials, so that they can extend their discussions of themes and conflicts in the directions which they believe to be significant” (Mohammadzadeh, 2009, p. 24). For these reasons, I dedicated half of the first workshop to “setting the stage”, and continued to make connections back to these groundwork activities throughout the remaining workshops.

I outlined the groundwork activities and materials in detail in Chapter 3.5.1. To review, I adapted several activities from van der Wey’s (2012) curricular and pedagogical focus on “setting the stage” for critically and respectfully participating in dialogues across difference and power, including Lee Mun Wah’s (2004) “The Art of Listening”, and a discussion about the implications of examining our group dynamics

through the lens of coalition politics theory (Reagon, 1983; Burack, 2004). The intent of these activities was to acknowledge that complex, intersecting differences of identity and power structure all group relations, and to provide an explicit framework for respectfully and critically discussing the specific tensions that might arise in our group. In particular, following van der Wey (2012), I hoped that the coalition politics theory frames of analysis approach, which acknowledges that identity is comprised by multiple, intersecting affiliations and ascriptions at the level of the self, the intra-group and the inter-group, would invite us to share the responsibility of interrogating power and privilege on all relational levels. Any discussion of “setting the stage” is incomplete without the acknowledgement that because the participants are all members of the Youth Network, and some are also active in other social justice movements, they already brought both experiences and theoretical frameworks which allowed them to engage at a high level with the groundwork activities. The activities that I facilitated were only one part of the groundwork. What I refer to as the groundwork was in fact the combination of the workshop activities, the pre-existing relationships between participants and the knowledge and experiences they brought with them. This is evident in the following section, as I explore how these different aspects of “setting the stage” informed one another.

The participants provided important feedback about how the groundwork activities had impacted their experiences in the workshops. For Lila, it was very important that each group member had the time to ask questions about, and articulate their understanding of the guidelines for group discussion in “The Art of Listening” (Lee, 2004). She noted, “I think those sort of rules [group guidelines of respect] are present even in classrooms, but they are often just said” (Lila, Interview, July 17, 2012). When group members do not have the opportunity to discuss what the guidelines really mean to them, and to adapt them for their own needs, such exercises become tokenized formalities that are easily disregarded. For example, during the “Art of Listening” activity, Hiwot asked for clarification about the statement, “Accept and validate the truthfulness of each person’s perception”. Moshtaba responded, saying that in order to have meaningful discussion, people must first commit to hearing each other, however different their perspectives might be. He explained, “Even when you don’t agree with someone, try to understand why they think what they think, instead of just forcing your ideas on

them” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 4, 2012). Hiwot’s question also prompted me to share Narayan’s (1988) concept of insider epistemological privilege with the group. Narayan’s acknowledgement that “members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle, and critical knowledge of the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group” (p.35) resonated with many of the participants, who agreed with Emily when she noted that it reminded her of times when she had noticed subtle instances of racism, but had not feel comfortable naming them as such because she feared that she would be perceived as over-sensitive. I believe that the above discussion was one factor in supporting respectful and productive analysis of different interpretations of the literary works. For example, as I related in Chapter 5.3, after hearing Sofia’s critique about the portrayal of Mrs. Mishima in “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), both Jon and Moshtaba acknowledged that they valued her insider perspective because it had prompted them to challenge their own assumptions about gender roles in the family.

The participants also emphasized the importance of being able to add to the guidelines, in order to ensure that the specific needs and priorities of our group were addressed. For example, Jon contributed the guideline, “check-in before correcting someone’s pronunciation or grammar”, which envisions the workshops as a space for prioritizing a person’s ideas, not the form in which they are expressed. This guideline recognizes that many group members have experienced having their ideas disregarded by teachers or peers who focused on correcting their English. In the workshops, participants wished to acknowledge that as multilingual individuals, they are each already capable of effective and expressive communication, so receiving feedback on English should be a matter of individual choice. Overall, the participants found “The Art of Listening” to be an important foundation to which they returned throughout the workshops. Sofia commented,

The guidelines that you brought were so much more powerful than just saying “respect” and “don’t discriminate” “don’t...” I just found them a lot more deep and easier to understand than what we usually do. I think that just set the mood from the beginning: this is how we’re going to conduct these sessions. (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

The participants drew on coalition politics theory in order to reflect on both their interpretation of the literary works and their positionality and responsibilities in the group.

A significant instance of such a connection was the discussion of the line “Washing away all the unknowing I have come to know” (young.anitafrika 2007, p.93) in “rivers and other blackness between us”. Lila offered this interpretation:

I think it’s challenging ourselves. I think that ties in here with fear, because I think obviously we have a fear to look inside ourselves and see the faults, so unpacking the unknowing reminds me of looking for your own prejudices, for your own misconceptions about, not just other people, but maybe people who are your own, right? So yeah, and how they [unexamined prejudices] can be holding you back from that love, that unconditional love. So yeah, just taking a look at yourself.
(Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012)

Jon added, “I agree with Lila. Unpacking, unknowing sounds like all the misconceptions and the stereotypes that you have, but you didn’t know. Like it was kind of hidden underneath your conscious, sort of unconscious” (Jon, Workshop, June 25, 2012). This analysis by Lila and Jon is very much in line with Burack’s (2004) call to begin with the self in any interrogation of difference. They recognize the challenges of such a process, including the fear of discovering one’s own prejudices. Yet they also point to what will be lost if one does not dare to interrogate oneself, that is, the capacity for communication and empathy both with “people who are your own” (Lila, Workshop, June 25, 2012) and those who are different, or, as young.anitafrika puts it, “relearning a language of integrity honesty passion” (p.96).

In considering the significance of groundwork for respectful group dynamics, Jon focused on balancing respect and care for others’ feelings with critical discussion. He commented, “You set the tone for the group to express respectfully and also challenge in a respectful way. [To] have a healthy discussion without offending anyone” (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). Similarly, Sofia said that one of the most important achievements of the workshops was to, “. . . have the discussion be safe, and have the discussion be done in a way where nobody got offended, where it was safe, not just in terms of our language ability, but in terms of culture, our beliefs and our principles” (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012). She went on to clarify that when she referred to “nobody [getting] offended”, she did not mean that the goal of communication across difference should be to eliminate critical engagement with one another. Rather, when discussing difficult issues of power and privilege she believes that it is neither possible nor desirable to avoid conflict, so for her, the concept of safety means that each person

enters into the discussion with responsibility and self-awareness, willing to acknowledge, deconstruct and challenge their own assumptions:

I think it starts with leaning about the self, which is what we did here, and I think we mainly do in the Youth Network, leaning about ourselves and how we position ourselves . . . What we do have in common is the Youth Network, but it not only the training itself, but it's that possibility we've had to look at oppression and how systemically it affects us, and what are our privileges

(Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012).

The participants also connected their sense of feeling safe in the workshops to their mutual trust in one another, built over their time together as members of the Youth Network, as in the following comments by Emily and Lila:

Emily: It totally felt like it's the kind of discussion I would have with my family, because you're just so comfortable with them that you pretty much just say what's on your mind. . . Our group is so diverse and we have that understanding of being respectful, or actually being open to difference. Versus if I were to be sitting in, let's say a university setting, it will be very different. (Interview, July 16, 2012)

Lila: I feel like with the group here, I know we have the same values when it comes to how we work as a group. So that's why I think it was easy for me to feel very comfortable. I think with different people I would have been more reserved. (Interview, July 17, 2012)

Others noted that the groundwork activities, added to the group members' pre-existing relationships of mutual trust, contributed to an environment in which they felt free from judgement. Moshtaba said, "I felt so much more comfortable being in a room where it was ok to ask about a word, or "I don't know what that means". And that's ok. Like there was no judgment" (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 18, 2012). Similarly, Sofia described the workshop setting as "free from judgment" (Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012) and Emily remarked, "you can just say anything and then you won't be really judged because of it" (Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012).

The participants were also aware of their own responsibilities for maintaining the workshops as an inclusive, safe and critical space. In reflecting on his own practice, Moshtaba referred to both the Youth Network's common principles of inclusive facilitation, and the specific activities used in the workshops:

You helped us by keeping the principles of the Art of Listening, I really liked that. Where people would talk a lot, like myself [laughs], you would make sure to give space to other people. It was a new creative way to set guidelines. It was related to what we've learned in the past, but it also had a new way of introducing the process for this kind of deep discussion. (Moshtaba, Interview, July 17, 2012)

Jon also identified such a shared sense of responsibility with his fellow group members, saying "We all were aware of the power dynamics in the group, and so we were intentionally trying to balance it out, and give everyone a chance to speak" (Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012). The participants' conceptualizations of the workshops as a space of shared support and fulfillment, but also of shared responsibility connect with Sumara's (1996) interrogation of meaning of "community" in his work on "interpretive communities" (95). He writes,

In the field of education, the word "community" has become increasingly popular as a slogan for describing classroom and research structures (p. 141). . . Despite this popularity, the meaning of the word community is seldom questioned. What do we mean when we use the word community? As used in educational literature, the word community seems to invoke images of comfortable, familiar, friendly groupings of persons who work together to accomplish collective tasks. From this process, individuals are thought to achieve personal knowledge and fulfillment. But is this what communities are like? (p. 142).

Sumara goes on to formulate a number of descriptions of what communities might entail: shared commitment to a communal structure; the sharing of work; "places where individuals are bound together in service of some common goal" (p. 142); places often involving difficult labour; and places where somehow both personal and communal fulfillment must coexist. As Sumara suggests here, and the research participants describe above, interpretive communities cannot be assumed to be automatically nurturing, safe or open. Building the conditions for meaningful literary engagements in our interpretive community entailed the shared, often difficult work of engaging with difference. This occurred both at the level of the intra-group, in which participants engaged with the multiple, different identities which intersected with their shared identity as immigrant and refugee youth, and at the level of the inter-group because of my presence as a white, Canadian-born English-speaker. For this reason, coalition politics theory proved to be an important lens, because, as Burack (2004) argues, coalitions are

places of discourse, in which participants engage in “a persistent discussion of the ubiquity of difference and the necessity of intellectual, political, and emotional work across difference.”(p. 159). The participants’ reflection also speaks to Reagon’s (1983) insight on the hard work that coalitions entail, as participants give up the privilege of insularity and commit to negotiating one another’s differences, intersections and varying agendas. In the next section, I explore how the “setting the stage” activities prompted the participants and me to look more closely at how positionality, power and privilege might impact the relationships in our interpretive community.

6.5. Navigating difference, power and positionality in the interpretive community

In Chapter 5.3, I wrote about the important insights that emerged as the participants and I examined our interpretations of the literary works through the lenses of positionality and the limits of knowing. This section is intended to provide a counterpart to that discussion by looking at how issues of positionality played out in our group relationships, and how the participants related these issues to their broader contexts. Mukherjee (2004) argues that in the field of Canadian literature, the notion of the classroom as a social and political space is understudied. She writes, “The multi-ethnic, multiracial, and multicultural classroom [in Canada] . . . is, for me, a postcolonial space, with all its contradictions” (p. 202). It is a space where, “students and teachers with heterogeneous identities, marked by differences of race, gender, class, and sexuality, study texts that are called “multicultural” and/ or “postcolonial” (p. 201). I connect Mukherjee’s argument with Freund’s (1987) critique of Fish’s (1980) stance that the interpretive community, rather than its individual members, is the primary site for the construction of meaning. Freund asserts,

Fish has evidently refused to face up to the ways in which the authority of the interpretive community might become grimly coercive or where the appeal to the imperialism of agreement is capable of threatening readers whose experience of the community is less happily benign than Fish assumes. (p. 111).

Mukherjee and Freund recognize that power relations in an interpretive community differentially structure the access of its members to legitimized speaking positions (Han, 2009) so that some members may be heard and assumed to speak with authority, while others may not. Mukherjee characterizes this as the “political economy of the classroom” (p. 218).

As one of the supplementary readings, I chose an excerpt from Episkenew’s (2002) article, “Socially Responsible Criticism: Aboriginal Literature, Ideology and the Literary Canon”. I find this reading important because it speaks to the complexities of power and positionality as they played out in one literature classroom, yet it also asks powerful questions that proved to be applicable to the participants’ experiences. In vignette form, Episkenew, a Métis scholar, remembers an experience that she had as an undergraduate student reading Laguna Pueblo writer Silko’s (1981) short story “Lullaby”. Silko’s story ends as “Ayah, a Dene (Navajo) old woman wraps herself and her drunken husband Chato, in a blanket, curls up beside a rock [in the South West desert], and prepares to go to sleep” (Episkenew, 2002, p. 55). Episkenew recounts how her professor, who is not Aboriginal, interpreted the story’s ending as a suicide, based on his assumption of the desert environment as hostile, and his judgement that the old people could no longer bear their tragic lives. However, Episkenew did not interpret the story as one of suicide, but rather as “one of survival, albeit filled with references to the suffering that results from a lifetime of colonization” (p. 55). Her professor judged that she had not understood the story, and gave her a low grade. Yet, although she could have drawn on experiences from her family and community to contextualize her interpretation, Episkenew found she could not share this insight with her professor. She writes,

Somehow, at the time, I felt embarrassed to reveal that I – and my people- still live this way at the end of the 20th Century. Somehow my husband’s story smacked of poverty and social problems, and all the things that I was sure my professors associated with Aboriginal people. Even worse, what if I told him and he didn’t believe me? What if he accused me of telling or believing tall tales? His was the voice of authority. How should I convince him that my voice contained authority, too?”
(p. 56)

Episkenew’s vignette contains a powerful examination of the challenges facing insider readers in educational contexts that are still structured by dominant discourses which

marginalize their knowledge and experiences. It resonated for Emily, prompting her to revisit and analyse one of her previous experiences in college. She recalled,

One of my profs, she was really into Bollywood movies. And I was the only South Asian person in that room, and I actually understood everything, all the languages and whatnot. So she would always look at me for affirmation about anything that she said. But there were so many things that I totally didn't agree with. But it was really difficult for me, because it's not like I know everything. . . So she ended up picking a movie that was very stereotypical, like one of the w-, well, it's not the worst, but I thought it was not a good representation.

(Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012)

There is much going on in Emily's story. First, she perceptively points out that her white professor singled her out as "the only South Asian person in the room" and then looked to her for "affirmation about everything she said". This dynamic made it very clear to Emily that she was not being asked to share her knowledge or perspective, but merely to legitimize, by virtue of her insider status, the narratives and analyses about Bollywood films that her professor had already formed. She continued,

I wasn't confident enough to just walk up to her and have a discussion with her and be like, "Hey listen, you know if this is what you want to teach to the students, there are better sources. This is not what you think it actually is.

(Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012)

It is important to connect Emily's account of not feeling confident to her earlier statement, "it was really difficult for me, because it's not like I know everything". She sensed not only that her professor would not welcome critique, but also that in order to raise her concerns, she would be expected to present herself as an expert, and she did not want to claim to be such. Emily said she would not necessarily act differently if faced with a similar situation in the future because "when it comes to school work, I would just go with whatever the professor would do . . . Maybe because it's not my first language. Therefore, I never feel confident enough, so I always go with whatever is safe" (Emily Interview, July 16, 2012). Nevertheless, Episkenew's vignette did offer a place from which to begin questioning power relations:

What I got out of that one is the fact that, you know, we don't always have to agree with them [a teacher or professor] . . . it was really interesting to read that, you know, someone who is actually a writer,

they have gone through that kind of problem too.

(Emily, Interview, July 16, 2012).

The issues raised by Episkenew (2002) and Emily are important for me as the facilitator, and as a white, Canadian-born English speaker working with multilingual immigrant and refugee people. As the facilitator, I had the primary responsibility to be well-informed about the content of our workshops, and to come prepared with theoretical and practical tools for dialogue. However, I could not assume that I had all the answers, or even all the questions. For example, if I had not been challenged to re-examine my assumptions by the critical voices of participants speaking from different social positions, I would not have realized the need to facilitate a new discussion about gender in “Andante” (Tablo, 2009), as I discussed in Chapter 5.2. Educators with privileged social positions have a particular responsibility to examine the dynamics of their authority and the limits of their ability to know across difference. Razack (2008) argues that the task of engaging across difference is not served by claiming to gain complete knowledge of another person or group’s experience, but rather to understand the workings, and limits, of one’s own lens as fully as possible. Reflecting on my own positionality and limits for knowing reinforces my belief that an interpretive community must make space for each of its members to raise avenues of inquiry into the text. Freire’s (1970) problem posing approach has been a resource as I grappled with these challenges. He calls for teachers and students to approach one another as fellow dialoguers, each grounded in their own individual experiences and circumstances, yet connected through their historical and social locations. This reveals both the possibility of hearing one another as individuals with unique interpretations and experiences, but also the need to recognize, deconstruct and contest inequitable power relations.

Sofia also spoke strongly about the responsibility of the facilitator or teacher to bring a strong background in anti-oppression theory in practice:

I think in order to ensure that this doesn’t fall into stereotypes and like re-confirmations of racist thoughts, the person in power, which is this case was you because you were facilitating, really needs to have their shit together. . . [They have] to be really aware of the privilege they hold in the room, and how they’re facilitating the discussions. Just know how to navigate that, and know how to call stuff when they see it. They need to do a lot of work before they can facilitate something like that.

(Sofia Interview, July 16, 2012)

Jon drew attention to the facilitator's responsibility to create the conditions for deconstructing essentialist assumptions about a text's representativeness:

I think one the most important things that the facilitator has to do is to make sure that the author's point of view is not representative of the country or the culture that the author is from. . . And that is really easy to assume and to have that stereotype, just by reading just one poem.
(Jon, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Cheung (1994) argues that while historically and socially anchored criticism is indispensable, educators must be able to support students in contextualizing literary works without conflating text with context. She writes, "We must avoid seeing creative work by one writer as testimony for the entire race" (p. 146). Jon signals an important angle to this problem when he notes that many such assumptions of representativeness and stereotypes are made on the basis of reading a single work. The problem is compounded when writers of colour are underrepresented in mainstream literature education in the United States and Canada (Bailey Nurse 2003; Cheung, 1994; Mukherjee, 1996, 2004;) so that students have few opportunities to develop an appreciation of the diversity of perspectives. In many cases, little has changed since Cheung cited the many survey or introductory literature courses in which "it is not uncommon to see [works by writers of colour] assigned only in the one week thematically devoted to "Gender and Race" (p. 147). Cheung points out, "Such insistence on representativeness, in precluding the possibility of a private vision, denies subjectivity to the author. It is, furthermore, a burden born primarily by ethnic- especially ethnic women- writers. (Norman Mailer is seldom taken to be representative of the entire white race)" (p.146). In her 2009 speech, "The Danger of a Single Story" author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues along similar lines. She says,

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult.

Adichie's speech could have been a good resource for intertextual analysis in the workshops. In planning a similar project, I would include it because it raises many of the points I discussed above in an accessible manner.

The participants also reflected on how issues of positionality and representation played out in their interactions with one another. During the workshops, Sofia wondered aloud how Moshtaba had felt when she asked him to provide background knowledge about “Surplus Knowledge” (Kurd, 2011):

It talks a lot about religion and being Muslim, and Islam. So I asked a lot of things to Moshtaba, like what does this mean? And I’m not sure how Moshtaba felt about that, but if it had been something related to Spanish, I would have felt good about it, like, helping out people, feeling like I know a little bit of something.

(Sofia, Interview, July 16, 2012)

Here, Sofia recognizes that she was asking Moshtaba to speak from a position of insider knowledge about “Surplus Knowledge” based on her awareness that he is a practicing Muslim. Although she imagines that in his position, she would have felt good about being invited to share her knowledge and insider perspective, she recognizes that she cannot assume that Moshtaba felt the same way. In this case, Moshtaba said that he had appreciated her questions, but added, “that’s because I know you, and where you’re coming from” (Moshtaba, Workshop, June 11, 2012), referring back to the mutual trust between the members of the Youth Network.

Later in the interviews, Sofia returned to the issue, this time highlighting the problem of assuming that insider readers will necessarily want to be approached as experts. Referring to the discussion of “Surplus Knowledge” in the workshop, she recalled that as soon as they encountered references to Islam in the text, she and several other participants turned expectantly to Lila and Moshtaba. Sofia found it useful that I used my role as the facilitator to open up space for Lila and Moshtaba to make the choice of whether or not they wished to contribute at that time. She said,

That’s happened in this group, but you handled it really well, and you were like, “well, it’s not only them who can answer” And we were like, “Oh yeah, ok, go back, sorry, anybody [can answer], and then they [Moshtaba and Lila] decided they wanted to contribute, but it was a good reminder for us. And this is a group that has had time working on some of these things and it still came up.

(Sofia Interview, July 16, 2012)

What Sofia suggests here is that problems arise when known aspects of an individual’s identity or social location (in this case, being a practicing Muslim, or simply being from

an ethnic or cultural group in which Islam is the dominant religion) go beyond being indicators of possible expertise, inviting the possibility of respectfully asking, to becoming labels and even stereotypes, in which the individual's identity is assumed to dictate their views, or the individual is assumed to represent their entire identity group. (See, also, van der Wey (2007) for an in depth discussion of these issues in the context of Aboriginal students' experiences in post-secondary contexts).

6.6. Conclusion

An important goal of this chapter was to document what I learned from the participants about the pedagogical conditions that they found to be necessary for creating an inclusive and critical interpretive community during this research. The participants not only reflected on their experiences during this research, but also on their previous educational experiences, primarily in Canadian secondary and post-secondary institutions. From these previous experiences, several important concerns emerged. Although the participants reported that the opportunity to read literature foregrounding the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour was a major factor in inviting them into meaningful literary engagements, they reported having had few opportunities to study such works in their previous or current educational contexts. They also pointed to the risks of engaging with such works in mainstream settings, given their experiences with racism. Scholars such as van der Wey (2012), Mukherjee (1996, 2004), Episkenew (2002), and Cheung (1994) have raised similar concerns, also arguing for the need to recognize, deconstruct and contest inequity in educational settings. Such a critical approach was the goal of the "setting the stage" (van der Wey, 2012) component of the workshops. The most significant theme to emerge from this process was that the concept of "safe space" in an interpretive community does not mean avoiding conflict or minimizing differences, but rather that each person enters into the discussion with responsibility and self-awareness, willing to challenge their own assumptions and positionality. The participants' insights in this chapter have important implications for educators who wish to work toward supporting other multilingual immigrant and refugee youths' meaningful engagement with literature in both ELL and mainstream contexts.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary and implications for theory, research and practice

A major goal of this research is to see what is possible in an interpretive community created specifically for and with multilingual immigrant and refugee young adults. By focusing on such a space, I hoped to learn from the research participants about the conditions which could support their meaningful literary engagements. My analysis of their experiences and stories is informed by reader response theory, critical literacy and theories engaging power and difference, primarily critical race theory, the concept of intersectionality and coalition theory. van der Wey (2012) and Sumara (2002) have used literary anthropology, based in reader response theory, as both a pedagogical practice and a research method. My study is built on their assertion that literary engagements may be enriched when they are juxtaposed with historical, philosophical and theoretical intertextual resources “concerned with interpreting the relationships among history, memory, culture, geography, language and identity” (Sumara, 2002, p.73). I argue that through adapting van der Wey and Sumara’s approaches, I was able to facilitate deeper and more meaningful literary engagements with the participants because the selected literary works and intertextual resources validated their respective experiences and multiliteracies.

This research documents how one educational setting, the Literary Engagement Workshops, was enriched by the unique and important insights that eight multilingual immigrant and refugee youth had into Canadian literature. Through exploring the participants’ experiences and insights, I seek to offer points of reflection about what it might mean to create critical, intellectually stimulating and equitable educational spaces with other multilingual immigrant and refugee students, both in ELL and mainstream contexts. Of course, the approaches needed to create such conditions will vary depending on the context, and the realities facing educators, including systemic barriers

and restrictions in time and resources. My goal is to provide the opportunity for other educators to reflect on this study's findings with respect to the specificities of their own contexts. I hope that this research may contribute to the development of more "spaces in which [students] can explore complex and conflicting images in their social and cultural world, and in which they can communicate with others about matters that concern them" (Rogers 1997, p. 112, cited in Möller and Allen 2000 p. 152).

I now return to my research questions in order to summarize how the results of my study have informed the vision I articulate above. As I began the research, I asked:

- How may engaging with relevant literary genres using reader response methods impact opportunities for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to critically analyse important issues in their educational contexts and in their lives?
- What pedagogical conditions and approaches may facilitate immigrant and refugee youths' ability to mobilize their multiliteracies (e.g., their experiences, identities, communities, cultures, languages, histories, and geographies) as they interpret literature?

These research questions continued to be important throughout the research design, data collection, analysis and writing, and have structured the main areas of focus in this thesis. Additionally, in looking back on the data analysis and the writing process, I see an emergent research question which I did not fully recognize, but that I believe informed my thinking: 3) What insights might multilingual immigrant and refugee youth offer into the complexities of interpreting multicultural literature in Canada? I explored these research questions with eight participants over the study's two stages, which included 1) a series of four Literary Engagement Workshops over the course of which participants engaged with reader response and critical literacy methods to interpret three short literary texts, and 2) follow-up semi-structured group interviews in which participants reflected on their experience in the workshops.

In interpreting and analysing the data that eventually shaped Chapter Four, the first two research questions directed my attention to the ways in which the participants portrayed their most meaningful experiences with the literary works as those which were also the most process-oriented and the most collaborative. For different participants, different aspects of their literary engagements proved to be significant, but several

important common themes emerged. For all of the participants, the research opened up the opportunity to reflect on how the study of literature had been approached in their previous educational contexts, and to then to re-articulate new understandings of what it might mean to interpret literature based on their experiences in the research workshops. Many of the participants reported having felt hesitant to participate, or even silenced, in previous educational contexts, and they connected these barriers in part to approaches to literary interpretation which emphasized attaining “the right answer” and explicitly or implicitly discouraged the sharing of in-progress ideas and initial, unpolished interpretations. Although some participants had encountered pedagogies acknowledging that a work might be interpreted in many different ways, none had previously experienced an explicit, guided pedagogy aimed at developing intertextual, recursive and collaborative interpretive processes in which in-progress ideas are seen as valuable resources for collaboratively building successive levels of analysis.

I argue that reader-response methods focused on creating the conditions for gradual, emergent insight (Sumara, 2002) were a key part of the participants’ experience of the workshops as a space for them to engage with literature in ways that were intellectually and emotionally meaningful, and also to gain insight into issues of significance in their lives. In the workshops, the conditions for exploring emergent meaning were created by pedagogical strategies adapted from van der Wey (2012) and Sumara (2002) building on the theory and practice of literary anthropology (Sumara, 2002, with reference to Iser’s (1993) original use of the concept). First, the participants interpreted the texts through their individual lenses, drawing on their multiliteracies and lived experiences. Next, they re-examined their initial interpretations upon hearing the perspectives of others in group discussion, or through engaging in intertextual analysis. In literary anthropology, intertextual analysis involves recursive interpretation of the primary text through the historical, philosophical and theoretical lenses of other texts, including both written texts and other texts such as videos, websites, oral histories or stories (Sumara 2002, van der Wey, 2012).

The participants used literary anthropology in powerful ways. Some examples include: 1) overcoming fear of the “wrong answer” in order to share experiential alertness to allusions to racism and sexism in the works, which ultimately developed into key themes for analysis; and 2) interweaving different multiliteracies of language, history,

geography, culture and religion to enrich analysis. Sumara elaborates Bleich's (1978, cited in Sumara 1996, p. 132) concept of "interpretive community" to refer to the web of interpersonal and intertextual experiences which both shape, and are shaped by individual responses to literature when people engage in literary anthropology in collaborative settings such as reading groups. I argue that over the course of the workshops, the participants formed an interpretive community by challenging views of literary interpretation as an individual product. Instead, they re-articulated their experiences of literary engagement as a community process and a collaborative meaning-making project. In an interpretive community, it is the web itself that becomes an important site for creating meaning. I argue that coming together as an interpretive community also opened up possibilities for engaging literature through lenses shaped by the participants' languages, cultures and lived experiences, as well as validating understandings based on emotional and embodied responses to the texts.

In Chapters Five and Six, I look at both the possibilities and challenges that are attendant with the creation of such an interpretive community in light of the recognition that all groups are composed of individuals with multiple, intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory and coalition theory allowed the participants to recognize some points of connection (in this case, their shared group affiliation as multilingual immigrant and refugee youth), while also acknowledging that they come together across other differences of identity, positionality and experience (Reagon, 1983; Burack, 2004). I argue that the explicit, structured pedagogical process of "setting the stage" (adapted from van der Wey, 2012, as well as from her pedagogical and curricular work)²⁵ fostered the conditions for the participants to critically and respectfully engage across and within difference using coalition theory, the concept of intersectionality and inclusive facilitation practices. In the case of this research, the participants' pre-existing experience as anti-oppression facilitators further contributed to "setting the stage". I also interrogate how my positionality as a white person whose family came to North America as the beneficiaries of colonialism and who grew up using Canadian "standard" English impacts my work as an outsider researcher. I discuss how my presence altered the

²⁵ See footnote 12, p.57, for more details of my use of Dolores van der Wey's "setting the stage" sequence.

research context, recognizing that I stand in relations of asymmetrical power with the research participants (Young 1997). All aspects of my research activities, from design, to analysis and to representation must be guided by the principle of epistemological humility (Narayan, 1988), that is, the awareness that I can only interpret, but never fully “know” the meanings of the participants’ actions and accounts of their experiences. In response, I have sought to critique the limits of my own partial, socially constructed knowing, and to foreground the participants’ theorizing and reflections on their own experiences.

While in Chapter Four I focus on the participants’ positive, nurturing experiences of being members of our interpretive community, in Chapter Five I seek to deepen my thesis argument by engaging with the more complex, and sometimes seemingly contradictory process of contextualizing our²⁶ personal interpretations of literature within the social construction of our perspectives. I re-examine my second research question’s focus on the participants’ “ability to mobilize their multiliteracies as they interpret literature” not only in light of what it suggests about the possibilities of doing so, but also with respect to exploring the attendant complexities and challenges. At times during the workshops, the participants’ interpretations of literature based on these very multiliteracies came into tension with one another, most notably in the case of their contrasting perceptions of sexism, gender and power in the short story “Andante” (Tablo, 2009). In response to these tensions, the participants used critical literacy strategies and literary anthropology to bring their experiential knowledge and personal responses into dialogue with theoretical frameworks such as gender analysis and critical race theory. I use the term dialogue because the participants used theory not to “prove” or silence different interpretations, but rather to challenge one another to develop deeper, more critical understandings that could still accommodate the specificities of their own individual experiences.

Critically examining the social contexts and the ideologies informing our perspectives was a powerful way to find a common space in which different individual

²⁶ I say “our” because as a part of this process, this research includes reflections and critiques on the way I participated in the interpretive community, and ultimately deepened my interpretations of the literary works.

interpretations could coexist, but could also challenge and even change one another. I argue that creating spaces for bringing experiential knowledge into dialogue with critical analysis is essential when the goal is to challenge the dominant, exclusionary discourses in education which impose “deficit identities” (Marshall 2010) on multilingual immigrant and refugee youth. The participants showed that their multiple languages and identities can be mobilized as critical lenses which can disrupt the assumed homogeneity of English-medium educational settings and English literature in Canada.

A major goal of this research was to provide opportunities for the participants to pursue their own learning goals and to engage with issues of importance in their lives as they explored their relationships to the literary texts. I believe that this was achieved because many of the participants stated that exploring issues of identity in the literary works prompted an interlinked, parallel interpretive process connecting to important questions and insights about their own lives and contexts. I argue that this process was at least in part facilitated by this study’s commitment to creating more inclusive, equitable conditions for the participants to engage their multiliteracies in the interpretive process. As Sumara (2002) theorizes, literary interpretation and exploring one’s identity are mutually constitutive pursuits which come together through the “complex relations of history, memory, language and geography” (p. 4). In addition, because the participants engaged the challenges and possibilities of critically analysing the implications of their personal responses to literature, their interpretive process was not merely an academic exercise, but had real consequences for making new meanings in their lives.

This study reveals a high level of concern among the participants about the need for more critical and inclusive educational spaces for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to engage with literature, as I discuss in Chapter Six. Based on their experiences in mainstream and ELL education in Canada, the participants saw such contexts as potentially risky places for engaging with literature foregrounding the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour. This was particularly the case for literary works that are, in hooks’ (1991) words, “critical fictions”, speaking of, and to, the social, political and material experiences of people and groups who have been underrepresented in mainstream literary venues and other cultural spaces, and which “challenge dominant discourses and reading practices” (p.55). The risks highlighted by the participants include: experiencing re-traumatization in the face of prejudiced

response from peers and teachers to representations of immigrants, refugees and people of colour in literature; being tokenized as either “expert others” or “representative others”, in which a single aspect one’s identity is assumed to dictate one’s views, or the individual is assumed to represent an entire identity group; and being excluded from legitimate speaking positions (Han 2009; Bourdieu, 1977) based on accent or non-native speaker discrimination. These risks demonstrate the continuing need for pedagogical and curricular approaches capable of combating structural racism in Canadian education systems.

I argue that effective pedagogical philosophies and practices for working with multilingual immigrant and refugee youth should be firmly grounded in scholarship such as critical race theory and coalition politics theory. I cannot assume that the participants necessarily always felt “safe” simply because this research used the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. However, I can argue that based on their feedback the research context was a productive space for exploring the meaning of inclusivity, critical engagement and safety. I further argue that because the research approached difference through the lens of coalition politics theory (Reagon, 1983; Burack, 2004), engaging difference at the level of the self, the intra-group (between immigrant and refugee youth) and the inter-group (between immigrant and refugee youth and a white researcher), we understood “safety” and “inclusivity” in our interpretive community not in terms of avoiding conflict or minimizing differences, but rather to mean that each person engages in dialogue willing to work to hear others, exercising responsibility and self-awareness in order to challenge their own assumptions and positionality.

I intend this research to be relevant in particular for educators in mainstream English language and literature programs, and also in academic literacy and ELL programs, which increasingly use “multicultural” literature with the goal of engaging diverse students (Cai, 2008; Colarusso, 2010, Möller and Allen, 2000). I affirm that it is vital for Canadian literature curricula to include literature that foregrounds the voices of immigrants, refugees and people of colour in a manner commensurate with the reality of Canada as a multilingual and multicultural society. However, I also recognize that dominant discourses of white settler-colonialism continue to impact the experiences of racialized people in Canada, and so it is not enough to simply include multicultural literary works in curricula. Exclusionary discourses in education must be recognized,

deconstructed and contested in order to make space for meaningful engagements with diverse literature. I offer the insights from the participants in this research as examples of creating counter-discourses. I also seek to draw attention to the important insights that multilingual immigrant and refugee youth themselves can offer for the exploration of more equitable literacy pedagogy. To summarize, the participants' key contributions include 1) clear, insightful and detailed descriptions of the conditions that supported them to articulate their ideas and voices, including intertextual analysis and collaborative meaning-making pedagogies focusing on creating space for multiliteracies and experiential knowledge, as well as the "setting the stage" (van der Wey, 2012) practices and theories of difference and power which recognize the multiplicity of subjectivity and identity; 2) complex and deep analyses of the literary works which have relevance for the theory and practice of Canadian literary criticism, particularly in engaging with the contemporary reality of multiculturalism and multilingualism; and 3) mobilizing their multiple languages and identities as critical lenses for challenging exclusionary discourses in English-medium educational settings and Canadian literary criticism. This research affirms immigrant and refugee youths' knowledge, skills and experiences as important assets for Canadian education contexts.

7.2. Scope, limitations and possibilities for further research

This research is designed to raise questions and avenues of further inquiry for educators interested in creating critical and equitable educational spaces for studying literature with multilingual immigrant and refugee students. It uses qualitative and phenomenological methods to engage in-depth with the experiences of one particular group of participants. Drawing on the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and dialogic knowledge production in research (Jones & Martin-Jones, 2001), I emphasize that the participants should not be taken as representative of all immigrant and refugee youth. Their experiences should not be linked to essentialized racial, ethnic, cultural or other identities. Rather, the knowledge that they created in dialogue with one another implicates their multiple, intersecting identities and thus opens up possibilities for asking questions of significance for other multicultural, multilingual settings.

For this research, a small group size was ideal for creating the conditions for all participants to contribute to rich discussion, and for prioritizing the in-depth exploration and analysis of participants' responses and narratives. However, I recognize that in many education contexts, whether institutional or community-based, such small groups are not always realistic. Therefore, it would be important to explore how a project such as this could be adapted to work in larger group settings such as standard class sizes in secondary and post-secondary settings. For example, van der Wey (2012) has used both literary anthropology methods and coalition theory in a large post-secondary class. If the benefits of small group interaction are desired in large group settings, the use of strategic small group activities with student facilitation could be explored.

Although this study's intensive timeframe was beneficial in maintaining a sense of continuity and momentum among the participants, it was challenging to conduct outside of a formal educational institution with participation on a volunteer basis. In order to further explore the potential of literary anthropology methods, including more intensive intertextual and recursive readings, future research could use a structure such that participants could devote substantial time to the project; for example, by receiving academic credit or other forms of compensation. Greater support would also allow for engaging with longer texts, for example novels, along the lines of research done by Sumara (2002) and van der Wey (2001, 2012). Nevertheless, by using a small scale, this study was able to create the space for productively exploring major issues in multilingual immigrant and refugee youth's engagement with literary fiction.

There are many possibilities for further research suggested by this study. In Chapter Three I argue that given sufficient resources and an appropriate process for fostering the involvement of participants as co-investigators, there is great potential in re-conceptualizing this study as a participatory action research project. In such a participatory project, questions might include the following. What process would be necessary to support the participants/co-investigators in defining their priorities and goals for engaging with literature? What criteria for literature might emerge as significant? Other questions for further research are: how might a variety of forums (for example, workshops, interviews, online discussion, self-made media, or blogs) allow for different explorations of the research questions? What might be the implications of creating an insular space by and for immigrant and refugee youth versus creating a

space where immigrant and refugee youth might engage across inter-group differences with others? How would research relationships and issues of voice and representation change depending on a researcher/facilitator's multiple identities and positionality?

This research is intended to address the need for more qualitative studies focused on multilingual immigrant and refugee youth's experiences of reader response and critical literacy pedagogies for engaging with literature. It focused on creating an informal, community-based space in which the participants could explore the necessary conditions for supporting their meaningful literary engagements. Although at the time of the research the participants' most recent experiences had been in mainstream educational contexts, such as college, university or high school English classes, many of them had strong memories of their past experiences in ELL classes. I argue that their insights are relevant for both contexts. This study could be complemented by research designed to elicit the perspectives of multilingual students about the use of literature in their current formal education contexts, both mainstream and ELL. Avenues for inquiry include analysing the use of literary works in curricula, interviewing students about their experiences in the classroom, and ethnographic observation of classrooms.

Several of the participants expressed a desire to expand this research to include the study of Indigenous literature, and dialogue with Canadian Aboriginal youth. These participants are currently part of community initiatives bringing together Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee youth to learn from one another about their histories, cultures and epistemologies, as well as the differences and commonalities of their experiences of oppression. They believe it is important to learn from Aboriginal people about the history and current impacts of colonization in Canada, and to grapple with the complex ways that immigrant and refugee people are implicated. This research direction offers great possibility, and could build on scholarship such as Mukherjee (1994) and Armstrong (1993) in recognizing the rich and ongoing projects of Aboriginal literatures in their own right, as well as the important connections between the literatures of Aboriginal people, immigrants and people of colour in Canada. In order to meaningfully address the complexity of the relationships between these two bodies of literature, any research should be committed to extensive groundwork, including working with Aboriginal youth, writers and scholars, as well as providing intertextual connections for exploring critical issues surrounding Aboriginal literature, history and epistemology. Bringing together

Aboriginal and immigrant and refugee participants in a similar group context could be supported by pedagogical practices such as van der Wey's (2012) "setting the stage" in order to foster respectful and critical group interactions. Coalition politics theory could provide an important framework for addressing the intra and inter-group dynamics arising in such a research setting. Along with critical race theory and the concept of intersectionality, coalition politics may provide ways for immigrant and refugee and Aboriginal youth to explore how their experiences and subjectivities may both differ and connect.

There are myriad ways to engage with literature. Each literary engagement is a complex interplay of meaning that can be imagined as a many-stranded web: the reader, the text, the context of reading, intertextualities, fellow readers, the moment in the reader's life, and a host of historical, social and political connections. These strands further branch off into the "relationships among of history, memory, culture, geography, language and identity" (Sumara, 2002, p.73) that shape interpretive relationships. No one strand of this web can be examined in isolation. To study any aspect of literary engagement is to pluck a strand which sets the whole web of relationships atremble. Sumara (1996) writes, "reading is not a virtual experience; it is caught up in life itself. Learning about the experience of reading, then, cannot be accomplished in the absence of inquiry into lived experience . . . The interesting questions for me is not "What is reading?" but, rather, "What is the experience of living a life that includes the practice of reading?"(p.1). I often asked this question, or variations of it, as I interpreted the participants' stories of literary engagement. Sumara continues: "Because all experiences are unique, answering this question means inquiring into the specificity of particular reading experiences" (p.1). This thesis is centred on the specific reading and interpretive experiences of eight multilingual immigrant and refugee young adults. Yet their insights have the power to reach beyond a single, isolated strand; they are part of the larger web connecting literary relationships to social reality and lived experience. The participants' words, questions, challenges and self-reflections are firmly grounded in the idea that literary interpretation and analysis can be powerful practices in educational projects dedicated to social justice. In this study, the literary works, the pedagogical approaches, as well as the context came together to create a set of conditions which supported the participants' deep and insightful interpretations of literature. The

participants' interpretative relationships with the texts were particularly powerful because they resonated with the critical issues in their educational contexts and lives. These are important considerations for educators and researchers who are committed to working toward more equitable, inclusive and meaningful literary engagements for all learners.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Youth Network member,

My name is Fiona Lemon. I am a student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, and I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction Foundations. I would like to invite you to participate in my study, titled; *Multilingual immigrant and refugee youth interpret multicultural literature using reader response practices*. The goals of my research are (1) to create a space for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth such as yourself to explore how your experiences, identities, communities, cultures, languages, and histories may impact how you read and respond to multicultural literature in Canada, and (2) to understand how multilingual immigrant and refugee youth may be better supported to critically analyze issues of importance in your educational contexts and in your lives through reading and responding to literature. There are three phases to the study:

Literary Engagement Workshops: There will be 3 – 4 sessions, 2 hours each, with 5 – 10 participants. Participants and I will select 2 -3 short literary texts (short stories, poems, or excerpts from novels). We will discuss in-depth criteria for choosing the texts later, but for now I propose the following:

- Texts should offer opportunities to consider complex issues such as identity, belonging, migration, power, and difference as they are relevant for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth.
- Texts may be written in English, or may be in English translation, and should be of a language level that is accessible to all participants' reading abilities.

I will create an agenda for the workshops, showing which texts we will read and discuss in each workshop. I will provide you with personal copies of the selected texts. In preparation for each workshop, you will read one of the texts and make notes on your responses. These notes can be based on any experiences or ideas that seem significant, can be written in any format (in margins, sticky notes, in a journal) and can be shared during the workshop, or viewed only by me. In each workshop, I will facilitate group discussions and "reader response" activities, which are designed to explore how different interpretations can come from the unique relationship between the reader and the text (examples include using other texts such as essays, media articles, videos, or participants own stories to explore different perspectives on the main text, or choosing quotes from the text and rearranging them to create new meanings). After each workshop, you will re-read the original text and your earlier notes, and then add a second set of notes if you have any new or changed ideas.

Individual Semi-Structured Interviews: I plan to interview you individually to debrief your experiences in the Literary Engagement Workshops. I will ask open-ended questions about the themes and issues that came up for you in the texts, your experience with the activities, and about the interpersonal and group dynamics during the workshops. An individual interview will last between 30-60 minutes.

Group Semi-structured Interviews: You will be invited to participate in a group interview if enough participants express interest in this phase. The content and procedure will be the same as the individual interviews (above), and it will last between 60 - 90 minutes.

For all phases, you, the other participants, and I will agree on convenient times and dates between June 2012 and August 2012, and convenient meeting places in public locations such as community centres or libraries.

The Literary Engagement Workshops and the interviews will be audio and/or video recorded and transcribed. With your permission, I will use any written work that you produce during the workshops (e.g., your notes) as a part of the research. I will also keep a project journal to record my own thoughts. Your participation is confidential, and your identity will be anonymized (e.g., by using a pseudonym and removing identifying details) in all publications based on this research. All participants will sign a consent form stating that any information from the group research activities will be kept confidential. However, although the objective is to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed in group-based research. Study information will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home, and only my senior supervisor and I will have access to the information. You will have access to your own interview transcript so that you can review it for issues of accuracy and confidentiality. Full transcripts of group activities or focus groups will not be shared with you, but you may request to review your own portions with me. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline participation in any part of the study, or leave the study during any stage of the process without negative effects on your status with the Youth Network.

Though you will not benefit directly from this study, your participation will provide important insights how to how multicultural literature may be taught more equitably and effectively, and will direct attention to the importance of multilingual immigrant and refugee youth's knowledge, skills and experiences in contemporary Canadian education contexts. You may contact me to obtain copies of my completed thesis and the rights to reproduce it.

Thank you for your consideration of my project. I would very much appreciate your time and effort in participating. If you would like to participate, please contact me, or submit the attached consent/assent forms to me. I can only accommodate a maximum of ten participants, and I will register participants in the order that they submit the signed consent form. I am available to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details at the beginning of this form.

Yours truly,

Fiona Lemon

(Ph) _____

(E) _____

Appendix B.

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Simon Fraser University

Title: *Multilingual immigrant and refugee youth interpret multicultural literature using reader response practices*

Principal Investigator: Fiona Lemon

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

DISCLOSURE

You are invited to participate in research conducted by Ms. Fiona Lemon, M.A. Student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate, withdrawal after agreeing to participate, or declining to participate in any part of it will have no negative effects on your status with the Youth Network. Please read all the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. When all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, you may then, if you so choose, sign the consent form to volunteer and participate in this research study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The goals of this study are (1) to create a space for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to explore how their experiences, identities, communities, cultures, languages, and histories may impact how they read and respond to multicultural literature in Canada, and (2) to understand how multilingual immigrant and refugee youth may be better supported to critically analyze issues of importance in their educational contexts and in their lives through reading and responding to literature.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

There are three phases to the study, described in detail below. This consent form covers all three stages of research.

Literary Engagement Workshops: There will be 3 – 4 sessions, 2 hours each, with 5 – 10 participants. Participants and I will select 2 - 3 short literary texts (short stories, poems, or excerpts from novels). In each workshop, I will facilitate group discussions and “reader response” activities, which are designed to explore how different interpretations can come from the unique relationship between the reader and the text (examples include using other texts such as essays, media articles, videos, or participants own stories to explore different perspectives on the main text, or choosing quotes from the text and rearranging them to create new meanings).

Individual Semi-structured Interviews: I plan to interview you individually to debrief your experiences in the Literary Engagement Workshops. I will ask open-ended questions about the themes and issues that came up for you in the texts, your experience with the activities, and about the interpersonal and group dynamics during the workshops. The interview will last between 30-60 minutes.

Group Semi-structured Interviews: You will be invited to participate in a group interview if enough participants express interest in this phase. The content and procedure will be the same as the individual interviews (above), and it will last between 60 - 90 minutes.

For all phases, you, the other participants, and I will agree on convenient times and dates between June 2012 and August 2012, and convenient meeting places in public locations such as community centres or libraries. The Literary Engagement Workshops and the individual and group interviews will be audio and/or video recorded and transcribed. With your permission, I will use any written work you produce during the workshops (e.g., your notes) as a part of the research. I will also keep a project journal to record my own thoughts.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You will receive a copy of your signed consent form. You may revoke your permission to use data acquired from you at any time preceding submission for academic presentations and/or publications by notifying the principal investigator using the contact information provided above.

By consenting to participate in the group research activities (Literary Engagement Workshops and Group Interview Session), you confirm that any information you encounter will be kept confidential and not revealed to parties outside the research setting. Although the objective is to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed in group-based research. Your identity will be anonymized (e.g., by using a pseudonym and removing identifying details) in all publications based on this research. You will have access to your own interview transcript so that you may review it for issues of accuracy and confidentiality. Full transcripts of group activities will not be shared with you, but you may request to review your own portions with me. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by Canadian law.

Access to any raw data, including field notes, digital audio or video, notes from interviews and participants' written work will be limited to me and my Senior Supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey. Data on paper will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home, and digital data will be stored on an external hard drive, also in the locked cabinet. Data will be stored until three years after the completion of my thesis and the publication of any other papers about the project. After this time, I will shred all hard copy data and permanently delete all digital data.

Though you will not benefit directly from this study, your participation will provide important insights how to how multicultural literature may be taught more equitably and effectively, and will direct attention to the importance of multilingual immigrant and refugee youth's knowledge, skills and experiences in contemporary Canadian education contexts. You may contact me to obtain copies of my completed thesis and the rights to reproduce it.

MINIMAL RISK

This study meets the "Minimal Risk" designation, which means that the topics, activities and risks included are similar to those you may encounter in your everyday academic or personal life.

I am available to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details at the beginning of this form. The primary SFU contact for questions or complaints about this study is my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey; _____ or _____. The secondary contact is Dr. Hal Weinberg at the Office of Research Ethics; _____ or _____.

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSION AND VOLUNTARY AGREEMENT

By signing this informed consent, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided on all 3 pages of this document, that I have considered whether there are possible risks and benefits of this research study, that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am providing my voluntary consent to participate in this research study.

Additional: I give permission for any written work I produce for the Literary Engagement Workshops to be used as a part of this research.

Appendix C.

Parent/ Guardian Consent Form

PARENT OR GUARDIAN CONSENT FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Simon Fraser University

Title: *Multilingual immigrant and refugee youth interpret multicultural literature using reader response practices*

Principal Investigator: Fiona Lemon

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

DISCLOSURE

Your child is invited to participate in research conducted by Ms. Fiona Lemon, M.A. Student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate, withdrawal after agreeing to participate, or declining to participate in any part of it will have no negative effects on her/his status with the Youth Network. Please read all the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand. When all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, you may then, if you so choose, sign the consent form to give permission for your child to participate in this research study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The goals of this study are (1) to create a space for multilingual immigrant and refugee youth to explore how their experiences, identities, communities, cultures, languages, and histories may impact how they read and respond to multicultural literature in Canada, and (2) to understand how multilingual immigrant and refugee youth may be better supported to critically analyze issues of importance in their educational contexts and in their lives through reading and responding to literature.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

There are three phases to the study, described in detail below. This consent form covers all three stages of research.

Literary Engagement Workshops: Your child will participate in 3 – 4 workshops, 2 hours each, with 5 – 10 participants. Participants and I will select 2 - 3 short literary texts (short stories, poems, or excerpts from novels). In each workshop, I will facilitate group discussions and “reader response” activities, which are designed to explore how different interpretations can come from the unique relationship between the reader and the text (examples include using other texts such as essays, media articles, videos, or participants own stories to explore different perspectives on the main text, or choosing quotes from the text and rearranging them to create new meanings).

Individual Semi-structured Interviews: I plan to interview your child individually to debrief her/his experiences in the Literary Engagement Workshops. I will ask open-ended questions about the themes and issues that came up in the texts, her/his experience with the activities, and about the interpersonal and group dynamics during the workshops. The interview will last between 30-60 minutes.

Group Semi-structured Interviews: Your child will be invited to participate in a group interview if enough participants express interest in this phase. The content and procedure will be the same as the individual interviews (above), and it will last between 60 - 90 minutes.

For all phases, your child, the other participants, and I will agree on convenient times and dates between June 2012 and August 2012, and convenient meeting places in public locations such as community centres or libraries. The Literary Engagement Workshops and the individual and group interviews will be audio and/or video recorded and transcribed. With your permission, I will use any written work your child produces during the workshops (e.g., notes, journals) as a part of the research. I will also keep a project journal to record my own thoughts.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You will receive a copy of your signed consent form. You may revoke your permission to use data acquired from your child at any time preceding submission for academic presentations and/or publications by notifying the principal investigator using the contact information provided above.

By consenting to participate in the group research activities (Literary Engagement Workshops and Group Interview Session), all participants confirm that any information they encounter will be kept confidential and not revealed to parties outside the research setting. Although the objective is to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed in group-based research. Your child's identity will be anonymized (e.g., by using a pseudonym and removing identifying details) in all publications based on this research. She/he will have access to her/his own interview transcript in order to review it for issues of accuracy and confidentiality. Full transcripts of group activities will not be shared with participants, but your child may request to review her/his own portions with me. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by Canadian law.

Access to any raw data, including field notes, digital audio or video, notes from interviews and participants' written work will be limited to me and my Senior Supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey. Data on paper will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home, and digital data will be stored on an external hard drive, also in the locked cabinet. Data will be stored until three years after the completion of my thesis and the publication of any other papers about the project. After this time, I will shred all hard copy data and permanently delete all digital data.

Though your child will not benefit directly from this study, her/his participation will provide important insights how to how multicultural literature may be taught more equitably and effectively, and will direct attention to the importance of multilingual immigrant and refugee youth's knowledge, skills and experiences in contemporary Canadian education contexts. Your child may contact me to obtain copies of my completed thesis and the rights to reproduce it.

MINIMAL RISK

This study meets the "Minimal Risk" designation, which means that the topics, activities and risks included are similar to those your child may encounter in her/his everyday academic or personal life.

I am available to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details at the beginning of this form. The primary SFU contact for questions or complaints about this study is my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey; _____ or _____. The secondary contact is Dr. Hal Weinberg at the Office of Research Ethics; _____ or _____.

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSION AND VOLUNTARY AGREEMENT

By signing this informed consent, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided on all 3 pages of this document, that I have considered whether there are possible risks and benefits to my child's participation in this research study, that I have been given the

opportunity to ask questions, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am providing my voluntary consent for my child to participate in this research study.

Additional: I give permission for any written work my child produces for the Literary Engagement Workshops to be used as a part of this research.

Name of Participant (your child) *Signature of Participant* *Date*

Name of Parent/Guardian *Signature of Parent/Guardian* *Date*

I have explained the research to the participant, and answered all of her/his questions. I believe that she/he understands the information described in this document and freely and willingly consents to participate:

Name of Investigator *Signature of Investigator* *Date*

PARTICIPANT CONTACT INFORMATION

First name: _____

Last name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

Appendix D.

Individual and/or Group Semi-structured Interview Question Guide

Interview Goals:

- To understand if, or how, reader response techniques impacted participants' interpretations of the texts;
- To explore if, or how, taking part in the workshops impacted participants' ability to mobilize their funds of knowledge (e.g., their experiences, identities, communities, cultures, languages, histories, and geographies) in relation to the texts;
- To gain insight into issues emerging from interpersonal and group dynamics during the workshops.

Sample Questions:

What made you to want to participate in this study?

What was your overall experience in the Literary Engagement Workshops like? What stood out for you?

What were the most significant themes or issues that came up for you from the readings and discussions of the texts? Could you elaborate?

Tell me how, if at all, your understanding of any of the texts was impacted after discussing it with the other participants or reading it in relation to the other texts or materials.

Did the group dynamics affect your experience in the workshops? If so, how?

What did you think about the techniques which I used to set the tone for participants to engage with one another as openly and as respectfully as possible? Were there instances that were particularly effective, or not effective? What would you have done differently?

Was there a time when you felt that you had particularly important insight or knowledge to contribute? If so, please tell me about it.

Were there any times when you felt that you could not contribute? If so, please tell me about it.

What do you see as the main strengths and limitations of the Literary Engagement Workshops?

Are there any questions I have not asked you that you would like to address?